

DRAGONS HILL

BOOK III OF THE FIRST YEARS

By: J Barrett

PROLOGUE

About 20 miles outside of Chicago, in one of the well-to-do enclaves that existed before the Great Burning, a large mansion stood on a rise in the center of one of the most exclusive of these. Haunted eyes peered out of the picture window watching men unload weapons and ammo from a large gray produce truck parked in the driveway. Dixon was a large man; his 6'5" frame held a well-muscled and finely tuned body. A scruffy dark beard and long disheveled hair combined with red bloodshot eyes gave him a look that said - 'mess with me at your own peril'. A former Marine Black Ops member; he towered over most men, and could take down any he encountered without much effort. He had been the best in his outfit and took great pride in his abilities; when in the field he was cold, methodical, and emotionless - a perfect killing machine. And now with no soul - he was deadlier than ever.

The men unloaded the many crates of ammunition slowly and with great care storing them almost reverently on shelves that lined one wall of the large garage. They took a number of weapons out of the van and stored the majority of these with the ammo; but they took their own weapons with them into the mansion. Dixon called them all to attention in a low voice as they gathered in the entry alcove; nervous twitching and low conversation confirmed this man was their leader, and they feared him. Dixon ordered them to seek shelter in one of the surrounding mansions and to pick their places well as they would ride out the long cold winter here.

Upon entering the exclusive neighborhood they had found few survivors, and Dixon had made short work of any who resisted. It had been three years since the Great Burning, and there seemed to be fewer and fewer reports of the black monsters in the area, so he wasn't particularly worried about them. His 'weatherman' had predicted the previous cold fronts, and now predicted the first blizzard of the season was on its way. Dixon decided to ride it out in comfort this time in one of these luxurious estates. No one disagreed with him; no one ever disagreed with him. He claimed the largest estate for himself and his seconds-in-command. Guards were posted and the remainder of his men was sent out to scour the other large homes for any and all food and drink.

Hours later Dixon gave orders he was not to be disturbed unless there was an emergency; and it 'damn well better be an emergency'. Others had learned the hard way what constituted an emergency, at the cost of their lives. Dixon grabbed a bottle of Jack Daniels in his powerful hand and walked into the large living room, taking a long swig. He paused at the window that looked out onto the back of the large estate; enjoying the burn as the liquor slid down his throat. A pathway led down a small incline to the abandoned tennis courts and swimming pool. The sun was setting on a cold blue horizon and he watched as its colors played across the dirty algae-ridden pool. He turned around abruptly and looked about as if expecting someone to be standing there. He waited for a few minutes and then slowly walked thru the large rooms of the house, taking a swig from the bottle every now and then.

On the second floor he discovered what appeared to be a private study. The décor was very masculine, dark paneled walls, small bookcase, and a large soft leather couch. An impressive leather chair stood behind a desk so ostentatious, and yet so definitely male, he was drawn to it immediately. He sat himself down in the leather chair and began to go thru some of the desk's drawers. The bottom drawer on his left produced a pearl-handled Colt 45. He leaned back admiring the weapon, *yeah; this is definitely me...* he thought to himself smiling.

He rose and went over to the plush sofa and plopped himself down grabbing a throw pillow and sliding it under his head. He downed the bottle of Jack and slammed it on the rectangular coffee table. Leaning back again, he closed his eyes and let his body go, releasing the tension at last. He cleared his mind of everything, and then as he dozed, he allowed himself to remember.

His mind took him back, back to the cave where he had found her; back to the ultimate joy that had gripped his mind when he made first contact.

In his last battle with the black monsters he had become separated from his unit. They had attacked with such a vengeance that he barely made it to safety. He had run to a ledge and jumped down the side of a mountain, sliding and rolling down a considerable way, striking his head several times on boulders. He ended up at the bottom of a small ravine in a clump of bushes, unconscious and hidden from view; the rest of his team was not so lucky. He remembered coming to and finding nothing but scorched earth and charred bodies all around him. He wandered about trying to find his way back to his unit. He was turned around and the ground was charred beyond recognition. He couldn't travel very far by day, and night travel was out of the question with the monsters in the area. A bad situation quickly got worse and he ended up on his own in the middle the monsters hunting ground.

