

Ashley's wings flapped hard frantically as she rushed to get back to her tribe's home. They needed to know what she just saw and she needed help to rescue Luna back from the humans. The mountains that were her home gradually grew larger in view as she got closer to them. Eventually, they became larger than her eyesight could see to where she could only see rocky parts of them, with the bottoms being covered in grass and moss, as she went. The dragon landed in the heart of the mountains, right in the middle of her tribe's home. There, she began to shout, "Everyone! Luna's in trouble!" All of the tribe outside the caves turned their attention to her. Even some of the other dragons came outside to see what the fuss was about. They were all alert to the troubling news they were about to receive. Ashley continued, "She's been captured by humans. They came and took her away in this big wagon. We have to go help her now!"

The tribe was in an uproar; everyone was voicing their panic over their kidnapped fellow. A female dragon gasped with wide eyes, "Luna's gone?!"

An elderly male cried, "The humans are at it again! They won't stop until they've taken every last one of us."

Another female assumed, "This has to be an act of revenge for our attack on them. Oh poor Luna." Her head shook sadly.

A hatchling wailed, "Mama, I don't want to die!" His mother curled her tail protectively around him as she held her baby close to her to comfort.

King Gregorios staggered out of his cave to meet Ashley and his terrified tribe. The wounds from the battle still have not healed and they were slowing him down, as well as hurting him, as he moved. Once he got to the end of the high cliff, he looked down at his tribe and told them, "Everyone, peace!" The shouts and panic died down to silence as the dragons looked up to him. The king turned his sight to the teal dragon in the middle of the crowd. He told her, "Ashley, please tell me everything that happened slowly and calmly as you can."

Ashley relaxed a little, trying not to let her shock rush or distort the story. She explained the best way she can, "Luna and I were out hunting for prey, when we suddenly heard some steps. Luna said she smelled something and went on ahead to go check it out. I told her to roar if she was in trouble. I waited for some time and then I heard these weird loud sounds. They were quite startling, but nothing happened to her yet. But then soon, I heard her roar. It was a signal for me to run." The tribe anticipated the moment of the pink dragon's capture. "I ran away as fast as I could, but then I stopped. I just couldn't leave Luna behind. It felt wrong to do so. So I turned and went back for her. But by the time I got there, it was already too late. The humans had already put her in a cage and they lifted her up into that big metal carriage. They rode it away without horses pulling it."

The tribe was baffled at the mention of the strange carriage. An elder male asked, "A carriage that doesn't need horses? What else have the humans invented?"

"Shush!" ordered the king. "Let her continued speaking."

Ashley finished, "That's it, your majesty. That was when I came back here for help. I need some dragons to help me save Luna." She looked at the leader with eyes moist with desperation. She begged, "Please, your majesty. We must go out there and save Luna!"

Gregorios understood how badly she wanted to save her best friend and he really wanted to help as well, but however. He shook his head with his eyes closed momentarily. He sympathetically apologized, "I'm sorry, Ashley. As much as I would like to assist you. Every fighting male, including I, are still recovering from our injuries as you can see." The wounds on him were visible, even to the dragons watching from afar. "I'm afraid you'll have to wait until we've fully recovered. Until then, Luna will just have to hold on in the meantime. My apologies."

The teal dragon looked down at the rocky ground beneath her, feeling defeated and powerless. She felt pessimistic regarding Luna's fate as the humans' prisoner. The stories she's learn about them stated that the dragons they killed or captured were stripped of their scaly pelts to be used as materials for the humans' clothing and their flesh cooked for food. It was much like how they do with any other animal they hunted. There was a high chance that this could happen to her friend with all the time she had to wait for the males to heal. She sadly thought, '*Luna, I'm sorry.*'

Then she heard someone from the air asking, "Hey everyone, what's going on?" The tribe looked up to see young adult males flying down carrying a pair of dead animals, a deer and a wolf. They landed onto an unoccupied space and placed their prey down before their feet.

Gregorios said to him, "Cyril, Heaton, you both came here at the right time." With a grim frown, he continued, "Come to me, you two have something you need to hear."

The pair approached the king, walking past Ashley as they did so. The gray dragon known as Heaton asked, "What is it, your majesty? Did something bad happen? And why are there holes on your body?" The king begun recounting everything that had happened involving the humans from their battle to repel them to the kidnapping of Luna.

The two males dropped their jaws in shock as the red dragon named Cyril asked, "You're kidding me! There are humans here on the island?! When? How?"

"That I do not know," the king answered. "But what is most important right now is that we need to save Luna. Because the other males can't do that right now, I will be tasking you two to guard Ashley and help her rescue her friend from the humans. This mission must take place at night, when most of the humans will be sleeping. I hope I or someone else will have healed somewhat by the time we need to escort you to where their nest is. Understand that this is a dangerous mission and you can be killed if you're not too careful. So stay safe and try to come back alive."

Cyril assured, "We will, your majesty. You can count on it." His confidence was a facade however. He was honestly scared about having to face an overpowered enemy force. *'Oh stars, I hope I actually do survive.'*

The king nodded, "Good, we will be waiting until then to do that. For now, I must return to my cave to rest." He turned around and went back to his cave. He winced in pain as he felt his wounds sting and burn. Ashley was grateful to luck that she finally had some help to aid in the rescue. She hoped that Luna will still be alive by the time they get to her.

Inside one of the caves, Ronord laid in his crater nest as he thought about everything he had heard outside. He thought, *'So Luna has been kidnapped. She will probably have learned some new things about the humans during her time there.'* Anything she learned will be crucial to his disposal of the humans. This bad situation could end up being a good thing, that is if she survived.

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Commander Stevenson was at his desk in his own tent going over documents for his list of objectives that needed to be complete. The construction of the base was still going on and nearly completed. Soon, America will be able to claim this island as its own after they get rid of the dragons. The tent's flap opened and Dylan came in to see him. The commander looked over his papers and greeted, "Private Dylan, how can I help you?"

Dylan asked him, "So these experiments that the researchers are going to. I forgot to ask them the details about them back there. Do you know exactly what they're going to do, commander?" He would have gone back to the researchers' tent, but the commander's was the closest place on his path. He decided to save time by going to his superior instead.

