

THE
WATCHERS
WHITE DRAGONS



DEIRDRA EDEN



ROBOMATTER™

White Dragons

by

Deirdra Eden

Book Five of *The Watchers Series*

————— *For the Original Edition* —————

Originally published by **Deirdra Eden** in association with **Eden Literary, LLC.**

Cover Design by **Eden Literary, LLC**

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DEDICATION



This book is dedicated to my tribe and my clan.

CHAPTER ONE

THE KOBOLDS

August 1363

When Erebus was cast down to Earth in his shadow form, he vowed to overthrow the Kingdom of Neviah. The Watchers were called upon to guard the humans during the ongoing war on planet Earth, a place which I now call home. If the Watchers stopped fighting, the Dark Rebellion would take over in less than seven days.

I dearly wished Azrael and I could someday have at least one week together without a crisis, being hunted, slaying demons, or trying to retrieve our ship from a tribe of kobolds. Azrael slid the Flaming Sword back into the scabbard. Dealing with the tribe would require wit and tactical skills, not heavenly weapons.

Azrael and I watched from the shaded cliffs surrounding the cove where he'd left the ship. The side was crudely patched with native wood from the island and the canvas sail hung upside down from the mast. Strips of colorful, traditional kobold fabric caught the bright noon sun. The kobold's foreign markings graffitied our Watcher's flag that waved from the highest mast. Dusty green creatures bounded across the deck, using ropes to secure their catapults as if arming the ship. They swung from ropes like ugly monkeys in loin cloths and danced on the deck. They pounded drums made of snakeskin and rattled colorful clay beads threaded at the ends of smooth sticks. Their musical chant was a victory celebration for taking our ship.

"What is your plan?" I asked, not knowing how to deal with this foreign enemy. Azrael had more experience with these swindling, sea-loving, goblin scavengers. I hoped he would know how to negotiate the return of the *Windcatcher*, because without our ship we would be stranded. If Alamar had been here he could possibly have figured out a way to get our ship back or at least a different way to navigate the seas using his power over water. He could not help us now. He was in survival sleep and when he woke up he had his own debt to pay in Atlantis. Woldor was already escorting Alamar there, and the dragon wouldn't be able to carry Azrael, Baby, and I all the way to Asia. Swimming to the Eastern Sanctuary was out of the question. I had attempted swimming a great distance once before and that landed me at the bottom of the ocean. We needed to get our ship back.

Right now, all the remaining Watchers on Earth were gathering at the Eastern Sanctuary where Erebus would launch his naval attack any day. Everyone was counting on me to lead our worldwide Watcher army, yet I was being held back by primitive goblins who'd redecorated our magnificent Celtic ship in their tribal colors.

I looked at Azrael who still hadn't given me an answer. "Should we fight them?" I finally asked. We really didn't have a lot of options and I doubted they would give us back the ship willingly after moving in and raising their banners.

Baby flicked his tail and crouched low, licking his lips. "I could just eat them all," he growled.

Azrael turned to Baby and said, "The last thing we need are rumors of a savage white tiger slaughtering a village. That would make you, and all tigers, a target for poachers and bounty hunters."

Baby folded his ears back and sunk to his hind legs in a pout. "I don't see you coming up with a better plan."

"This is delicate," Azrael said. "Stealing from a kobold is dangerous. They're masters of sabotage. Who knows what will happen if we try to take our ship back by force from a whole tribe."

He was right. As immortals, Azrael and I could easily take back our ship, but we also had two oceans to cross, and the kobolds probably had the ship rigged to sink in several ways if we tried to retrieve it. There had to be another option.

"Can we talk with them?" I asked. I wasn't sure if diplomacy would be helpful in this type of situation. I looked at the ship once again. Somehow they had stranded the boat on the beach. Ropes from the stern and mast were staked into the beach as if they'd captured and tied down a massive beast.

Azrael shook his head. "Once a kobold has his mind set, there is no way of changing it. They don't trust outsiders." Azrael squinted his eyes at his ship, as goblins bounded across the deck, singing in victory. "I don't have any money left to purchase the ship back. I used all I had on this." He held up the Shield of Light.

Since I became immortal I hadn't thought much about money, which was typically traded by mortals for other things of value. I worked hard every day for the king, and the king always provided what we needed. "There must be something else we can use to negotiate for our ship," I thought out loud.

"Let's go see if we can find their chief," Azrael suggested. I was glad we were taking action now.

After spending a week in this swamp, being caked in moldy mud, fighting two Shadow Queens, an army of water demons, and Moloch, I just wanted to take a hot bath and dry out. I brushed back my hair and smoothed out my travel worn clothes trying to look somewhat presentable before we walked down to the beach to meet with the leader of this tribe.

"We need to leave all our weapons behind so they will see that we are unarmed. They don't usually attack unarmed people," Azrael said and explained further, "Besides, if they see our beautiful weapons they may try to steal them." Azrael turned to Baby and instructed, "You guard the weapons. If anyone tries to take them, then you can eat them for breakfast."

Baby's whiskers lifted in a catty smile of approval.

We'd already spent most of the day silently watching the kobolds. If there was going to be a fight we had already learned how many kobolds there were, what weapons they had, and their behavior patterns. I still felt unprepared and couldn't shake the feeling that we were walking into a trap by confronting these creatures. Azrael and I navigated silently through thickest parts of the forest so as not to draw attention to where we left Baby with our gear. Once we were ready to make our presence known, we made our way down the slopes. There was no way to hide along the

exposed barren hillside leading to the sandy beach. The dirt on the hillside was loose and we turned our feet sideways and slid most of the way down while avoiding random foliage.

We hadn't even made it to the sand before the kobolds were lined up at the side of the boat watching us, their primitive feather-decorated spears pointed in our direction. Shards of black lava rock, sharpened to a razor point, glinted at the tip of each spear.

