

A FANTASTIC JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY FOR ALL AGES

DRAGONQUEST

A dragon with a rider flying over a castle. The dragon is dark grey with large, translucent wings that have a reddish-orange hue. A rider is perched on its back. Below the dragon, a large, stone castle with a prominent spire sits atop a hill. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds.

A NOVEL

DONITA K. PAUL

AUTHOR OF *DragonSpell*

Praise for
DragonQuest

“Donita K. Paul’s *DragonQuest* is a rich tapestry of creatures, characters, and adventure. A whimsical allegory, casting bright light on ultimate truth.”

—LYN COTE, author of the *Women of Ivy Manor* series

“You never know what to expect in a magical world full of creatures like mordakleeps, blimmets, and doneels. But one thing is sure: this grand, fantastical odyssey of Kale the Dragon Keeper will sweep you off your feet.”

—ROBERT ELMER, author of the *Hyperlinkz* fantasy series for kids

“Shut your eyes, hold your breath, and plunge into the unshackled imagination of Donita K. Paul! In *DragonQuest*, Kale’s journey of self-discovery continues through a succession of adventures and mishaps that leave you grinning with breathless, page-turning anticipation. I am in awe of Donita K. Paul’s intricate world-building that can rightfully stand alongside master storytellers Lewis and Tolkien. There is so much depth of heart to this fantastic adventure that it’s difficult to say what I most enjoyed. This book is a fantasy must for the very young at heart, no matter your age.”

—LINDA WICHMAN, author of *Legend of the Emerald Rose*

“Donita K. Paul’s *DragonQuest* continues the story of Kale and her well-drawn compatriots, who set out on yet another quest in service to God by serving His people. Cleverly and compellingly wrought, *DragonQuest* is a terrific sequel to *DragonSpell* that is sure to delight readers of all ages.”

—KATHLEEN MORGAN, author of *Giver of Roses*



DRAGONQUEST

DONITA K. PAUL



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PRESS

DRAGONQUEST

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This book is dedicated to these first readers,
who “test” my work for me:

Mary and Michael Darnell

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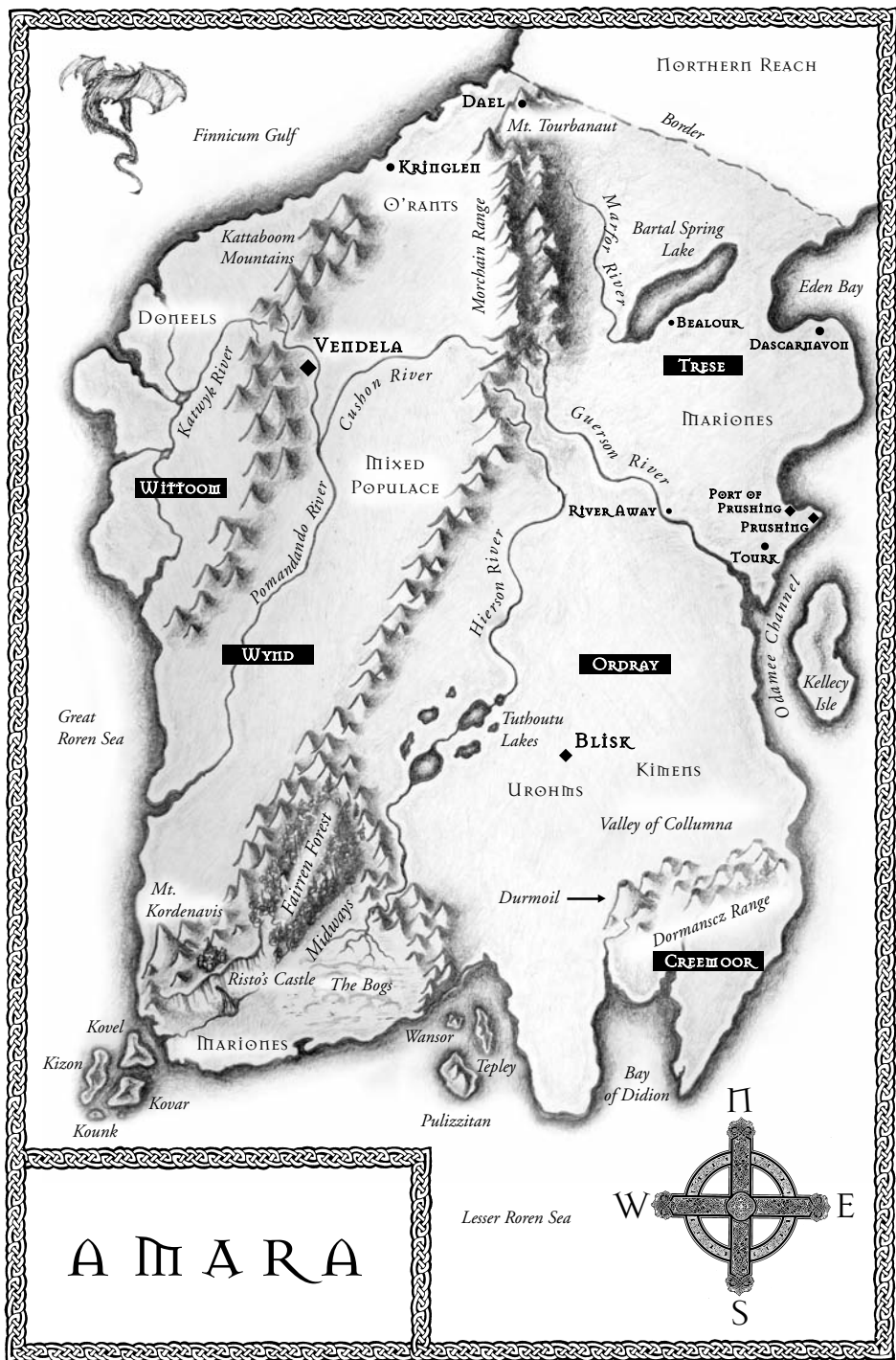
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VENDELA SURPRISES

