

VALOTIN

BOOK TWO OF THE FIRST YEARS

By: J. Barrett
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PROLOGUE

Sometimes it's not the way you mix something; it's the ingredients you put together. Take one over-zealous archeologist, (hell-bent on making a name for himself); add a ten-man team of untrained professionals, (committing all the sins of the unprofessional). Toss them together and place them in an unexplored cavern littered with fossilized 'boulders'.

When Professor Wilson entered the unexplored second cavern under a military base in Nevada, he took with him several of his students; all untrained and untested in the field. The cave was littered with many large oval-shaped 'boulders'. Dr Wilson wrongly guessed that they were just stone, probably being prepared for a sculpture rendering later. He couldn't have been more wrong; and his error would cost him his life.

These 'boulders' were actually dormant, hibernating dragon eggs. All it took was a touch, a skin on 'stone' contact, to awaken the sleeping occupant. The warmth from the skin, like an electric shock, passes thru to the egg instantly and results in awakening! Dragons emerging from their eggs without a rider to link with telepathically descend into madness. They need the telepathic link to stabilize their violent natures. A dragon without a rider is a very dangerous thing; mad and clever at the same time. They will seek out their 'brothers'; and destroy anything in their path.

Days spent in the adjoining cave studying the many fossilized bones strewn about the chamber held the attention of the professor and his charges. There was plenty to keep the 'diggers' occupied; they were rebuilding an entire flying creature, perhaps a new creature. Mesmerized by the skeleton of a fully-grown 'pterodactyl', the professor kept his charges busy. So busy in fact, that they were oblivious to the goings on in the outer chamber. This was a perfect time for the so-called 'fossilized egg', (already mature), to hatch. Enraged at not finding its rider, it began to feed on the meal it saw before it in the adjoining cavern... then it woke its brothers.

Four fifths of the world population was wiped out within a year. Four years later the survivors were beginning to fight back.

They say hope keeps a person going when all else is gone. One survivor kept it alive in her heart when all was dark in the world. It was insane, crazy to even think of it but Kate held on to the thought that there was some kind of master plan in all this insanity. Every obstacle she faced, every loss she endured; foremost in her mind was the belief that she and her small group were being prepared for something.

Shaped and molded for a year by very special dreams, Kate and her small group was readied to accept the possibility of a different kind of world, a new world. Guided by some unseen and unknowable force, Kate found Jake - and then everything changed.

Jake, the First of the Ancients to return - the Healer. He would heal the old wounds and return order to the land. He brought Kate and Daniel together; and with their pairing, his Queen made her entrance.

He and his Queen produced 20 children (one of which would become the Second of the Ancients). He had cultivated riders across the country for four years; now he gathered them up and introduced them to his children. With their bonding and then eventual hatching he had his army. He trained them both in the art of dragon fighting. He rid our land of the monsters that destroyed it; and then set about healing the people.

With North America free of the deadly menace, Jake's intelligent black eyes now looked towards Europe. They would be next to free themselves, as their need was great. For in Europe the menace had taken the form of an old enemy... NaTas.

An ancient battle was about to be replayed, hopefully for the last time.

Those across the Atlantic did not fare well. Aware of this, Jake contacted Alakar, Third of the Ancients – the Rescuer. He set plans in motion that would ultimately lead to their deliverance. Alakar's base of operations was located in Scotland. Jake learned they were late to the game of dragon fighting. The black devils had a much longer time to increase their numbers, and their dragons were fit and strong.

It was a long hard search for Alakar to find and rescue riders for his camp; and then he had to hurriedly play catch-up in training his recruits. It was made more difficult as they were under constant attack. They had lost their first hatching ground in a surprise attack by the black devil, and the second had fared little better. Half of its eggs and would-be riders were lost. It was a devastating blow to their cause. When the remaining eggs hatched, Alakar kept these dragons hidden as long as possible. He feared the newly hatched dragons would be attacked before they could build up their strength. With the morning sunrise to conceal their departure, Alakar secretly took these dragons to a hidden glen on the shores of Loch Ness. Alakar and his rider, Peter hoped they would be able to buy some time there for these dragons to mature and grow stronger. Leaving their camp in a shambles, as though they had all fled quickly, had been the idea of Peter's friend James, and his dragon Valotin. It proved to be the catalyst that bought them the time they needed.

