



The Situation

Billy Chan felt as if the whole world was watching him.

In fact, it was only about twenty people. But they included some of the most powerful leaders in the world – the president of the United States, the British prime minister and the Chinese president. Not to mention the dozen or so journalists who had their pens poised, ready to write down every word that came out of Billy's mouth.

As he glanced around the room, he realized there wasn't a single person not staring at him. Staring and waiting for his response to the question that the British prime minister, Edwina Nelson, had just asked him.

‘So, Billy?’ the prime minister repeated, giving him an encouraging smile. She was a short woman with red hair which she always wore in a neat bun right on top of her head. Billy wondered if she’d purposely chosen that hairstyle to make herself look taller.

Billy swallowed, his mouth suddenly so dry that it felt almost impossible to speak. He took a big sip of water and gulped audibly. He’d never been so nervous in his life, and that included the time he’d faced the Dragon of Death.

He tried to ignore the raised cameras, ready to capture the moment that he, a twelve-year-old boy from California, told the entire world how to deal with what was currently being called ‘The Situation’. ‘The Situation’ was that hundreds of dragons were falling into the Human Realm every day, and nobody knew what to do about it. Nobody but Billy and his friends, apparently, who were all sitting at a round table in Buckingham Palace, taking part in this historic meeting with the world leaders.

‘Well . . .’ Billy finally said, his eyes darting to the side towards his friends.

Dylan O’Donnell, Charlotte Bell, Liu Ling-Fei,

Lola Lam and Jordan Edwards looked back at him encouragingly. They were all from different places around the world, but what they had in common was their bond with their dragon.

Charlotte widened her eyes at Billy and mouthed something, but he couldn't understand what she was saying. He knew she wished the prime minister had asked her the big question instead.

The question of what they should do with the dragons.

It had been five days since Billy had woken up in Buckingham Palace, surrounded by his friends and their dragons.

Five days since the uneasy truce between humans and dragons had begun.

Five days since Billy had leaped into the In-Between, the secret place between the Human and Dragon Realms, to chase down Frank Albert and stop him from becoming all-powerful.

Billy had managed to steal back *sanguinem gladio*, also known as the Blood Sword, which Frank had been using to tear rips between the realms in his

search for the Forbidden Fountain, a source of magic that gave items unimaginable power. Billy and his friends had special powers from magical pearls, which had been created this way.

But Frank himself had disappeared into the nether of the In-Between, and Billy wasn't sure whether he was dead or alive. Frank had drunk the golden elixir directly from the Forbidden Fountain, but instead of granting him the power he'd been seeking, it had turned him to metal. The last Billy had seen of him was his body sinking into the rising tides of golden elixir spilling out of the Forbidden Fountain uncontrollably.

The dragons seemed certain that no living thing, especially not a human, could survive being submerged in the golden elixir, but Billy wasn't sure. He'd seen Frank's eyes follow him as he'd sunk. And they'd been full of fire and an angry promise. A promise to seek revenge.

But right now, Billy had bigger things to worry about than the fear of Frank coming back from the In-Between.

Much bigger things.

Dragon-sized things.

Because all of those rips that Frank had torn between the realms had resulted in the entire Dragon Realm starting to collapse into the Human Realm. Dragons and mountain ranges and lakes and all kinds of things were falling into the Human Realm, and nobody could stop it. The only thing they could do was figure out how to live with it. And everyone was looking to Billy and his friends for a plan.

Billy tugged at his tie and wished he were wearing something more comfortable. But his mother had insisted he dress nicely for the meeting.

That was the other thing. His parents now knew his secret. And while he wasn't exactly in trouble (after all, they couldn't ground him for saving the world), they weren't thrilled to learn of his role as a dragon-riding superhero.

His mom and dad had even met Spark. Billy wished he'd been there when that had happened, just so he could have seen their faces. But he'd been recovering from his battle with Frank Albert when his dragon had flown to California to tell his parents that he was okay. The last thing they'd seen had been an

international news channel's report that had shown their son mid-battle at the top of Big Ben . . .

They'd flown to London straight after to see with their own eyes that Billy really was okay. His mom had hugged him so tightly that Billy had thought she'd never let him go. She'd sworn she wouldn't let him out of her sight after that, but he'd managed to convince her, and his dad, that, well, he wasn't just any old kid any more – the world needed him and his friends and their dragons. Oh, and as if that wasn't enough, he had powers too.

