Land of the Beasts

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Introduction

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Star flew towards a web-like network of caves that was the home of the griffins. Banned by humans long ago because of a fatal mistake of their ancestors, the next generations were forced to pay the price. They didn’t really care. Humans were loud, stupid annoying little things, always in a hurry and waving their little sticks with bits on the end, as if trying to soar like the elegant griffins. He flapped his wings, sending a gust of air below, and dived down to catch a small rabbit nibbling on the sparse, sun-deprived bushes of the mountains. He finished it off with a sharp blow with a paw, then continued home. The fog began to clear and he saw his friend Talon--three-hundred years older, but no matter--streaking towards him, a golden blur. He grinned. “Hey, Talon! Where are you going?”

“Dragon egg hunting. Raid’s in a few hours.” He sighed. Then he surveyed the ground below as if looking for something. Star took a sharp breath.

“Already?” A war with the dragons had been long anticipated for three years, but they had all been waiting so long they all thought it would never happen. Recently, though, more fireballs than ever crashed into the once-impenetrable griffin realm. A few eggs are stolen, one griffin, Lava, was killed. “I’ll come with you.” He offered.

“It’s okay. Really. Stealthier alone.”

“But Talon-” began Star.

“Hush!” Whispered Talon urgently. “Lord Skye!” They immediately tucked their front paws beneath them and bowed their magnificent eagle heads, yellow eyes closed. Lord Skye was the beta of all the griffins. He was a deep blue color on his feathers, and his mood fur was typically aqua-colored--peaceful. Star couldn't help noticing the purple--worry--shining from his mood-shifting fur. “Ah, Talon, start with your duties. I suppose you can bring Star there. Pass me that rabbit, though, Star.” He rumbled in his deep, respected voice. “Y-yes, Lord Skye!” Star squeaked and proceeded to do likewise. He felt his mood-shifting fur on his hindquarters turn red with embarrassment. He bowed again, and they flew off with a nod from Lord Skye. He turned to Talon excitedly. “I’m sure Gale will fill in for you...she’s eager to prove herself!”

Talon shook his head calmly. “Not experienced enough. You can come if you want but be warned. And Fang said he’d come.” Star exhaled a sigh of relief. Fang was an experienced warlord. That meant they were going on a huge raid. Others would be coming, but with Fang there, they’d be fine. “Who else?”
“Creek, Feather, Silver, Blue, Claw, Gust, and, of course, Fang. I think we’ll be fine. Minimum loss.” Star nodded. He was still worried, though. “I’ll come.”

“We’re splitting up into pairs. Partner?” He nodded again, his mood shifting to purple—worry. Talon saw. His own shifted to maroon, but he tried to act calm. “It’s okay. The dragons left for Ravenclaw. Not too many Defenders.” Defenders were dragons—or griffins, for that matter—that stayed behind to guard. “Stealth mission. I’ll go round up the others. Can you catch us some food?”

Talon shifted uncomfortably for some reason.

