

Age: 15, Grade: 9

Home School, Prattville, AL
Educator: Lucas Jacob

Category: Novel Writing

3,000 years ago, corrupted dragons called Raethians ravaged the land. Eventually, they were sealed underground and were thought to have died out—but that was not the case. Inexplicably, they were able to escape, and have begun to create havoc again. Four dragons, Lazuli, Thistle, Gale, and Fury are the only ones who stand a chance against the Raethians. They are the Champions, and each of them wields a unique power. In previous books, Lazuli, along with her friend Quantum, started the quest to find the other Champions. Now, in the fourth and final book, the Champions must unite their powers to take down the Raethians. However, there is one problem: Lazuli has been captured by the Raethians. Without her, the Champions do not stand a chance. Somehow, they must free her, if they are to succeed. Their journey is a treacherous one, but by far the biggest threat to their quest is the Shrouded One; a masked creature wielding eerie, dark powers, seemingly operating under the control of the Raethians. No one is sure what it is or why it exists, but there is no doubt that it plays a large role in the Raethians' plan. Together, the dragons will travel to the center of the continent, to the dark and dangerous lands that have been corrupted by the evil influence. It is there that they will find the Raethians' fortress, free Lazuli, and, if all goes well, defeat the monstrous creatures for good.

They hadn't been expecting the airships.

If they had, the five of them would have been a little more careful when trying to get out of the Badlands.

Thistle dodged yet another cannonball, evaded another spear, and ducked under a volley of arrows. After a few days of hiding and careful planning, they had taken their chances trying to escape the Badlands, only to be attacked by humans. And just like that, their plans were rendered completely futile, because none of them had been expecting the humans to have airships.

Thistle ducked under the hull of one of the ships, then soared back up, twisting in midair and grabbing onto the side of the giant, wooden contraption. The humans scurried around on the deck, shouting at each other.

"There she is, clinging to the starboard si- SHE'S ON THE DECK! I REPEAT, SHE IS ON THE DECK!" shouted one of the men.

"We're not blind!" another human called irritably. Sure enough, Thistle had, in fact, climbed onto the ship, causing it to lean precariously to one side. The humans dropped their bows and pulled Dragonsbane gold swords out of sheaths attached to their belts.

Thistle was small, for a dragon, but the humans were still much smaller, so she did not feel particularly intimidated by them. But she wasn't really trying to attack them; she was just causing a distraction.

The whole ship shuddered as something else crashed into it. Thistle stepped over to the other side and saw Fury, a Badlands dragon with blood-red and gold scales. She was gripping the hull of the ship, with one of the propellers in her teeth. With an almighty tug, she ripped the propeller off, sending the airship spiraling towards the mesa. Thistle leaped off the deck and into the air seconds before the ship crashed and exploded against the stone.

"One down, four more to go," Fury said, looking towards the other airships. Quantum, Rainstorm, and Gale

being the Fireborn, didn't have wings naturally; instead, her wings were made out of fire. Normally, fire wings wouldn't be able to keep anything in the air, but since these were *magic* fire wings, Fury could fly anyway.

Fury split away from Thistle to distract the other ships; the arrows and cannon fire were becoming a nuisance.

On the deck of the airship, Quantum had grabbed Rainstorm's chains in his teeth and was trying to tug them off.

Then Thistle saw it; a strange machine, sort of like a combination between a slingshot and a cannon, on the deck of the ship. Humans were loading a giant spear, made entirely out of Dragonsbane Gold, into it. Then, they pulled a lever, and the contraption fired the spear.

One second, the spear was coming towards Thistle, pointed right at her heart, and the next, Fury had thrown herself in front of her, flaming wings spread wide. Thistle heard the sickening sound of a sharp object piercing flesh, and a cry from Fury.

"FURY!" Rainstorm shouted, fighting against the chains still holding him down.

Fury's wings vanished as her fire lost its strength, and she began to fall backwards towards the ground.

For a moment, the sudden agony blinded Fury. She hardly noticed as she began to fall, and Rainstorm's shouts sounded distant. But then, as the airships grew farther and farther away, it hit her; she was falling.

A wave of panic slammed into Fury as her old fear of heights returned, tearing down the fire wall they had been contained in and flooding her brain. Fury almost screamed, but forced herself not to.

Focus, Fury! Think! Why are you falling?

Thistle's eyes widened as he saw the spear falling towards Fury, but when she hit the ground, she saw that the Dragonsbane gold spear was the slingshot of a resident of the town to fall onto her path. The spear had hit Fury, but it hadn't hit Thistle.

Fury reached forward and gripped the spear in her paws. Clutching it tightly, Fury tugged it out, sending bright bursts of pain flaring through her body. She threw the spear away and felt her strength beginning to return, as her flames were no longer suppressed by the metal.

Wind roared in her ears as Fury flipped over in the air and her wings burst to life on either side of her. She shot back up into the sky and felt the ground far below her.

"They'll kill you," Rainstorm said. "And if you will you destroy them? Your fire can't burn them. You can't get close with all the sharp things the humans are firing at us."

"They aren't invincible. Those horrid contraptions have a weakness, and I'll find it."

"This is far too risky. You have to come with us!"

"We can't all hide. At least one of us—me, specifically—needs to distract and destroy the humans. Otherwise, they'll just chase you and trap you in that cave."

Rainstorm stared at her for a long moment. "Just—promise me you won't die."

"Only if you promise me that you also won't die."

He nodded. Briefly, he touched his snout to hers, then flew away, along with the other three dragons.

Fury watched them go. As long as she kept the airships' attention, her friends would be safe. That thought made her feel better about their cautiousness.

Fury turned and slammed herself as hard as she could into the mast of the ship. It cracked and splintered, but did not give way. The humans on board scrambled around in terror like bugs. And like bugs, they would be destroyed with hardly a thought.

Little pinpricks of agony appeared all through her body as more arrows pierced her scales. Fury hissed, struggling to stay in the air. She dove toward the ship, landing heavily on the deck. She knew that if any more arrows hit her, her wings would fail and she would fall again. And Fury did not think she would survive another fall.

Fury snarled at the humans surrounding her. They pointed spears and swords at her. A few of them were still firing arrows from the other end of the deck.

She swung her tail around, knocking the humans down and sending a few flying right off the ship. Her tail smacked into the mast, splintering it even more. And this time, it gave way and began to fall.

The mast crashed onto the deck, breaking the wood. It hung over the side of the ship, and the sail dangled over the distant sands of the desert. The ship groaned, leaning to one side. The human at the wheel fell off, and nobody was in control of the vessel. It began to drift towards the mesa, picking up speed as it went. Fury had wanted the ship to crash—but not while she was still on board.

As the ship hurtled closer and closer to mesa, Fury leaped desperately. She grabbed onto the stone, every muscle in her body protesting painfully. Below her, she heard the sound of the ship exploding, and felt a wave of fiery heat. Thankfully, no shrapnel hit her.

Fury dug her talons deeper into the stone, feeling the arrows slowly drain her energy. She heard the hum of propellers behind her; the remaining three ships were closing in.

Fury looked up, she had fallen to the top of the mesa rock. If she could just make it up there, she might stand a chance, assuming nothing else went wrong. Keeping her eyes fixed upward, Fury began to climb.

Reluctantly, she thought, trying to shove back her creeping fear. She heard more arrows flying and the ships. A few of them landed in her back. Many more ended up stuck in the rocks beside her. One landed horrifyingly close to her face.

Fury continued to climb, dragging herself up to climb, do the same as a rarerahindace.