After twenty-four hours in London, Billy had said goodbye to his parents as they'd headed home to California, promising he'd check in regularly. So when he'd video-called his mom that morning, and she'd told him that he needed to wear a tie to the meeting, he'd agreed with her. But now he was regretting it.

Someone at the table cleared their throat, and as a rising panic started coursing through his body, Billy realized he'd been silent for far too long.

'The dragons are our friends,' he said, desperately searching his mind for something else to say – something more convincing.

‘Friends?’ scoffed one of the reporters. ‘They’re beasts! Beasts that need to be controlled!’

‘No, they’re gods!’ murmured another reporter. ‘We should bow down to them!’

‘I’ve heard that dragon scales can cure cancer and all kinds of diseases! We should harvest them!’ a third voice piped up.

A low rumble punctuated the voices and Billy instantly recognized it as Tank’s growl. He must not have liked the comment about harvesting dragon scales.

Tank and the other dragons hadn’t been allowed into the meeting. They were in the next room along – a gigantic ballroom, large enough to fit them all except Lola’s dragon. Neptune had gone out to sea to find other sea dragons and convince them to stop attacking human ships.

Dragons had far superior hearing to humans (as Xing liked to say, they were far superior to humans in every way), so Billy knew their dragons would be listening to every word. Which was good because it meant they wouldn’t have to repeat the events of the meeting back to the dragons, and not so good because

they could hear comments like that one. And Tank did tend to have a temper.

‘Dragons aren’t gods or beasts,’ said Billy desperately. A bead of sweat dripped down his forehead. He *really* wished he’d been better prepared for this meeting. Public speaking always made him nervous. He needed Dylan’s charm or Charlotte’s confidence, but at least his friends were by his side.

‘Well, they *are* beasts,’ said the prime minister. Her smile was more fixed now. ‘I’m sure even they would agree.’ She drummed her fingers on the table.

‘Beasts with incredible power,’ added President Yang from China. He was a tall, slim man with square glasses. ‘Power that can apparently be shared with humans through some sort of bond?’

‘That isn’t how the heart bond works!’ Charlotte burst out, clearly unable to keep quiet any longer. ‘Only when a human and a dragon have hearts that match are they able to bond, making the dragon more powerful.’

‘Well, I would like a bond like that,’ said President Banks. The American President was the youngest of the three world leaders and had a wide smile that

made Billy think of both sharks and toothpaste ads. ‘Bring me a dragon to bond with.’ She leaned back with the self-satisfied smirk of someone who was used to getting their own way.

‘That really isn’t how it works,’ muttered Dylan.

‘You can’t exactly boss around a dragon,’ added Billy.

‘Well, we must show them who’s in charge,’ said the prime minister firmly. ‘They’re in our world and they must abide by our rules.’

‘It isn’t as simple as that,’ said Billy. He felt really warm now. Really, really warm. ‘The dragons do what they want.’

‘I think you’ll find they’ll do what we want them to do,’ said the prime minister with a smug smile just as the doors burst open.

A dozen people wearing combat gear surged in, dragging something behind them.

A caged dragon.

Everything in Billy revolted against the sight. Dragons weren’t meant to be caged. This particular dragon wasn’t very big, about the size of a bull, but it was radiating with power. And anger.

The caged dragon had vibrant yellow and orange

scales, and it was so bright it almost hurt Billy's eyes to look at it directly. It had two sets of wings – two in the front and two behind. The front set looked like bat wings and the back ones were sleek and sharp with edges that looked as if they could slice someone in half. Four horns protruded from the top of its head, almost like a crown.

Not only was the dragon caged, it was muzzled. Steel ropes looped around its snout so it couldn't open its mouth, but smoke billowed dangerously out of its nostrils.

The man at the front of the cage nodded towards the prime minister. 'Madame, we've successfully caught one for you. It was tough, but we managed it using TURBO technology.'

'I thought TURBO had been disbanded,' said Jordan.

TURBO was the organization that Jordan's scientist mother had worked for. It had been run by none other than Frank Albert, who had hired Professor Edwards for her knowledge of other realms and expertise in mythical creatures, such as dragons. But unbeknown to her, Frank Albert had been using TURBO

technology for his own gains. After the children had defeated him, they'd heard that the entire company was shutting down.

