

The dragons dropped their jaws in panic as they realized that this sound alarm would alert every human here to their presence. Ashley urgently told, "Quickly, get over the walls before they get to us." They sped for the closest wall border and ascended as high as they can to be able to fly over it.

Remembering what Dylan had told her was armed along the walls, Luna warned the others, "Be careful, they have gun nests to-" Gun shots were fired and the dragons were shot down, roaring and screaming in pain. They dropped to the ground with bloody holes on where they had been shot. Thankfully, no one was killed.

The dragons painfully tried to stand up as Cyril smelled human scents behind him and looked back. He cried desperately, "They're coming! We got to go!" The dragons ran limping as hard as they can to make a getaway.

Luna did not want to be the bearer of bad news at a time like this, but she had to let them know anyway. "Guys, we're not going to make it. They have tanks that go faster than us."

Ashley looked back at her friend, asking, "Tanks? What tanks?" Then they heard a monstrous roar in front of them. They stopped and saw a terrifying M1 Abrams coming for them with its gun aiming right at them and its headlights staring them down. This tank was taller than they were and it looked ugly and scary to them. Luna gasped as her friend grimaced, "Oh no, we're trapped!" The humans caught up to them and quickly moved around in formation, surrounding the dragons in a circle. Then a couple of Apache helicopters hovered over them with their lights shining down on them. Their whirling propellers made a *TUNKA TUNKA* sound. Looks like flying away was not an option either, that is if it was ever, considering all these guns pointed at them.

The dragons were trapped, feeling helpless and hopeless to do anything, but Heaton decided that he was not going to give up without a fight. He spewed fire at one of the soldiers in front of him. The blazed man dropped his gun and screamed loudly in pain as he turned and fled. This action was paid back with triggers pulled and bullets flying into the gray dragon's body. He collapsed, bloodied and dead with holes in his body. The other dragons gasped at their dead companion as Cyril cried out in shock, "Heaton!"

Then they heard one of the humans speak, "So you all thought you could get away, didn't you?" They looked among the parting soldiers to see Commander Stevenson stepping into view. He stared down the dragons and smugly said, "Too bad for you, this army's security is tighter than you expect." He ordered his troops, "Men, recapture the pink dragon and bring her back to her cage. The others are to be-"

A familiar voice shouted, "Luna! Luna! Are you okay?"

Luna smelled the speaker's scent and her eyes lit with happiness. "Dylan!" she burst. The private came racing into the scene as he pushed his way past the soldiers to get into view.

Ashley and Cyril were confused about the pink dragon's joy for that member of the enemy species.

"Dylan?" the teal dragon asked her friend. "Luna? Do you know this human?"

The pink dragon nodded to her, "Of course! He's a friend of mine. He's not a bad human. In fact, none of them are bad. They're very nice when you get to know them."

Cyril protested, "But they killed Heaton! How can they be nice?" He was not ready to trust humans so easily.

Luna understood his distress at the loss of his friend. But she reasoned, "That's only because he tried to burn them. He really shouldn't have done them. The humans' weapons are way too powerful. We're no match for them."

Stevenson spoke disapprovingly to the private, "Well Private Dylan, I see your friend here has tried to break out with these fellows of hers. What do you have to say for yourself, son?" He had warned the private of the consequences that he would face if the dragon caused any problems for them.

Dylan responded, "If no one was hurt, then I have nothing to say."

The commander told him sternly, "Well then I'll have you know that one of the soldiers here just got roasted by the dead dragon. He's still alive, but now he'll have to be treated in the infirmary."

"Oh..." Dylan mumbled, now knowing that he was going to get punished for this. "Well...uh... I'm sorry about that. I'm not sure what to say about that one."

Luna pleaded with the commander, "Wait! It's not his fault!" Everyone looked to her. "My friends came here on their own to save me. We had no idea that this would happen. Please forgive him." Her eyes moistened, begging for the man in charge to show mercy to the private.

Stevenson gave this some thought before he proposed, "Well Luna, I guess we can put this incident behind us if you and your friends will remain here as prisoners."

"What?!" both Ashley and Cyril cried out hysterically at the same time.

The commander continued with a sly smile, "After all, we can't have you relaying any information about our base and its equipment to the other dragons. The army does love to keep its secrets."

Cyril begged, "You can't! The tribe will be worried about us!"

Ashley growled defiantly, "What are you going to do to us, you creeps?"

Stevenson answered, "Oh nothing. At least not until I get my orders back from the general on whether we can have this meeting with your king or not."

The teal dragon looked to her best friend, asking, "Luna, you told them about the king's idea?"

"I did," the pink dragon confirmed. "And Dylan likes it. But I'm not sure about the commander, though." She looked at Stevenson nervously. He would not hesitate to kill off the whole tribe if he was ordered to. She can only hope that this general of theirs would allow the army to spare the tribe.

Stevenson told the private, "Dylan, escort your friend back to her cage. Everyone else, bound their wings and chain them up to the stakes in separate places." For precaution, he added, "And don't forget to put a muzzle on that red one. I don't want any more fires tonight." This is a fact that he had learned from Dr. Pierce after she had reported her findings from her interview with Luna. The soldiers got the chains and tied them around Ashley and Cyril's wings, while one of them put a tight muzzle on the latter. Then the men put collars around the dragons' necks and began to lead them away to their spots for tonight.

Dylan leashed Luna and apologized, "I'm sorry, Luna." She did not respond, but she forgave him anyway and let herself be taken back to her cage. After she was taken back to the lab tent and put back in her cage, Luna laid down and slept, praying that tomorrow the army's confrontation with Gregarios will be a peaceful one.