“We’re going to get in trouble,” Kale muttered. She’d lost sight of her doneel friend Dar in a Vendela market. Amara’s capital city teemed with people from each of the seven high races. Kale found the throngs fascinating and intimidating.

She inched past two women, a marione and an o’rant, haggling over the price of a brass candlestick, then ducked as a man swung his arm out, gesturing to three men listening to his tale. She bumped into a kimien, said, “Excuse me,” and moved to the middle of the street.

I should have stayed put. I should have turned away and marched right back into The Hall. But no! Dar says let’s go explore, and I follow him.

Kale detoured around a fruit cart. As an o’rant, she was taller and slimmer than the mariones in the crowd. Much taller than the kimens. A good two feet taller than Dar. But her height hadn’t helped her keep an eye on the doneel.

She shook her head at the confusion in the street. People seemed either in a hurry to get somewhere or else planted firmly in one spot so she had to squeeze around them.

Dar’s nimble ways are to his advantage in these huge streets. I keep getting jostled and shoved aside.

Dar! she shouted with her mind. She listened, expecting him to answer with a thought as clear as if he spoke in her ear. Mindspeaking was a gift she had recently developed, and it still surprised her. It also puzzled her that Dar technically could not mindspeak. She talked to him and listened to him with her mind, but he could not start a conversation.

Kale spotted Dar’s furry head, ears pricked up in excitement and a

grin spreading across his face. He stood on something, she couldn't tell what, and waved his hat above the crowd. He'd found a long red feather and two creamy white ones to stick into the dull brown band of the leecent hat.

Heads turned to size up the image of a somberly clad leecent wearing jaunty feathers. Some smiled. Her own uniform was partially hidden by her moonbeam cape.

"We're going to get in trouble," she grumbled again.

Dar dropped out of sight, and Kale zigzagged through the milling shoppers, trying to get to him. The carts full of trinkets, clothing, and gadgets caught her eye, but she didn't stop. She must catch up and persuade Dar to go back to The Hall.

Of course, he said I didn't have to come with him. But when he headed out the east gate instead of through the west portal, I followed. When will I ever learn?

Kale gave a little hop, trying to see over the heads of the gossiping matrons in front of her. She spotted the tall red feather in Dar's hat.

Too late to change my mind. I'd never find my way back through these city streets by myself.

She pushed aside a niggling suspicion that she probably could find her way to The Hall. True, all the roofs of the city were the same azure blue. But many spires and turrets in a vast variety of shapes and colors studded the tall buildings like jewels. She recognized quite a few landmarks even though she could not name them.

Each afternoon, Kale spent time admiring the metropolis outside her window. She was supposed to be reading, actually studying. But she'd never lived in a city. The view intrigued her more than the books.

Three azure towers spiraled above The Hall compound, a clear globe floating between them. Even now, she looked over her shoulder and saw one of the distinctive blue towers rising above the buildings.

I could get back.

But she didn't really want to return yet. She'd chosen the east gate and freedom from monotony, just as Dar had. The west portal led directly

into the back quadrangle of The Hall. The old abbey and its complex of buildings were the center of spiritual and intellectual renewal for the entire continent. Kale and her friend trained for service to Paladin in a many-windowed edifice where great scholars roamed the corridors.

Kale and Dar had been residing in The Hall for two weeks. In those two weeks, they'd gotten uniforms and instructions—two sets of the tan and brown leecent uniforms and a dozen lists of instructions, rules and regulations, edicts and codes of ethics, orders, injunctions, and decrees. They'd finished the last orientation class that morning and had been given the afternoon to relax.