The large black bull that ruled the devils assumed that they had all fled in fear of him. His great ego would eventually be his undoing.

Eight months later Peter led his dragons out the loch and began to push his way back to the mountains between Inverness and Fort William. In long conversations with Jake, Alakar had learned some of the fighting skills of the Dragons of Light. He had trained his dragons and riders just as Jake had instructed. He had trained them hard and well, and now the pay off was about to be realized. They waited for sunrise and attacked the bull's camp with the sun at their backs. They destroyed it completely; 100 of the devils fell that day, and the big black bull barely got away with a few of his minions. It was the first time in almost two years that Alakar had the upper hand. The riders began to feel that maybe they had a chance. Taking careful precautions this time, and wary of the bull and his surprise attacks, they settled into a long abandoned castle on the side of a mountain. They dug into the mountainside making huge caves above and around the existing castle. Guards were kept on patrol at all times. They scoured the countryside destroying any and all hatching grounds with abominations in them. They rid the area of the black menace. Three months went by and they heard nothing of the black bull. It was as if he disappeared off the face of the earth. Alakar knew that was too good to be true. Then they got wind of a possible hatching ground up near Thurso, Scotland. Several of the monsters had been seen in the area. It was a far piece away, but Alakar knew they couldn't afford to ignore it – they had to check it out.

With his Queen by his side, Alakar was once again on the offensive. He knew that this could be dangerous, but he also knew that he had to go. They left early before sunrise, and headed towards the mountainous region ever on the alert. James' mate Catherine had insisted on coming along. She had just learned she was with child and James had wanted her to stay behind. She promised she would stay in the heights and not engage in any fighting.

Halfway through their journey they were attacked on all sides in a well-planned assault. At least 10 large black dragons went for Alakar and Valotin. Fearing for James and Valotin, Catherine and her dragon, Lady Versula, dove on the monsters to pull them away. She succeeded too well and the beasts turned on them both, and before anyone could get to them they were pulled down.

An anguished cry echoed throughout the mountain as both Valotin and James roared out their horror. Blinded by hate and filled with rage, Valotin and James began to attack the black devils with vengeance. They went from dragon to dragon ripping them in half and firing them to ash. Seventy-eight dragons fell in shredded tatters or flaming balls that day. The big bull quickly realized his mistake and ran.

Valotin and James were covered in blood and ash, bloody sweat dripped from both their bodies. Alakar and Peter tried to console them, reason with them, but they were numb to everything but hate and revenge. They charged after the bull with Valotin roaring out his pain across the mountaintops. Sensing them coming after him, the bull set his minions on them - Valotin tore thru them in seconds. There was pure uncontrollable rage in Valotin's eyes, and the bull knew that rage well. He knew he would not be able to stop them; so he fled at lightening speed. He made for the mainland of Europe; they would be unable to follow his trail once he made it there.

Alakar and Peter caught up with Valotin and James and finally managed to get thru to them. They were spent; sorrow and grief enveloped them both just as the ash covered their bodies. Their pain was like a living breathing thing. Peter hoped that in time they would heal. The next several months were a nightmare as they were attacked everywhere they went. The black bull made their lives a living hell. James and Valotin became sullen and withdrawn. They spent more and more time away from the group; they would be gone for days at a time. Alakar assured Peter that this was as it was supposed to be, for Valotin and James had a different destiny.

And then early one morning before sunrise, the black bull attempted to attack their castle base. He sent his minions in to destroy the castle and kill anyone they saw, (a costly mistake he would soon realize). Alerted to their proximity by some inner force, Valotin and James felt their rage start to build again. But this time they channeled it not to blind hate, but rather to calculated justice. They watched them come over the mountainside and dive on the castle. They rose to meet them and exploded into a living, breathing ball of blue-white fire.

Alakar sounded the alarm, and stood transfixed as he watched what was taking place before him. Instinctively he realized what was happening and stopped the other riders and dragons from joining the fight. He told them to just observe; this was something that had to take place.

Valotin and James were destroying everything in their path. James had a large staff in his hands; it appeared to be very old, older than time itself. As Valotin would fire at one dragon, James would use the Staff to fire at another. The fire of blue-white light was flashing so fast and dragons were incinerated so quickly that it was like watching a video on super fast speed.