Nova had heard a strange-sounding roar as well as the familiar sounds of the shooting weapons the humans had used earlier. The shocked brown dragon flew up high into the dark sky to see what had happened with his fellow dragons after they had botched the rescue. He was above the flying contraptions with their lights beaming down on them, so that the humans would not see him. Then the terrible thing happened; Ashley and her friends, with the exception of Heaton, who had been slain, were getting captured by the humans. The rescue attempt had failed. "No..." Nova murmured with dread. The tribe had lost another few dragons that night. It was hopeless, there was no way that the dragons would be able to stand up against the humans. Not by charging in and not by sneaking, too. The scout turned and fled through the air, making a quick getaway before these two-legged beasts would see him, too. He needed to tell the tribe the bad news. After 2 miles during his flight, Nova spotted a bluish-white light coming up from the ground past the treetops. Curiosity got ahead of him as he wondered, *'Huh? What's that?'* He descended below the trees away from the light, so that he could check it out while stealthily approaching, in case the light was from the humans. The dragon walked quietly, careful not to make a sound that would attract any unwanted attention. After getting closer to the light, he discovered it to be a giant oval-shaped ball of light. His jaw slightly opened as he thought, *'What is that?'* He also discovered something he feared he would see. There humans, armed and accompanied by their killer metal carriages. They appeared to be guarding this light as they were surrounding it and watching the woods in front of their eyes. Then a strange thing happened in which few flying carriages came hovering out of the light. Nova had made an interesting discovery and wondered, *'This light, is this how the humans got here?'* He needed to warn the tribe about this.

But before the dragon would flee immediately, the top part of one of the land carriages rotated towards him. Immediately, an unseen human alerted the others in a deep and scratchy voice, "Dragon spotted over at the east."

'Oh no!' thought Nova, shocked and frightened to know that he was in big trouble.

Another human shouted, "Let's shoot it, boys!" Upon hearing these words, Nova began to turn and run away as fast as he can. He could hear the metal carriages, both from the ground and air, behind him giving him chase to attack. Nova looked back to see the three monstrous land carriages chasing him down. But to his utter terrifying surprise, he could not believe when he looked behind him for only a few seconds to see how fast they were. Every time they turned, their tracks would dig up the ground and at the same time, kick up dirt high in the air about nearly as high as the top of the killer carriage itself. He could also see two flying carriages above him. He continued to run and tried not to look back.

Soon during the chase, the men in one of the Apache helicopters received a call from the colonel on the radio, "Attention soldiers in this chopper, I need you to return back to the portal immediately. You all left it unguarded trying to chase down that dragon. Please return at once, over."

The pilot of the Apache cursed himself over their careless mistake before saying, "Shoot! He's right, we need to go back now." The helicopter turned around and hurried over to guard the portal, so that no dragon went in there uninvited and threaten America.

The other pilot of the other attack helicopter was none other than Lieutenant Ginger. The one he flew was different and more advanced; it was the AH-64E Apache Longbow, the newest model of the Apaches, which has more powerful engines, more advanced avionics and more advanced fire control for the weapons. It was also much faster in that it went at least 227 miles per hour, which can outfly the dragons. Ginger looks through his visors at the infrared camera on his display to see the dragon shown with its heat signature white and the forest around it all gray and black. Cracking a smirk, he said, "You're not going on anywhere, sucker. We're gonna get ya!"

Before he could even tell his gunner to fire, he heard the lieutenant commander from the M3A3 Bradley in front of the other twos telling him, "We need you to put down some fire for us, Lieutenant... Send the beast down and lower it to another direction. But don't hit it, just lower it away. I just got a command from our colonel that he wants us to make this quick and drive it away into the woods, over." The M3A3 was compatible with the inter-vehicular communication system of the M1A2 Abrams tank and AH-64E Apache.

Ginger replied, "Wilco, commander." He looked into the sides of the infrared camera with the dragon continuously running live with what looks like the sea to him with brighter spots everywhere on the dragon. He suspected that they were wounds. It was probably one of the dragons that attacked the base earlier. He switched the communication to his copilot gunner, Alex Griffin, saying, "Griffin use the HEI-T rounds. We need to lure this thing away, not kill it. Pursue and put some rounds down in there and scare

it deeper in the woods."

The gunner replies, "Wilco." The lieutenant knew that the gunner officer's helmet has a special type of system which wherever he turns his head, the 30mm chain gun that sat underneath the Apache's nose would turn to the direction wherever he was going to look. Basically, the gun always tracks where Alex turns his head. It was a special type of system the Apache had where the gunner could actually control the gun by moving his head in a direction he wants.

Pointing to a specific place ahead, Ginger ordered, "Send some in there." Alex turned to look at that spot and pulled the trigger on his joystick. Then 30 mm rounds spewed out of the barrel making a rapid shooting sound of 560 rounds a minute, like a lead dispenser. The rounds left a stream of tracers that lit up the night & the infrared camera and exploded when they went in contact near the dragon.

"Whoa!" Nova was taken by surprise and blown right off his feet for only a brief moment until he got back up on his feet and continued to run.

Alex continued to fire for a few more seconds until they lured it into another direction away from the base and the portal. Ginger told the gunner, "Alright Griffin, cease fire now." The gunner let go of the trigger.

The commander in the front M3A3 Bradley put up the comms and contacted the Apache once again. "This is CFV Lieutenant Silver. Lieutenant, the colonel says that he also wants you to come back to the portal as well. He says that we're enough to take care of the dragon and lure it away."

Ginger let out a sigh of relief, grateful that he was finally going to be able to get his rest tonight. He switched his comms from the gunner to the Bradley's frequency channel. "Wilco, thanks for letting me know. You all have fun huntin' tonight. Thanks for the spotlight, RTB." He turned his helicopter back around and headed at full speed back to the portal.