Stevenson answered, "Oh that. They're just going to take the dragon's blood sample, examine its breathing rate and check if it's female and see if there any physiological differences from the males."

"Males?" asked the private. "So all these dragons we killed were-"

The commander nodded, "Yep! You guessed it; males. Dr. Pierce told me this when I went to check with her findings." He shook his head slowly, "I'm surprised they didn't have any girls among them. They're probably have babies to care for at home."

Thinking of Luna, Dylan thought, *'That or they could be just shy.'*

Then Privates Kurt and Fred came inside as the former of the two asked, "Hey Dylan, whatchu doing in the commander's tent?" Then he grinned in humor, "Did you get into trouble?"

Stevenson answered for the dark brunette, "No, he was just wondering about the experiments. He forgot to ask the researchers for the details about it."

Dylan told everyone, "I asked because I was concerned for Luna, the dragon I just talked to."

Fred looked at him in surprise. He exclaimed, "Talking dragons?! I thought Kurt here was pulling my leg when he told me about it."

Dylan said, "I know it sounds crazy, but it's the truth." He then began to tell them everything about his conversation with Luna such as the dragons' history with humans and how he told her about his weapons in return. The men who were not there were surprised to hear about the magic part, but they silently brushed it off as nothing more than superstition on the dragon's part. "So as you can hear, she does speak English. Kurt was there when he saw us." Looking at only the commander, he told him, "She's no threat at all, commander. She didn't even try to blow fire at me when I shot her; she just ran away. She's practically timid."

Stevenson thought over the private's story with some skepticism. "You make it sound like she's helpless, Dylan. We could probably do away with the tranquilizers for her, but I'm not sure if she's incapable of attacking anyone if she wants to get out. She still has claws and teeth, you know. She might just breathe fire through that cage if she hasn't been muzzled yet."

The dark-haired brunette assured, "I'm sure she won't, commander. She seems to be afraid of our technology, so she won't dare try anything."

The commander replied, "I hope you're right about this, private."

Then Kurt suggested an idea, "While those researchers are studying her, maybe they could ask Luna everything about her species like how they hunt and stuff. It's only fair since she got to learn some things from Dylan. Sure, there's the threat of her roasting them, but if he's right, then they should be good."

Stevenson thought about it for a minute or so before he came to a decision. He decided, "Alright, I'll accept this under one condition. As long as she does what is told and what not to do. We have our means to keep her in line after all."

Dylan thought about getting to befriend the dragon some more. So he began to ask, "Commander, if I may." The older man looked to him expectantly. "Would you allow Luna to roam around the base freely? She could see some of the sites and I could tell her some things about our vehicles and such."

The other men did not take a liking to this idea. Fred looked at him as if he was crazy and objected, "Are you kidding me?!"

"Preposterous!" Stevenson protested. "Private Dylan, this is a military base. You cannot share our secrets with the enemy! She'll tell the other dragons everything."

Dylan quickly proposed, "But what if we wrap some chains or ropes around her wings to keep her from flying away. We already have the walls around our base and they're over twenty feet tall. She wouldn't have enough time to get out around the walls quickly enough. Besides, the machine gun nests will be engaging her if they spot her leaving."

The commander found the benefits to be okay, but he still did not like the idea of giving intel to the dragon. "Alright fine, I'll let you do this once the researchers are done with her." Then he warned him sternly with a serious scowl, "But if she causes any trouble for us, then you will have some serious consequences to face. Is that understood?"

The private nodded, "Yes, commander; I get it."

"Good," replied Stevenson. "I hope you know what you're doing for ours and especially your sake."

The three privates left the commander and went on back to their tent. Kurt grumbled to his best friend, "Sheesh, Dylan. You're giving a tour to a dragon? What are you trying to do? Get us all killed?"

"I'm not!" Dylan insisted. "I just want to be her friend and maybe even get to know her some more, that's all."

Fred frowned, "Well you sure have a funny way of getting new friends, Dylan. Let's just hope it doesn't come to bite us in the asses later."

The dark brunette argued, "I'm telling you, it won't! You all are just worried over nothing." Can these men not see that they will be perfectly fine? Luna was not going to do anything here.

Deciding not to argue with this issue, Kurt crossed his arms behind his head and said, "Eh whatever. I guess you do have a point about the walls, ropes and guns. Maybe we'll be alright, after all."

Dylan smiled at his best friend, "See? That's what I'm telling you. We'll be safe. Escaping's impossible for her. Now let's get back to our tent."

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It had been 4 hours later since the dragon had been brought in to the researchers. A man among the team opened the pink creature's eyelids to study the appearance of its eye. The eye was amber in color with a round black pupil in the center taking up half the space, making it resembling an iguana's eye. He wrote down the subject's description in his notes. The female's eye was nothing unique among the other dragons' recorded, which were various shades of browns, greens and yellows. But what was

unique however were her lack of horns. It was discovered to be a gender difference after scanning her with an x-ray for any developing horns underneath the skin of her skull. It seems horns were one way to tell the difference between males and females among dragons.

Dr. Pierce came over to them and went to check on the pink dragon. She told her employee, "Okay Phil, it's time to put on our aluminized suits. Our dragon should be waking up any moment now."

Phil stood up as he responded, "Yes, Dr. Pierce." The researchers went to put on their aluminized suits, which will protect them from the dragon's flames. Phil flipped the page in his notebook over as he got ready to record any vital information from the head researcher's interview with the dragon. Another researcher set up the camera tripod to record on video. With everything set, the researchers waited for the dragon to wake from her slumber.

Luna's consciousness returned as her closed eyes blinked a few times. She opened them slowly, still feeling drowsy from her all-so-sudden sleep. Her vision was blurry to her surroundings. Pretty soon, it became clearer and she was able to see this strange whole new place she was in. She freaked out with a shrill scream and reared up as she tried to back away from all these strange silvery humans in front of her. But her back and head were immediately meet with something hard in her way. The dragon looked behind and above her to see the same metallic bars crossed in squares like the ones in front of her blocking her way. They were on the sides, too. Luna's mouth dropped over in fright; she was completely dropped. Was this one of those cages she heard about? Then that means... She screamed, "Nooo! Please don't hurt me! I don't want to die!" She covered her ducking head with her wing, trying to hide behind it like it would protect her from the humans' onslaught.