Seeing what was taking place, the black bull screamed out his rage and retreated quickly leaving his minions to their fate. In a panic, the last of these tattered and crazed dragons tried to rush Valotin and James. They were met with such a fiery blast that they were consumed before they realized their mistake. Panting and dripping with sweat, and blood, Valotin and James looked about them in surprise at their accomplishment.

Approaching them cautiously at first, Alakar made sure they were still not in the throes of blind rage again. Assured by Valotin that they were in their right minds, Alakar congratulated them on a fight well done. Alakar asked James when and how he received the Fire Staff. James told him that he had seen it in a dream embedded in the rocks on the top of a mountain. He and Valotin had gone and retrieved it the night before. Alakar ordered them both to rest, to eat and build their strength back up. The black bull would not be returning anytime soon.

That evening Alakar conferred with Jake about what had taken place. After much deliberation Jake and Alakar decided upon a plan. Several days later Alakar asked for a volunteer to attempt to fly to the States and seek out Jake, the First of the Ancients, at Dragons Hill and ask for his help. He knew that Valotin and James would step forward to undertake this task. They would think that they were going to their deaths, but in reality they would be going to fulfill a prophecy: The Prophecy of the Phoenix.

REGROUP

James and Elizabeth stood on the front lawn of the Rider's house and waited for Valotin to arrive. Coming to Dragons Hill was the best thing he and Valotin had done. Little did he and his companion suspect that here both would heal; and James would find Elizabeth. He had found love again, a love that was different from any he had ever known. Elizabeth had healed also, in finding James she had put the past aside at last. They were both looking forward to the future with hope and excitement. As Elizabeth stood outside the house in the town, she looked towards Dragon Hill; she could make out a very large dragon headed their way.

"He's on his way James!" She called very excited; she wanted to get back as soon as possible as she knew her dragon would be hatching this day.

"Calm yourself my love; your queen will not hatch before you arrive." James enjoyed watching her excitement grow. She constantly surprised him with her lust for life and everything in it; she took nothing at face value, she questioned everything.

My friends, I see you waiting for me. Valotin greeted them as he circled and lined up for a landing, your spirits shine bright with happiness!

And you my friend are looking very regal today! James saluted his friend as he landed on the lawn.

Elizabeth held her breath as she watched him land. His size was that of a colossus; twice the size of Jake. He was the biggest dragon she had ever seen. Yet he gracefully landed on the lawn in front of them. She shouted out; *You are indeed a king among dragons, Valotin. Your Queen will be worthy of you - I can guarantee that!*

Oh, so the rider of my Queen can predict the future now? Valotin roared loudly as he lowered his massive head in front of them both.

James went to him and gave him a long hug. *I have missed you my friend. I have missed our long talks.*

And I have missed your company also, my friend. Raising his head, Valotin now addressed them both, now we must be off. There is much to do and learn before we return to our homeland. And my Queen is anxious to join us.

He lowered his left wing, and James showed Elizabeth how to climb up and on to the ridges of his neck. He showed her that with his great size, Valotin was very different from the dragons she was used to. It was most important to find the sixth ridge, and use this as her perch. She would find the same area on her Queen once she hatched and matured enough for First Flight. He then loaded their duffel bags and they were soon on their way back to Dragons Hill.

Elizabeth was thinking of all that happened since she was brought to the mountain. How her life had changed when she found her beautiful companion; and of course there was James. James who brought her back to life, who showed her it was all right to feel again, who accepted her as his equal; and she loved him for it. And of course there were the dreams; dreams showing her that her future was across the sea with him. She looked forward to the future, as long as it was with James. She would follow him anywhere, even across the sea. But for now, she wanted to get back and meet her dragon. And then she wanted to see all those beautiful babies she had helped bring into the world. As they approached the large Mesa they could hear all the dragons keening; it was a soft sound, very relaxing, very calming.

James knew right away what they were doing. *They're keening for the babies, Elizabeth! Do you hear?* Valotin landed amid the keening dragons.

Jake came out of the Riders Hall with Jeffery by his side, *Greetings James and Elizabeth! Your spirits are shining brightly; I salute you both on your newfound happiness.* Both bowed to Jake in respect, and thanked him. He chuckled loudly and continued; *Daniel and Steve have prepared a cave for your use while you are with us. They said to tell you it is their gift to you both for all your help during the births.*

Yes, Jeffery interrupted, *I must speak with you both in regards to that matter.* Jeffery went to James and shook his hand, and gave Elizabeth a hug.