He had been wandering for several months and came upon a desolate valley; the land was scorched and blackened. He had to be very careful, always locating a place he could hide in nearby in case the bastards showed up. He had finally found a cave in the side of a mountain; it seemed to go on forever. He spotted one of the monsters above and retreated to the back of the cave. He was trapped, so he decided to explore it further when a wrong turn led him to a dead end where he slipped and fell into a large crevasse. He slid down at least a hundred feet before he landed in a puddle of some horrible smelling liquid, which he later discovered was dragon urine. It was very dark, and he couldn't get his bearings. He could see some light down a long pathway, so he quietly headed for it keeping alert to any sounds.

It opened into a large cavern, and the ground was littered with odd shaped orbs. He realized quickly that they were dragon eggs of various sizes – he was in a hatching ground. He quickly backed against a wall and dropped to his knees carefully looking about; there was no movement or sound. He began to move forward slowly when he heard a small child's voice calling out and froze on the spot.

Is anyone there? A small plaintive female voice called, *Please, can you help me?*

A child trapped in here with all these eggs, he thought, probably food for when they hatch.

He looked about frantically searching for any indication of where she could be. His natural instincts kicked in and he made a decision - no way will those beasts feast on this child! He looked about and thought, *where in the hell are you, kid?*

The reply was immediate.

You are somewhere very near; I can feel you close by.

Dixon spun around scanning the ground near him. All he saw was a small gelatinous egg. Going down on one knee he looked closer at it and noted it was honey-colored and appeared to be sparkling in the dim light. For several seconds he seemed spellbound, mesmerized by the dancing lights. He stood up and looked all about the chamber. He became aware that there were several of these colored gelatinous eggs about the floor of the chamber, but none like the one at his feet.

He looked down again at the small egg at his feet and reached out to pick it up. He was hit with a huge electrical shock that knocked him down. He landed flat on his butt, stunned for a moment. Almost immediately his mind was flooded and contact was made.

All the false bravado, all the macho bullshit, the hard outer shell he had erected about himself dissolved away in an instant. It was replaced with an all-encompassing love unlike anything he had ever felt before. He would never be alone again; never know rejection again; he would have a friend who accepted him as he was. Their joining made him happier than he had ever been in his entire life.

{Dixon stirred in his sleep and smiled at the memory.}

The next several months were spent finding a safe place for the little girl to mature. She showed him how to get out of the cave and soon they began a long journey to find a safe haven. If the monsters got wind of her existence, they would surely try to kill her. So he searched for a safe place to hide her while she grew.

Several hundred miles away from the cave he had found her in, Dixon stumbled onto a hidden opening in the side of a small mountain. Burrowing and squeezing into the opening he found himself inside a huge cavern. A landslide, probably from an earthquake, had blocked the entrance. For his purposes, this seemed like a safe place for her. He set up camp in the cavern talking to his charge and telling her all about their safe hideaway. He retrieved small branches and leaves and fashioned them into a nest for the egg. He blocked any openings he found in the cave, the better to keep her safe from prying eyes. He explored the cave and found a pool of water at the back, down a long slope. Feeling safe at last, he set in for the duration of her hibernation.

In the days and weeks that followed the egg began to grow. They spent their days exchanging knowledge. She explained that the full extent of her knowledge would happen at the hatching, when they blended as one. But she gave him the knowledge of the history of her kind. For the first time in his life Dixon felt he was part of something greater than himself; and he was humbled that he had been chosen to be included in it. He told her about himself leaving nothing out, and he felt her acceptance of him as he was, without any reservations. She would teach him a new way to wage war on the devils, she told him, and they would join with others of her kind and put an end to this horror.

And then one morning, as he was bathing in the pool, she called to him to come quick. He dressed hurriedly and as he ran towards the main chamber he heard her egg cracking. He entered the main cavern and saw the shells lying about and looked for her.

She called to him and stepped out into the open light. Dixon stared in awe at her; she was gorgeous, more than he had envisioned. She was honey colored, stood at least 20 feet, and as she lowered her beautiful head to him he beheld her dark brown eyes, and the intelligence beyond them.