We raised our hands in a surrendering gesture as a courtesy, though we knew no weapon they had could harm us. The kobolds on the ship aimed Azrael's cannons at us while others loaded their bows.

"This is a good sign," Azrael whispered and nodded as if approving of the hostile greeting.

"Are you sure?" I asked under my breath. "They don't look happy to see us."

Azrael's confidence didn't dim as he explained in a whisper so soft that only my immortal ears could hear, "If they weren't willing to give us a chance they would have attacked by now."

A group approached us, shouting in their foreign language while holding their weapons at the ready.

"I'm not convinced they won't attack after they know we intend to take the ship back," I whispered in a breath no louder than the beat of a butterfly's wing.

Azrael caught the kobolds' attention. He pointed to the ship and then back to us trying to communicate our intent. The advancing kobolds eyed us as one left the group and ran to the ship spitting out a string of incomprehensible words.

"We want to trade with the chief," Azrael said loudly as if talking louder would suddenly help them understand our English.

A few of the kobolds tossed a ladder made of rope and bamboo over the side of the ship.

"It worked." Azrael smirked. "They are allowing us to board." Azrael took the ladder in his hand.

I still didn't trust them, but the invitation to come aboard was promising. Azrael gestured for me to climb the ladder to the deck first.

"No, you go," I insisted. I didn't want to be the first person on the deck. It would mean that for a brief awkward moment I would be alone with them while I waited for Azrael.

A flirtatious smile flared across his face. "You just want to enjoy the view while I climb."

I let out an innocent gasp and tilted my head. "Really?"

He started to ascend. I wasn't sure if the primitive ladder, made for much smaller creatures, would hold both of us, so I waited while he climbed. I couldn't help myself but to look up and admire his attractiveness as he deftly climbed. Once he was at the top I quickly scaled the ladder and Azrael took my hand and lifted me onto the deck. The kobolds watched with yellow eyes sunk deep into unfamiliar faces. One of the young sailors sneered and eyed us up and down like we were the primitive creatures.

I turned to Azrael and whispered, "They don't know what we are." Perhaps they'd never seen Watchers or the humans we resembled.

They all started speaking at once in their language, pointing at our Celtic clothing and hair arguing with each other. I held my breath at the putrid smell of the kobolds.

“Do you know what they are saying?” I asked Azrael. He shook his head. I cleared my throat. “Does anyone here speak English?” I asked.

They all stopped and glared at me as if I had interrupted an important discussion.

“Gaelic?” Azrael asked in his ancient Gaelic tongue.

An old goblin hobbled forward, leaning on a walking stick decorated with skulls of small rodents which dangled from leather straps at the top. His hands and feet looked too big for his short body, and his nose was too long for his face. He wore a crown of feathers and a necklace of red beads. I could only guess this was the chief as he pointed his stubby green finger at us and shook his walking stick, rattling the skulls. His face was wrinkled like a raisin and his eyelids were so heavy I wondered if he could see at all.

He spoke a few words in Gaelic, heavily accented with kobold dialect.

Azrael nodded and seemed to know what was being said. Azrael replied and hammered his hand into his fist. Was he talking about punishment for stealing the ship or complimenting them on their renovations? The kobold explained something, and Azrael replied. This went on for a long time and I was eager to know what they were saying.

A few of the sailors crossed their arms and watched the two speak. The dialogue between Azrael and the chief went on for several minutes before Azrael nodded as if agreeing. I hoped this meant they were giving us back the ship. The chatter on the ship ended with an abrupt hush when Azrael bowed to the old kobold.

Azrael finally turned back to me. “Well, I have good news and bad news,” Azrael admitted.

“What is the bad news?” I asked.

“They won’t let us have the ship back,” he answered.

I dropped my shoulders. “So what’s the good news?” I asked. I did not lower my voice. No one understood what I was saying anyway. “If they’re unwilling to compromise we might have to take the ship by force. We’re at war and there are Watchers in dire need counting on us to come quickly.”

“The kobolds are at war too,” Azrael said in an attempt to defuse my frustration. “They are defeated. That is probably why they didn’t attack us. They have almost nothing left. Trolls from the rival tribe attacked and killed most of their people. They came here on their canoes as refugees to this island only to find it infested with the Shadow Snakes. They would like our help in slaying the serpents.”

“Will they give us back the ship once we finish killing the snakes?” I asked, hoping they would be reasonable and fair.

“No,” Azrael sounded hesitant to explain. “They will not trade us anything for the ship.

“It’s our ship,” I argued.

Azrael nodded in agreement but added, “To them, the ship already belongs to them.”

I dropped my shoulders and looked at the chief. The chief gripped his staff tighter. His face wrinkled even more into a threatening frown as if daring us to take away the ship they’d claimed in our absence. This was exactly what Azrael was talking about when he said that the kobolds were tricky with their business deals and would try to swindle people and strip them of everything they owned.

“So, what is the good news?” I asked, still hoping there was a way we would get off this island quickly.

“We are going to get a brand-new ship!” Azrael held out his arms as if he had just given me the biggest surprise of my life.

“A new ship?” I asked unamused because I knew there was something more to this.

Azrael looked to the ground and scratched the back of his neck as if to avoid eye contact with me while he explained, “First we have to build the ship.”

“Oh, no, Azrael,” I dropped my shoulders. “We don’t have time.”

He quickly added, “And we will have to do labor for the wood.”

“What?” I asked in disbelief. “Do they think all the trees on the island belong to them as well?”

“The chief said that for every Demon Snake we kill we can have one tree to build our new boat with.”

This was not how I wanted to start my trip to Eastern Sanctuary. Azrael seemed excited about the idea of getting a new ship. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to go along with this unfair plan.