The pursuit of the dragon was now left to only the three M3A3 Cavalry Fighting Vehicles on the ground. In the turret of the front CFV sat Lieutenant Commander Dennis Silver. He was sitting at the right side while his gunning part sat at the left. Silver watched the dragon in the CIV system camera that was on the right side of the turret as it displayed the creature in infrared mode. "Keep it up, men," he said in the comms with the other Bradley tanks. "Switch to HEI-T!" The gunner on his left pressed the button and within mere couple of seconds, the ammunition changed into a different type. "I'll take it from here." He switched the gunner's position to his, since he also had a joystick at his disposal like the gunner did. Silver watched the dragon and continued to chase it down. He moves the joystick slightly to the right as the turret started to turn towards the creature. He aimed the 25 mm M242 Bushmaster near the target. The gun did not bobble up or down because of the highly advanced stabilizer, which kept the gun from moving off its target, which means that it could fire on the move with extreme and deadly accuracy on the target. Silver adjusted the gun's firing rate to 200 rpm. He sighed as he saw the trees went by, while he was about to engage the dragon. They were crossing speeds a little over 35 miles per hour since they

were on flat terrain. He ordered other Bradley tanks, "All vehicles cease fire; I will deal with this...." After his subordinates stopped shooting, he readied and put his finger on the trigger. He measured the range with an eye-safe carbon dioxide laser rangefinder. In less than a near instant later, the range finder puts up the range on the screen displaying, "Range 100 meters.... Fire setting is 200 rpm..." The commander waits for the right moment until they went into a large clearing of trees, where there was barely any around. This was his chance to hit the mythical beast. "Fire...." He pulled the red trigger and soon, the chain gun spread to life. It was loud with a deep *TUNK TUNK TUNK TUNK TUNK* from the gun, sending HEI-T round near the dragon. On the infrared camera was the rounds from the lit-up incendiary tracers that made a stream of viewable lit-up rounds that were sent at a standard fire rate, but a high speed of 1,100 meters per second towards the dragon.

As Nova kept on running, he was suddenly bombarded by a few explosions close to him. He let out an astonished cry, "Gah!"

The rounds exploded making viewable puffs of lit-up white clouds of smoke on the screen display. They exploded near the dragon. The hot shrapnel from the incendiary rounds got through some of the dragon's scales. Silver continued for a few more seconds and stops firing. They chased the dragon down for nearly two miles and they could not keep it up since their orders was only to at least chase it down a good distance. The commander had one last option to make sure that this thing knew what it was messing with. He would have to use a TOW missile, which was launched from a smooth tube launcher. But the Bradley had to stop and deploy, in order to fire these missiles. He shouted in the comms, "All units, halt!" The Bradley tanks screech to a stop and the commander could see the dragon getting away. "Deploy the tow launcher." Suddenly, the launcher started to move and then braised from its armored rack as it raised the two tubes at a 90° angle from its deploy. "Send one in at my command...." He turned his head at the gunner and said, "Gravel, the missile will be under your control as soon as I give the command to fire." He switched the weapon position to the gunner. He watched as the dragon was at a good distance. "Wait.....wait...." Soon at that right moment, he shouted to the gunner and said, "Send one now!"

The gunner gave a quick yelling reply, "Sending it...ON ITS WAY!" He pulled the trigger and suddenly outside the tank, there was a stream of jet flame coming out of the launcher. The white casing in front of the missile that sealed it inside popped right off and soon the flying ammo was sent out the launcher. Within seconds, it got up to a speed 278–320 m/s, which was almost the speed of Mach 1. In the optics of gunner gravel, the soldier used the joystick to optically guide the missile towards the target, like flying a toy RC helicopter to its destination. Soon, the missile hit a nearby tree that was close to the dragon and it exploded with a massive *KA-BOOM!*

There was some silence and lots of smoke where the missile had hit. Thankfully, the Bradley tanks could see through it. They saw the dragon's body and thought it was down for a second until it started moving again. The dragon looked back and Silver let out a sigh of relief. He told his soldiers, "Good job, men. Let's go and return to base.... You all deserve a find rest tonight." The squad cheered as they all returned to the base for sleep.

Nova's ears were ringing furiously as the strange flaming high-speed spear from the killing metal carriage exploded at least about 7 meters away from him. He was completely shocked and wondered what in the world of stars did he survived from? He saw the strange metal carriages rapidly turned around all the way in just about 4 to maybe 6 seconds and then the strange carriages rode off into the night. He could not believe what just happened now; only that he was being tracked down by flying machines and also the strange flying spears. He also wondered how the heck those strange carriages could see him at night? It was unbelievable what was happening unlike earlier where he saw those flying carriages with their huge beams of light shining down. They were chasing him at first, but then they decided to cut off for some reason. He could not see how they worked, but he also saw something else. The few times he looked back; he could see something was moving on top of one of the strange land carriages' moving things that carried what looked like its weapons. It turned around and also followed him; perhaps it was something like an eye or some sort. But whatever happened, he was glad to be alive, but he was merely wounded by the hot debris of the exploding spear fired by the carriage's strange black tube weapon that made him saw actual light coming at him at speeds he has never seen before. It was almost fast as the strange exploding flying spear as he could have guessed, but he was not sure if it was much faster. But he could not tell, even with the deep sound of the thing's continuous fire of death from that long black tube that made a "tunking" sound. At least he was not too wounded to move. Nova was glad that the area was now clear of the humans. He spread his wings and he began to fly back to his tribe. But eventually, he had to take a rest for tonight since he had to heal his wounds. By now, he was very close to his tribe's home. Nova found an old dragon-made hut and knew that tomorrow he would have to race at least another mile towards his tribe and tell them the experiences he has encountered.

The morning came and Commander Stevenson got himself dressed to go to the eating area for breakfast. Before he could leave his tent, he heard a ring signaling a video call he was to receive. The man went to sit at his desk and pick up his smart phone to answer his family's FaceTime call. On the screen, he could see his 29-year-old wife and their 6-year-old son greeting him with smiles. The boy waved at him, "Hi daddy!"

The wife greeted, "Good morning, dear! How's your mission going? Is everything going fine?"

Stevenson was always happy to see his loving family. He answered, "Yes Miriam, we're all still kicking. You're not going to believe all the things we've discovered."

Miriam asked, "Is it about the monsters? What were they?"