Professor Edwards was now working with the British government and various global science agencies, trying to figure out where the next rips between the realms would appear. At first, she hadn't wanted Jordan to stay with Billy, his friends and their dragons – she'd wanted him to stay at home where he'd be safe – but in the same way the others had convinced their parents, Jordan convinced his mum that he had to do this because the world needed them. Just like the world needed her and her vital research and expertise. At this very moment, Professor Edwards was down the hall in a meeting of a group of top scientists.

The prime minister laughed. 'We couldn't let a company like TURBO, which has so much specialist knowledge and truly amazing technology, simply disappear. Yes, Frank Albert turned out to be someone we never should have trusted, but with TURBO's help, humans will retain their place at the top of the food chain . . . even with dragons in the picture.'

President Banks gazed hungrily at the thrashing yellow and orange dragon. 'I'm very impressed, Edwina. I do hope TURBO can catch me one next.'

'You can't catch dragons and force them to bond with you!' cried Lola.

'Nonsense. That's exactly what we intend to do,' said the prime minister. Then she turned back to Billy. 'Now, how does one bond with a dragon?'

'Let it go!' Billy shouted, standing up. 'This isn't how you bond with a dragon!'

Suddenly, there was a blast of light and heat from the cage, and the next moment, the dragon was free. Spots appeared in Billy's vision, but he could see the dragon was now glowing a molten white. He'd never seen a dragon with the ability to turn its whole body into a ball of white-hot flame. Waves of heat rolled off the dragon as it opened its mouth and roared in anger.

'This is bad!' said Dylan. He and the others had quickly left their seats and were now standing next to Billy. 'Very, very bad.'

'I will never bond with a human!' roared the flaming dragon. 'We have come into your world against our will, but we will make our own home

here.’ It threw back its head and roared again, and a column of white-hot light burst out of its mouth and blew a hole in the ceiling. Government aids and journalists screamed and ran for the doors.

‘Prime Minister! Get down!’ shouted a man in a military outfit, helping the British prime minister take cover behind a desk. ‘You too, President Banks and President Yang!’

The American and Chinese presidents both huddled with the prime minister as the security team tried and failed to control the flaming dragon.

The flaming dragon roared again, blasting another hole in the ceiling, and the entire building shook. Billy felt his stomach clench with anxiety. He and his friends were the ones claiming that humans and dragons could live together peacefully, yet here was a dragon destroying Buckingham Palace in a rampage. He quickly thought about his friends and their various powers to figure out who might be best suited to dealing with this particular situation.

‘Dylan! Can you try to use your charm on it? We need to calm it down! I think it’s frightened.’

Dylan groaned. ‘There’s no way I’m going near that

thing. It isn't frightened, it's furious! And murderous! If my charm didn't work, I'd be barbecued O'Donnell, and nobody wants that.'

'You could try to charm it from a distance,' muttered Charlotte. 'I would if I could.'

'Do I tell you how to use your power?' said Dylan.

'Yes, frequently,' said Charlotte with a scowl.

'Guys! We have to stay focused!' said Billy, his voice tight with exasperation. 'It just blew another hole in the ceiling!'

'If that dragon keeps blasting holes in Buckingham Palace, we're going to have a very hard time convincing anyone that dragons are generally friendly,' said Ling-Fei, wincing as it blew another hole in the wall.

'Friendly? That thing is as angry as a trapped hornet,' said Charlotte, slowly edging towards the back wall. 'We need backup.'

'About time you asked!' cried a familiar voice as Xing burst through the window, sending shattered glass everywhere.

'Xing! I'm so glad you're here!' said Ling-Fei, beaming at her dragon. 'We need you!'

'Of course you do,' said Xing. 'You always need

us.' Then she moved so fast she became a silver blur shooting through the air as she zipped around the furious flaming dragon in the middle of the room.

Moments later, Billy realized what she was doing. She was using her water power to douse the flaming dragon's fire. Steam rose up from its body and it roared in frustration.

Then came a sudden loud crack and the entire back wall of the room fell away. Spark, Billy's dragon, flew in and shot out a stream of ice, leaving the flaming dragon standing frozen in place.