



A WYVERN WARS  
DELETED CHAPTER

# HANA

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## HANA

Her charge was not to defend the weak and the innocent. The Bushi code demanded alertness, awareness, and self-sacrifice for the sake of the Hiryuunoki. It must be protected from those who would exploit its power.

Alertness, awareness, self-sacrifice.

That's what Hana's mother had drilled into her head, repeating it before each lesson. Though she'd never understood the meaning, she memorized it.

The Bushi were to protect the Hiryuunoki at all costs. But she wanted to know what the medallion was capable of that warranted so many skilled warriors at its defence.

And how had all the Bushi, save for her mother, been killed trying to guard it?

Hana's mother only offered half-answers. Sometimes Hana's frustration almost got the better of her, and she thought she might give up on the way of the Bushi. But she persevered, even if it was the last thing her mother wanted for her.

Each morning, Hana woke and repeated the mantra while she prepared to go to the Hikari Tower. One day, her mother would open up and tell her everything about the Bushi and the medallion. She had to.

The Hikari tower shadowed over the grove outside Tsukiko, where Hana lived with her best friend. Zohan was a student, like her brother, Hidekazu. They always preached about how she should become a mage instead. The Bushi were past their time, they said. Neither understood the responsibility she felt toward her mother.

A chill ran down her spine. She looked up as the sun was blotted out. A shadow descended upon the Hikari Tower.

"Hana!" a voice shouted from behind. Zohan came toward her on horseback.

The shadow became darker, twisting into something physical. A beast. It descended faster than a hurricane, smashing all the invisible wards that surrounded the tower. The uppermost floor exploded on impact, debris falling everywhere.

Hana unsheathed her katana and ran toward the tower, dodging around falling dust and rubble, forgetting to ask why Zohan had sought after her. "Quick, get help!"

"We don't know what's going on—don't go in alone!"

"But my mother!" she said.

And for the first time, Zohan did not protest.

He galloped away, and she never saw him again.

Hana kicked open the remnants of the splintered, wooden door. The magic which usually illuminated the altar at the end of the entrance had been snuffed out. She stepped into the darkness.

Dust obscured her vision, falling from the ceiling as the building shook. It was so thick it turned to paste on her tongue.

Her ears rang from the vibrations in the walls, shaking the building's foundations. She navigated the lowest floor of the temple and ran toward the stairs. Unfamiliar magic bounced through the entirety of the tower, setting her own inner energies abuzz with anxiety.

Whatever waited on the upper floor was powerful.

Hana couldn't fool herself into believing otherwise: she was terrified. But she'd been training to defend the medallion. She wouldn't let her mother down.

She raced up the spiral stairs. Each time the tower shook she almost slipped, but she kept herself upright, heart pounding in her chest.

Finally, she reached the double-doors that opened into the single room that made up the entire upper floor. On the other side, a winged man grabbed the Hiryuunoki from its pedestal.

"Stop!" she said and ran to face him.

She took a closer look at him, then—taking in his muscular limbs adorned with glistening black scales, ending in long claws. The black wings that flapped behind him reached high above his head. He looked like a... a dragon.

Except all the dragons were supposed to be dead.

The dragon-man smiled at her. There was a body at his feet—Hana's mother.

Her fingers stiffened to ice. If this man had defeated her mother, what chance did she stand against him?

"How cute you are, little warrior-girl," he said. Hana winced at the sound of his voice; it was like icy nails clawing the inside of her skull. His smile deepened into a grin. His golden eyes gleamed, so beautiful she thought she might stare into them forever.

The man laughed, and when he blinked, Hana shook her head clear of the confusion. She refused to look him in the eye again.

Alertness, awareness, self-sacrifice.

"No fear, little one. I have no business with you."

His wings wrapped around him and a whirlwind thrashed through the room, knocking Hana away. Debris tossed up into the air, circling him as dark purple and black tendrils of energy surrounded his body. The energy amassed, feeding into him until he no longer resembled a man.

A long, spiked tail curled around his scaled form, his maw open to reveal sharp teeth. He jumped into the air, flapping his wings, and took off to the skies, disappearing into the clouds above the Hikari Tower.

A dragon. She never thought she'd see the day.

And yet even more confusing still—he was both a man and a dragon. She'd never heard of anything like it.

Her legs went limp, and her knees dropped to the floor. She was covered in sweat, her whole body trembling.

After a moment to process, she remembered that her mother had been on the floor beneath the dragon-man. She spun around, spotted her on the steps of the dais which had held the Hiryuunoki, and crawled toward her.

Her mother didn't appear to have a single injury. She seemed to be asleep.

Two fingers against her mother's neck eliminated Hana's worst fears. But unconscious or asleep, she needed to see a healer soon. Hana tried to lift her, but her strength failed her when she saw how her breath came as white tufts. Goosebumps appeared on her arms. Gently, she laid her mother back on the steps and turned.

Behind her, she found three large, translucent figures. They towered over Hana at an impossible height.

Each wore a bear pelt that drooped from their shoulders. Bear skulls masked their faces. The fangs were intimidating, but the creatures' lavender, glowing eyes penetrated the shadows beneath. Upon their heads rested crowns of twisted, ivory antlers, entwined with pale flowers.

They pointed their curved staves at her, decorated with bits of metal, bone, and shiny ornaments. Ready to strike.

They stepped toward her, weapons at the ready.

Hana brandished her katana, taking a deep breath to steady herself. She recalled her mother's lessons on how to win outnumbered battles.

Alertness, awareness, self-sacrifice.

She half-closed her eyes to picture the silver daikatana that would give her the reach to defend herself. A white light enveloped her hands, and she pulled it from the katana's hilt far past the tip, extending the weapon's blade to double its original length.

The monsters advanced. Hana grit her teeth. She would defend her mother, no matter what. That was the least she could do for failing her mission.

They fought one at a time, at first. Hana knocked the ghosts' staves away with her daikatana, keeping herself at enough of a distance to poke at the next target before it could strike her. They made no effort to dodge or deflect her attacks. Each time she struck true, her weapon sunk into their ghostly forms and did nothing but set her off balance.

The third time this happened, a second creature came in from the side and its staff connected with Hana's ribs. It knocked the air from her lungs and sent her flying. She hit the wall on the other side of the room and crumpled to the ground. Her palms scraped against the sharp rocks and shattered glass.

Everything was blurry, but her daikatana was on the floor next to her. She reached for it.

The room glowed amber. A shadow sped through the light toward her. Then when the light winked out, one of the translucent creatures stood over her. It knocked her weapon away, then held its staff over her.

It whistled three notes, which were answered by its companions. The sounds hurt Hana's head and made her vision dark. All she could see was the figure standing above her.

Then the ringing in her ears faded, replaced by scuffling near the entranceway, footsteps coming up the stairs. At first, she thought it was her mind playing tricks on her, but then shadows appeared on the other side of the threshold.

The creature's staff twitched over her head. Its glowing, lavender eyes bore into hers.

Alertness, awareness, self-sac—And its weapon connected with her skull, tearing through bone and brain. Everything went dark.

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