Stevenson answered, "You're not going to believe a word I say until you see them for yourselves. The monsters we saw were dragons, actual real-life dragons."

The boy's face lit up with delight and excitement as he beamed, "Whoa!"

His mother looked at her husband skeptically, a reaction that Stevenson expected considering how fantastical it sounded. She questioned, "Dragons? You can't be serious, Bill. How is that possible?"

The man shook his head understandably, "I wouldn't believe it myself either if someone told me that before all this. I'll send you a video of them later to prove it. You'll be surprised to hear them talk the same way like we can." Just as Miriam opened her mouth to speak, the husband continued, "Sounds crazy, I know. But what can you expect when you're warped to an undiscovered island protected by magic walls by a magical portal? Anyway, these dragons want to negotiate peace with us. They're trying to stop a war after we've shot them down from the skies for trying to burn us. Even one of our privates wants in on this treaty. But we're not about to go through with that until I hear from the general himself. You know? Government orders and all."

Miriam voiced her opinion, "Well if these dragons want to surrender, then I don't think they should be killed. I mean they can't be that bad."

Their son started begging, "Daddy, you can't kill them! You know I love dragons."

Stevenson hated to see his son cry. No parent ever wants to make their child unhappy. But his service must come first; he replied, "Yes Timmy, I know you love dragons. But I can't go against orders or else I'll lose my job and probably go to jail, too. You're just going to have to hope that the president wants them alive."

Timmy with his hurt expression whined, "But daddy, I don't want them to die! I want them to live!"

The father let out a sigh and said something to try and cheer him up, "Alright, I'll see what I can do. Maybe I can convince the president to spare them and then they can live out their happy lives."

Timmy relaxed a little, asking, "Really? You'll do it."

Miriam asked worriedly, "Are you sure about this, Bill? If the senate doesn't want to negotiate, then-"

Stevenson sternly replied, "I know what's at stake, Miriam. I'm just trying to cheer the boy up here." Then he falsely assured his son, "Don't worry, Timmy. Everything will be alright. Dad's going to make sure the dragons will be okay." He did not like to lie, but how else was he going to get his son to quiet down and not cry. If it came to annihilation, then the commander will just snatch up a dragon egg and use it as "proof" to his son that the dragons have lived.

Timmy smiled at his father and said, "Thanks, daddy! I really hope they live, because I want to see dragons someday."

"And you will," Stevenson smiled back. "Now run along, kid. You got to go eat your breakfast and get ready for school."

"Okay!" responded the boy. Then he gave his farewell, "Bye daddy!"

Miriam wished her husband well, "Take care, honey!" Then she closed the FaceTime app.

With his family greeting over, Stevenson got up and left his desk. He did not get too far when his communicator alerted him of an incoming transmission. The commander went back to his desk to answer it, expecting the general to be on the other end of the line. General Caine called, "Commander Stevenson, are you there?"

The commander responded, "Yes, it's me, General. Have you heard anything from the senate?"

Caine replied, "I did, and here's what they have to say." Stevenson listened intently to find out if he would be forced to take aggressive action against the dragon tribe. The old man answered, "They said that if we went to war with these dragons, then it would be considered as war with like one of the other countries, because the United States cannot go and directly declare war on a country, especially with an island we don't know anything about. It is not our business to interfere with their laws and their community, because it's their own culture. That's the way of the United States, commander. You need to keep that in mind that we cannot declare direct war on a civilization that attacked us out of misunderstanding."

Stevenson thought, *'So it's peace then.'* Timmy would be so happy to hear that his precious dragons were going to live. "Okay, we won't take hostile actions then. We'll just go to this king and see what they want."

"That'll be acceptable. You will go to them as diplomats and ask them if we can continue building the base here."

The commander replied, "Understood, General. We'll have one of the dragons lead us there and get this going." So now Operation Delta had changed from killing dragons to settling down the conflict instead.

"You have your mission, Commander. General William out!"

After the communicator shut off, Stevenson took up a lighter and a cigarette out of its packet. He went outside, lighting the end of the cigarette and putting it to his mouth to smoke. As he walked on to the eating tent, his thoughts turned to Dylan, *'Well private, it looks like you got your wish after all.'* He let out a puff of smoke on the way.

Very early in the morning before the sun could touch the horizon, Privates Kurt and Fred brought the American flag to the very bottom of the pole to get it ready for the start of the day. With that done, Kurt smiled, "And that's done. Alright Fred, let's munch on some breakfast."

As they headed for the cafeteria tent, Fred mused, "I wonder what we're getting today." Would it be pancakes? Eggs & sausages? Waffles? They will have to find out when they get there.

Luna laid there soundly sleeping in her cage. Dylan came inside with a plate of meat he brought from the cafeteria tent. He knelt down beside her, holding the plate, as he began to murmur, "Wake up, Luna. I got you some breakfast." The pink dragon did not stir and understandably so, since 5 am in the morning was too early for most to wake up. But breakfast was not going to last forever, since militaries needed to be up early to be ready for any enemy attack. The man prodded this time as he repeated a bit louder, "Luna, wake up."

This time, Luna did open her eyes with the tiredness stinging them since she was rudely awakened early before she could get a full rest. She asked groggily, "What is it? Is something happening?"

"Not exactly," Dylan answered. "But I did bring you some breakfast." He showed her the food plate.

The dragon looked at him in confusion with her eyes still squinting, "Breakfast? Early at this time?" She noticed that it was still dark outside the tent. The dawn must not have shown itself yet.

The man explained to her, "When you're in the military like me, you have to get up this early. It's a way to a way to get your body energized and fresh." He set down the plate before her.

Luna asked skeptically, "But shouldn't make you tired later in the day?" She did not understand how one would have less hours of sleep from waking up so early and not suffer the consequences of it later.

"It sounds like it should and I was like that when I first started. But now, I'm used to it and it doesn't bother me anymore."