I am the Lady Tessa, Warrior Dragon to the First. She began to tell him, you are my savior, my companion, and my friend. I was chosen for you and you were chosen for me. We are to be Riders of Light, in the army of the First. We will rid the land of the monsters that kill and destroy for no other reason than they can.

He felt himself rising in the air and he heard her cool sultry voice calling to him. A flash of bright light suddenly burst from her and they were encased in it. He felt himself changing, and the knowledge began to flow. He was in ecstasy, reveling in the joy of full bonding. And then the bastards burst in.

Dixon lashed out in his sleep at some unseen enemy. “No!” He shouted as tears began to slide down his face.

Screeching and roaring filled his mind as he remembered what took place when they broke in and attacked. Lady Tessa dropped him on the ground, sweeping him aside with her tail to protect him; she spun around and faced her attackers. She fought a terrible battle with the devils; fire flying in all directions. He was thrown out of the cave and rolled down the side of the hill slamming his head against a rock. He could hear the loud roaring from above; it filled his mind just before he blacked out. When he came to all was deathly quiet. He searched in his mind for his friend; but the connection had been severed.

Noooo!

Heart pounding, he ran up the hill to the cave; he found it covered in blood. He searched everywhere and sadly found her lifeless body towards the back of the cave. She had been torn to pieces. Dixon howled like a madman, screaming out his anguish.

He held her lifeless head to his chest rocking back and forth and wailing. He thought he had known pain in his life; but it was nothing compared to the pain of this kind of loss. A dark, black emptiness filled his mind and his heart - his grief so deep. He could not fathom the pain he felt... Dixon went mad.

Days passed and he was barely aware; he would be quiet and reflective one minute, and a raving madman the next. His rages went on and on and in his madness he looked for someone to blame, someone to take vengeance upon. This ‘First’ she spoke of never came to her aid; he abandoned her in her hour of need. Dixon would hunt him down and make him pay.

Eventually, through his strong will, he was able to pull himself together; but he was a changed man. He had one thing on his mind now – revenge! He would find the one responsible for this and destroy him. He would raise an army, an army so large that none would oppose him. He would hunt this First down and do to him what had been done to Dixon. He would kill his rider and watch with hideous glee as the madness overtook him, and then Dixon would kill him.

Days later he gathered his small possessions and left his cave of so much joy and headed out into the wasteland. He wandered about for some weeks until he stumbled across a band of marauders who quickly attacked him. They had no idea who or what they were dealing with.

Dixon ran at them screaming and roaring; all they saw was a madman with wild red eyes. His appearance, wild and disheveled, put them off for a few seconds. He used the time to swiftly take out their leader; then took over the band of cutthroats, killing any who resisted. The majority knew it was better to follow than die but they did so out of fear. He took this small band and went in search of other bands doing the same. As the months went by he slowly began to build up his forces.

“Aargh!” (He screamed in anguish)

Dixon bolted upright in a cold sweat panting deeply. He wiped his eyes and looked around. One of his men had come into the room explaining that he had heard him yelling, and asked if he was okay.

Dixon shot him between the eyes.

“I am now,” he said in a cold dead voice as he watched the red pool slowly form around the man’s shattered skull.

“I am now.”

RETURN

Much had happened since the Great Battle here, and the destruction of NaTas in Peru. The Blue Dragon Clan had returned to the West Coast and immediately began flying up and down the coast proclaiming the land free of the black menace. Slowly the people came out of hiding and began to pick up their lives once again. It was Surfman and Diana who made first contact, hailing a group of surfers. Their laid back attitude provided an easy opening for an introduction, especially after Surfman showed them a new way to ‘ride the crest’. His ability to speak the surfer lingo endeared him to them quickly, and soon the general population accepted him and the other Blue Dragons as well. Order was once again restored along what once was the California coastline.

Diana delivered six healthy babies and in true dragon fashion pawned them off on her brothers. These children grew at a rapid pace and were soon communicating with Wolf on a telepathic level. Following an inner instinct, Wolf paired them with six of his telepathic dragons and began training them himself. He watched as they grew, in both body and spirit; studying them and their emerging gifts carefully. The children and dragons ended up picking each other and within a short time were ready for pairing. Two years had passed, but the children had aged rapidly to almost 7 years in body. They informed their father that they were ready for enhancement and told him they wanted him to know before they went to Wolf.