The researchers were stunned and surprised. Phil's eyes widened as he gasped, "Oh my god, it can talk!"

Dr. Pierce was much calmer than everyone else here, due to having been told about this by the private beforehand. It turns out he was right after all. She held her open-fingered hands forward to gesture the beast to calm down as she assured softly, "Relax, relax. We're not going to hurt you. We just want to talk."

Luna lowered her wing slightly, peering back at them from over it. She hesitantly asked, "Really?.. About what?"

The woman told her, "Just some questions about your kind, that's all. We're biologists; we study and research everything about all kinds of life. Animals, plants and stuff. We like discovering new creatures and you just happen to be one of them. So will you be so kind as to tell everything you know about your species?"

The dragon thought that they were going to use her as a means to gain knowledge on the weaknesses of her kind. She did not want to put her tribe in danger, even if defiance could cost her own life. Shaking

her head, she refused, "N-n-no! I can't! I won't speak of this." She looked around for the first human she met and asked, "Where is Dylan?" Did he sell her out to these humans here?

"I'm right here," said a familiar voice.

Luna looked and saw Dylan coming inside the place through a flap. She was relieved to see him again. "Dylan!" she burst. Then she started asking him, "Dylan, am I going to be okay? These people aren't planning to hurt dragons, are they?"

The private assured, "Don't worry, they're not. They're just trying to learn about you; that's all."

"Well okay then," trusted the dragon. He did not seem like he was lying about this. She turned back to the biologists and said, "Alright, I guess I'll talk. Ask me anything."

Content that the dragon was now finally cooperating, Dr. Pierce began, "Okay then, let's start with your fire breath. How does it feel when you blow it out sometimes?"

Luna answered, "Oh I don't breathe fire. Well I can't, actually."

"Can't?" asked the woman. "Why not?"

The dragon answered, "Because females like myself just don't have that ability. Only the males do, and I don't exactly know how it feels for them."

Phil wrote down this little fact and said, "Well, what a relief. I guess we don't need these suits after all." He began to take off his aluminized suit and put it over one of the chairs at a table.

Dylan recalled his first encounter with Luna and thought, '*So that's why she ran away.*' Now he knew for sure that female dragons were not a fighting gender. This was all the more reason why letting Luna around the base is no big deal.

"Interesting," remarked Dr. Pierce. "Now to the next question. How do you dragons hunt? Do you eat only meat or are there other foods you enjoy?"

Luna answered, "Oh no, we only eat meat. We track down our prey smelling out for them and following their trails."

"Okay then," the woman replied as Phil wrote that down. Dr. Pierce asked more questions, including how many eggs dragons laid, how long they lived and what they do during the winter. Luna answered everything. The head researcher appreciated, "Thank you, Luna. Everything you've told me about your kind has been a very fascinating experience. I'm sure the dragon enthusiasts out there would love to hear these facts about your kind."

The dragon looked on with confusion, "Dragon enthusiasts?"

Dylan explained, "She means people who like dragons. You have fans out there in the world. They write fun stories about your kind and make artwork of them, too."

Luna was flattered to hear, "Oh my, I never knew there were humans who love dragons. How amazing!" The humans' adoration was quite surprising, despite their bloody history with the dragons. But that may have been due to them believing dragons to be simple legends.

Dr. Pierce agreed, "Yes, it is pleasing to hear." Then she looked to one of her employees and told her, "Okay Louis, get the needle. We're taking a blood sample now."

As the man named Louis went to pick up the needle, Luna got scared, thinking something bad was about to happen. "B-blood sample?" she stammered.

Dylan tried to reassure her, "Don't worry, it's nothing too bad. They just put a needle under your scales and draw some blood. That's all they do, and it doesn't hurt that much." Louis, no longer in his aluminized suit, comes back with the needle and the private tells him, "Show here an example, man." The blonde researcher inserted the needle to his wrist and drew out some blood, which slowly came into the tube. Luna was completely surprised by the lack of pain on his face; it did not hurt at all. The private told her, "It's just a little pinch; it really doesn't kill you. It's only used for studying blood, that's all."

"He's right," said Louis to the dragon. "Now can you please give me your wrist? So I can take some of that blood?" He had replaced the needle's tube with a fresh & empty one, so as not to have the dragon's blood mixed up with his own.

"Well okay," Luna complied. She held out her claw and the man inserted the needle to the wrist underneath her scales. The pinch was there just like Dylan said it was, but it was nothing too bad as she had braced herself for it. Louis withdrew the needle and placed a bandage with cotton on her. Then he walked away with tube. The dragon looked to her friend, "So Dylan, where are we anyway?"

The private answered, "We're at the new U.S. military base. We have many others around the world and this is our recent one."

Luna was astonished to hear that. "Wait, you're settling territory on our island?!"

Dylan confirmed, "Well yeah. Our government wanted us to check this place out and make another base here. We're just following their orders."

"And what does the government want you to do about the dragons here?"

The brunette answered hesitantly, "Well, we were supposed to shoot you guys down." He heard a frightened shriek from her; the expected reaction he would get when he mentioned this. "But now that we know you guys can talk, I guess we won't have to do that anymore." At least he hoped so anyway for their sake and his conscience.

Luna calmed down again, "Well that's good, because our king wants to try and make peace with you humans."

Most of everyone in the tent looked at her. "He does?" asked Dylan.

"Yes, he knows how powerful you humans have grown and he doesn't want our tribe to be killed. So he's hoping to negotiate with you and prevent a war between us."

Dylan smiled, "I see; I think that can happen. Come on, let's go talk to the commander and see if he can get this through."

The human's optimism made the dragon feel the same way, too. "Okay, but could you get me out of this cage first?"

"I'm on it." The private turned to the researchers and asked them, "Hey, can she come out now?"