“Sure.” Star wheeled upwards. Talon skimmed the ground, still looking for...whatever it was he was looking for. Probably a prey carcass he lost. Star wheeled upwards swifter than a falcon. Of all the griffins, Star was most at ease in the sky. Sure, they all were flying marvels, but Star was something else entirely. He could hover, go backward, do steep dives, plummeting upwards, wings shot out at the last second, could fly upside-down. The others were envious, but he was good-natured enough. They didn’t bother him. His adeptness at aerial combat and flying made him an excellent fighter, comparable to Fang’s skills as his age. He was also a great hunter. He could catch large prey by himself, normally done with about three griffins—and could do it quickly without pain to the animal. He hated dragon-killing techniques. They would pounce down and carry the writhing prey up before dropping it. They didn’t like the blood leaking out. Yuck. Star spotted a young Sparco grazing. Sparco were creatures of the griffin realm, spotted hyena-looking things that were kind of cute with little hooves. Sorry, He thought and lunged. He carried that carcass back to his cave in the mountainside. Then he flew off and caught six more. A little excessive, but prey was bountiful. Besides, he would share with all the others. He and Talon had already eaten. Then he flew two masterfully carved caves up to Gust. He dropped the prey. “Hungry? We’re leaving soon.” Gust nodded and tore into the smarco. He then visited the other’s caves, dropping prey and notifying them of the raid. He was a bit hungry still, so he flew down to the Great Plain for a rabbit or two and saw it—an abandoned griffin egg. He landed beside it lightly, curious. Hmmm. He then saw its blue speckles—lower ranking. That would explain the abandonment, but it still wasn’t nice. He wondered why it was here. They had stopped cruel practices long ago. It was probably dead—griffin eggs required continuous heat. But then he saw it twitch. It was alive! Panicked, he summoned all the elemental arts he knew—fire learned at the second year, water and wind learned at thirty years, a youngling, stone, and plants at adulthood, and only experienced warriors learned thunder, ice, and wind. Star knew them all...save Magick, the most powerful of the Elemental Arts. Only Lady Lady Lightwing and Lord Skye, the alphas, so brilliant a griffin as low ranking as Star could not even think of their name—he was forbidden to, despite his much higher than average status. and maybe Fang knew Magick. This egg would only learn water, fire,
and stone. It was a lower ranking. He panicked, and stone lifted the egg, grass and vines entwined it, thunder clapped, fire circled it and set the vines on fire, wind rippled softly. He calmed and stopped, then, controlled, summoned grass, then lit it on fire, an effective heating technique. The egg cracked. A beak poked out. It looked unusual. Poor thing. A deformed lower ranker. Then came a fiery orange eye. Huh? Smoke rippled from its nostrils. This griffin could have had so much potential if it were higher-ranking...it had already learned fire! In the egg, too! But then...then...the egg fell shell away. And there was definitely not a griffin standing there. Instead, a light blue baby dragon stood there with gold-silver horns, huge wings and feet, delicate webbing between the wing fingers, black talons, and a huge tail spade. Star scrambled away. It chirruped softly. He sniffed it curiously. Griffins did not kill dragon eggs--they instead abandoned them. Not much better than death, but it was mainly to make them feel better. This was probably one of them. It rubbed against his leg with rough scales. He examined it closer. Huh! It had griffin feet! Two eagle, taloned feet, and two retractable-clawed lion paws! It also had feathered ear nubs and furry hindquarters. Crossbreeding. Only loners and rogues did that. Nasty. Disloyal. Cruel to the egg, too, for it would be unwanted in both the dragon and griffin realms. It would probably also become a loner. Dragons and griffins were actually very similar species, the griffins simply having an extra gene that meant feathers, fur, beaks, and lion paws. Ancient Magyk also allowed them to crossbreed. The rest was, well, the same, gene pool-wise. Poor thing. He could raise it, but the others would treat it as an outcast. It would eat last, never go somewhere without a responsible adult--four hundred years old. Star was only a hundred years old. Still an adult, but compare an irresponsible eighteen human-year-old to a forty-something-year-old. That was Star and Talon. He had a best friend, though, his age--Shard. She was the only griffin who could best him at aerial combat, hunting, flying, and basically everything else. She could also fight like there was no tomorrow. He’d see what she said. He picked up the mewling thing in his talons gently--and a purple flash shot out of its dragon mouth, stinging Star through his thick feathers. He gave a start. What was that? The only time he’d seen something like that happen was when Lord Skye, king of the griffins--or queen of the griffins, Lady Lightwing, used Magicks. But...that was impossible. The thing was barely five minutes old! Regardless, there was no leaving it to die. Because if it really did know Magicks...at this age, too...then it was the prophecy's hybrid. The prophecy was something every dragon and griffin learned at birth.

A Blue Flash, a hybrid egg...son of a claw, son of a river. Feathers of Night, the egg that brings light. Daughter of a storm, daughter of flight. The blue egg, to fight alongside the night. The blue and the night, to end the plight, of constant war prevails. The blue, weathered storms, will find the captured darkness fledgling. They will find the Old One and
they will end the fight--they can do what is right. They will bear the words that change a life forever--the Dragon and the Griffin war will be at its end...unless the forces of evil, the Deepworms Sight, reach them first...for if this happens, we will forever fight during an endless night.

Creepy. The prophecy was more fairy tale than reality--after all, no griffin and dragon in their right mind would hatch an egg together. The Deepworm’s Sight--could that tie into the evil Leviathan society, the Ocean Giants? Star shuddered. He hated the sea, endless, gaping, unbreathable. Plus, it was full of water, making your feathers get wet, and making Elemental Arts impossible. Quenching fire, too. Dragons and Phoenixes also hated it, for good reason. The sky was much better. One knows Magicks...that was a pretty accurate description of the hybrid so far, but still. It couldn’t be Magicks. Each tribe at war, the Griffins, Dragons, Phoenixes, and Leviathans had been searching for it for ages, hoping for it to win the war in their favor. Every creature knew, however, either the Dragons or Griffins would find it. After all, it was a hybrid of them, and they were the main two in the war. There were other minors, of course. Centaurs, Unicorns, Alicorns, Goblins, Trolls, Fairies, Imps, Gnomes, Kelpies, Minotaurs, Yetis, Sasquatches, Hippocampuses, Imps, Ghosts, Nymphs, Chimæras, Sphinxes, mermaids, giants--the list went on and on. All were allied with one of the four sides--however, the Griffins and Dragons were main contenders, very clearly. The leviathans were close, though. In fact, so close, that the Griffins had issued a kill-on-sight order. Luckily, leviathans couldn’t fly. But they could swim. Very, very well. So well, in fact, that Star had lost a dear friend last week skimming the ocean. His name was Gust, Gale’s brother. He picked up the thing by the tail, careful to keep its head down. Then with a galloping start, he launched into the sky.