“I want to get all the facts down correctly for the Chronicles. Please come by and see me when you both have a few minutes to spare. I find that if I speak to the participants early on, their memories are fresh with details.”

Master Jeffery is very meticulous about the Chronicles; we shall have quite a history book by the time he is through. Jake explained praising Jeffery; *he spent quite a long time with Valotin yesterday.*

Yes, yes Jake. I have enough information from Valotin to fill four or five chapters! I shall be very busy for some time. Jeffery was patting a large black leather bound book he held in his hands.

James could see that Jeffery really loved his work. *That is one book I want to take with me when I return. Do you think you could possibly make a copy for me by the time we have to leave and return home? I know that it would be a great morale booster, and Lord knows they probably need it.*

Jeffery perked up at that, *Yes, yes! I have several new helpers and this would be a good test of their skills. You shall have a copy of this book to take with you on your return to Europe, James. I should have thought of that myself, sorry, sorry..!* Jeffery's mind was already on something else and he walked off patting the book.

His work keeps him occupied, and his mind is always working; he is a priceless treasure. We dragons find him unique among humans. Jake had spoken from the heart in regards to Jeffery. *When you return James, you must find one like Jeffery to keep records of your journey across Europe. We will discuss this and other things tomorrow when you both begin your training. For now, go and enjoy the day.*

Yes Jake, there is much to do, and so little time to do it in; we will see you tomorrow. James picked up their things and he and Elizabeth headed for the landing stairs. They followed it down to the second level and met Michael on his way up.

“James! Elizabeth! Good to see you. Please let me help with those things.” He said grabbing a duffel bag from Elizabeth. “I’ll show you where your cave is; it’s right next to ours. Come, follow me.”

He went out the exit and down the landing and then crossed over to the other mountain and up a pathway. They met no one on their way, and James thought it strange that Daniel wasn’t there to greet them. But perhaps the baby was occupying his free time.

“Here it is, please go in,” said Michael with a grin on his face.

As they went in, they were greeted with a loud, “Welcome back!” The riders were all there welcoming them. The men were beaming, and the women were holding their precious future. Kate rose and with Daniel by her side came up to them. She enveloped them both in her arms, “Thank you both for the help you gave us all. We are all very happy for you both on your new found happiness.” Daniel gave Elizabeth a one-arm hug and lowered his swaddled son for her to see.

“Oh Daniel, he’s just beautiful!” Elizabeth gushed. Then she went from rider to rider and cooed over each child. James spoke with the men and they were all boasting about how smart their son or daughter was and how their future would be a safe one now.

“All right everybody, listen up,” Sam was barking orders like a drill sergeant, “we’ll meet down at the Hall for lunch and more talk but for now the wee ones need their feeding and a nap.” He had them all on a tight schedule. Slowly at first, they started to leave, and after a bit they were all gone except for Sam. He gave them both a big hug, and a, ‘see you later’, leaving James and Elizabeth alone, at last.

Elizabeth dragged their duffle bags over to the bed and was unpacking when James came up behind her. He slid his hands around her waist and gave her a squeeze. *Are you ready for all this my lovely yank? I feel after today, we will be going at a pretty fast pace.*

***With you by my side, I’m ready for anything.* She turned and faced him sliding her arms up and around his neck. They kissed gently, and then more passionately. *If we keep this up, we will get nothing done my love,* Elizabeth said in a husky voice.**

Suddenly they both heard Valotin, *James my friend; we have a very special ride to take. I shall need you in the morning before sunrise.*

Elizabeth looked into James’s eye, *which gives us the afternoon and night. Think we can find something to do?* James smiled and kissed her on the forehead.

