

## The Tide of Dreams

### Trial by Fire, Part 1

Luke, Max and Elaine stood on the edge of a building's roof, looking down on the creature that had punched its way into the real world. It was a griffin, the body with the short golden of a lion, the head like an eagle, with dark eyes, a curved yellow beak, and black feathers with gray tips. Its wings, though contracted against its body, had the same color feathers. The tail was thick and meaty, the tip shaped like an arrowhead. The paws were thick, and the claws were long, sharp, and pristine white. Around them were the remains of crushed cars and shattered glass from the lower levels of the building the Guardians were standing on and buildings across the street.

“Holy hell, it’s a griffin,” Luke said. “Cool.”

“Until it’s ripping you to shreds,” Max said. “Elaine, we need to seal off the area before...”

“Well ahead of you,” she said, arrow at the ready. She aimed straight up.

“Barrier of the Rising Moon!” She fired the arrow which flew up about 50 feet before exploding like a firework across the sky. From the center of the explosion emerged a translucent yellow dome that spread outward and dropped down, creating a dome that covered a half-mile radius from where they stood.

“The hell is that?” Luke asked, looking around.

“Barrier of the Rising Moon,” Elaine said. “One of many barrier techniques we utilize. It can keep all but the most powerful creatures in it and puts every person within into a stasis lock, preventing any loss of life. Which is good since no one was dumb enough this time to go running out into the street.”

“That’s good to know,” Luke said. “That thing looks fierce.”

“Yeah,” Max said, “so let’s take it out before it causes any more damage. Elaine, standard formation, and don’t hit me with any arrows.”

“It was only one time!”

“Luke, stay with her, just to be on the safe side.”

“Right.”

“Wish me luck,” Max said as he disappeared in a flash of blue lights.

“So, wait,” Luke said, turning to Elaine. “You actually shoot Max with an arrow?”

“It was my first mission,” she said, “leave me alone.”

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Max looked up at the griffin, which he could now see was almost four stories tall. It looked at him with its dark eyes and growled.

“This should be interesting,” Max muttered as he stared down the griffin, readying the Dream Crusher.

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“I really think we should be doing something to help him,” Luke said.

“I am,” Elaine said as she readied an arrow and drew the string. “I’m his long range support. Bows aren’t exactly close range weapons, and you have to stay with me.”

“True,” Luck said, looking at Elaine. Her normally soft and happy face was hard and focused.

“It’s starting,” she said.

Luke turned. Max charged, the griffin lowering itself to make its own attack. It swiped at Max with a paw, claws extended. Max jumped high into the air, switching the Dream Crusher into assault mode, and landed on the griffin’s head, digging the blades of his shield into it. He

grabbed on to a handful of feathers as the griffin began to thrash about, trying to shake Max loose. Max tried to pull his weapon free, but it would not budge.

“Oh, shit, this is bad,” he groaned. His feet gave out from under him, and he was completely at the mercy of the beast.

“Elaine,” Luke said, watching helplessly from the sidelines, “now might be a good time to shoot.”

“Right, because if I shoot that thing in the butt, it’ll flail around even more, fling Max into next week, and come after us.”

Luke was taken aback by Elaine’s comment. “You could have just said ‘no’.”

Max was holding on for dear life when the Dream Crusher’s blades suddenly popped free.

“No way!” was all Max had time to yell before finding himself flying through air with no sense of where the ground was and a fistful of feathers. His vision was randomly filled with shots of the sky, the ground, and nearby buildings until he finally hit a building at around the third floor and fell onto a car, bouncing off the roof and hitting the ground. Laying face down on the pavement, Max knew he’d be able to move in a few minutes, after his body adjusted to the loss of energy. He also knew that he would have a stiff neck in the morning. He tried to relax as his body recovered, but the sound of the griffin coming closer kept him on edge.

“Elaine,” he muttered, “if you’re gonna do something, now would be the time.

On the rooftop, Elaine and Luke watched as Max flew head over heels through the air, into a building fifty yards down the street, then falling 30 feet to the ground. The griffin began to stalk closer toward Max’s motionless body.

“Jesus, that had to hurt,” Luke exclaimed. “No, I think he’s dead.”

“He’s fine,” Elaine said. “And now that he’s clear...” The arrow that Elaine had nocked began to glow and vibrate. She took aim at the griffin’s spine and took a deep breath.

“Arrow of Destruction,” she said calmly as she fired. The arrow flew, leaving a streak of yellow in the air. It hit the beast just to the right of its spine near the rear right leg, and exploded on impact. The griffin let out a roar, then turned to see where its attacker was. It spotted the pair on the rooftop and let out another roar.

“And now it’s gonna come after us,” Luke said, voice dripping with sarcasm. “Great.”

The beast ran to the building Elaine and Luke were standing on, stood on its hind legs, and tried to reach for them like a dog reaching for food. It could only reach up the seventh floor of the fifteen story building, but it clawed away anyway. Luke looked around at the shorter buildings around them that the griffin could have climbed on to reach them.

“Huh, it’s not very smart, is it?” Luke sneered. The beast stopped for a moment, and then the building shook.

“Yeah, I don’t think insulting it was such a good idea,” Elaine said as she peered over the edge and watched the griffin slowly climb the building.