Tempest, warrior captain to-be of the dragons, was bored. She was supposed to be hunting, but hunting was boring. Besides, she’d found a blue griffin egg and left it to die. Wasn’t that enough? But noo. Royal Queen Hurricane and Royal King Tornado, her parents, just had to make her catch their sorry selves more food because they didn’t even believe their own daughter. They needed to take action, to do something! The leviathans were unmmonitored! Who knew if they were friends or enemies! They even could have sided with those unspeakably foul griffins! She couldn’t believe she was related to those dopes. She had a different attitude, different build, different color, different habits, different….everything. She had always hated her parents. The feeling was mutual. She rolled her eyes, then trudged to the mouth of her cave. Then she walked out onto the ledge of the sheer dropoff, then kept walking. As she fell, she righted herself into a steep dive, wings tucked in, then pulled up as
she fell so close to the earth that she could count the blades of grass. She swooped up, twisting until her huge, bat-like wings shot out and she glided along a gentle updraft. She started scanning the ground for prey. She swooped down and caught sight of a Rhihoki—a kind of deerish prey. She lifted the struggling thing, then dropped it. She ate half, then flew up, wings laboring under her and the Rhihoki half. She grumped the whole way home, and accidentally got the Rhihoki covered in dirt and grime. Then she brought it to her parents. They surveyed it discriminately.

“Bring us a new one.”

“No.”

“This one is filthy! Just like you!”

“Well I’m sure you’d enjoy eating me.”

“Tempest, you little brat—”

“Heave your lazy self up and catch one yourself if you want one so bad. I know that must be hard for you but just try. Also, try to hold your flatulence in. You’ll scare away all the prey.”

Hurricane and Tornado growled low in their throats. Whelp. That was her cue to move it. She swooped into the air, riding on an updraft. Not even her parents, dragon king, and queen, could catch her in the air. She heard angry shouts of annoyance behind her and turned around. She comically cupped a talon around her leathery ear hole. “Eh?”

“Sorry, can’t hear ya.”

“Hm?”

Tornado furiously launched toward his daughter. She whirled around and away. Hurricane grabbed her as she did this. Not fair, double-teaming. Tempest, whining and pouting, let herself go limp in the air, and dropped her wings.

“Tempest, you better—”

Tempest gave a comical slump and they plummeted, Hurricane’s wings not strong enough to support the both of them. As they fell, Tempest twisted out of Hurricane’s grasp, pushed past Tornado, and launched into the sweet freedom of the sky. Hurricane desperately righted herself close to the ground and gave chase, but by then Tempest was a distant speck on the horizon. A distant speck carrying a dirty Rhihoki half. Tornado shook a fist at the speck eating the prey on a cliff.

Star had long deposited the fledgling in his cave and rolled a huge, unmovable (for a fledgling at least) stone in front. He’d left it with a bit of food, substantial enough for three days or so, typical expedition time. He’d scratched into the stone, If four days pass or I, Star dies open this
Very subtle. Not. Often griffins did this with treasure hoards and the like though, so he was fine. Talon approached him. He surveyed him carefully.

“Star, I have to ask you something.”

“Huh?”

“I have been missing….an egg. Blue. I lost it somewhere down here. Close to hatching. Have you seen it?” Star, not processing this all the way quite yet, leaped with glee.

“An egg! Talon, you had an egg! Tell me, tell me, who’s the lucky one? Berry? She seemed to like you. Or, hmmm, Rose--I’m sure it’ll be found in no time! Don’t worry--” Talon cut him off.

“She was killed during a territory border sweep, at the Highlands. Have you seen the egg?”

Star realized what had happened suddenly, due to three pieces of evidence. Horrified, he backed up. His mind slowly processed all the information coursing through it. Talon had hatched an egg with a dragon. His evidence was this: the Highlands were dragon territory. A raid on the Highlands had occurred last week. Griffins had lost, retreated, but no casualties. A few for the dragons. And he had a blue egg. Close to hatching--no, hatched. And finally. Son of a claw. Talon. Another word for claw. His--no, Talon’s egg was the blue hybrid of the prophecy. It was fate. Star knew Raggock the Great had chosen this, chosen Talon and the dragon to be the bearer of the blue hybrid, that it wasn't Talon’s fault, but still. He also knew death by treason, and for him too, for sheltering the hybrid--death by association. Yet Raggock had made him be the griffin to find the egg. He wouldn’t tell Talon, as that wasn’t his destiny. His destiny was to guide the egg, he supposed. To protect it where a lower-ranking griffin like Talon, born to Lord Skye’s attendants, a bit better than servants, couldn’t. And so he shook his head. Then he thought of something. If he died in the raid but Talon didn’t, then Talon would find his son. He’d be charged with treason. And he’d think awful of Star. Star had to survive. Or the entire war could be at stake.

Star flew aside Silver. She was a female griffin, silver feathers, silver fur, small, dainty paws, huge blue eyes, grey beak, sharp talons, long tail, and exceptionally large, silver-feathered wings. This, of course, was her namesake. He glanced over at her. “Silver, I didn’t keep track. How many miles have we flown?”

“Three-hundred ninety-six.”

“How many to go?”

“Uhm....a hundred and four.”

“Thanks.”