Both the children and their dragons approached Wolf requesting enhancement. Wolf conferred with Big John on this (because he was the children’s father), and received a resounding ‘yes’ to his inquiry. Diana protested at first, but the children all convinced her that it was the best thing for them. She relented and finally agreed with them, it was time for this. So it was that the children were officially joined with their dragons, embracing enhancement with open minds. And the six children of Diana and John, along with their dragons became known as ‘The Blue Six Squadron’.

It was then that Wolf was called to Dragons Hill for his evolution to Ancient.

Several days later as they flew over the large mesa those below were not prepared for the startling change in the children. Only Jake had known of the rapid development of Diana’s children, and their joining with their dragons. Wolf waited for his clan to land and then he circled and landed in the midst of them.

He proudly called out their names to Jake, rider and dragon alike, as they dismounted: “May I present the Blue Six Squadron: Abby and Akira; Bobby and Bato; Charlie and Catai; Daniel and Drega; Ellie and Entai; and last but certainly not least, Kyra and Okada.” Each bowed in respect to Jake and greeted him telepathically.

A deep resounding chuckle erupted from Jake as he shot a huge flame into the air signaling ‘Approval’.

You are full of surprises Wolf; I congratulate you!

Daniel and Kate stepped forward and greeted Big John and Diana and bowed to Wolf in respect. Daniel reached out to Big John and taking his forearm in a greeting of equals. *Welcome back to Dragons Hill, it has been a long time since we were all together. Big John, your children are quite a sight, how wonderful for you.*

“You have no idea,” he laughed loudly and the children joined in, “a private joke, Daniel,” he said slapping Daniel on the back.

“No need for telepathy, the children translate all to their brothers.” Turning around John called to his children, “Come over here and meet your Aunt Kate and Uncle Daniel properly.”

The young men and women all turned in unison and laid their hand on their dragon’s head for a moment, turned and joined their father. He introduced them to Kate and Daniel, one at a time. Each exuded an air of confidence and strength; both Daniel and Kate felt it immediately.

Diana smiled brightly, “My children are beautiful, aren’t they?” she said sweetly.

“Yes Diana,” answered Kate, “They are a wonder; but then I would expect nothing less from you.”

Diana laughed childlike and went to her children, “Did I not say that you would like your aunt and uncle? Come, let us go below and meet Sam and the other riders. And perhaps Oreo will come and say hello also.”

Kate noticed that her ‘children’ treated her with great respect and also something else. Their manner and speech was that of a parent to a child.

“Yes Mother, we will go below now and meet the others,” said Bobby. “But we must conduct ourselves as warriors befitting our leader, Wolf.”

“Yes, yes, of course my precious,” said Diana as she slipped her arms in theirs and pulled them along the path leading down.

Daniel, Kate and Big John followed behind them. “As you probably noticed, the young ones take care of Diana. They control her bursts of impulsive behavior, and no, she had no idea. Yet when we fight, they follow her lead; it is a very symbiotic relationship for all involved.”

“Are they that powerful?” asked Daniel in alarm.

“More than you can imagine, Daniel,” answered Big John somberly. “They have a built-in sense of right and wrong that goes far beyond my understanding. Wolf says not worry; they love their mother very much and will do nothing against her will.”

John stopped and cocked his head to the side, listening, he then looked at Kate and Daniel, “The children just informed me that Valotin and Queen Valeria are about to exit the thermals. We should return to the mesa and give them a proper welcome.” They hurried above and joined the other riders.

Valotin and his Queen, Lady Valeria, came out of the thermals and began the long spiral down towards Dragons Hill. It had been a little over two years ago that Valotin had left Dragons Hill to complete his task. He had managed to lure the ancient slayer Seth with the promise of a future, which thereby reinforced his strength of will. Seth was able to resist NaTas's false promises and see thru to the truth; he was able to destroy NaTas and end a thousand years old war thus releasing him from his bondage. The final battle with the forces of NaTas was fought and won by Valotin, Ichor, and Alakar's armies; but a high price was paid for their victory.

