

# Dragonbane

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In memory of Vanessa Delagarza, and to all we have loved, who have left us too soon. We miss you, but you will forever live in our hearts.

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## PROLOGUE

*Arcadia, 2986 BCE*

*Is this dead or hell?*

Maxis growled at his brother as he struggled to carry Illarion out of the filthy dungeon where he'd been held for more weeks than he could count. Damn, his little brother was heavy for a creature who made his meals mostly off field mice and wheat.

*Shut it, Max snapped at him with his thoughts. If you can't help, then don't distract me while I'm trying to save your scaly, worthless hide from the human vermin.*

*I don't know why you're complaining so. Humans aren't so bad. I rather like them, myself... They taste like chicken.*

In spite of the danger surrounding them and his bitter rage over their latest "lovely" predicament and the betrayal that had put them here, Max had to bite back his laughter. Leave it to Illarion to find humor at the worst time imaginable. But then, that was why he was risking life, scale, and claw to save Illarion when all dragon-sense he possessed told him to abandon his brother and worry about his own cursed arse.

*You're not making this any easier on me, you know.*

*Sorry. Illarion tried to use his human legs to walk, but the weak, unfamiliar appendages buckled beneath him. How do they balance on these spindly things, anyway? He scowled at Max. How are you doing it?*

*Sheer piss and vinegar ... and the resolute need to live long enough to get to the ones who'd done this to them and kill them all.*

*And after those poor demons went to all that trouble to cave-break you. They'd be so disappointed to see their efforts go for naught.*

Max let out a frustrated breath. *I swear by all the gods, Illy, if you don't stop your nonsense, I will leave you here.*

His expression sobering, Illarion fisted his hand in Max's long, matted blond hair

and forced him to meet his gaze. *Go, brother. Like this, I'm nothing but an anchor to you and your freedom, and we both know it. Together, we're caught. Alone you stand a chance at daylight again.*

Tightening his arms around his brother's frail human body, Max locked gazes with Illarion. It was so eerie to see blue human eyes staring up at him and not his brother's normal yellow serpentine ones. To stare into the face of a man and not a dragon. What had been done to them against their will was all kinds of wrong.

Without their permission, they'd been bespelled, captured, and merged with a human soul that neither of them understood, or comfortably wore.

One day, they'd been fully Drakos, the next ...

Human.

But though they weren't the same in form, they were still the same in heart and spirit. And one thing would never, *ever* change.

*We are drakomai! And we do not abandon our kinikoi. You know this!*

They might not cluster together in living communities, or share domiciles, once they reached their majority, but when the Bane-Cry sounded, they were honor bound to heed it and fight together until they defeated all threats....

Or death separated them.

Illarion winced as he stumbled and fell, dragging Max down with him. *Why did they do this to us? Isn't it enough that they hunt and kill us for sport? That they've enslaved us for centuries? What more do the human vermin want of our kind?*

Max didn't speak as he helped his brother regain his feet and staggered with him toward the narrow opening he prayed led to the forest where they might find shelter. The answer wouldn't comfort Illarion any more than it'd comforted him. Rather, it pissed him off to no end.

They'd been a merciless experiment so that King Lycaon could save his worthless, whiny sons who'd been cursed by the god Apollo to die at age twenty-seven. While Max could respect the man for not wanting to lose his children over a curse that had nothing to do with the king's family, but over an ancient grudge the god bore the queen's bloodline, Max didn't appreciate being the means by which Lycaon hoped to accomplish the cure.

Even now, he remembered the sight of the fierce Akkadian god Dagon in his blackened armor as Dagon had trapped him with his arcane powers.

“Easy, *Drakos*,” the god had breathed as Maxis had struggled against him and done his damndest to fight him off. “You’ll thank me for what I do. I’m going to make you better. Stronger.”

But this was neither of those things. Never had he felt so weak or vulnerable.

So lost.