Griffins could fly at extremely high speeds. Faster than jets. They could make sonic booms, though they didn’t right now. They didn’t want to draw attention to themselves. Besides,
they were preserving energy. It would take about half an hour to arrive at Havenclaw. They flew in silence. Once they arrived, Star, in front of Gust, gently landed. He spotted the two defenders. A burly-looking brown—not bad—but then a tough-looking red. Dragon’s had colors of red, blue, brown, yellow, orange, and green. Only royalty were other colors. Blues, yellows, and greens, were calm. Browns and oranges were aggressive but simple and slow. Reds, on the other paw, were fast, smart, and strong. They were the lords and dukes among peasants. He heard Silver suck in her breath beside him. Well, nothing their party couldn’t handle. He ducked behind a huge clump of boulders. Behind it was a dragon egg nest. What luck! It had six eggs in it. He passed them off one by one to Blue, who carried a huge, fireproof bag around his neck. Dragon eggs were known to get very hot, and, occasionally, catch on fire. Griffins were fireproof, but their manes were not, and charred, smoking feathers and fur wasn’t very attractive. Also, fire drew unwanted attention. He wordlessly slipped them into the magically noticeably expanding cockatrice skin pouch. So far, so good. Creek flew ahead. The red spotted him. Creek gave a long, warbling shout—the signal. Fang flew ahead and terminated the red in about three minutes. Silver was in combat with the brown—he was unusually fast and smart tactics. Feather ran ahead to help her. Meanwhile, as Blue with the eggs hung back out of sight, Creek, Feather, Talon, Claw, Fang, and Gust streamed into the rocky cave. The red gave a dying cry. It would alert the others. They had to move fast. They sprinted down, the cavern too small to fly in, wings folded, and emerged into a huge, circular cavern. Three dragons were in it. They defeated them, only having Claw get a small gash, and Feather’s mane partially burned off, much to his great displeasure, and flew into the next room. Empty. This was weird. Hadn’t the red signal to the others? They flew on. Empty again. This was the farthest they had ever gone. They flew ahead. Empty. Star’s feathers bristled. Something wasn’t right. But he dared no upset the celebrating griffins, having collected about forty more eggs they’d given to Blue, who’d slipped in behind them. Fang kept motioning for them to huddle, but the elated griffins didn’t notice, and he dared not make a sound. He couldn’t nip them either, for fear of them crying out in surprise. His mood scales were purple—unease. They came into a wide, circular cavern, as round as a finely crafted golden ball. A huge purple dragon was sitting there. Purple. Royal. Or, purple sometimes meant, walking dead. This one was both.

Tempest sniggered. Those dumb griffins would find Marquis sitting there. He’d slaughter them all easily. It had been her idea in the first place. Get them into a place of no escape,
grab the troublesome one with the stupid name--Fang-ha! Griffins had stupid beaks, not wonderful fangs. Then, when they were nice and drawn in—that’s when Marquis would strike. The idiots hadn’t even noticed the absence of the big one. He had been too strong to put in prison, and thus barely her mother and her father together, using every scrap of skill they knew, without escaping unscathed, managed to barely terminate him. What weaklings. Tempest bet she could do it on her own, unscathed. Currently, Tornado was incapacitated, having a large gash on his wing from the troublesome griffin. She watched Marquis rise slowly. He had been instructed not to harm any of the eggs, but return them gently. She watched, interested, seeing if he’d follow his orders. He did. Marquis could not fly anymore, but he was so huge he could raise his head and reach the ceiling, so no worries there. Bam. Marquis killed a silver one. Bam. A blue one. She heard some call out their names as they died. Creek. Gust. Feather. Only two were left Star and Talon. She watched as they expertly avoided the raging Marquis. Then she realized something was wrong. Griffins were extremely hardy. Something like a quick snap, even from Marquis, couldn’t kill them. Why were they dead already? Yep. She was right. They were merely unconscious. She could tell from the way Talon and Star were guarding them. Why guard dead bodies? She watched Star and Talon use water elements to wake up the griffins. They woke. She watched, kind of glad. It was a bit sad watching them die. They also shot some elements at Marquis, to no effect. Marquis went after Talon. He crunched him in his huge gaping mouth. Tempest cringed. Talon was really dead. The griffins were losing badly. She knew that should have made her feel better, but it didn’t. Griffins were really dying one by one. They fell like flies. That was until a little blue mangled hybrid popped its head out of Creek’s bag, full of spilled but not cracked eggs. Dragon eggs were tough. All were on fire. But the hybrid wasn’t. Star and the other griffins showed extreme surprise. It stumbled toward Marquis, a jeweled purple, eyeless, gaping-mouthed huge thing versus the tiny pathetic thing. She watched in dismay, not wanting to see a child die, until….it shot a huge stream of purple flame--Magick--toward Marquis. Marquis thudded to the ground. The impact jarred her all the way from her hiding spot in a niche in the wall. He was dead. That is, as dead as a dead thing can be. Marquis would never rise again. Tempest watched, eyes bugged out. Star ran towards the thing.

“What are you doing here!”
The thing cooed.
The griffins were clearly confused. “Huh?”
“You know it?”
“What was that purple stuff?”
“Hey, where’s Fang?”
Tempest watched the hybrid. Trained and with the griffins, they’d be unstoppable. But with
the dragons….it would be a major asset. Also, she hated her life. Babied and not allowed to do anything. Plus, she just felt a sort of connection to the little-but-powerful blue thing. She made a decision. She’d follow them.