Dr. Pierce answered, "Of course she can. We're done with her, so she's good to go." She took out a key and used it to unlock the cage.

Luna was glad to be free of this narrow enclosure. She got out and stretched her legs and then her... "Huh?" she perplexed. She had tried to stretch her wings, but for some reason, they seem to be held together. She looked back at her wings and noticed that they were bound by chains, which weight she had not noticed due to how light they were. "What?!" she gasped with a little jump.

Dylan apologized to her, "Sorry Luna, the commander didn't want us to let you leave the base. You're kind of our prisoner here."

"What?! But why?" whined the dragon. It looks like she will not be going back to her tribe anytime soon. "Can't I do anything to get out of here?"

"I'm sorry, but you'll have to talk with the commander about that. He doesn't seem to trust you." Dylan could understand how she felt and he pitied her for that. No one wants to be trapped in a place they did not want to be at. Hoping to make up for it, he tried to cheer her up with a bit of good news, "But I least I did convince him to show you around the base. Maybe we could see what this place is like after we talk to him. Is that alright?"

Another opportunity to learn about the humans' culture would be good. Hopefully, Luna would be able to go back and share everything she knew with her tribe and tell the king that his peace idea will work. "Of course," she responded. "I would like to learn more about you humans, Dylan."

The private said, "Alright then, let's go." Then they went out the green tent together and went on their way to Stevenson's tent. There, they told the commander about the king's diplomatic intent with the army.

Stevenson's eyes were narrow with suspicion. "So let me get this straight, you dragons come flying over trying to roast us, and now you want to bury the hatchet after we gave you that good shoot-down?" He shook his head, surmising, "I don't know if this is some kind of trap to get our guards down, or if your king is really this cowardly that he'd want to save his own hide."

Luna did not like the commander insulting her tribe's ruler like that. But she refrained from scolding him lest she would be shot. She corrected, "No, the king doesn't scheme like that. He's a very honest dragon. I promise you."

"So you say." The commander was still not convinced about this. He spoke darkly, "You know, this army is under orders to eliminate all the monsters here on this island."

Luna's heart skipped a beat and she quickly pleaded with fear, "No! You can't!"

Dylan tried to reason, "Commander, please! It doesn't have to end this way! These dragons, they can reason like we do. Just hear them out before you make that decision."

Stevenson told them, "They want talk? Then the king better be involved in this. Either he comes to us or we'll come to him. Then we'll decide if they get to live or not."

Luna felt despondent about it. She sighed, "But the king's hurt right now. It'll take days for him to recover."

Stevenson decided, "Then we'll just have to go pay him a visit tomorrow." Then he warned, "But we'll be armed, of course. Your friends try any dirty tricks and they're dead, got it?"

The dragon gulped, "Yes, sir." She prayed that this treaty attempt goes well tomorrow.

"Good, you're both dismissed. See that we don't regret it."

Dylan and Luna left the tent and walked away together. Luna to the private, "Your commander doesn't seem to trust me. Is that why my wings are bound?"

Dylan replied, "That's part of it, but he's just looking out for his men. Just making sure nothing bad happens to them. That's all." He was not entirely sure if it was out of care, but it was a commander's duty to make sure that they did not have too many soldiers killed. "Come on, let's go check out the base."

As they began their tour, Luna wondered, *'I bet I'm going to be seeing tons of stuff that I've never seen before.'*

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Stevenson watched the man and dragon leave. When he was sure they were out of earshot, he picked up the communicator and contacted the army base for the general. Soon, the general's voice sounded, "This is General Caine. Commander, do you have anything to report?"

"Yes, General," Stevenson answered. "And I doubt you're going to believe what I say if I jump to the point immediately, so let me give you the full story." He told the general everything he learned so far from Dylan and Dr. Pierce about the dragons. The general did not express any reaction to the fact that dragons can talk. The commander assumed the general must be keeping his composure and mind open to whatever he had to say. "And just now, one of them has come into my office saying that her king wants to prevent a war with us, so that his tribe, or whatever it's called, won't get shot. He knows he can't beat us, so he's opting for that. I was going to keep on going with the operation, but our private here wants us to hear the king out as well. I'm not sure if you're of the same mind as he, so that's why I called to check with you about this situation."

Caine replied, "A peace deal, eh?" He let out a quiet laugh before he scoffed under his breath, "First, they want to burn us. And now they're groveling on their knees, asking us to spare them. How the mighty have fallen." Bringing his voice back to normal volume, he said, "Okay, I'm going to tell the congress this and see what they have to say about that. If they want us to negotiate, we'll negotiate. But if they still want those beasts dead, then resume Operation Delta. Until then, don't do anything and wait until you have my orders."

"Understood, sir," Stevenson obeyed. Then they hung up. The commander pulled out a cigar and used his lighter to lit it. He smoked the cigar and let out a puffy gray cloud. He stared off into space as he thought, *'Well Dylan, you better pray that the congress is on your side here. If not, then kiss your new friend goodbye.'*

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Dylan and Luna came across some machine gun nests on top of the watch towers. Each tower had a soldier stationed to it and watching vigilantly for any dragons coming to attack them. They also saw some armored vehicles such as the AFVs and some transport-type ones, some of which were armed with M163 Vulcan anti-aircraft weapons. All of this was named and told about to Luna, so that she would

know what they are and what they did. There were other vehicles that were bigger than her. She was 6 feet tall due to her young age. Her friend, Ashley, was at least half a foot shorter than her. Dylan was about her height, but he was two inches taller. Then they saw some men jogging their way together in a group. They went fast past the two as they chorused some songs, one of which they sang, "I don't know what I've been told. Dragons have been hit by a cannonball." Some of these men saw them for a second before they steered their gaze away and continued jogging.

Luna's mouth dropped in surprise and concern for her tribe. She frantically asked the private, "Wait! Did they just attack my tribe just now?"

Dylan assured her, "No, no, it's just a song. We don't use cannonballs anymore. We have way better ammo than that."

The dragon placed a claw over her heart in relief. "Oh, that's good. I didn't want to lose any more of my friends."