And the worst had been to awaken in front of his “twin.” A human male identical to this body whose soul had somehow been merged with his. Unlike Max, the human hadn’t been strong enough to survive the spell that Dagon had used on them. Probably because Dagon hadn’t bothered to learn what type of drakomai Maxis was before he cast his magick.

Magick had never played well with Max’s accursed breed. It was why they’d been originally conceived and charged with their sacred duties.

The weak human had died howling in agony a few hours after the spell-casting, as his body attempted to become a dragon’s form. While Max hadn’t enjoyed the transition to human, he’d survived it.

Barely.

He just wished he could control the impulse that threw him from human to dragon and back again. Those horrid transitions came at random intervals without warning. Something that kept him grounded for the time being, since the last thing he wanted was to be airborne when his wings turned to arms and sent him plummeting.

“There they are!”

Max hissed as he heard the humans behind them. He tried to use his powers on them, but like this ...

Useless.

Illarion’s eyes widened in panic. *Go! Leave me.*

*Never! Better I die by your side trying, than sacrifice your life to save mine. I will not leave you, little brother.*

A single tear ran down Illarion’s bloodied cheek as they were overrun by the humans, retaken, and chained like the animals they were. Max fought as best he could. But since he didn’t really know how to use his human body, it did him no good.

In a matter of minutes, they were dragged back to their dark, filthy cage where other species awaited the same horrid fate.

Experiments for gods and man.

Disgusted and furious, he held his brother in his arms and protected him as best he could while the pitiful creatures around them howled for mercy and death.

*What's to become of us, Maxis?*

Honestly? He had no idea. But one thing was absolutely clear to him. *We are drakomai. We are kinikoi. And if I have to kill every human and god in this universe, above and below, my oath to you, little brother, you will fly again in blue skies as we were born to, and we will both live free of them and their wretched curses. No one will stop us.*

Yet even as he spoke those words, he knew what Illarion did. Some things were much easier said than done.

And no matter the intent or heartfelt emotion, not all promises could be kept. A jealous goddess herself, Fate was a cruel, bitter bitch who often made liars of man and beast. Never one for mercy, she'd never shown any to either of them or his breed.

“Does it live?”

Max froze at the sound of the king of Arcadia's voice as the old man neared their rusty cage. It was a gruff tone Max had learned to recognize, to his deepest regret.

“Aye, Majesty. Both of the animals that were merged with the princes survived and are intact. Should we kill them now?”

Max went cold at that.

“No!” the king roared. “Those are my sons, too. Even if they are born of beasts, they are still of my royal bloodline, whether their hearts are those of my sons or of a mindless creature who was merged with them. They are all that remain of my precious Mysene, and I will never dishonor her. Fetch them to me so that I can embrace my blood and that of my fallen queen. I want to meet my wolfson and my dragonson and welcome them to this world.”

# 1

*Sanctuary*  
*New Orleans, 2015*

“You know, really, someone should just drop a razor-wire fence around this entire place, and declare it an insane asylum.”

Max snorted at Dev Peltier’s dry wit as he set the plastic rack of clean glasses on the mat for Aimee Kattalakis to put away. With blond hair a few shades lighter than Max’s, Dev was one of the rare males at Sanctuary who was also more muscular.

Pausing behind the counter next to Dev, Aimee draped one long, graceful arm around her brother’s waist, and wrinkled her nose at him. “The correct term is mental health facility. Get with the times, you old knuckle-dragging cave-bear.”

Max laughed at the female werebear’s quick humor. One thing about the prickly bar owner, Aimee always kept her brothers and employees on their toes. She stepped away to pick up two glasses from the crate and placed them on the shelf under the bar while she sang along to the jukebox metal song. For a bear, she had the voice of an angel.

And that snarky, long-legged blonde had been one of Max’s favorite members of the Peltier bear clan since the day he’d sought refuge in the famed Sanctuary bar and grill her family had founded in the heart of New Orleans.

