

Tide of Dreams

Trial by Fire, Part 2

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

“Is running away an option at this point?” Luke asked as he looked over the edge.

“Not yet,” Elaine said as she readied another arrow, “I’m gonna shoot it off the building.”

“Huh?” Was all Luke could muster as he watched Elaine lean over the edge and fire an arrow, catching the beast between the eyes. It roared and swiped at the arrow, breaking it off and resuming its climb. Elaine fired another arrow, this time hitting the griffin directly in the left eye. It screeched in pain and let go of the building, falling on its back. It rolled and thrashed around, screeching.

“Nice shot, but don’t you think taking its eye out is a little much?” Luke asked.

“I know how you feel,” she said. “But we do what we must in order to protect this world. Once we send it back to the Dream Realm, it’ll be fine.”

“Okay,” he said, stepping away from the edge. “So how do we send it back?”

Elaine looked down the street and smiled. “Just watch.”

Down the block, Max was running back into the battle. He stopped well out of the range of the thrashing griffin, and looked up to Elaine and Luke.

“You okay?” he shouted.

“We’re fine,” Elaine shouted. “How about you?”

“A little sore, but I’m ready to finish this fight.”

“I hear you,” Elaine said, readying an arrow.

Max took a stout defensive stance, shield in front of him. He took a deep breath and began focusing his energy into the Dream Crusher. The blades extended outward, and the energy flowed in the space between the base and the blades, which resembled clear blue ocean water on a sunny day. Max watched as the griffin began to right itself. When it got to its feet, it was still slightly dazed, and Max struck, driving the shield into the ground and releasing the stored energy.

“Hydra Riser!” Max yelled, pushing his energy through the ground until it was under the griffin. With a final push, he completed the technique. The result was five pillars of water erupting from the ground like geysers, launching the griffin end over end into the air.

On the rooftop, Luke watched in amazement as the griffin rose above him thanks to Max’s incredible ability. Next to him, Elaine aimed towards the sky with another Arrow of Destruction at the ready. When the griffin reached its peak height, Elaine fired, piercing the griffin through the chest. The ensuing explosion completely enveloped the beast, and all the three could see was a ball of smoke falling to the ground, creating a large crater in the street.

Luke and Elaine looked over the side of the building. Max, on the ground, walked into the dust cloud to investigate.

“Is it dead?” Luke shouted to Max. He could barely make out Max’s impression against the smoke.

“I can’t... really see it,” Max shouted, coughing between words, “but I think... it’s done for.”

Elaine and Luke both sighed with relief. “Glad that’s over,” Elaine said. Before she could say anything else, an ear-piercing roar filled the air.

“Oh, give me a fucking break!” Luke shouted as he looked over the edge.

“I knew I shouldn’t have said a bloody thing,” Elaine groaned.

On the ground, Max narrowly avoided being crushed under a paw as the beast began to rise. He turned and ran clear of the dust cloud, which had just begun to settle.

“I would like to take back my previous statement!” Max shouted as he ran. He looked back and saw the griffin eye him, then turn to the duo on the roof.

He stopped and took a defensive stance. “Who do you want?”

“Make a move,” Elaine muttered to the beast as she readied another arrow.

The griffin roared, brought its head around and charged Max.

“Damn! Aquarius Shield!” Max exclaimed as he activated the Dream Crusher’s bubble shield. The griffin hit it head on, but was stopped in its tracks. It was all Max could do to keep the beast from running through his shield and trampling him. Up above, Elaine fired another arrow. It hit the beast in the hind leg, just below where the first arrow she shot had hit, but that didn’t slow it down.

“Dream Seeker, Rapid Fire mode!” She began to fire arrow after arrow at the griffin, but nothing was having an effect. The beast stopped ramming its head into Max’s shield and looked back at the rooftop. It swung its tail around and hit the already damaged building Elaine and Luke were on, destroying most of the fifth and sixth floors. With a loud creak, the building began to lean forward.

“Bad!” Luke said. “Very bad!”

“We have to jump!” Elaine said.

Luke paused. “We have to what?”

“Hang on!” She grabbed Luke by the arm and, despite his protests, ran to the edge and leaped, wrapping her arms around him. They fell amid a shower of glass, concrete, and steel as though the building stopped lurching forward and collapsed straight down.

Through his shield, Max watched his friends jump from the collapsing building amid a shower of debris. He knew that they wouldn’t make it safely through the debris field while avoiding the griffin’s now thrashing tail. He had one option.

“Please make it,” he whispered to his weapon as he dropped the shield and quickly undid the shield’s latches on his arm. Luckily, the griffin was too distracted by the happenings around his rear end to notice. “Dream Crusher, protect!” He threw the shield into the air past the beast, who watched it go by. It reached the falling duo and created a bubble around them. Still in control of the Dream Crusher, Max tried to aim his friends toward a building across the street, clear from the debris, but the griffin’s tail intervened, bursting the bubble. Elaine and Luke were knocked onto the roof of a building two buildings closer to Max, where Luke landed hard near the edge, and Elaine landed a few feet further from the edge. The Dream Crusher fell to the ground with the debris of the now collapsed building.

“They’re alive,” Max sighed. He began to worry about himself, now weaponless against a foe that could turn its attention back to him at any movement.

Luke tried to get to his feet, but only made it to his hands and knees. Somehow, he had managed to survive the landing and hold on to the Dream Weaver.

“Elaine!” he called out. “Elaine, are you okay?”

“I’m okay!” she said. “What about you?”

“I can’t really move right now, but I’ll say this: no more building jumping!”

“Yeah, not the most fun experience I’ve ever had. Thank God Max sent the Dream...”

She stopped mid sentence as she watched the griffin’s tail line up for another shot, with Luke directly in the line of fire.

“No!” Elaine screamed as she ran towards Luke. He, still unable to move most of his body, turned his head enough to see the tail ready to come down on him. He let out a gasp as Elaine grabbed him by the collar and, with all her strength, threw Luke off of the roof. He spun in the air until he was looking back at the rooftop he had just left.

“Elaine!” he screamed. He watched in horror as the tail came down on top of her, crushing her and obliterating much of the building she was standing on. Before he could cry out again, everything went black, and his entire body hurt.