"I get you," Dylan related. "But really, we're not fighting dragons right now. We're just busy getting this base set up." Then they came across a long beige-colored tank.

Luna looked at it and asked, "Hey, what is that?"

The private answered, "That? That's an armored personnel carrier; we just call it an APC for short. It's designed to carry our soldiers and protect them using its armor plates."

The dragon stared at the APC's surface and asked, "It doesn't look like the same kind of armor you humans used to wear. What's it made of?"

Dylan answered, "It's made out of aluminum alloy. It's good for keeping us from getting shot by enemy fire and landmines." He immediately explained what landmines were to her before she even asked.

"That's amazing!" exclaimed Luna, who was pretty impressed by the APC's description. She could imagine the soldiers being perfectly safe in the monstrous machine that ran on gasoline. Or was that diesel? She could not tell which vehicles ran on gasoline, diesel or oil. She figured that they may run on certain ones, but she was not sure.

"It is," the private nodded in agreement. "It's one of our best weapon vehicles ever." Soon, they got to an area with big and round concrete circles with each of them having the letter H in the middle. He started to explain, "These are our landing pads. It's where our-" He stopped speaking when they heard something in the air. The noise resembled chopping sounds like a professional chef rapidly cutting a carrot into small pieces. They looked up and saw a helicopter coming down to land. Luna was completely awe struck and completely amazed at such a large metal flying machine, but she could also see something else. She saw some weird long-looking tubes on the side of its small little stubby wings.

The tubes were mostly black. There were also some parts here and they had some yellow lines that circled all the way around the long strange-looking tube. She also saw another two, but they also have multiple holes in them. She could not tell what they were, but she probably could guess they were weapons. The dragon also saw another black weapon, but this time it was on the bottom of the helicopter's nose. It did not look very scary; probably, because she had gotten to know what guns are like.

The helicopter landed on the H as the pair felt what seemed like tons of air pushing against them. It was enough to blow away light things such as the leaves on the ground. Soon, the flying vehicle turned its engine off and they could hear the machine start to go quiet as the propellers gradually slowed down until they stopped for good. After a couple of minutes, the men inside got out of the helicopter. They wore helmets with shades attached to cover their eyes from the sun. Luna noticed how strange the helmets looked and thought, *'These helmets, are they just hats or do they protect the head?'* The pilots took their helmets off and hopped down from their vehicle.

Dylan chuckled happily and walked over to them, greeting, "Hey bud, long time no see!"

One of the pilots smiled with joy as he and the private hugged each other. He said, "Hey Dylan, I didn't think I'd meet you here."

Luna watched their interaction, seeing how familiar they are with one another. She asked, "Dylan, who is that?"

The men let go of each other and looked to the dragon. The private explained to her, "Luna, meet my buddy, Lieutenant Ginger Linza. We were fast friends in college." When the dragon opened her mouth to ask what college was, Dylan continued, "I'll tell you what college is later. Anyway, Ginger is a pilot of that Apache helicopter he came out of."

"Apache?" Luna asked. She looked to the strange green flying machine and realized that this was its name. She saw some round silvery metal things on the helicopter and some smaller ones on the tail, but they were angled differently. She did not know why they were made that way, but they were probably there for multiple reasons. Maybe they were there just to make it go in certain places? Or turn? She did not know how fast the thing was, so she asked her friend, "Dylan, how fast does this Apache go?"

Dylan answered, "Why it can go up to 178 miles per hour at top speed. And it's not just any Apache helicopter either. It's a Boeing AH-64 Apache."

The dragon was a bit surprised at the name and a bit curious, too. She asked the lieutenant, "Ginger, what are those strange tubes were on the sides of those small little stubby wings?"

Ginger walks beside one of the "wings" and show her the weapon there. He answered with pride and joy, "This beauty right here is the most deadly weapon that this thing carries. It's called a hellfire missile launcher."

Luna jumped up almost like a cat getting scared by something jumping up in right in front of them. She had never heard such a weapon that be called something so deadly-sounding. Wondering what the other weapons were, she asked, "And what about the others? What are they?"

Ginger patted the weapon she described and answered, "Why this is an unguided rocket launcher." He explained to the best way he can in words that she would understand, "It shoots out long pointy spear-like arrows, but with flames coming out the back." The dragon was a bit surprised; she wondered what unguided meant. The lieutenant then points to the other armament that was underneath the helicopter's nose. He told her, "And this is a 30 mm chain gun."

A bit confused, Luna asked, "Why is it called that?"

Ginger answered, "It's because when it fires, it's basically shooting every ammo it has simultaneously. Well almost like that, anyway." He then showed her the long black belt carrying ammo that fastened the gun. He explained, "These here are the rounds that feed the gun when it fires." The dragon was pretty intrigued about it. The man continued, "Another reason why it's called a chain gun is because it also gives off this sound, and I'll tell you what it sounds like." He gave off an example, imitating the sound of a firing chain gun, "TA TA TA TA!" Luna blinks a little bit curiously and looks at the chain gun again. He says to her, "Don't worry, it's not going to hurt you. The other guy with me is a weapons officer and he's the one who controls all the weapons." The weapons officer waved his hand at her and gave her a friendly smile. The lieutenant continued, "I'm just the pilot charged to fly the helicopter. But we can switch positions anytime if I wanted to be the gunner or if my partner gets hurt trying to shoot somebody. Although anyone can do both, we have two men to do separate jobs for a reason." Luna understood what he means and figured that the helicopter needing 2 people was more efficient. Ginger told them, "Anyway, we need you guys to clear the area. Wes and I got to do some fixing on the chopper and some tweaks."

Dylan nodded understandingly, "Okay, we'll leave you. It's been nice to see you again." To the dragon, he told, "Luna, let's go."

"Coming," Luna replied, walking alongside him. She was amazed to see that other soldiers like Dylan could be friendly to a dragon. It seems more likely that King Gregorios's idea could come and play very well. But still, she must study the humans' other weapons in case the proposal goes wrong.

Soon, they got to another vehicle, which a quarter of it was uncovered. There were some men lifting what Luna thought to be some sort of weird-looking star. The big muscular man, who is in charge of this, waves at the private and greets, "Hello there, Dylan. I see that they somehow managed to get you to have this dragon called Luna, I believe? Toured around the base."