Kale and Dar had called two dragon friends. Responding to the strong mental connection with their riders, Merlander and Celisse had flown in from the hills.

They had swooped out of the sky and landed in the dragon field. Merlander's scales flashed brilliant colors while Celisse's ebony and silver scales looked subdued and elegant.

Kale stroked Celisse's long neck and felt some of her tension drain away. Without words, they exchanged details of the past two weeks. All dragons and their riders shared a special bond, stronger than friendship. She was tempted to climb on Celisse's back and ride far above the city, forgetting all about lists of rules and stacks of books.

Too soon, Dar and Kale waved good-bye to the dragons. With a swoosh of large, leathery wings, Celisse and Merlander rose above the flowered meadow. The two spiraled upward in an airborne dance, twirling and passing back and forth until they were specks high above the dragon field. Kale watched them head out toward the mountains and then looked with displeasure at the many buildings surrounding her. The field seemed a part of her old life. The Hall offered a very different future.

A brick wall, not a wooden fence, hemmed the beautiful field. Dar nodded his head toward the imposing barrier. "Let's go," he said.

Beyond that wall, the city beckoned. Sights the country-raised o'rant girl had never seen filled the bustling streets. She wasted no energy resisting Dar's suggestion to go explore.

And it was fun! She didn't gawk like a complete gaperlot. She'd seen urohms and kimens and tumanhofers before. But she still watched in awe as a group of towering urohms passed by.

Her knees almost buckled when a small creature slammed against her lower legs. Her cape tightened around her body, seeming to draw itself closer in a protective clutch. She staggered, caught her balance, and looked down.

A doneel child's furry head barely reached her knee. The tiny girl grinned and winked one eye under her fluffy eyebrows. "Sorry, mistress."

Mistress! I'm not old enough to run a household. I haven't got a gray hair on my head nor a wrinkle on my chin. I'm only fifteen summers.

The child reached up and put her grubby hand in Kale's.

Doneels prided themselves on their appearance. Yet this poor urchin had somehow missed that point. Kale examined her more closely. The child had a doneel's flair for bright, fine clothing, but this getup had been scavenged from refuse bins. The girl wore a yellow silk blouse many sizes too big, cinched at the waist with a man's purple necktie. Garish green pantaloons peeked out from the skirtlike hem of the blouse. Slippers, decorated haphazardly with discarded buttons, covered the girl's feet.

A toothy grin on the small doneel's face charmed Kale just as easily as any Dar had ever used. She found herself smiling back.

"Thief! Pickpocket!" A shrill voice pierced the babble of the marketplace. The hand in Kale's squeezed convulsively and then let go. Kale looked up at the commotion. In that moment, the girl disappeared.

Three mariones, in city guard uniforms, appeared among the crowd. The men's powerful muscles strained against the fabric of their gray jackets. Bright yellow epaulets and corded trim did nothing to make them look more congenial. Kale had only met a few mariones who had any cheer in them. These guards wore typically sour expressions and marched unhurriedly to do their duty.

A red-faced tumanhofer merchant followed, shaking a pointed stick in the air. "She's a pest, a nuisance, a blight on the market." The short, round man rushed ahead of a guard and thrust his wooden stick between

two crates belonging to a vegetable vendor. “She’s quick, sneaky, and looks as innocent as muffers in a flowerpot.”

The tumanhofer’s head swiveled on a thick neck as he vigorously searched among the market stalls. He banged his crude weapon on an upturned barrel and then stood on tiptoe to peek inside. Whirling about, he scowled at those watching. His look accused them all of hiding the vagrant child. He shook his fist at several men who grinned at his anger, then still bristling, he stomped over to confront the lead guard. He waved his stick in the man’s face.

“You catch that child and put ’er in an orphanage. Better yet, send ’er into the country. Find a small village as many miles from ’ere as you can.”

Grunting, he went back to poking his stick into any little hole he saw. “It’ll do ’er good to be a village slave. Train ’er up in service and righteousness instead of letting ’er run wild.”

The man’s words caught at Kale’s heart. She’d been raised in an obscure marione settlement as a village slave. In fact, she would still be there if she hadn’t found a dragon egg and been sent to Vendela. Kale looked around quickly, wondering where the urchin had gone.

A whiff of hot air and dust swirled around Kale’s legs. The moonbeam cape relaxed. Kale furrowed her brow, trying to figure out the odd occurrence. Why had the cape tightened around her? Why had it then loosened its hold? She suspected she still didn’t know all the mysterious properties of the wondrous garment.

Granny Noon, an emerlindian wise woman, had given Kale the cape. The cloth repelled water, didn’t tear, and sloughed off dirt. She could deposit any number of things in its special hollows without creating bulges or any additional weight. Granny Noon had sewn pockets for the eight dragon eggs Kale had carried. Two had hatched.