Valotin was returning to Dragons Hill to be a part of the installation of another dragon to the status of Ancient. Lady Arian came out of the thermals right behind Valotin. At Jake's personal request she had accompanied them on this journey with her rider Lady Emily and her mate Adam, the winged man. As they slowly spiraled down James and Elizabeth could see their friends from Dragons Hill gathered on the mesa below. James also noted that the Blue Dragon Clan was also present. He called to Lady Arian's riders telepathically.

Adam, you'd better prepare yourself, the Blue Dragons are already here. That means Diana knows you were coming with us, sorry old man, James laughed, I can ask Jake to step in if she gets to be too much.

I'm not the least bit worried about her James; she won't bother me I assure you. He gave Lady Emily a little squeeze, Emily I'm going to take to the air now.

Spreading his magnificent wings, Adam lifted off the back of Lady Arian and flew to her side calling to her politely, Lady Arian, thank you for a lovely ride, it was a fantastic experience!

My dear Adam, she purred to him, I was most happy to give you a ride thru the Thermals. And I understand your need to be in the air again. Look below; all the dragons are staring in envy at your beauty! Lady Arian was a bit prejudiced where Adam was concerned.

She was right about one thing, both dragons and riders below let out a low humming sound as Adam spread his wings and took to the air. He dove and circled above the large mesa waiting for Valotin to land first.

Watching from below Diana was itching to jump on Surfman's back and fly up greet Adam, but she held her position. *No, I will remain here by John's side. I will show respect to Wolf, just as I promised the children I would. I will not embarrass Wolf on this his special day, she thought to herself defiantly.*

She continued to watch with the others; the fact that her children were grouped tightly around her never occurred to Diana.

Valotin circled once and landed with his Queen by his side. Lady Arian landed just behind them. All the riders dismounted and stood by their dragon's right side. All heads and eyes were fixed above as Adam circled once more.

Valotin called to him, *Spread your wings my friend, you have their attention, now come and land beside me.* Adam glided in and landed by Valotin's left side - a place of honor.

Valotin began, *Hail Jake, First of the Ancients; I bring greetings and salutations from Dragons Bay. You know my Queen, Lady Valeria, she lowered her head in respect, and of course our riders James and Elizabeth, both bowed in his direction. Behind me I present the Lady Arian and her rider, Lady Emily. Both bowed in their respective way. And at your personal request, Adam, the winged man, has joined us.* Adam stepped forward and spread his wings wide with great pride as he bowed to Jake with a flourish.

There was an audible gasp from the riders assembled on the mesa, and a deep throaty chuckle from Jake, who roared ‘Approval’ to the astonishment of all.

I bid you all welcome to Dragons Hill. We are pleased that you could come for this august occasion. Now, let us dispense with all the formality, go and enjoy for we are all family here.

With that the riders came forward on both sides. Steve reached Adam first and gave him a big bear hug to the surprise of all. He and Adam had become fast friends during his many visits to Dragons Bay. He picked up Emily and swung her around and gave her the same. Then he took Lady Ashley’s hand and introduced her to them both. She was flabbergasted and tongue tied in front of Adam until he put her at ease by giving her a welcoming hug, and with a wink to Steve, lifted her two feet off the ground. Adam had her beaming when he let her go.

Kate and Daniel welcomed James and Elizabeth warmly and they also paid their respects to Valotin and his Queen. Walking over to Adam and Lady Emily they formally welcomed them to Dragons Hill. Daniel asked Lady Emily to introduce him to her dragon Lady Arian. With great politeness he bowed before her and welcomed her warmly.

Please tell Daniel that I am most pleased at his politeness, she relayed to Lady Emily, and I am honored to be here. Daniel smiled and bowed again and bid her to enjoy her stay and feast on the herd at the feeding grounds, then he took his leave.

“All right everyone lets go below,” Daniel ordered the large group. “Come on, we can all visit in the Great Hall.”