Dylan nodded and said, "I did. Did you hear about that?"

The man replied, "Sure did. I overheard Fred talking about it just a few minutes ago. He fretted about this being a bad idea and saying that you would be in trouble if she caused some problems for us." Luna's eyes were in shock. She did not know what to make of this. Any troubling issues she made could probably risk her getting killed or maybe forced back into the cage to be locked up for good. The working men replaced the weird-looking star and reattached the weird squeaky-looking flexible things that look like a chain gun's feed belt, but they were different. The man in charge tells his workers, "Alright boys, secure the tracks and drive sprocket."

After the men did just that, one of them gave the signal, "All set, sir!" They pack up the tool boxes and closed the door on the back of the tank.

The big man turned to face the dragon and introduced himself, "Hello there, missy. I am Lieutenant Tank Commander Hercules Flex."

Before Luna could say anything, the men took off the tarp and revealed a mighty-looking modern battle tank. She jumped to her feet as soon as she saw the mass of the gun it was armed with. She could see the long tube with a strange-looking extra tube in the middle. She was completely in shock of seeing the humans' mighty tank. "Eek! What is that?!" she cried.

Hercules answered, "This is a M1A2 Abrams the tank I command. We had to replace one of driving sprockets when it started being wonky."

Dylan described the sprocket to her, "It's that strange-looking star that's used to drive the tank. The flexible thing they put on it are called tracks. These are what makes the tank go anywhere on the ground."

Luna was completely awestruck and saw other weapons that were on it. "And it's weapons?" she asked.

Hercules says, "This tank is armed with a 50-caliber machine gun, a lightly armored 30-caliber machine gun on the top of the turret and another one inside the turret."

The confused dragon asked, "What's a turret?"

The tank commander answered, "It's a type of platform that houses or carries the weapon. This turret can turn all the way around, meaning it can shoot in any direction I want."

In case the dragon wanted to know about the turret's weapon, Dylan explained to her, "The long tube on it is called a barrel. It raises up and down, and can fire at any range it's meant for. This barrel here is a 120mm smoothbore gun."

Luna was completely amazed by it. But then a question came to her mind, "But how do you see and know where to shoot." The tank did not look like it had any windows. It must be impossible to see outside, unless the humans had another way for it.

Hercules answered, "We have the view ports on the tanks. They're hard to see from outside when you're not looking for them, so I'll point them out to you." He pointed to the two holes on the tank, one on the platform and one on the turret. He described each respectively, "This one's for the driver to see through and this one is for the shooter. We also have mirrors to see what's behind us and camera to help us out, too."

Luna was confused as to what cameras were, but she decided not to ask about them. "So does the thing turn? It looks like it can go only straight."

"Does it turn?" Hercules repeated, eager to show off the tank's capability. "Missy, you'll be surprised." The tank commander ordered his men, "Alright boys, get back into the tank. We're going to show this dragon how a tank turns." The driver's hatch opened and the men squeezed themselves in. After the last one got in, the hatch closed. Soon, the tank came to life as the gas turbine started up before roaring. The dragon jumped as she nearly felt her scales were going to come off. The thing sounded so terrifying with its whining and roaring. She saw light smoke coming out of the pipes on the bottom back. Then the tank began to move. She was struck with amazement as the tracks left prints in the dirt that looked like the pattern they have. The track came up around and back down on the ground as the driving sprockets drove the tank. Soon, the tank started to turn all the way around as one track went forward and the other went backward. The monstrous piece of mail started to turn itself. Luna was amazed by it turning as it left nothing, but a large circle in the ground as it turned, leaving only bits of ground-up dirt in its wake. She saw its true start to turn as the barrel went up and down. The tank commander demonstrated, "See? This is how a tank turns. Now watch what else it can do". The dragon was amazed at how the thing could work and how it was probably used for. Soon, the tank stops and then a *kluck* was heard! The tank started to reverse rapidly and the gas turbine whined as the rear rose into the air. It rapidly went backwards with the tread squeaking and squealing. It stopped about 500 feet away and then the gear shift again. With a mighty roar, the tank rose forward.

Luna was in shock as many thoughts went to her head. *'My goodness! Look at how fast this thing goes!'* Soon, the tank went faster than it could go in reverse. The thing soon reached its top speed of 42 mph since the ground was all flat when the army constructed the area to make it all flat. The ground was smooth like the roads that cars drove on. Soon, the tank quickly stopped. As it did, its tracks grind to the ground for more than 50 feet before stopping right in front of the dragon and two men. Luna could not take her eyes off of what she just saw. It was one of the most powerful weaponized vehicles she had ever seen in her life.

Soon, the turbine ceased and it was shut off. The soldiers got out as Hercules had a splendid grin on his face. He beamed at the dragon, "So what did you think, Luna? Pretty impressive, huh?" Luna had no

words to speak her reaction; she could not even think in her head as to what she would say. Then the tank commander told his men, "Alright boys, let's get this tank back over to the garage."

Luna wondered if the M1A2 Abrams could also smash itself through anything since it looked powerful. Could it go through trees and such? She asked the tank commander, "Could this tank go anywhere?"

Hercules says, "Pretty much on land, but not on water. The tank ain't equipped for that. But it does have enough power to knock down a tree, depending on its width and size."

That's when Luna got very scared; she could not believe such a monstrous machine could smash its way through trees like that. It was almost like an unstoppable monster. The humans' new technology would make any dragon awestruck. She murmured, "That's incredible."

"It sure is," the tank commander replied. "Anyway, I got to go with the boys to haul off the tank. Have a good day, missy." Then he and his squad went back into the tank and drove it away to get it to the garage.

Dylan said to her, "Come on, let's go see what else is around." He showed her some more of the gun nests and some of the entrances into the base. The dragon was intrigued by all this and such as he told her the details of everything. Soon, her stomach started to growl. The private looked at her and asked, "Hey Luna, you hungry?"

She answered, "Well yes, I suppose so."