Star flew slowly. He cradled the blue thing sadly.
The griffins had pestered him about it non-stop. He’d made up a lie about finding it and rescuing it. Not far from the truth. They’d managed to salvage lots of eggs, at least. Although Gust and Creek were dead, Silver badly wounded, chances 75% of dying, Fang missing, and Talon….dead, those hundred dragon eggs they’d brought captive, compressed into a small yet magical bag of cockatrice skin would have killed more. All in all, it was successful. But he did not feel triumphant as they flew. He had been granted guardianship over the hybrid. The griffins were too befuddled and confused to remember the Magick of the hybrid. Star had to decide on a name. He had a list he’d thought of, but right now he was too sad to think of it. He realized he could not just keep calling it the hybrid, so he decided to choose a name. It was a boy, he thought--but who knew? He checked the between-the-legs part of the hybrid. Yep. Definitely a boy. Hmm. He was thinking about Rex, maybe, or Tex. He had a list of Orion, Blue, Tex, Rex, Sky, Skylar, Star the second, Star. Jr, Jax, no--Talon. A remembrance to his brave father. Perfect. Then he heard a noise behind him.

Tempest clawed and bit at the wyverns. Untamed monstrosities, barely like dragons at all, wild and primal, and a high nuisance. But three against one? A threat. Tempest felt stupid. She’d been so intent on stealthily following the griffins, she hadn’t noticed the wyverns creep up. She dispatched one, but another fell on her back. The other grabbed her belly. She was vulnerable and outmatched. She cursed. The griffins watched in anger.
“What are you doing here!”
“A dragon!”
“Royalty!”
The griffins all stopped what they were doing. One approached her, a big gold one.
“I know you, you little brat.” The griffin’s hindquarters turned angry deep red. Tempest had always thought it hindersome for her feelings to be broadcasted to everyone if she were a griffin. Now, if only she was a griffin. She kicked the wyvern and sent it spiraling down, and the final one flew away in fear. Tempest watched them depart steadily. She folded her
claws to her chest so they couldn’t see them shaking. Never show fear. There was iron in
killed Talon, Creek, Gust, wounded Silver here, and--and--hey, where’d you take Fang, you
sniveling bag of snakes?” She bristled.
“Says you, feather brain.” He hissed.
“You can’t defeat me by your lonesome, and definitely not when I have more friends
backing me up.
“Give me the hybrid.”
“Oh, this?” He picked it up. “Star Jr.--I mean, Talon Jr. here? No way. He’s ours.” Tempest
snarled. “First of all, you big fat ugly idiot, it’s not it, he’s him. Second of all, he’s ours. His
mother was Jaang-e, a high-ranking dragon. Higher than her pathetic consort Talon,
anyways. What’d your Talon do, put a glamour on to look like a dragon?” The griffin
gaped, then muttered, “Must have.” The stupid griffin looked surprised.
“Yes. That means he belongs with us, the tribe of the highest-ranking parent. Sorry if you
griffins violated the honor code a long time ago, but we dragons never did.” The griffin--
Star--growled. Then he appeared lost in thought in his pea-brained mind his. Then he said
quickly, “I’m his father.” She gaped like a fish out of water.
“Are not.”
“Are too. And I’m of the Royal Order of Talon of Feather. Higher than Jaang-e.” She shook
her head, but the other griffins nodded, catching on and agreeing with him. She growled.
“Give me proof. What was Jaang-e’s favorite thing to do?”
He shrugged. “I dunno. All we did together was make an egg.” He shrugged again. “I have
no viable proof, but do you, to prove this child--of mine--is truly part dragon?” She snapped
her teeth angrily. “Look at the scales!” He shrugged.
“Birth deformity or I have a dragon in my bloodline.”
She snapped her teeth. “You’re lying, and I know it!”
He smiled. “Prove it.”
Her hackles raised. “I’m coming. Until you give me proof you’re his father, there’s nothing
you can do about it. Attack me and I will flay you, then you griffins will receive a full-scale
attack for attacking me, the princess.” Star scoffed. “Who can prove it was us?” She smiled
here. “Are you stupid? Wait, nevermind. That question was a stupid as you. Duh. Anyways,
don’t you know dragons can feel when their kin has died? It’s well-known. My parents
being royalty, they’ll also know how I died. They’d see my final moments through my own
eyes.” Star shrugged. “Blindfold.”
“They’ll know what I’m thinking too.” Like a tree that had weathered many storms, proudly
looking none worse for the wear, but suddenly gave up, Star relented. “You will pretend to
be our prisoner.”
“So long as you don’t treat me like one.” He nodded. Then he turned to the other griffins. “Not a word.” The griffins nodded. “I swear on my golden feathers,” they swore, which was of course simply traditional, as griffins had many feather color varieties. Star clacked his beak. “You swear?” She nodded. “Say it.” She rolled her eyes. “I swear.” He nodded. “Follow us.”