Wounded and barely alive after a nasty encounter with an ancient enemy, Max had collapsed on the third floor of this very building, at Aimee’s feet. When he’d awakened a week later, she’d been sitting on the floor of their attic next to him, petting the scales of his head, completely unafraid of his dragon form, and humming a soft French lullaby. She, alone, had nursed him back to health and made sure that he survived. The true depth of her kindness and compassion for others had never failed to amaze him.

There wasn't a shapeshifter in this building or the one adjoining it who wouldn't give his life to save hers.

But none more so than the lucky dark-haired bastard who called her his.

Fang Kattalakis came up to the front of the bar and passed around the specially brewed long-neck beers reserved for their "unique" shapeshifter metabolisms to let them know he'd locked the front door. A ritual that signified Sanctuary was now closed to the humans for a few hours of Were-Hunter respite. He angled his fortified beer at Max. "So many village idiots, brother. So few fire-breathing dragons."

Dev burst out laughing.

Taking his beer, Max arched a brow at the strange remark, curious as to what prompted it. "Pardon?"

Fang released a long-suffering sigh as he glanced to his mate. "How attached are you to Cody? Can I offer him up as a sacrifice to Max? Please?" He glanced at Max. "I know he's not a female or a virgin, but exactly how picky are you dragons about those things?"

Not wanting to go there for several personal reasons, Max moved to break down and clean the soda dispensers while Dev prepped the beer taps. "Depends on the dragon."

Aimee tsked at them. "Please don't kill and eat my little brother. I don't want to listen to you bitch about the indigestion he'd give you, and I doubt Carson has enough Roloids to cure *that* burn. Probably take half the firefighters in Orleans Parish to put it out."

"Damn." Fang sighed again. Then he looked up hopefully. "Hey, if I accidentally blew pepper in your face, Max, and you happened to sneeze, what are the odds you'd spew fire all over him?"

Running carbonated water into a metal bin, Max shook his head at the wolf. "Doesn't work that way."

"Then what good is having a fire-breathing dragon on hand?"

"There's always Simi," Dev said. "With enough barbecue sauce, she'll eat anything. Even obnoxious bear kin."

"Y'all are so bad." Frowning, Aimee placed her hand to her distended stomach and sucked her breath in sharply.

Fang immediately teleported to the backside of the counter to support her. "You

okay?”

Leaning back against him, she smiled up at her husband. “Your sons are frolicking like cubs on a picnic-honey high.”

A proud smile spread across his face. “The little she-wolves are nocturnal.... Like their father.”

She snorted at that. “I swear, if I have puppies, I’m turning you into a wolf rug for my floor.”

Fang laughed, then kissed her cheek. “Why don’t you go on up and rest? I’ll finish closing and prepping the bar.”

Aimee hesitated.

“Don’t worry. I won’t even attempt the paperwork. After the gnarled mess I made of it last time, I have learned my lesson to keep my paws off it.” Fang motioned for the tall, blond Amazon who was sweeping the floor to join them. A former Dark-Hunter, Samia was Dev’s better, much more attractive half. In spite of the Greek goddess Samia had once been enslaved to that Max couldn’t stand, Max liked Sam a great deal, especially since she didn’t talk much. And she never asked him questions about his guarded past—something he appreciated even more.

Like Aimee, Sam was compassionate and kind when it came to others, whether they were people, animals, or a mixture of the two.

As soon as Aimee’s pregnancy had been made public, Sam and Dev had moved back into Dev’s old room in Peltier House next door to soothe Dev’s fears, as he worried like an old woman over the health and well-being of his only sister. Not that Aimee needed it. With eleven blood-related brothers and even more in-laws and close friends, she had more than her share of males wanting to help her lift any object in the place, and carve body parts off her husband for risking her life with a complicated hybrid pregnancy.

“Sam?” Fang asked as the Amazon paused at the counter. “Will you please take Aimee up to bed for me and make sure she’s tucked in?”