As they began to gather in groups and leave the plateau, Michael came over to Steve with Lady Sally; their eyes pleaded for an introduction to Adam. Steve smiled and called to Adam and Lady Emily.

“Adam, Lady Emily, a moment please,” they came over to them and Steve began, “Adam I believe that you asked me introduce you to Michael and Lady Sally at the first opportunity.” Steve swung his arm wide and bent in a mock bow, “Well, here they are buddy.”

Adam’s eyes got big and he smiled enthusiastically as he marched right up to Michael and grabbed his hand.

“Lady Kate’s grandson, Oh, I am honored to meet you sir,” Adam spread his wings in excitement as he shook Michael’s hand vigorously. “I’ve read all about you in the Dragon Chronicles, and spoke to Master Jeffery himself when he visited us recently. You were the second to enhance, after Lady Kate.”

Both Sally and Michael were taken aback by his obvious admiration of them; and here they were like school kids in awe of him.

Turning he looked down upon Lady Sally and worked his magic on her. “And Lady Sally, you must promise to introduce me to your friend, Oreo. I am so looking forward to meeting her.” Sally was surprised he knew about Oreo, let alone wanted to meet her. “I have heard much from Steve about your wonderful camp.”

Adam turned and reached out his hand to Lady Emily and pulled her to him. “May I present my wife, Lady Emily.” Sally graciously greeted Lady Emily with a hug and an invitation to come by her cave and see their child.

As they made their way to the Great Hall, Lady Sally promised, “Adam, I am sure that Oreo will join us in the Great Hall when we arrive. She is filled with curiosity and has a tendency to check out all the newcomers to our little community during the dinner hour.”

“I look forward to seeing her, and Tabs, and Brutus and Cesar, and the other animals that were enhanced. I read about your Lady Emily’s falcon, Lancelot; I want to meet him too!” he told her excitedly.

Adam checked out the pathway leading down remembering the tales from the Chronicles; *so this is where the battle took place between Oreo and one of the mutant beasts. And she dove off this very path into the midst of them. That must have been one hell of a leap!* They entered the large cavern and Adam looked about in wonder.

Sam had outdone himself preparing a great feast for the day. All the tables were laden with piles of biscuits and honey, ice tea and water, and bowls of steaming veggies. Sam had asked Steve what the birdman ate as he did not want to offend him by preparing anything he would find offensive. Steve told him that Adam was just like him, he just happened to have a pair of wings. As Steve, Adam, and Michael came into the Hall there was a hushed silence. Lady Sally took Lady Emily’s hand and with Lady Ashley leading, they made their way to a table with Adam, Steve and Michael right behind.

James, Elizabeth silently called to her mate, Adam looks a bit unnerved by all this attention.

He’ll be fine my love, he answered her immediately; I believe that he is secretly enjoying it. He’s just worried that Diana will make a scene and embarrass Big John.

Perhaps not, I noticed that she has remained by Big John’s side since they arrived. Elizabeth stole a glance in their direction, but her eyes say she wishes she were over there with them. Oh, here comes Sam for the blessing.

Sam came into the large room and went to the center table where he called everyone to attention and said the blessing. Then he bid them all enjoy the meal as the servers came out with giant platters laden with steaks, pork chops, and barbequed chicken and began to place them on the tables.

Sam began to make his rounds of all the tables and speak a word or two to all the riders. He began with the leaders table and warmly greeted James and Elizabeth, promising James that he had made a special desert for him to enjoy.

As they sat at the table, Adam stared at the large platter of food. "Steve, I haven't seen a feast the likes of this in quite some time." Emily piled his plate high, "I do believe I shall be too heavy to fly if I eat all this!" Adam said in exasperation as everyone laughed.

Sam finally made his way to their table and Steve handled all the introductions. "I certainly hope everything is to your liking young birdman," he told Adam. "And if no one has said it yet," he bellowed, "my God man, your wings are magnificent!"