"Well that's interesting," commented Luna. "But why feed me now? I'm not in the military. Couldn't you wait until I get up?"

Dylan answered, "Because breakfast would be over by then. I know it sucks, but that's how it is."

The dragon let out a low, tired sigh, "You humans sure have some strange ways." She began to eat up the food on her plate.

"We sure do," the man understood her perspective. "Anyway, I got to get ready to sing the national

anthem. They're about to do it pretty soon."

"Okay, can you tell me what it's like if I don't hear it?"

"Sure," Dylan answered. "I'll play it to you on a cellphone." He left the tent and went to join the other soldiers over at the flagpole. There, he stood and waited as more soldiers arrived. Some walked their way here while others drove to this place in tanks. The ones who rode parked their vehicles in appropriate spots before getting out to join in with the rest of the ranks.

Once every last soldier had arrived, Stevenson ordered the 4 men carrying rifles and flags, "Colors, fall in!" The Color Guard marched up to the front and got into formation, lining themselves in front of the flagpole before the army. The commander ordered, "Now begin the national anthem."

The army saluted the rising flag that was being slowly raised as the music player played America's song on audio speakers, *"Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light. What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming? Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight, o'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming? And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there. Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave. O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"* Upon the ending of the song, the flag had reached the very top.

After the music was over, Stevenson gave the morning announcement, "And now I would like to go over today's agenda, but first thing's first. I need the captured dragons brought here; they're going to want to hear this." Looking at a certain someone, he told him, "Private Mark, go bring your friend over." He told a few other men to fetch the dragon's other friends.

Dylan went back to the lab tent and found resuming sleep after she had finished her breakfast, leaving her plate completely empty with only minimum stains. He got the cage's key and used it to unlock the barred box. He murmured to her, "Luna, wake up. The commander wants to see you right away."

Luna had no trouble getting up as she had been struggling to get back to sleep. She asked, "I'm up, what is it?"

Dylan answered, "The commander says he's got some news for us. I think it might be about your tribe. We should go hear what he has to say."

As she left the cage, the dragon said, "Oh I hope it's good news." They walked together back to the flag post, making their way to the front of the crowd for Luna and the commander to see each other.

Pretty soon afterwards, the other soldiers brought over Ashley and Cyril, who were both being led by the chains. The teal dragon groaned, "Gee, why do we have to get up this early? Can't we have another hour or so to sleep?" Both dragons looked pretty sleepy; apparently, they had just woken up.

After they were taken to the front with Cyril having his muzzle removed to speak, Stevenson began, "Now I'm sure you're all wondering why I've called these dragons up. Yesterday, the pink one here came to me with Private Mark and told me that her king doesn't want a war with us. I've contacted General Caine about this and waited till today as he told the government the dragons' intent. This morning, he contacted me and gave me the response." Dylan and the dragons listened intently, eager and hopeful for the right answer. "The government has decided to change Operation Delta's mission for the time-being and gave us the order to go meet with the dragons' king instead."

Smiles formed on the dragons' faces as they were pleased with the good news. Luna was the most joyful out of the three. She looked at her human friend and beamed, "Dylan, did you hear that? We're going to live after all!"

The private nodded contently, "And it looks like your king got his wish, too." He was glad that no one would have to fight any dragons. The last thing he wanted to do was hurt or kill any innocent dragons, especially Luna. This mission was going to have a happy ending after all.

Stevenson continued, "No longer are we here to exterminate the beasts, but instead to treat them as people and this island as another country. After one hour, we will venture out to the dragon tribe's home. These three here will be our guides to their place." He looked at the dragons and asked them, "Will you do it?" It was more of a demand than a simple question.

Luna nodded and simply answered, "Of course we will."

Cyril said, "As long as I'm not going there with these chains on me, I'm good." He looked at the chains on his wings in annoyance.

The commander assured, "Don't worry, you won't have to. We'll throw those things off once the hour is up. For now, this army will do its morning exercises before we head out. Men, make your way to the training ground and get started."

The army made their way over to the place of interest as Luna walked alongside Dylan. She presumed, "I guess that song will have to come later, huh?"

"Yeah," replied the private. "Guess I'll have to show it to you after the tribe thing." The pink dragon stopped and watched her friend go off with the other humans.

Ashley came up beside her friend and said, "Looks like the humans have changed after all." Luna turned her head towards her. "I was afraid we were going to end up like..." Her eyes drifted down to the ground in momentary disconsolation, "Heaton..." The thought of last night's death still weighed heavy on their minds. "But it looks they're more merciful."

Luna replied, "You were right for us to give them a chance. In fact, I've made friends with one of them."

"Yes, you did. I think that means we can all get along." She looked up to the sky briefly in thought, "Dragons and humans; one day we're enemies, and now we're friends." Smiling, she continued, "Wait till the other dragon tribes here about this."

The pink dragon smiled, "They're going to be thrilled that they don't have to hide anymore."

Nova left the hut and resumed his return to his tribe. The dragon's wounds from yesterday's battle had gotten slightly better, but the other wounds from his escapes still hurt just as ever. He decided it would be best to walk his way to the foot of the mountains before using his wings for flight. When he was finally close to home, the dragon spread out his wings and leapt up to fly. Upon reaching the top of the cliff, he walked his way into the home. The many caves and the king's cliff appeared in sight. A few of the dragons had risen up for the start of the morning. They saw the scout coming into their home and two of them flew down to meet him. They had noticed something was off when one of them asked, "Nova, what happened? Where's Ashley and the others?"

Nova looked at them with a defeated frown, answering, "They've been captured; the humans spotted them. They did get Luna, but then the humans came with their shooters and carriages." His voice started to take on a horrified tone, "They killed Heaton and they chained the others as their prisoners."

The two dragons and the others that had listened to the scout were all shocked and devastated. The other dragon, that had come to Nova, grimaced, "Damn it, that's three more we've lost now. We have to let the king know about this." He turned and flew up to Gregarios's cave to deliver him the bad news.