“Sure. Be glad to.” Sam held her gloved hand out to Aimee. “C’mon, hon. You don’t want to overtax yourself. You need to take care of those Chow Chows you’re carrying.”

Aimee groaned at her worst fear of what her hybrid bear-wolf children might look like. “You’re off my Christmas list, Sam. Anyone else?”

Dev held his hands up and shook his head.

The bearswan glared at him, then turned toward her husband as Dev's identical brother sauntered up to grab a fortified beer from Fang. The fierce, bloodthirsty grimace on his face would have sent small children screaming for their mothers and made seasoned gladiators wet their armor in terror.

Aimee tsked at his expression. "Fang, make sure Dev doesn't kill Rémi while I'm gone."

Popping the top off the beer, the bearswain looked at her with an even fiercer scowl. "Not Rémi ... Cherif. Damn, Aims, you're usually the only one who can tell us apart. Has the pregnancy knocked loose your brain cells?"

Aimee bit her lip. "Sorry, Boo. The way you've been scowling all night, I could have sworn you were Rémi."

Dev, Rémi, and Cherif were part of a set of identical quadruplets, with their brother Quinn rounding out their number. Alone, the bears were badass. Together, they were damn near invincible.

Unless you happened to be a fire-breathing dragon. Then there wasn't much in this world that provided a threat to your health or well-being.

Cherif snorted. "Yeah, well, what do you expect? Y'all threw me upstairs with Etienne all night. He's been dry humping my last nerve like it's the only female he's seen for a hundred years. I swear, Maman should have done us all a favor and eaten that cub at birth. At least it would have saved my humor ... and sanity. You're all lucky they're not hauling me away for murder right about now."

"Here, here." Dev clanked bottles with him. "Where is the little prick?"

"Finishing up a hand of poker with Eros. I'm hoping he wins and the god splinters him on the wall in anger. That's one mess I'd volunteer to clean."

Aimee met Max's amused gaze. "Oh my God, they're awful! I'm so glad you love your brother."

Max shrugged as he rinsed off the soda nozzles and put them back in place. "What can I say? Absence does indeed make the heart grow fonder, and the guilt of having him locked away in a hell realm for a thousand years means I have to tolerate any annoying habit Illarion possesses with utmost patience."

She popped Dev in the stomach. "See how great dragons are? You should be taking notes."

“Fine. Lock Etienne and Rémi in a hell realm for a thousand years and I promise I’ll be nice to them when they get out.”

Fang laughed. “Give it up, Aimee. You’re not going to win this one.”

“Are you seriously taking his side?”

Fang went pale. “Uh, no. Never. I’m not a dumb wolf and I have no desire to sleep in a doghouse tonight.”

Playfully, she wagged her finger at him before she tapped his nose and kissed him.

All of a sudden, there was a loud crash upstairs that said Cherif might have gotten his wish that Eros had killed Etienne for winning. But it wasn’t the unexpected noise that made the hair on the back of Max’s neck rise. It was a fissure in the air he hadn’t felt in centuries. One that went down his spine like a shredder.

Every sense he possessed was on high alert.

No. There was no way it was possible ...

It couldn’t be.

His breath caught as he saw a bleeding Serre scrambling down the stairs, leading a small group of women dressed in the ancient war garb and armor of a long-dead race. While Sanctuary closed to humans at four thirty in the morning, it remained open around the clock to any preternatural creature who needed a safe haven to rest from battle. Limani such as this had always been few and far between, and in the twenty-first century, there were only a handful left intact and operating.

As a precaution to keep humans from accidentally discovering their supernatural breed and freaking out, the Peltier bear family had the entire building shielded. Anyone coming here by way of magick was confined to do so on the third floor only, where a shapeshifting bouncer was always posted.

Tonight, Serre Peltier had pulled that duty. As blond as his brothers and sister, he was a slightly smaller version of the quads, which meant he was still bigger than most creatures. But even so, it hadn’t kept him from getting his ass kicked by the Arcadian newcomers who beat him down in front of their group.