The whole room erupted into cheers and loud clapping; at last the ice had been broken. Everyone wanted a chance to meet and talk with Adam, but they were also aware that it was just too much attention for him. They knew that Valotin would be at Dragons Hill for at least a week or two and they would have ample time to meet and speak with the famous 'birdman'. So they left him alone to enjoy his meal. And enjoy everyone did, especially the dessert, strawberry shortcake and peach cobbler. The strawberries came from Dragon's Hill own gardens. Growing in the rich earth they were twice their size and sweet beyond compare. James had sent a crate of peaches from Dragons Bay the week before with a special request of Sam for peach cobbler. Seeing it before him now, James couldn't resist and had two helpings of cobbler, much to the surprise and admonishment of Elizabeth.

Conversations broke out all over the Great Hall. At Steve's insistence, Adam began to regale his table with the tale of Diana's visit and the uproar that ensued. They were all laughing so hard that tears were streaming down their faces. As they settled down to the dessert, Oreo took this opportunity to saunter into the Hall and make her way to their table. At one point she stopped and sniffed the air; lowering her head, she crept up behind Adam with her tail high in the air. Lady Sally began to smile knowing what was about to happen. She nudged Steve and he joined her grinning at Adam.

Suddenly Adam stopped in mid sentence as he felt his wings being lightly caressed. He spun around quickly and found himself face to face with the biggest cat he had ever seen. Oreo stared at him for a long moment and then she licked his nose, purring loudly. Adam burst out laughing as did all nearby. Adam pet her large head and began to purr at her himself. He moved to a more open area and knelt down on one knee and called to her. She answered him with a loud purring sound and came over to him nuzzling his face. She stepped back looking at his wings, sniffing. Very slowly, Adam opened his wings to their full spread. There were many "ahs," as the Hall became silent and everyone watched. Curious, Oreo pranced about Adam, sniffing over his wings and purring loudly; then she began rubbing herself against them. After a few minutes she walked completely around Adam and then sat before him staring intently. Finally she threw herself down, and purring loudly began to 'play'.

Lady Sally came to Adam's side apologizing, "Please forgive her, I've never seen her quite like this Adam."

“It’s all right Lady Sally, she’s been telling me all about her life here.” Adam scratched her massive head and slapped her large side lovingly, “She’s really very engaging, and she absolutely loves you and the dragons. By the way, who is Rah?”

“Rah is my companion dragon Adam,” Lady Sally replied, “Jake’s First Wing; why do you ask?”

“She said he is her big brother, I was just wondering who she was referring to.” Adam rose and patted her head and walked back to the table with Lady Sally. “Emily,” he called to his partner, “you wouldn’t believe the things she showed me. She is truly an amazing creature!”

“You can really speak to her?” Sally asked Adam, “Oh, this is wonderful! Rah has been the only one able to communicate with her. I have so wanted to speak to her myself, but I just don’t have the ability.”

“Nonsense!” Adam stood and took Sally’s hand, “Lady Sally you just have to be taught how it is done. Come with me and I will show you.” He called Oreo over and placed Sally’s hand on her head; she immediately began to purr loudly. “You must first forget how you communicate normally. Close your mind to all the sounds and open your inner eye to the pictures that will appear before your closed eyes. They will come very fast, as tho you are flipping thru a picture book,” he illustrated with his hands. “This is how Oreo communicates, she sends pictures and feelings.”

Sally tried and tried, but she was too excited at the possibility of communicating with the great cat, she was getting nowhere fast. She finally gave up in frustration and was about to return to the table when all of a sudden she ‘saw’ a quick flash of her and Oreo running in the field by the horse pens, she felt warm and cozy.

“Oh!” She exclaimed wide-eyed. She quickly sent a picture of her petting Oreo and hugging her. Oreo purred loudly and rubbed against her leg.

“She is pleased that you understand, you must find a quiet place and practice with her,” Adam told a beaming Lady Sally. “She is looking forward to thanking you for her life here.”

Adam returned to the table and turned his attention to Michael. “Michael, do you know why Jake asked me here, is there something he wishes me to do?”

“I have no idea Adam, Jake said nothing to me.” Michael replied.

Adam turned and looked at Steve, who quickly added, “me neither Adam; Jake must have something special in mind for you.”