Star was very, very peeved. The creature, Talon, was the griffin’s property, not bratty, eye-rolling, royal teenage dragons. He glanced back every few seconds to make sure Tempest wasn’t killing a griffin or something. The baby, Talon, kept straining towards her in between his wings. He brought his tail up and shoved it down, hard. It squeaked. “Groop.” He brought his wings together, pinning Talon for a moment, then flapped hard to keep going. It was silent after that. Very silent. The only sound was the magnificent flapping of feathered griffin wings, plus the dull, leathery beat of a dragon. He had enlisted Feather to help Silver fly. Silver looked up groggily, then fell, her wings limp. She’d finally fallen unconscious. Star dived to help them, then had another griffin carry her with Feather. Silver wasn’t conscious anymore. Star had healed her all he could, and he figured she could pull through. He was thirsty, and the clouds were making his feathers wet every time they flew through one, so he dipped down toward the waves. The other griffins followed, lapping up the water hungrily. He skimmed the waves. How peaceful. It was quite soothing, and ocean flight. If only there weren’t a dragon along. He spotted a ripple under the water. A trick of the light. A stick…no, a fin. Oh, no.

“UP!” He screamed, but he was too late. A giant mouth came hurtling up towards him. A Leviathan. He could see down its throat for a split second, could see the tiny teeth lining it, could see the gills funneling water in and out. He could see the tiny, beady eyes, the disproportionately long neck, the seal-like flippers. He shut his eyes. This was where he would die. At least he could shove the hybrid away…no time. He braced himself, but a black cloud darted in from behind and shoved him out of the way as the giant maw snapped shut and the creature slowly sank beneath the waves. Tempest had saved his and the hybrid’s life. He muttered a quick thank you, ashamed and shocked, then hastened upward, away from the treacherous sea. The griffins quickly followed. He spotted the griffin realm in
the distance and picked up the pace. When they arrived, the griffins there to receive them hustled the injured away, while the residents of Featherflame gasped at the sight of a royal dragon. Mothers covered their eyes. The beta, Lord Skye, and his beta-mate Lightwing approached, expressions grim. “Report. Where is Fang? And what is that dragon doing here?” He demanded. The griffins looked to the ground. Star finally spoke up. “They had a trap for us in a series of caverns. They had a grand and royal Undead. We captured the princess, but Talon, Gust, and Creek were killed in battle. Fang captured, likely dead. We managed to defeat the Undead.” Skye nodded.

“How many eggs?” Wordlessly, the ornate clasp on the magic sack containing the eggs was opened and all the eggs spilled out. Skye nodded. “Many. Good.” Lightwing ushered a flustered-looking, plump, elderly griffin over. She was the official egg caretaker, griffin or no. “Take them away.” She did, carrying one at a time, angled away from her like she couldn’t bear to touch them. Her assistants helped, in the same awkward no-contact pose. Lightwing nodded. But Skye wasn’t done. “How did you defeat the Undead? Only Magick can do so.” Star quickly made up a lie. “Before Fang was taken, he managed to do some.” Skye looked thoughtful. “Hmm. I never taught him Magicks, but perhaps he learned himself.” Star nodded quickly in agreement. “Very well.” Skye rumbled. “We grieve the loss of many brave griffins and will hold a ceremony today to honor their courage. We will then initiate our new batch of dragons.” Star turned to leave, but Lightwing stopped him. “And Star, take away that atrocity. Such a shame. If only we’d captured him earlier, we could’ve made him a loyal slave.” That was enough for Tempest. She snarled. “I’m a female! I’m royalty too, you--” Star restrained her, but she spat the last words out. “And we dragons are not your ‘loyal slaves!’ We are your captives! Dragons are not half as cruel! We simply leave eggs where eggs belong!” Star shushed her, then proceeded to clap his wings together for silence. “My apologies, Lady Lightwing. I will take this….atrocity down to the dungeons at once.” Tempest gulped. Dungeons? Dragons needed the sky. Lightwing nodded. “Good. See to it.” Star nodded, and, towing Tempest, sailed away.

Tempest leveled her gaze with Star or at least tried to. He refused to look at her. “You’re not taking me to the dungeons….are you?” He said nothing. She pressed on. “I need the sky. I’m a dragon. I can’t live without it.” He still said nothing, so she stopped and started to
hover. “Star. Are you taking me to the dungeons?” He jerked her painfully behind him and said, “I have to.” His voice was flat and husky. He really did sound sorry about it, but that didn’t change anything. She hissed and refused to move. Star snarled. “Move.” She shook her head. “No,” Star growled again, and jerked on her chain, to no avail. She was a boulder, and she would stay here. At least she thought so. Star, however, wouldn’t stand for it. He shocked her with a bit of electricity through her chains. She reared up, then followed Star, going painfully slow. She pestered him all the while. “Star. Star. Star Starstarstarstarstar. C’mon Star. Pleeease? Stupid-Star. Pleaaaase. Star Starstarstarstarstar.” He ignored her. “STAR!” She swatted his face. Finally, he turned around to face her. “Staaaar I saved your life and I’m royalty and you can’t do this to me I’m a dragon Staaaar--”. He growled. “What choice do I have? Disobey Lightwing and Lord Skye?” Tempest considered this. “Uuuuum….yes?” He clicked his beak. “No.” Suddenly Tempest had an idea. “Pass me off as a supervisor for the eggs! I can watch the dragon eggs--dragon eggs almost always die in griffin care! Ask Lord Fartwing and Lord Pigsty or whatever!” Star nodded slowly. “It’s Lady Lightwing and Lord Skye, but yes, perhaps I could ask them. You’d have to be very good though. No misbehaving. Do as you’re told.” She nodded eagerly. “Yup! Ya got it, boss!” He wagged a talon in her face. “I’m serious. And you’ll have to stay in the dungeons until the say-so.” She nodded again, quite a bit less eagerly. He nodded. “Good. Be good. I’m going to try to help you.”