***That’s what I love about you Elizabeth you know what is important. Lets go see Jeffery and get it over with; then we will have no demands on our time.* He reached for their jackets as he grabbed Elizabeth’s hand and they headed above. Three hours later they were back in their cave. Their evening was spent pleasuring each other.**

The next morning Elizabeth busied herself unpacking their things and making the cave a little bit homier for them. She knew they would be here for a while, at least four months, time enough for her Queen to mature and strengthen herself for the long flight they would be taking. *Oh this waiting is going to drive me crazy. I have to keep busy. My beautiful Queen, how are you this glorious day? I can hardly wait to meet you! I shall keep myself busy till you call. Now I must be off to the Hall, see you soon my Queen*

***My sweet Lady, it will be very soon now. I am so pleased that your spirit has healed. Your James is going to be a great leader as is fitting the rider of my Valotin! Be patient, it is almost time...* Elizabeth finished up in the cave and then headed down to the Hall.**

Up above, James climbed out onto the mesa and saw Valotin and Jake waiting for him. He bowed to Jake, and to Valotin. *I’m ready for our ride Valotin.*

Yes James, but this will be a different ride. There will be more changes when we complete this ride, but I believe you will approve. You must bring the Fire Staff with you, Valotin explained; Jake has already made arrangements with Ichor, Rah, and Wolf to join us; so if you are ready we will begin.

***I am more than ready Valotin.* James retrieved the Fire Staff, and climbed onto Valotin’s back. With a quick leap they were airborne in seconds. As they reached the heights, James could see Ichor and Rah and Wolf waiting for them. They appeared to be glowing with a bright white light.**

As they reached them, Jake began to speak.

James, protocol dictates that we must have your permission to proceed with this part of the enhancement. It will require the four of us to probe your mind. You will know what we know, and we in turn, will know what you know. I must caution you James, it will be invasive; we will know your every thought; all your hidden weaknesses, and your strengths. But the end result will be a great deal of knowledge passed on to you, and with that you will overcome any weakness. You will become stronger and your mind will not be clouded by doubt. Your mind and Valotin's will work as one in dealing with the black dragons overseas. Do you consent to this James?

You know my answer Jake. There is nothing I wouldn't do to rid this world of those devils. I consent of my own free will. I trust you and Valotin with my very life. James wasn't sure what was about to happen, but he meant what he said, he trusted them. He knew that this had to take place.

Jake let out a huge roar: *We begin!*

A beam of bright white light shot out from Jake, it hit James and Valotin enveloping them both. James could feel electric currents coursing thru his body. A tingly sensation began in his lower back at the base of his spine and slowly began to travel up to the back of his head. He felt a surge of energy and his ears popped as if he were decompressing. Suddenly his 'mind' seemed to pop also. He could see a great deal of bright light about him; it seemed to be changing color. He began to make out familiar shapes and faces of dragons and people he knew floating in the various colors of the light.

Information began to flow quickly into his mind. He relived many things in a matter of seconds. The initial arrival of the burning dragons over Manchester; the destruction of everything and everyone he knew and the sadness he felt at their loss; trying to save some and failing; the feeling of utter helplessness; his rage against the dragons, against God, against everything. Finally acceptance and asking in utter humility for help. Asking God to help him find his way; finding Valotin, the sheer joy! Hope at last! Hope that maybe there was a way to defeat them. He relived the devastating loss of Catherine and Lady Ursula to the deadly monsters; the utter despair that descended upon both he and Valotin. Volunteering for the long trip to Dragons Hill and hoping for death. Meeting Jake; beginning to hope once more; finding love again, but a stronger different kind of love; Elizabeth – his equal! James rose in the air off Valotin's back and was encircled by the dragons. Bright lights of varying colors began to shine all about him.

Wolf came before him and showed him how he could use the thermals around the world. He showed him how to attack the devils in their weakest points. Jake was suddenly there showing him compassion for the living, acceptance of all creatures; and a feeling of separateness with all negativity and recognizing it in all living things. Seeing the light around each creature; the true nature of each. Ichor showed him great strength and what the bonding meant between him and Valotin. How they could use their strength together and channel it thru the Fire Staff. And then the information and knowledge began to flow at a faster pace. Throughout the entire ordeal James could 'feel' Valotin beside him. He knew his friend was there for him, and the knowing gave him strength to accept what was about to happen to him.

A bolt of bright white light hit him, and James arched his back and screamed. It changed to a light blue shade, felt very comforting and James quieted. A yellow light slowly encircled his head; it gradually changed to a light green color. White light shot out of James' body and encircled him in a bubble of light. Then all four dragons shot a flame of red light at James; he could feel it hit but it felt soothing. James was suddenly aware of information flowing into his mind. He suddenly knew, with complete certainty, how he was going to deal with the monsters. Knew where he was going to find new riders for his Queen's eggs. Knew where the 'sleeping one', Enaj, was hidden; and saw the one who would waken him.