So much for abiding by the eirini, or so-called peace laws, that Savitar and the Omegrion had set down for their species to follow.

Blond and built for murder, the leader of the small group of women grabbed Serre by his short hair and wrenched his head up to show his battered face to their group. She held an old-fashioned Greek kopis to his throat. “Who owns this place?”

When Aimee started forward, Max, her brothers, and her husband cut her off to protect her and the unborn babies she carried. It was obvious this preter group was here for war and not to make peace or truce.

Fang moved to meet the warrior bitch face-to-face while Max covered Aimee. “That’s my brother you hold. I suggest you release him or lose your head.”

She raked a scathing glare down Fang’s body. “I am Drakaina Arcadia and we don’t deal with inferior species. Stand aside, *animal*.”

Sam stepped to Fang’s side. Gloved hands on hips, she met the women with the open hostility of someone ready to battle. “And I am Samia, Basilinna of the Thurian Riders, granddaughter of Hippolyte—who was the daughter of Ares. Declare yourself.”

“Nala, Basilinna of the Drakaina, most favored of Ares, Artemis, and Athena.”

Samia scoffed. “Color me unimpressed. Now release my most beloved brother or suffer my full wrath and battle-tested blade.”

Nala tightened her grip on his hair. The pain of it must have been severe, since a moment later, Serre involuntarily shifted into his native bear form. Something that only happened when the Katagaria were in severe pain or suffered an electrical shock.

Sam manifested her staff. The men moved forward to engage their group as Aimee shot past him to cover Serre.

“Wait!”

All eyes went to the stairs and for a full minute, Max stood completely motionless as the mark on his hand heated and burned in response to her appearance. Every part of his body came alive in a way it hadn’t for more centuries than he could recall.

The dragon inside salivated and it was devouring the human in him so fast, he could barely hold his form.

He struggled to breathe. If he broke dragon right now, he’d take out half the bar. He was far too large in his native body to shift here and now.

But it wasn’t easy to remain human....

Not when the beast inside him was stirred to this level. Not when it wanted blood.

*Her* blood.

Like a grand queen wrapped in a mantle of red, brown, and gold feathers, a lush, full-figured, Titian-haired beauty descended the stairs. Her red helm fell over her face to form a sharp beak that shaded her eyes.

But he knew their color. Searing, haunting green that was salted with gold. Filled with bold intelligence. They had a way of looking at him with ball-shriveling scorn.

Seraphina of the Drakaina-Scythian Riders. Voluptuous. Passionate.

How he hated every breath she drew.

The Amazons parted to make way for her to pass through them, to reach their queen. To the baretos humans, her armor would appear as painted, scaled bronze. Yet it wasn't. Those were the tanned and preserved scales of Katagaria dragons she'd slain, and marked her as one of the most vicious dragonslayers of her tribe.

Her queen's champion rider.

Seraphina struck her chest in salute and lowered her head. "Forgive my interruption, Basilinna, but perhaps I can be of assistance?"

Nala hesitated. "Is he here?"

"No, my basilinna. I fear your informant lied to you. I would know if my mate were here."

Nala cursed and kicked Serre in the ribs. With a flick of her vibrant red cloak, she faced Seraphina. "I'm going to gut that demon." And with that, she led her warriors back upstairs.

Seraphina stayed behind as they left. It was all kinds of stupid to lie to her queen. She knew that and yet ...

She swept her gaze over the gathered men. The raven-haired one was definitely not the Drakos she sought. By his fetid stench, she knew him to be wolfborn Katagari. The rest were all blonds. All exceptionally handsome and well built. Two were twins. They couldn't be her Maxis. They, like the one wheezing as he turned human again and pushed himself to his feet, were bears.

That only left the one.