After hearing this, Gregarios looked down at the cavern floor in dreariness, shaking his head and sighing, "There's no good news when it comes to humans, is there? Oh, what am I going to do?"

"I'll tell you what you can do," came Ronord's voice from the cave entrance. The king and the other dragon looked to him as Ronord continued, "We're going to sneak up on the humans and take them out one by one. This is slow, but we'll eventually thin their numbers out until there's not a single one of them left."

Gregarios was not confident in the plan to work. He asked, "Ronord, what makes you so sure that the humans won't come back with more to replace the ones they've lost?"

The blue dragon agreed, "Yeah, we still have no idea how they got here. Shouldn't we put a stop to that first?"

The black dragon, realizing he had not thought things through, replied, "You're right. There must be

some boats they rode on to get to here. We should destroy those first." He frowned doubtfully when he suspected this possibility, "But they're probably made of metal, too. I don't know how we're going to break them."

Nova came up beside him and told, "They didn't come here on boat. They came here through some kind of portal. I saw it last night before the humans went after me."

"A portal?" asked the surprised Gregarios. "You mean to say the humans used some kind of magic to get here?" The other males were surprised at this as well.

The scout responded, "I don't know, but that's the only way I can think as to how they got here."

The king looked down in thought of this, murmuring, "A portal... It's been so long since this island has had one. Our ancestors used it to escape to here before it closed off and we lost our magic for good. Why is it here now?"

Ronord interjected, "It doesn't matter. We must find a way to seal this portal before more humans come in. We're all in danger and we need to take action now!"

The blue dragon asked, "So do we kill the human who made that portal?"

"Exactly!" Ronord slammed his foot hard on the ground for emphasis. "There's got to be a wizard among them. I say we ambush each human we find until we've killed the right one. Then the portal will be closed and we can use my sneak-and-kill tactic to exterminate the rest."

Gregarios thought about the black dragon's proposal, thinking about how it could work and if it will work. He looked for possible flaws in the plan as a precaution before going with that. He discussed, "This could work with the humans going about on foot, but what do we do when they're in their carriages? I don't think we can simply pull them out."

The black dragon gritted his teeth, having not thought about that either. He growled, "Curses! This could be a problem. Things would be a lot easier if we had our magic. They're probably going to stay in these things for safety all the time."

The blue dragon questioned, "But won't they have to come out to eat eventually?"

Ronord found the possible scenario to be brilliant enough to exploit. "Hmm, you're right. I guess we'll just have to wait for them to come out then."

Gregarios said, "I hope this plan of yours works, Ronord. Because the fate of our tribe depends on it."

"Oh, it will work," Ronord surely said. "You'll see." He grinned, eager to taste humanity's blood.

The king advised, "Very well then, we shall wait until all of the males have fully recovered. Get some rest right now; you need to prepare your body for the attacks we'll do in the future."

But the black dragon had other things in mind. "Actually, I'd rather act now."

"What?!" cried Gregarios as he was taken aback by the black dragon's disobedience. Even the other males were just as stunned. In dragon culture, a king's word was law. Nobody dared to disobey that.

Ronord reasoned, "We need to be quick or else this tribe is lost. So I'm heading out." To the scout, he told, "Nova, show me where this portal is."

Gregarios told the scout, "Nova, don't do it. We need to heal ourselves first."

Nova apologized to the black dragon, "I'm sorry, Ronord. But I can't take you there."

Ronord frowned, displeased that no one was going to help him destroy the humans. "Fine then. Then I'll just have to go and find it myself." He turned and walked out of the cave.

Gregarios quickly tried to stop him, "Ronord, wait!" But the words did nothing to halt the dragon as he took flight out of the mountains to search for the portal. The king frowned and sighed, "That fool, he's just going to get himself killed." The tribe needed every male to be fit and healthy in order to attack the humans and defend the tribe. One less dragon could make the situation even more difficult. He told the blue dragon, "Bring Ronord back here. He mustn't do anything rash."

The blue dragon obeyed, "Got it." He went out of the cave and flew to fetch the black dragon. Ronord landed in the forest and began to trek to find the portal. The blue dragon landed close behind him and told, "Ronord, you need to get back home. It's not safe out there."

The black dragon continued to walk as he defied, "I will be fine. I know what to do around humans."

The blue dragon rushed to catch up to him as he insisted, "I'm serious! If you keep disobeying his majesty like that then-" The moment he tried to grab onto Ronord's tail, the black dragon turned and swatted him in the head with his front talon. The blue dragon fell over and laid on the ground unconscious.

Ronord huffed in an uncaring manner and left the blue dragon alone. He growled, "I'll do whatever it takes to save the tribe." He wandered throughout the forest to wherever his feet and wings took him.

The time to depart for the tribe's home finally came. Stevenson had chosen several soldiers, including

Dylan and Ginger, to go with him and the dragons to the tribe's home. A few helicopters, 5 Boeing AH-64 Apaches and the newest transport copter, the MH-139A Grey Wolf, were also going to be deployed for the diplomatic mission. The commander briefed the now-unchained dragons on what to do, starting with the pink one first, "Luna, is it?"

Luna confirmed, "Yes, that's my name."

Stevenson continued, "When we get close to this place, you are to go way ahead of us and let your king know that he's expecting visitors. Tell him that this is not an invasion, but that we all come to them in peace. Is that clear?"

Luna heard every word and nodded, "Yes sir." She was pleased as punch to tell the king and the tribe the good news.

"Good," replied the commander. Then he spoke to the other dragons, "The rest of you are to lead us as well, but stay with us as we land at your place, got it?"

Ashley replied, "Got it."

At the same time she spoke, Cyril said, "Yeah, I get you."

Glad that everyone understood the orders, Stevenson said, "Good, now let's head on out." To his men, he told them, "All soldiers get in the choppers and take off for the destination."