James' mind was alive with knowledge; he looked at Valotin with new respect and new love. They were no longer rider and dragon; they were brothers. Then he felt his body changing, expanding and stretching, taking on a new shape. He knew this was part of the enhancement and he accepted it openly and willingly. Gradually James took on the appearance of a much younger man. His body was honed to perfection, tight and taut in the right places. His chest was built up and muscled, as were his upper arms and his legs. He hoped that Elizabeth would approve.

Almost four hours later, they were finished; James and Valotin were ready. Valotin's size had increased again by a third. And Ichor too had doubled his size, a perfect match to the dragons at home in Scotland.

Wolf now spoke to Valotin and James. *I have asked two of my dragons to return with you to your homeland to instruct the dragons of your clan as to the art of 'Surfing the Thermals; that is if you are both agreeable to the idea. Artiku and Keyana have stepped forward and agreed to do this task; but they are a bit uneasy. They do speak James, and your dragons and people might find it strange.*

James laughed, and Valotin spoke for them both; *have no fear Wolf, at this point they would be most appreciative of any aid. I will inform Alakar and he can prepare the others. They will soon get used to your brave Blue Dragons, and there should be no problem. I know once they learn to ride the thermals, we will be able to complete our tasks much quicker. Thank you for thinking of our plight Wolf, your help is most welcome.*

Flattery is not needed Valotin, it was my pleasure to contribute to your cause. Now, I must return before Surfman and Diana get into any more trouble. Her pregnancy has turned our camp upside down. Wolf turned to leave and then turned to Valotin. I wish you well, brother. If we can be of further service, please do not hesitate to call. Till we meet again Valotin! With that Wolf was off in a flash.

They headed back towards the mesa in silence. James was thinking of what had taken place and also of the future. Valotin was the first to put into words what they were thinking. *I have been thinking of something Wolf said; 'Ride the Thermals'. Jake, how long do you suppose it would take to reach Scotland riding the thermals?*

I will ask Wolf; there was short period of silence and then Jake spoke again, Wolf says it depends how high you go. If you go to the top of the thermal you could be there in a little over an hour. What are you thinking of doing Valotin?

I think I know what you are planning my friend. James could see what Valotin had in mind for he had thought of it also. Bring Alakar and the other dragons here for a few days rest. We could all train together without the black bull knowing anything about it.

Yes James, it would also give a great boost to their morale. They have taken a beating for a long time, and this is greatly needed. Valotin turned to Jake continuing, they would see how the people of Dragons Hill live in peace; how the populace accepts the dragons.

Yes Valotin, a very good idea. Of course Jake had planned this all along. It would help to boost their courage, and the men and women would be able to rest and build up their strength. The black bull is in semi-hibernation, for it is winter in Europe now. He holes up in a large cavern in northern Germany, trapped by a blizzard. He would not even know they were gone.

I will contact Alakar and propose our plan. Valotin continued, If he agrees, I will ask Wolf to send his teachers. We could depart in the morning; it shouldn't take too long to teach them the maneuver. We could be back here by dinnertime.

Good idea Valotin, please keep me informed. I shall also arrange for my dragons to escort your large friends to the feeding grounds. They can indulge themselves for several days.

Jake knew that there was an overabundance of deer this year. It would do well to cull the heard and what better way to do it than to provide a feast to these battle weary giants. Jake headed for the Riders Hall thinking; and Master Jeffery would be beside himself with glee to speak with Alakar and Peter. He will have much to add to his chronicles.

A thought crossed Jake's mind, he smiled and looked in James' direction. James, a stay at the house in town would be very inviting for your friends. They could enjoy themselves and relax for a time. They have fought long and hard without any respite.

Jake knew that the atmosphere would be good for their tired souls. They could also pick up any essentials they need from the warehouses. Besides Valotin is about to be engaged for several days.

James answered him immediately, as usual Jake, you think of everything. That would be perfect and they could use the diversion after all they have been through. Thank you for thinking of it. Wait a minute! Engaged for several days!

James smiled, as he knew this meant Valotin's Queen was ready to hatch. He and Valotin thanked Ichor and Rah for their assistance in the enhancement. Valotin then confirmed what James had picked up on; his Queen was almost ready to hatch. He told James that he should return to Elizabeth and be with her when she is called. James excused himself and headed down to their cave.