Like the others, he wore strange clothing—not that of a warrior or traditional Drakos. His dark blond hair was cropped *very* short, but as their eyes met, she recognized those perfectly chiseled masculine features. That strong, rigid, and unyielding jaw. That look of fiery defiance that pierced her with its proud arrogance. A pride that had always dared her against their traditions and culture.

Her hand heated up with that familiar burn. Something that only happened when two mates were brought together again after a long separation.

Determined, she headed toward him, only to have her path blocked by the other

Amazon in the room.

Samia gestured toward the stairs. “You need to leave with your tribe.”

Seraphina shook her head. “You have something that belongs to me.”

Samia stood fast and solid. “There’s nothing here for you.”

“Oh yes, there is.” She held her hand up for Samia to see the dragon mark on her palm. “I’m here for my mate.”

## 2

Max cursed while those words cut through the immediate and echoing silence of the room. All attention went straight to him as jaws dropped in comical unison.

Before Max could think to leave, Dev took his hand in his own and checked to see the matching mark. Tsking, he shook his head in chiding condescension. “Maxy! You got some ’splaining to do!”

He shoved at Dev over his bad Ricky Ricardo impression. Dev laughed it off good-naturedly. Nothing ever really fazed that huge bastard.

Aimee stepped away from where she’d been checking on Serre’s busted nose and bleeding lip. “Is this true, Max? Are you really mated to ... *her*?” By the way she hesitated, it was obvious she had to struggle to use a more polite term.

Releasing a tired sigh, Max nodded slowly. “Yes, the gods hate my guts. And they have a sick sense of humor.” Hence the living proof before them.

They’d mated him to *her*.

A natural-born dragon to an Arcadian-born dragonslayer.

Cherif snorted. “Well that explains the mystery about your lack of interest in women all these years. We just assumed you were gay.”

Max passed him a droll, irritated smirk.

Actually, he’d have much rather been gay than forced to his involuntary celibacy. The worst curse of their species was that mated males were physically incapable of sleeping with anyone other than their mated females. Once the Fates assigned them a partner, they could take no other so long as that mate lived. The ultimate pair-bond.

On the day he’d walked away from his wife, he’d known exactly what he was giving up. The steep price he’d be paying for his freedom and sanity ... which said it all about the utter travesty and hell of their marriage.

Making sure to keep his expression blank, he crossed his arms over his chest. “What are you doing here, Sera?”

“We need to talk.... Alone.”

*Yeah, right. I went to war to train for my marriage....* Alone for the two of them had never worked out all that well for either party.

Unless they were naked and she was in heat.

Unfortunately, that only happened twice a year, and he could tell by her pissed-off stance he wasn't getting lucky tonight.

Unless she happened to gut him. That might be construed as a step up for his current celibate situation.

Max shook his head. “I said everything I had to say to you a long time ago.”

“Things have changed.”

“I haven't, and I seriously doubt you have. Hell, you're even wearing the same clothes you had on the last time I saw you. And that's been what? Three thousand years? Give or take?”

She glared at him.

He laughed bitterly. “And there's that ball-shriveling glare of hatred I remember so well. Point taken. It's all the same. Now there's the stairs.” He started for the door that led to the kitchen.

Seraphina teleported across the room to catch his arm and keep him in place. Those golden-green eyes enchanted him and weakened his will more than he wanted to cop to. “No, Maxis. It's very different. Please. I must speak with you.”

He arched a brow at that. “Wow, that is a new word for you. I had no idea it was even in your vocabulary.” In the past, she'd always treated him like a brainless animal to be ordered about. One she had to train not to piss on her rug or chew her furniture.

A little more curious about whatever had brought her to this time period, he glanced to Fang. “If I'm dead by dawn's light, wolf, hunt her down and tear her throat out.”

“I don't think I want to know what kind of kinky sex dragons have if they come with *that* kind of warning. So glad I'm a bear mated to a beautiful woman.”