Dylan offered, "Then let's get some dinner. I hope they'll have something for you at the eating area."

"Me too," replied the dragon. She wondered what eating a fully cooked meat would be like. She heard humans did not like to eat their prey raw, which is why they always cooked them with fire. She followed her friend over to the place where the soldiers ate. When they got inside the very large tent, some of the men at the tables turned their eyes away from their plates to glance at the unusual sight of the pink dragon. Luna felt awkward being at the center of the attention of all these stares. She looked down at the grass below as she tried to ignore the many eyes.

The pair joined the line and eventually got to the cook, who was serving food on the plates. Dylan asked him, "Hey, could you make up a special meal for a dragon. She only eats meat."

The cook nodded with a reply, "Sure thing! I'll give her an all meat platter." Then he went to the cooks and told them to cook some plain meat for the dragon. Luna looked at the strange equipment in front of her and the tables the other cooks set up to prepare food on. There was no fire to be used here for the food. It seems like they had all their food cooked on the box-like machines. Not only that, but the temperature inside the tent was cooler than it was outside; like a cave being cool, just not too cold or

hot. This must be the humans' way of taking shelter from the sun. The cook came back with a plate of steaks and he handed it to Dylan, "Here you go."

"Thanks!" the private replied. "Now give me stew and fruits."

"Gotcha," the cook complied. He put a bowl of stew and some mixed fruit on the plate before giving it to the private. Dylan carried the two plates, one in each hand, over to a table. He set them down, one on his side and the second on the other side where Luna will eat from. The private sat down on the bench and began to eat his meal.

Luna took up a steak piece and ate it. The food was soft and bloodless compared to raw meat. It was easier to chew on; no wonder the humans made their meat like this. Though the lack of blood did remove some flavor from it, it was still alright for her to enjoy. Looking at the strange combination of food known as stew and the cut-up fruits, she asked about them, "Hey Dylan, what's that strange-looking food you're eating?"

The private followed her eyes to the bowl of meat & veggies and answered, "Oh this? This is stew. It's got bits of beef, carrots, peas and potatoes in there."

Luna asked, "Can I try some? The beef and brown water that is."

"Of course, sure," Dylan granted. He used a spoon to take up a beef piece along with a bit of stew liquid. He fed to the dragon, who opened her mouth for a bite.

When she tasted it, her eyes widened and her mind felt like it went beyond anything in the world. This food was amazingly tasty. She beamed, "Wow, this is so delicious! Can I have some of this stew?"

"Sure, I'll get you some." Dylan went to rejoin the line and got to the cook, telling him, "Hey, I need a bowl of stew for my friend here. Just meat and no veggies."

The cook obeyed, "Okay, I'll have that ready." After the cooks got the bowl of meat stew made, he returned and gave it to Dylan.

The private went back to the table and put the bowl next to Luna's plate, which was down to the last steak due to her eating some while he was away. "Here, I got it for you."

"Thanks!" appreciated the dragon. She hastily ate up the savory stew, eating the beef pieces and lapping up the meaty liquid. Within seconds, she was already done with it as she licked her chops after an empty bowl. Dylan was in shock at how fast she ate. But then again, he realizes that she is a dragon after all. She asked, "Can I have some more?"

"Sure," Dylan responded. He went back to the line again to get another bowl of meat stew for her.

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A while after dinner, Dylan went back to showing Luna around the base. Soon, they saw some walking soldiers carrying some nearly familiar guns. Luna asked about them, "Dylan, are those M16A4s?" Earlier, he had told her about them when they came across another soldier armed with such a weapon.

Dylan answered, "No, I think those are AR-15s."

"AR?" asked the dragon.

The private explained, "AR stands for automatic rifle. Basically, they load themselves with the rounds of ammo we put them every time we pull the trigger. They can even fire more than one shot in a succession. It's different from the M16A4s."

"Oh, okay," Luna replied. Then they heard some firing gun noises. She let out a shriek and clutched her ears to block out the startling loud sounds.

Dylan says, "Sounds like they're practicing. Come on, let's go see the firing range." They went over to where the sounds came from and saw the soldiers shooting at a long row of shooting targets. All of the targets had holes punctured into them by the bullets.

Luna saw moving red dots on the targets. She noticed that everywhere they stood, a hole would appear from where a bullet shot at them. Were these red dots used to show these soldiers where to shoot? Then she looked to the golden cylinder-like things on the ground right by the targets and saw some smoke coming out of them. They were probably hot and what might have been what made the weapons have their capability to shoot even an iron stone. She also saw another man holding a strange-looking ball in his hand. He puts his finger on its thin-circled chain and pulled it out, which made a clanking sound. Then he threw the thing 50 yards away before it hit the ground and suddenly *BOOM!* The ball exploded in a fire blast with a loud sound. It surprised Luna so much that she cried, "Eek!" It was heard to believe that something so small would have so much power in it. It made a large area go up in smoke and flames, which were probably more than 5 feet wide. Dragons certainly would have died from that.

The soldiers stopped shooting and looked to the dragon within their presence. Dylan made a small grin at them and said, "Don't mind her, she's just shy. That's all." When one man about to ask what was the dragon doing outside her cage, the private quickly told him and the others, "And don't worry, she's not going to do anything bad. I just want her to get to know what us soldiers are like. That's all."

Luna looked at them all shyly and greeted, "Um, hi."

Then the men started asking questions about her and her species, to which she answered a few of them before the trainer showed up and told the recruits, "Alright privates, it's time for you to head on out to

bed. Got to get ourselves rested for the early morning." The soldiers began to leave the firing range to go to their respective tents.

Dylan said to the dragon, "Well, I should probably take you back to your cage now."

Luna frowned and moaned, "Oh, but I don't want to be behind bars."

"I know, but I don't think the commander trusts you enough to be outside on your own. Look, maybe once we settle things with the king, then you'll be able to sleep wherever you want. For now, it's just the cage for you."

The dragon sighed, "Well at least it's only for tonight, I think." Then they went back to the researchers' tent to put her back inside the cage.

Dylan did a little wave at her and said, "Night, Luna. I'll see you tomorrow morning."