As James entered their cave he could see that Elizabeth had been busy making the place theirs. Little touches here and there that gave it a cozy, warm, homey feel. He watched as she moved about. Hearing his footsteps she turned around and stopped, staring at him wide-eyed.

“James? Oh my Lord! You... you’ve changed!” She stood there inspecting him, “all for the better I can assure you, my love. Oh my...you are so,” James took her in his arms, “James!”

“Easy there yank, I might just take advantage of you here and now,” he smiled and laughed at her enthusiasm, as he kissed her passionately.

“Oh I have no objections I assure you. In fact, right now I would find that...” Elizabeth stopped in mid-sentence, her eyes got very big. “She calls for me!”

Elizabeth grabbed James by the arm, her face beaming, “she’s hatching James! I, I have to go to her.” Elizabeth hugged James and ran out of the cave and headed up to the hatching ground.

A loud roar echoed down the mountainside, *A Queen hatches!* There was no doubt to anyone on Dragons Hill as to what was taking place.

James went down to the mess hall and found Daniel. Michael and Steve and Andrew were also at the table. “Come join us James,” Daniel called out. “It will be several hours before you see Elizabeth again.”

James joined them for lunch and sat down. Several of the other men came in and made their way over to them. They tried to put him at his ease recounting tales of their own first meeting. With Daniel and Michael at the table, James told them all of his plans to bring Alakar and Peter’s group of dragons and riders to Dragons Hill.

Daniel thought it a great idea, “from what you have told us, they have been on the go with no let up for far too long. With the vermin in hibernation for the winter months, this would be the perfect time for them to take a break. Good thinking, James!”

“Thank you Daniel. The only problem is the size of the dragons that will be coming here. Daniel, I am afraid we will have to create a larger landing area.” James could see a look of bewilderment on all their faces. He smiled and said, “Imagine eight dragons the size of Valotin, all landing at the same time, get my drift now?”

Daniel looked at Steve, “Whoa! There’s no way they will all fit on the mesa; Steve ole buddy, we have our work cut out for us! We’ll have to create a whole new mesa for these big guys.”

“And we’re going to have to do it between naptimes for the little ones. You know the women wouldn’t want us to scare them.” Steve grinned at Daniel, “maybe one finely tuned explosion. We could set the charges in strategic spots so that each explosion clears the way for the next. “

“Better still, lets ask Jake to have a few of the fellows keening to the babies while we work. That way the noise will be muffled for them.” Daniel was thinking ahead as usual, he knew Jake would help any way he could.

Elizabeth was almost out of breath as she entered the hatching grounds. She calmed herself as she allowed her eyes to adjust to the half-light of the cave. She could make out shell fragments lying about, and then she heard movement behind her.

Turn My Lady, turn and let us meet face to face at last.

Elizabeth heard the sweet silky voice of her Queen Dragon, and turned to face her. Before her stood a 30 foot beauty; she was a soft forest green, more subdued than Valotin, but just as rich in color. She glowed in the muted sunlight as several rays penetrated the grounds. Elizabeth was unprepared for the onslaught of emotions that engulfed her. She sank to her knees as tears streamed down her face at the vision before her; overwhelmed by the love she felt emanating from her Queen.

I can feel you ... the love within you ...oh! She almost swooned at the emotions engulfing her.

My sweet beautiful Lady Elizabeth, at last we meet! She stood her full height and extended her wings, then she reared back and came forward lowering her head till she was level with Elizabeth. She blew on her and took in a long breath.

I am the Warrior Queen Valeria, mate to the mighty Valotin! I have been chosen for you, and you have been chosen for me. Together we shall put an end to the burning menace overseas. You have been thru the fire and you have overcome it. You have been molded for just this occasion.

A beam of bright white light shot out and hit Elizabeth with such a force that she was almost knocked over. She began to rise up and was engulfed in Lady Valeria's wings. She began to turn slowly and she could see different shades of light all about her. Suddenly she could feel information entering her mind; she began to 'see' things. She saw dragons she would meet in the future, people she knew, and others she would soon meet. She saw a very strange and frightening dragon glaring at her. She knew who this was – her enemy. She saw the site where the final battle would be fought. She saw the castle and the mountain range where Alakar's forces camped. Then she saw where she and James and Valotin would make their permanent camp. And suddenly James was before her.