... Tempest fidgeted furiously. It had been three hours, and no report from Star. He probably ditched her. What choice did she have to trust that measly, spineless, low-lying birdbrain? ‘I’m going to try to help you, huh? More like, ‘I’ll ship you off to jail and never see you again! I’m hero!’ She thrashed her spiked tail and gnashed her teeth. She never should have trusted that….she thought of a word she would have been thrown in royal A griffin guard thumped on the walls of her prison cave. “Quiet in there, ya little royal schmoyal dragon scum!” She hissed. The guard leered at her through an intentional crack in the wall to look at prisoners through. “I, for one, am glad that Stellar or whatever is name was gotcha. Little brat.” Tempest furiously swelled up and drew herself to her full height. He jeered mercilessly at her. Star had said be good, but surely he would see an exception for this idiot….right? The rest of the guards seemed to hate him. For good reason, she decided. Well, it was too late now. The familiar hot feeling began to blaze in her chest. Might as well make it a good one. The hot feeling intensified. It was like there was an inferno rattling around in her rib cage. Now it was different. It felt different than usual, but….right. Like it was what she was born to do. She inhaled deeply. The guard’ eyes widened. He could see it coming. She meant to send a huge fireball at the guard, to singe his stupid, falsely accented face, to burn his wiry mane off, but instead a stream of purple shot out of her mouth. The
guard ducked just in time. He looked startled, then began shouting. “Oi! Oi! This dragon
brat here just used Magyk!” The other guards, who had been running towards him at his
shouts, pulled up short. “Enough, Chatava. We’re tired of your pranks. You don’t deserve
our attention.” They turned and trotted back to their charges, who had been looking hopeful.
Chatava glared at the guards. “You gave away my name, you bandy-legged dodos!” He
looked quickly at Tempest. “Of course, that might not be my real name.” Tempest rolled her
eyes. The guard leader yelled back. “Good thing if dragons come and eat you, Chatava!”
Chatava clacked his beak angrily, tried to eyeball his giant bald spot on the top of his
smoking head, then snarled at Tempest. “I know what you did, ‘royal’ dragon scum. And I
will prove it to the world. You will be deemed too dangerous….to live. Yes, I’ll prove it.
Scum.” With that, he spat on her face.