"Yes sir!" the soldiers responded. Everyone entered the helicopters as Stevenson got into the Grey Wolf. The dragons took to the front and were the first to fly off since they were slower than the helicopters. The military's deployed copters took off afterwards and followed their envoys to their home. They flew over the forest, going in the direction of the mountains.

After many minutes, they began to see a silhouette of the mountains in sight. As they flew closer and closer, the mountains gradually grew in their view. Once the mountains were big enough for the peak's tips to go over the top of the eyes, Luna knew that it was time for her to go to the tribe. She flapped her wings harder and flew on ahead faster than her friends. She zoomed towards the tribe's home, happy and eager to be back home. She flew down to the heart of the mountains and saw a multitude of spots of different colors that grew and took shape into dragons as she neared her destination. "Everyone!" she shouted out joyfully.

The tribe looked up to see that the missing pink dragon has returned. A female asked, "Is that Luna?"

An elder dragon smiled with great delight, "She's alive and back in one piece! Oh praise goodness!" The others began to chorus their surprise and joy as they welcomed Luna back home.

Gregarios had been waiting for the blue dragon to bring Ronord back to his common senses and to his tribe, but it taking much longer than the king had hoped. The waiting was stressing his mind, making him wonder if anything wrong had happened. He groaned wistfully, "Oh, where could they be?" What was taking them so long? They should have been back by now. The king wondered if the blue dragon had lost Ronord somewhere in the woods or if they had gotten sniped or captured by humans. Suddenly, his thoughts were interrupted by the cheerful noises of his tribe outside. Had something good just happened just now for once? Gregarios got up and walked out his cave to go check it out.

He could hear the voices of tribe greeting someone he had not expect to be back so soon. One of the females said, "Oh Luna, it's so good to see you again!"

A teenage male said, "We were all worried for you."

A male adult asked, "How did you escape?"

Luna, smiling at each member of the tribe, told the last one, "I'll explain later. Right now, I have to talk to the king."

She began to walk and it did not take more than a couple of seconds when Gregarios approached her and said, "I'm right here."

Luna stopped and said, "Oh, your majesty. What perfect timing, I got some good news you'll want to here."

The king smiled, eager to hear this good news of her. "Pray tell what it is."

The pink dragon told him, gradually getting happier as she spoke, "I met this really nice human; his name is Dylan. Then after he took me to his military's base, we told the humans' commander that you wanted to prevent a war with us since we couldn't beat them anymore. The commander talked to his general and then the general told his government this and the humans decided to spare us."

The tribe was surprised to hear this; they had not expected the humans to be merciful. A female asked, "Spare us? That easily?"

Luna confirmed, "Yes, the humans aren't like they're ancestors. They've become way better than them. In fact, they're all really nice! Dylan showed me and told me everything about their weapons, tanks and their culture. He even gave me some of their food to eat."

Gregarios was amazed to hear this. "That's quite the marvelous news, Luna. It sounds like the humans can be reasoned with after all."

The pink dragon nodded, "Yes, they can. You just got to get to know them."

Then another thought, this one concerning, came to mind that he itched to bring up. The king asked, "And we will, but where are Ashley and Cyril?" They were out to rescue her, so they should have been with her.

She answered, "They're with the humans' helicopters; those flying carriage things. They're coming here with them as ambassadors, so that the humans can meet and talk with you."

"Well I'm glad to hear that they're safe as well; especially after what happened with Heaton." The king frowned as he closed his eyes in doleful thought of the killed dragon.

The sudden mention of the gray dragon had put a damper on Luna's mood. She asked, "You heard about what happened to Heaton?" She had been about ask the king about his lack of mention of Heaton, when questioning the whereabouts of Ashley and Cyril.

Gregarios reopened his eyes as he answered in a low tone, "Yes, Nova told me about it when he came back to us. He said that the humans had killed him."

One of the baby dragons, having been reminded about the morning news, said in realization, "Oh yeah, that's right. That means the humans aren't really nice."

A male dragon agreed, "Come to think of it. Why did they do it?"

A female brought up, "And not to mention that they tried to shoot Nova as well."

Luna tried to dispel their fears and worries as she explained the reason, "Guys, Heaton was only killed because he attacked first. The humans were only trying to defend themselves."

Another female asked, "But then what about Nova? I heard they were chasing him down with their weapons."

Luna could not imagine the reason for the humans' actions then as she had not been around to witness that. She admitted, "I... I don't know." She wanted to believe that the humans weren't doing that out of malice as she knew them to be better than that. But how can she when she had no idea what exactly happened then?

Then Nova made his way through the crowd to get to the pink dragon. He answered, "I think they were trying to keep me away from the portal they were guarding." The tribe gave him their undivided attention. "They were coming right out of that thing. It was a gateway between their world and ours. It was like they didn't want any dragon getting into it, or rather knowing that secret."

"A portal?!" an elder male cried.

A female asked, "Who cast a portal?"

Gregarios said, "That is a curious question indeed. And I know we're all sure it wasn't any of us. It has to be a human." He asked the pink dragon, "Luna, do you know of any wizards among the humans?"

Luna shook her head, answered, "No, your majesty. I never got to meet one over there."

Nova asked, "So then, who?"

Gregarios looked to the sky, expecting the humans to arrive any moment. "We shall ask them when they come. For now, let us wait for their arrival."

Ashley and Cyril led the helicopters into the mountains and towards their home. Upon reaching the tribe, the two dragons began to descend and land. The tribe looked up at the sky in awe and utter surprise of the monstrous metal carriages with whirling wings on top and on their tails. Stevenson picked up the radio communicator and told his men, "Alright boys, start helping me look for a descent landing spot."

The response he got was, "No need to, the dragons are already making room."

Stevenson looked down at the ground see the tribe backing away to provide his Grey Wolf some space to land. "I see," he said. "Alright then, you all stay up there and be prepared to shoot in case anything goes wrong."

"Wilco," said the soldier in one of the Apaches.