"Goodnight," Luna responded back. She watched him walk out the tent before the researchers turned off the lights in the lab tent and went out to go to a separate tent for slumber. As she laid down alone in her cage within the darkness, she began to think about her tribe. What were they doing now? Had anybody learned of her disappearance? If so, they must have been worried and fretting over her well-being. Was anyone out searching for her? And lastly, did Ashley make it back home safely? Luna hoped she did; that dragon was her best friend. She would be sad if anything terrible happened to her. Perhaps once the commander takes her with his troops to the tribe, considering if he does use her as a lead there, she will find the answers. The dragon closed her eyes and went to sleep.

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Later that night, a small group of dragons soared over the woods as they went on their way towards the humans' territory. Ashley's quest to save Luna had begun. Leading her and her two guards were Nova, who had filled in the king's spot since Gregorios was still too weak to lead them. Though Nova still had not fully recovered, he had more strength than the king to be able to take the trio there. The scout saw some lights moving around the humans' turf. Their guards must be stationed to keep an eye out for dragons. The group dove below the trees and landed in the woods just before the place. Nova sat there as he told the others, "I'll wait for you here. You three go on and do what you can to save Luna."

Ashley replied, "Will do. You stay safe, Nova." She looked to her guards and told them, "Cyril, Heaton, let's go!" The trio went back into the sky and flew towards the humans' place. They avoided getting caught in the lights and they landed somewhere within the walls of the place. They walked quietly together, using their noses to sniff out scents to detect any humans in their path and to search out Luna.

Cyril smelled something strange and told them quietly, "I think I smell humans. Let's hide quickly!" The dragons hid behind a green house of some kind and waited for the humans to pass.

The scents came closer and closer and then they started to hear laughter. Two humans with weird-looking helmets on their heads cracking jokes to one another as they walked. One of them grinned and said, "So this fat lady keeps thinking I work at McDonald's and kept bugging me for a big mac until I had enough. So I said, "Here's your big mac!" Then I turned and farted a big one at her."

The other human howled with laughter before saying, "Damn, boy! I bet she had her panties twisted or something."

The first man grinned, "She sure did!"

After watching the laughing men leave, the dragons felt surprised by the conversation. Heaton asked, "Did they just speak our language?"

Ashley, feeling just as confused as her guard, answered, "Yeah..." She wondered how the humans were able to talk like them until she put that thought to the side for now and concentrated on finding her friend. They left their hiding spot and continued their search until they picked up a familiar scent. She murmured, "That's Luna. She must be nearby!" They followed the scent's trail until it led to one of the houses. They went around it, looking for a way in, but it was closed off on all sides.

Cyril, feeling frustrated, asked, "Oh great, just how are we going to get in?"

The teal dragon wondered if they could break through instead. The material this house was did not appear to be made of stone or wood. She tried to tear through with her claws poking in through and then swiping down. To their surprise, it worked. Ashley realized that this house was made of some kind of cloth. "Uh, like this?" she answered.

Cyril smiled at having a way through. He decided, "That sounds like a pretty good idea. Let's do it!" So they teared through the house and went on inside. There they found their fellow tribe member sleeping inside a cage with her wings bound by rope.

"Luna!" Ashley murmured happily with joyful tears. She was so happy to see her best friend alive and unharmed. She had been hoping that the humans would not kill her and her hopes came true. The teal dragon quietly went over to her friend and prodded her with her claw. "Luna... Luna, wake up," she told her.

The pink dragon opened her amber eyes, feeling groggy from the fading sleep. She rose her head and turned it to see her surprise guest. Fully awakened by the sudden appearance of her friend here, Luna exclaimed, "Ashley?! Is that you?!"

Ashley shushed her and whispered, "Not so loud! The humans will hear us." She hoped her friend's outburst had not attracted the attention of the patrolling humans outside.

"Sorry," Luna whispered her apology. "It's just I can't believe you're here. How did you get here?"

The teal dragon said, "We'll talk later; right now, we have to bust you out of here." She looked around and asked, "Where's the key?"

The pink dragon answered, "I don't know. I didn't look to see where they took it. Maybe one of the humans have it."

Ashley frowned, "Well, that can't be good. That means we have to risk ourselves trying to search every human." It was going to be very difficult to do so, especially when they have to try and snatch the key from one of the patrolling humans. She wondered if any of them could ever be swift and quiet about it.

Then they heard Cyril asking, "Is that it, right there?" They looked to see him touching his muzzle to a set of keys on the table.

Luna recognized them and answered, "Yes, that's them. They used one of those keys for the cage."

The red dragon said, "Okay, let me see if it's this one." He took the keys on the chain into his mouth as he held one of them in his teeth. He tried to it into the keyhole, but it would not go in. "Okay, it's not this one." He used his tongue to switch to the other key and said, "Let me try this one." He inserted it in and this time it fitted. He turned the key around and got the cage's door unlocked. Cyril moved the door to the side as Luna stepped out.

The pink dragon was glad to be outside the cage. Even better was that her friends were going to rescue her. "Oh thank you so much, everyone! I'm so happy you came for me!" She rubbed her head against Ashley's in appreciation. She was finally going to right back to where she belonged, home. Cyril blew out a tiny bit of fire to burn off a small section of the ropes. The ropes dropped and her wings became free once more.

The teal dragon replied happily, "And I'm glad you're alright." Then she told her urgently, "Now come, we must get out of here now." The sooner they left the humans' place, the better. The dragons got out of the house and begin to take off into the air.

A soldier, who had been nearing the lab tent, noticed a gray tail in his flashlight's range before it disappeared. "What the?" he sputtered. He held his flashlight up and spotted the flying dragons above.

The dragons jolted in alarm, having just now been discovered by a human. Luna let out a frightened cry as Ashley worried, "Oh no." There goes their perfect escape. Now they were going to have to hasten their escape to leave the premises now.

The human gasped, "Dragons! They're here!" He raced towards a metal box on a pole and opened its door to push a big red button. Suddenly, the sirens roared and the dragons heard a loud screeching *RUUUUUUUUUUUUUHHHHHHhhhhhhhhh*.