Star knew that dungeon food was terrible and scarce, as his father had thrown him in there
once for a day and a night for accidentally calling Lady Lightwing and Lord Skye’s son
(bratty Beryl, in his mind--he’d seen the royal records and knew he could oust him at
anything--), Beryl, for calling him Butt the Brat. He didn’t mean to out loud! The griffins
got a good kick out of that--no one liked the imperious and excessively snobby Beryl--
except his father. Not like he liked Beryl--he just wanted to be pristine and perfect, and one
day be beta. Star could tell, though it was treason to want to overthrow the betas. The
alphas? Not even possible. There weren’t any. There was an old legend, that the true king
and queen would come as siblings, and that they would come in a time of need. No one had
risen to the throne. The betas were basically the alphas, though formally the betas. Star had
no siblings, and he scolded himself inwardly for even thinking he could be alpha. He
wouldn’t turn out like him. Never. Anyways. He caught two smarco, a few rabbits, and a
rhihoki for Tempest. If she needed more food, assuming he couldn’t get her out, he’d catch
more. He felt guilty and hoped catching prey for her would at least give peace to his
conscience. It did not. He brought them to her anyway. “Tempest….I’m asking soon. Here.
This is for you. If you need more, I’ll catch some more…” She didn’t say anything, just
turned her scaly back to him. He left forlornly with heavy, plodding footsteps. It didn’t seem
fair that he could fly when she couldn’t. Tempest watched him go. Maybe she’d been a bit
harsh on him. He was keeping his promise, after all. But still. He’d still been the one to
arrest her, to ditch her, to throw her in jail after she’d saved his groveling life. Let the
Levithan eat him, for all she cared. But….she’d also saved the blue thing. That was good.
She had nothing against it, besides possibly saving a bunch of griffins’ lives, and even then,
even though it was treason, she was a little bit relieved that they’d survived. She was the
tiniest bit grateful to Star for the prey, but not that much. The guards had served her food
and she had stayed away because of the smell, eventually torching it, hoping her fire didn’t come out purple, and though the smoky, acrid, burnt scent wasn’t pleasant, a dragon was used to it, and it was better than the food-scent. Tempest had experience burning things, and the familiar smoke-scent was welcome. It reminded her a bit of home. Home….King Flatulence and Queen Gassy. Was that really her home? Well, it was, but she didn’t like it. It was better than here though, guarded around the clock and chained to the wall. She longed to unfurl her wings, to ease out the kinks running up and down her wings, her neck, her limbs, her tail, her back, to send the brittle chains snapping in all directions, but the chains were enchanted by Lord Skye himself, and every time she strained for freedom a great pain came upon her. Thus she was forced to remain still and waiting, waiting for the moment of her release. Each morning and evening Star brought her food and she wolfed it ravenously down. She spoke not a word to him, but little by little, meal by meal, her anger and her glare lifted until she was indifferent to his comings, at least as far as he could see. Then she began to smile when he came and said a few words. They spoke of the blue hybrid, Talon, who was growing well and revered for his Magyk. He was about to speak, said Star. He said he could feel it in his gizzard. But every time Star left, she felt worse. She longed more and more for the sky. Every time he left her was like a stab with sharp talons, or hitting a spiky stone when you flew. Her imprisonment was almost making her go mad. She needed the sky, needed freedom, needed to ease the painful bite of the chains. She longed to soar, to feel the wind washing over her curved wings, longed to feel the lift under her wings, and the power, the feeling as she soared majestically over land and sea, over mountain and mesa, wood and desert, that she was free. That she was powerful. That she could do anything, that nothing could defeat her. Finally, after two weeks, two weeks of torture, Star grinned at her. “Tempest! They’re releasing you. To watch the eggs, remember? Be good!” Tempest made a burbling, warbling sound that dragons made when pleased. Star smiled, as he had begun to understand dragon behaviors after so much time with her. To be honest, Star thought her a bit similar to himself, even making natural griffin noises just as often as dragon noises and the feeling was mutual. Star often found himself being stared at curiously after making a dragon noise or behavior. He figured it was Tempest, of course, rubbing off on him, which of course it was. He tried to limit the dragon warbles, cries, launchings, landings, hunting tactics, and whatnot, but he began to get worried. Some of the things he did Tempest had never shown him, restrained as she was in her prison. How did he know them? Maybe Tempest was teaching him these behaviors despite not doing them, simply by being around her. Still, it had only been two weeks, and for them, twenty-eight hours together. (He spoke to her twice a day when he brought her food for two hours). Lord Skye had conferred with Lady Lightwing and, after much debate, agreed to permit Tempest to tend to the dragon eggs, under strict orders to be watched and monitored constantly. And she was not to be
given access to any griffin eggs. She would sleep in the dungeon still, but in a nicer area with better food and she would be permitted to fly when duties were done. It wasn't an ideal situation, but Tempest felt like celebrating. Star came to Tempest’s cell. He unlocked it by twisting a complicated combination on her padlock with his beak and giving the guards multiple passwords and phrases. He grinned at Tempest as the guards slid open her rusting gate with a creak. No one had believed Chatava, though Tempest suspected he still had some mischief left in him and that was not the last she would see of him. When Tempest was released she squinted at the light. She had not seen it in so long, and it was blinding. She kneaded the ground like a cat, feeling the soft earth, the grass beneath her talons. She breathed in the fresh air. Then, suddenly, like a striking snake with no warning, she sprinted toward the edge of a cliff by the dungeon--as usually prisoners had wings bound, thus escaping hard, nearly impossible, but Tempest didn’t. And she was ready to fly. But her wings were not. She launched herself off the edge, did a perfect intentional somersault--and then plummeted like a rock. Her old, creaky wings felt painful as the folds in skin and fabric of two weeks of the same position sorted themselves out, slow, painful, painfully slow. She urged her wings to splay out at the last second, like many of the fearless dives she had done before. But they would not. Her heart leaped into her throat. The ground was nearing--closer, closer. She squeezed her eyes shut, bracing for impact. But it never came. A feathery ball shot into her--Star. He had repaid his debt of her saving his life. He held aloft Tempest as her wings beat slowly, but gaining speed. He clicked his beak. “You shoulda known better! A ledge like that, after two weeks--”. She bowed her head. “I’m sorry. I just needed to fly.” He nodded. “Ready then?” She was puzzled. “For what?” “To fly, of course!” He launched over the edge, and Tempest, much more cautiously, followed him. The wind whistled underneath her, and the lift pushed her up, up, up, up. Star fanned out his wings in a lazy circle on a strong updraft but Tempest skimmed low and fast above the ground. Then she streaked upwards with Star following her until she was above the clouds. This was the moment she had dreamed of for two weeks. This moment. That was all. She felt rejuvenated. Much too soon, Star shouted to her over the wind. “WE’RE DUE IN TEN MINUTES. WE BETTER GET BACK NOW.” She nodded and wordlessly (and much slower than before) began soaring back, flapping every once in a while.
Chapter 2

Sorry it is just a story not a chapter book, Lol
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