Behold he who loves you, cooed Lady Valeria. She saw their life together - fast paced at first, very passionate. After the final battle with the vermin, they would settle down; and then she saw their children. "Oh!" Elizabeth could actually feel James' arms go around her, felt him holding her to him. *Mmm ...yes ...*, she wanted to stay like this forever.

You are filled with love for your mate... this is good. The velvet tones of her dragon's voice filled her with hope. *Your mind is strong, and I am pleased that we shall fight together to rid the world of these vermin. Your mate is as strong as mine for they are as one; just as you and I shall become my lady. Now, look into my eyes and prepare to receive the knowledge of the ages!*

Two and a half hours later Elizabeth emerged from a trance-like state. She felt renewed, filled with a sense of purpose in life. She understood now everything that had happened to her in the past; she accepted her future with great anticipation.

Lady Valeria opened her great wings and Elizabeth felt herself turning. She was engulfed in a warm yellow light, cocooned in pure love, total acceptance. She relaxed her body, and the changes began. She was honed to perfection; lagging muscles were soon taut again; her breasts rose up and regained their youthful appearance. She could feel her waist and hips and backside all take on a new form. Her hair grew longer, rich and luxurious; her face took on the features of a much younger version of herself. Elizabeth expected all these changes, as she had been instructed by Jake himself as to what would take place during and after the hatching. She hoped that James would like the change in her appearance. She was bursting with happiness.

At last Lady Valeria placed her back on the ground. *I must go and present myself to my mate. I am anxious to see him, and he waits for me even now. I shall feed and return in two days.*

Lady Valeria went to the entrance and turned again to gaze upon Elizabeth. She let loose with a loud roar of ‘approval’ and then she glided out of the cave. She flew to the waiting Valotin and suspended herself in front of him; the entire populace of Dragons Hill heard his voice ‘Approval’ rather loudly. They flew about each other and entwined their long necks. Finally they flew off to the feeding grounds together.

Elizabeth was still overcome with emotion when she left the hatching grounds and slowly made her way down the mountain to their cave. She was thinking to herself: *oh James this is so wonderful! I feel such a, a connection, such a deep closeness with everything. Damn, I can’t find the right words to express what I am feeling.*

It’s all right my sweet yank; I know exactly how you feel. It was James, answering her thoughts! We have all felt it when we met our companions for the first time. Ah, and it seems that you and I share the gift of telepathy. It will come in handy when we return to Europe.

Elizabeth entered their cave and James was standing there waiting for her. Now it was his turn to approve of the changes in Elizabeth’s figure and face. “Well now, I didn’t think you could improve on perfection – but it seems you can!”

“Oh James,” Elizabeth rushed forward and literally jumped into his outstretched arms. “She’s beautiful James, she’s a Warrior Queen! She said her name was Valeria, the Lady Valeria. She said we were going to kick ass overseas! Well, maybe not in those exact words,” James laughed at her enthusiasm remembering how it was when he first met Valotin.

He lifted her in his arms and kissed her passionately as he carried her to their bed. “Shh, not a word; let me show you what I feel at this moment.” James laid her down and began to remove her clothes, interspaced with gentle kisses to her body. He told her he loved her more than he thought possible. With their newfound communication skills, they began making love on a whole new level. They reached new heights of ecstasy and surprised themselves with its intensity. Afterward, as they lay in each other’s arms James began to tell Elizabeth his and Valotin’s plans for the future. She approved of his bringing his friends and their dragons to Dragons Hill.

“From what you told me they could really use the rest. My Queen mentioned that they would return in two days from the feeding grounds. Is that when you plan to go get them? I would like to be able to join you, but she won’t be ready for first flight yet.”

“I wouldn’t be gone long my sweet, I should be back by dinnertime. Perhaps you can get the house in town ready, lay in some food and such. Valotin agrees that bringing them there would be good. Jake says that the chance to relax will do them all a lot of good; ‘heal their souls’ I believe is the term he used.”

James was looking forward to seeing his old friends again. “Valotin plans on speaking to Alakar himself, but I believe he is enjoying the company of his Queen tonight.”

“Can you blame him, my love? You seem to be doing the same thing.” With that Elizabeth stretched seductively and reached for James. As with their dragons, their evening was a passionate one.

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