Max ignored Dev's dry comment. He also knew better than to take Seraphina near his younger brother, who was currently sleeping in Max's attic apartment ... in full dragon form. The last thing he'd ever do was bring more harm to Illarion. His little brother had been through enough.

His job was to protect his family.

Even against his own mate. And having been mated to her and forced to live with her breed, he knew exactly what dragonslayers did to dragons. What they thought of them. Her armor paid a gory tribute to what her people thought of his kind.

They were better off dead and their remains used solely as decoration, or ingredients for their candles and beauty ointments.

So instead, he teleported her to the special room on the second floor that Dev and his brothers had built for their more unruly clientele. Completely soundproof, it would give them total privacy. It was also shielded to keep her from using magick against him. Given what she'd done to him the last time he'd made the mistake of being alone with her, it was an appropriate precaution, too.

He waited until she was inside before he turned the light on and shut the door to the small, spartan room.

What he didn't count on was the involuntary reaction of his hormones to her close proximity. The sweet rose scent of her skin made his blood burn and his mouth water. Before he could stop himself, he began circling her as she stood in the center of the room, under the light that reflected off her armor and tawny skin like a majestic halo.

Damn it to Hades. He'd forgotten just how beautiful his mate could be when she wasn't trying to kill him and mount his hide to her tent wall. She had that lush, full body that was made for countless hours of marathon sex. And a heated Amazon passion that any male would kill to taste.

Worse? All the memories of the hours they'd spent together when they weren't fighting, and insulting each other, and their heritage came flooding back to him. The hours of the two of them sequestered in her tent, laughing and teasing.

Curse his mind and its inability to forget....

Seraphina tried to focus on why she was here. Why she was so desperate to speak to her enemy. But Maxis wasn't making this easy on her. How could she have ever buried the memory of how incredibly handsome and sensual Maxis was? How much his presence affected her?

How fierce and lethal. Compelling. Seductive. Forbidden. Overwhelmingly masculine and primal, he possessed a raw Drakos magnetism that was impossible for any female to resist. Even small girls had been reduced to unintelligible fits of giggles in his presence.

Worse, he had his head bent low and was circling her like prey he wanted to

devour. And it was making her breathless and hot against her will.

She scowled at him. "Could you stop that?"

"Stop what?" His rumbling deep baritone was challenging. No one had an accent like he did. Words rolled off his tongue like poetry.

Refusing to let him beguile her, she answered his challenge with the same amount of ferocity. "You know what you're doing."

A sexy, insidious grin spread over his lips. "Is it bothering you?"

Yes. Of course it was. It was what all Drakos males did to spread their irresistible pheromones and intoxicate any female they hungered for. That fierce predator's lope was every bit as mesmerizing, and he knew that, too. No creature born had ever held a seductive lure akin to that of a full-grown dragon male. It was part of what made them so incredibly dangerous. "I need to talk to you."

He approached her then. Pressing the front of his muscular body against her back, he lowered his head to lay his cheek against hers. Those prickly whiskers teased her flesh as he began the slow, rhythmic Drakos swaying that was its own form of foreplay. She could feel every single muscle in his body taut and ripped as it wrapped around her and held her against him.

*Oh dear gods ...*

How did they do this? Was it something dragons were born with or did they take them aside as young males and teach them? Her entire body came alive as if she were in the heat of battle. Or lying naked in his bed. It was so intense that she couldn't even protest when he removed her helm and dropped it to the floor. Or when he freed her hair to fall around her shoulders. All she could do was lean back against him and surrender her weight to his hypnotic, primal dance.

Breathless, she felt his hardness against her hip as he encircled her waist with his arm and dipped his head to brush his lips against her neck. Her throat went dry and every part of her ached to feel his hands on her body. "I have needs too, Sera."

Closing her eyes, she trembled and hated the part of her that responded instinctively to his touch as he slowly caressed her. But then that was the nature of the beast. While she and Maxis were different species of dragon, they were still dragons.

Not human.

A different breed entirely.

More passionate.