She counted the cape as her own personal treasure, even though it was cream-colored and rather plain. The gift had been from someone who treated her kindly, and she had not received many gifts in her life. This gift was wondrous in other ways as well. If she stood very still in a dimly lit area, the cape acted as camouflage.

She watched the guards as they moved among the gaily dressed shoppers, searching several booths. Turning her eyes away, she admitted to herself she didn't want to see them capture the little doneel. She moved in the direction she had been going before.

Dar? Dar? No answer. That's odd. He must be preoccupied.

She jumped when his voice entered her thoughts.

"Kale, I found the inn."

The Goose and The Gander?

"None other."

Kale smiled. A kind old farmer had once told her about the inn and a woman named Maye. She wanted to meet the lady.

"Can you find me?" asked Dar.

Not in this crowd.

"You can't follow my thoughts?"

Dar! Kale bit down on her exasperation. I'm getting better at this mind-speaking, but there are hundreds of people. Every one of them is thinking up sufficient noise to rattle the windows. It's hard to hear you. Vendela's entire population is buzzing around your words with their scattered thoughts.

"Humph!" The doneel paused. *"Are you still in the market square?"*

Yes.

"I'll come back and get you."

Kale grumbled under her breath, "He wouldn't have to come back and get me if he hadn't run off in the first place."

Thanks. She muttered the word in her mind.

"You're welcome."

Dar's chortle echoed after his polite answer. Kale knew he'd heard the sarcasm underlying her thanks.

She glanced at the city guards going from one merchant's stall to the next. The little culprit seemed to have given them the slip.

Roaming around the square, Kale examined the merchandise—finely woven material from the southern provinces, glazed pottery from the hills of Blandel, and intricately sculpted stone statues. She paused to run her fingers over a glossy purple fruit she didn't recognize. A tart, lemony smell tickled

her nose. A tug on her cape brought her eyes down to a small figure hiding under the wooden counter. Two big eyes stared mournfully up at her.

“Help me?” The whispered voice barely reached Kale’s ears, but the frightened look in the doneel child’s eyes reached her heart.

She glanced over her shoulder and saw the guards approaching. One surveyed the crowd as the other two systematically inspected each booth. Kale waited until the marionette scanning the marketers turned his head away. Quickly, she opened her cloak and signaled the child to come. The little girl hopped out of her hole between baskets of fruit and attached herself to Kale’s leg like a monkey.

As a leecent, Kale had vowed ten days before to uphold justice in the name of Paladin. Instead, she walked across the square to a booth that had already passed the guards’ inspection. Pretending to examine trousers and blouses in the merchant’s display, Kale reached out with her mind to speak to the fugitive she harbored.

What did you take?

“You can mindspeak!”

What did you take?

“A pickle.”

Kale looked over her shoulder at the guards moving to a cart filled with bags of grain.

“I’m Toopka. What’s your name?”

Leecent Kale.

A rough hand slammed down on Kale’s arm and spun her around.

“This one ’ere!” With a stubby finger pointed up into Kale’s face, the shopkeeper spewed out his accusation. “She’s the one. She’s got that pick-pocket under ’er cape. They’re in league together.”

“Master Tellowmatterden, she’s one of Paladin’s,” said the guard with a captain’s insignia on his collar.

“Ha!” the tumanhofer merchant growled. “She’s stolen one of their uniforms, more likely.”

“Here now!” Dar’s voice rose above the murmuring of the crowd. “That’s no way to treat a servant of Paladin.”

The shopkeeper thrust Kale against the captain's broad chest. The guard seized her arms in a no-nonsense hold.

Tellowmatterden rounded on Dar. "A doneel! The child's a doneel. Arrest 'im. He's the one trained 'er to steal."

Dar pulled himself into his most dignified stance. His glare should have made the peasant merchant tremble. "I beg your pardon." He turned to the guard in charge. "This unfortunate incident can be easily unraveled. May I suggest you send for a representative of The Hall? Lecent Kale is, indeed, in Paladin's service, as am I."

"Stuffed with feathers, they both are!" screeched the merchant. "Who ever 'eard of a doneel in the service?"

Dar ignored the man and spoke with solemn politeness to the guard holding Kale. "Should we take our business out of the streets, Captain?"

"That's right," the shopkeeper's voice boomed. "Take them down to city jail."

"I think," said Dar, still amiable and soft-spoken, and still talking only to the captain, "a nearby inn would be more appropriate while we wait. It would be less embarrassing for your superiors if you were to settle this without involving the court."

The captain eyed the calm doneel and the red-faced tumanhofer. He nodded toward his companions. "We will escort these two to The Goose and The Gander. Hamwell! Off to The Hall. Get someone to come vouch for them."

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