

## Tide of Dreams

### Trial by Fire, Part 3

“No!” Max screamed, running towards his friends. The griffin turned and roared at Max as he tried to run past.

“Fuck you!” he shouted as he used the Hydra Risers again, this time pushing the beast up and away. It flew down the street, spinning end over end until it hit the barrier and fell to the ground dazed. Max ran over to Luke, who had landed in a storefront. He was just coming to, so Max ran over to the rubble of the building Elaine was standing on.

“Elaine! Elaine!” Max began tossing aside bricks, wood, and other various parts of the building. “Come on, I know you're alive in there.”

“Max,” he heard from behind him. He turned and saw Luke stumbling toward him. He held his left arm up with the right, and there was blood streaming down the side of his face. “Max, I'm sorry, I didn't even see it. She just...”

“It's okay. Just help me dig her out before the griffin comes to.”

“I can't really feel my arm.”

“Just give it a minute. Your body needs to readjust to the loss of energy from... well, being thrown from an building and hitting the ground. The downside is that you get slower and weaker as the energy making up your body is spread thinner and thinner.”

“So what happens when you run out of energy? Luke asked as the feeling began to come back to his arm.

“Well...,” Max started as he pulled away a piece of drywall. He stopped when he as a gloved hand. He began to dig faster, until he had revealed most of Elaine's upper body. “Found her!” Luke climbed up the rubble pile to meet them.

“Elaine? Hey, Elaine, wake up,” Max said as he gently rubbed her face. “Come on, we have to

move.”

She began to groan and opened her eyes. Everything was blurry, but she could make out Max and Luke's faces.

“Elaine, are you okay?” Luke asked.

“Considering what just happened, yeah,” she groaned. “But I think I'm done for tonight.”

“What? No!”

“Elaine,” Max said, “you can't. I think it's getting stronger.”

“Sorry Max, Luke. I'm all tapped out.” As she spoke, she began to dissolve in a cloud of small, glowing yellow particles that floated up to the sky and disappeared.

“Great,” Max groaned. “Just great.”

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Elaine woke with a start, rolled over under her sheets, and stared at the clock on the nightstand. It read 5:37 am.

She sighed. “I'm so sorry guy. Good luck.”

She rolled back over and tried to go back to sleep.

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“That's what happens when you run out of energy,” Max said. “When you can't maintain your dream body, it disappears and you wake up.”

“So she's okay?”

“Yeah,” Max said as he rose to his feet and looked down the street. “I wish I could say the same for us.”

Down the street, the griffin was getting to its feet. It shook its head, reared up on its hind legs, spread its wings and roared.

“It can use its wings,” Max said, “which means it's almost through, and gaining its strength

back.”

“Then we need to stop it,” Luke said. “Dream Weaver, awaken.”

“Wait, no. You aren't fighting this thing.”

“Can you beat it on your own?”

Max sighed. “No.”

“Can you hold it off until the Dream Master gets here.”

“Probably, but it'll be all the way through by the time he arrives.”

“Then I don't think there's much else we can do but fight it.”

“Yeah. Get ready, then. Here it comes.”

The griffin charged down the street as Max and Luke descended the rubble pile to the solid footing of the street. As the beast drew closer, Max took a deep breath, then unleashed another Hydra Risers attack. The griffin saw the attack coming and leaped over it, spreading its wings and flying over the geysers and the Guardians.

“Oh, give me a break,” Max yelled as the griffin flew overhead.

“It has wing,” Luke said. “Things with wings tend to do that.”

“Shut up.”

As they watched the griffin sail overhead, Luke saw something out of place. A man in full armor, like the ones he saw when he first connected with the Dream Weaver, floated just above him, holding another incarnation of the Dream Weaver, swinging it and unleashing a wave of energy. In an instant, Luke knew he could do the same move. As the griffin turned and landed, Luke took a step forward and swung his sword like a baseball bat. The tip of the blade drew a red arc in the air that shot forward as Luke finished his follow through. The griffin barely had time to react and took the attack full on. It was knocked back a few yards where it landed hard on its side and quickly got to its feet.

“When the hell did you learn that?” Max asked.

Luke turned to Max. “Uh, about five seconds ago.”

Before Max could reply, he noticed the griffin rearing back on its hind legs. Near its beak was a glowing circle of energy.

“Shit!” Max yelled as he ran up to and just past Luke, activating the Aquarius Shield around them just as the beast fired an energy blast at them. As the blast made contact with the shield, Max and Luke looked away to keep from being blinded by the light generated.

“Yeah, that's new,” Luke said over the rushing wind the opposing forces were creating. “I didn't know we here fighting a boss from a video game.”

“Yeah, who knows what else it can do,” Max yelled back as he struggled to hold the shield up. The energy blast began to fade away and quickly dissipated. Seeing the two Guardians unharmed, the griffin roared.

“Luke, we have to end this soon,” Max said. “I can't stop a shot like that again.”

“Okay. I hope you have a plan.”

“Yeah. Flank him from the rooftops, and blast him into submission.”

Luke looked at the buildings around them, all four stories in height. “I can't jump that high.”

“Just remember your training. Now, go!”

Max released the shield and ran to the right. Luke stammered for a second, then ran to the left. Max jumped onto an upturned car, up to the second floor balcony of the nearest building, then up to the roof. Luke pushed energy into his legs and leaped onto a first floor awning, then up to the edge of the roof, where he pulled himself up.

“Okay, it worked,” Luke said, surprised at himself.

Max charged down the edge of the rooftop, opening the blades of the Dream Crusher and firing blast after blast of energy. Many hit their mark, but none seemed to have any effect.

“I hope Luke's attack does better than my Mana Pulse,” he thought.

Luke sprinted down the rooftops, the tip of the Dream Weaver dragging a few inches from the tar. He brought the blade up as he neared the beast.

“Eat this! Shockwave Blade!” He yelled as he brought the sword down again, unleashing an arc of energy. This time though, Luke instantly felt a shot of fatigue from the energy loss. He stopped and watched his attack fly as he gathered himself. The shock wave flew right into the griffin, but the impact did little more than anger the griffin. It roared and began charging a ball of energy just off of its beak, aimed at Luke.

“Just my luck,” Luke muttered.