Daniel stood up at the head table and announced to all, “the ceremony will take place tomorrow morning at dawn. Everyone enjoy the rest of the day, we will all meet at dawn on the high mesa.” Daniel and Kate stood with James and Elizabeth and began to go around the Hall greeting and talking with all the riders. Elizabeth turned to Kate and they discussed the children and the many new changes at Dragons Hill.

“Where are the children Kate? I have really been looking forward to seeing them. They must be toddlers by now,” asked Elizabeth, “I bet they have grown a lot.”

Kate chuckled, “you have no idea Elizabeth. It seems that our children are the new future of our world, and they are all very special. The Dragons are keeping tabs on them while we meet here. I’ll take you to them later.”

“Wonderful, I look forward to it Kate,” Elizabeth answered with great excitement.

A line of sorts had formed around Adam as each of the riders was introduced and had a few words with him. Lady Emily and Lady Sally watched with amusement off to one side.

“I hope you don’t mind Emily, but we are all in awe of his beautiful wings and ability to fly.” Sally told her excitedly.

“Adam tends to cause a stir everywhere he goes,” Lady Emily replied softly, smiling. “It wasn’t so long ago Sally,” she said placing her hand on Sally’s arm, “that he shunned attention of any kind. But all that changed when Lady Arian came into my life.”

“Did she change Adam’s heart?” Sally asked intrigued.

“She gave him a new way of looking at all that had happened; and Jake did the rest. In the process Adam found peace; the physical change was just a bonus. So you see I don’t mind the attention he receives, for I know where his heart lives.” She smiled knowingly.

Big John, Diana, and their children waited patiently for an opening to meet and speak with Adam. As they stood there Kyra moved back and forth restlessly, she did not possess her father’s patience. Checking to make sure no one was looking she sent out a quick ‘flash’ in Adam’s direction. He looked up almost immediately and searched her out (correctly), and then excused himself and made his way over to the group.

Looking directly at Kyra he said, *I received your picture, what can I do for you Kyra?* With her brothers and sisters snickering behind her she turned beet red.

Big John laughed loudly, “Ha! Got you good girl! You should have waited your turn.” Turning to Adam he apologized for his daughter’s rashness; “I’m afraid she’s just like her mother in temperament.”

“It’s quite alright, I planned on coming over after I was freed up.” Turning to Diana and taking her hand Adam quickly added with a smile, “You don’t think I would pass up an opportunity to fly with you again, do you, Diana?”

Diana giggled and winked at Adam, “Only if John-of-my-heart approves; I would give proper honor to Wolf on this, his day.”

“It’s all right Diana; I know you want nothing more than to fly with Adam.” Turning to his children he told them, “All of you, go! Fly with Adam and have a good time!”

All seven ran to the mesa for their dragons. They called ahead and their dragons were ready and waiting for them. Diana took off first and her children followed quickly behind. Adam was waiting for them in the air and they took off at breakneck speed and were soon lost from view.

For 60 minutes Diana and Adam went thru a series of dives and twists and unbelievable close shaves. The children were amazed at the birdman’s abilities, and the fact that he could keep up with Surfman and Diana. When they returned to the mesa, they quickly went below and gathering around their father excitedly described to him the workout Diana put Adam through; Big John laughed loudly at their unabashed enjoyment. Diana returned to Big John’s side smiling brightly and took her place as befitting a Queen.

Adam returned to Lady Emily spent, and they made their way to their cave. He was panting and sweaty after his flight with Diana; she wore him out and he needed a rest.

“She is flawless in the air Emily, never seen anything like it,” he told her, “She has a natural ability that is stunning; she and Surfman work as one; it’s incredible!”

“Well, while you were off flying about the countryside, I was sketching pictures of everyone here in camp. And I’ll have you know, even Oreo herself sat and posed for me!” Emily said triumphantly holding her sketchpad for Adam to see. “You’re not the only one who has a way with animals.”

Adam looked at the sketch of the beautiful cat, and marveled again at the ability of his talented mate. He looked at Emily again and thanked God that he had found her. Then he impulsively scooped her up in his arms and made for the bedroom with a leer on his face laughing all the way.

“My sweet lady, let me show you just what kind of an animal I can be!”

Emily chuckled and held on knowing how much Adam enjoyed spontaneous lovemaking.

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