The Grey Wolf began to descend down to the dragons' home, lining up its position with the flat ground below for a safe landing. Upon touching the ground, Stevenson and his men wait for about a minute or so until they shut down the blades and then wait for them to come to a stop. After the engines completely shut down, the commander came outside with two juggernauts behind him in heavy armor and light machine guns as his guards. Dylan was the last to follow outside as well. There was some dead silence as the commander looked around in front of him at all these dragons. He wondered if any of them were distrustful of his kind. They did send out their bunch to attack his army after all. He cautiously walked towards the dragons for a bit as the others followed behind him. He stopped after several feet and as the yellow dragon stepping slowly towards him away from the others. Suspecting who he thinks the dragon is, Stevenson asked, "Are you his majesty? Because if you're not then it would be pretty embarrassing at first try if you aren't."

"Indeed, I am," the king answered. "I am King Gregarios, the ruler of this tribe. Now may I ask for your name?"

The commander answered with a salute, "Colonel Bill Stevenson, your highness. We come to you as representatives of the United States of America. I hear you wanted to surrender and have us leave your tribe alone?" Some of the dragons were surprised to hear this kind of greeting and the way of how and what nation he is from.

"Yes," Gregarios answered. "Originally, we saw you humans as a threat to our island and intended to destroy you. But unfortunately, that backfired heavily against us."

Stevenson thought, *'It sure did.'*

Gregarios continued, "Seeing as how we were no match for you now since your race has grown more advanced over the centuries, I decided to try and save this tribe by asking, no begging, you to spare us all. This island is our only home and there is no other land around for us to flee to without tiring ourselves." Looking to Luna, he continued, "I hear from this young one that you have all decided to spare us." He looked back to the commander, "If that is true, then I appreciate your mercy, especially knowing that even the little ones among us will still live."

Referring to Dylan and Timmy, Stevenson replied, "Well good thing for you some of us would like to see you alive. I have a son who's a fan of dragons." With a smile, he continued, "I'm sure he'd be happy if I take out my camera and film you all."

The king asked, "Camera? What is that?"

Taking his cellphone out and touching the camera app, the commander said, "You'll see." He activated the video recorder and moved the camera from side to side slowly, getting every dragon he can see within the film. The tribe curiously looked at the little strange device in his hands. Once he had his video made, Stevenson sent it to his wife through a text message, telling her to show it to their son later. "And there we go," he said to himself as he closed the camera app and put away the cellphone.

Luna asked, "What was it you were doing?"

Stevenson answered, "Just giving myself a video of you all. He wanted to see dragons, so I gave it to him."

Gregarios said, "Well I'm sure your son will be pleased with this video of yours or whatever it's called. But now I have a concerning question, I would like to ask of you."

The commander replied, "Ask away, your highness."

The king gestured for his scout to come forward. Then he asked the man, "Nova here told me that your soldiers were chasing him away from a portal that he found and that they tried to shoot him. Why did they do it?"

"The incident from last night?" Stevenson had heard about it today. "We needed to protect the gateway and keep out any dragons from entering our country. We were still under the assumption that your kind would have gone and attack our people unnoticed. So naturally, we had to do just that. We weren't to kill them, mind you. But just to scare them away."

Glancing to the burns on his back, Nova commented, "I guess that explains why I'm still alive."

"Is that so?" Gregarios said. "Well thank you for not trying to kill him. It seems this tribe can now relax, knowing that we have nothing to worry about. Thank you for your time, Commander Stevenson. You have my gracious gratitude."

"You're welcome, your majesty," the commander replied. "And just so you know, we'll also be using this island as one of our bases. The magic walls here do a good job of cloaking everything here. We can still share the island, of course."

"Oh yes, these walls were made a long time ago to hide us from humans outside."

"So you used magic for that?"

"Yes, we did before we lost our powers. The portal you see however was not of our doing." The king asked, "Perhaps it was one of your wizards, I presume?"

Stevenson and the juggernauts looked at him confused as the former said, "Wizards? We don't have any wizards."

The tribe was surprised with the answer. Gregarios asked, "No wizards? But then, who made the portal?"

The commander answered, "We have no idea either. All this magic stuff here is pretty much a mystery to us."

"So it is." Then the king said, "Well anyway, now that we all know that we're safe. There's this certain black dragon that needs to know about this as well. His name is Ronord. Right now, he's out there trying to find a way to seal the portal and go to battle against the humans. I've sent one of us to bring him back, but I don't know what's happened to him. Ronord sees all humans as our enemies, so be careful when you see him."

Stevenson said, "Well he's making a huge mistake. I'm going to relay this to my men and tell them what they're dealing with here."

"Okay, but don't kill him. This tribe has lost too many of us and I'd rather not lose any more. So if you can, please find a way to spare him."

"I won't make any promises, but we'll do what we can, your majesty."

"And I'll send out every dragon who wants to join this search to find him." Gregarios turned to his tribe and told them, "If any of you dragons wants to help find Ronord, please fly out and start looking for him." Many of the dragons took off into the air and flew out over the woods to look for their vengeful tribemate. Stevenson went back into the Grey Wolf and used the communicator to tell the other Apaches and the army back at the base about Ronord.

Luna went up to Dylan and asked, "Well Dylan, want to go help me look for him?"

The private responded, "Sure, but I need to ask the commander first." He went over to the Grey Wolf and asked his superior, "Commander Stevenson?"

"What is it, private?" asked Stevenson, who was still at the seat.

Dylan asked, "May I go with Luna to find Ronord?"

"Sure, you can," the commander permitted. "If you can handle him on your own, that is."

Dylan smiled with confidence, "Don't worry, I have my guns with me. I won't be going down that easily."

"Glad to hear that, private," Stevenson said, pleased with the answer. "Now take your friend and move out."

"Wilco," Dylan replied before he went back to his friend. "Alright Luna, let's go." The pink dragon let him get on her back and then they off into the forest below to search for Ronord before it was too late.