

BOOK 3

**BATTLE
DRAGONS**
CITY OF SECRETS

ALEX LONDON

SCHOLASTIC PRESS
NEW YORK

Copyright © 2023 by Alex London

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc.,
Publishers since 1920. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks
and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for
author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or
transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information
regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department,
557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the
product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual
persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-1-338-71669-6

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

23 24 25 26 27

First edition, March 2023

Printed in the U.S.A. 23

Book design by Maeve Norton

ABEL HAD ARRIVED IN GLASSBLOWER'S Gulch a few weeks earlier. His family traveled together for the first time in as long as Abel could remember. An unspoken rule of the overnight flight was, apparently, that his older brother, Silas, and his older sister, Lina, wouldn't speak to each other. Abel and his parents acted as go-betweens until they realized how silly that was and that they did not want to be involved in teenager drama, and they left Silas and Lina alone.

Abel settled onto one of the soft reclining chairs by a window and watched episodes of the animated *Dr. Drago: VDV (Vigilante Dragon Veterinarian)* series on his phone until he fell asleep. He occasionally woke up to look out at the Cloudflayer's wings beating their way through the air, but after they left the gleaming skyscrapers and bustling dragon traffic of Drakopolis, there was nothing to see but the endless expanse of the Glass Flats all the way to the mountains on the horizon. At least once the sun set, the glare wasn't so blinding, and he could stare out at the stars.

Silas spent the entire flight sitting bolt upright doing some kind of meditation thing he must have learned at the Dragon Rider Academy, though Abel suspected he'd actually been asleep. There was drool inchworming its way down his chin.

Lina ate and slept and read fantasy novels about teenagers in a world that had no dragons—just romances and high school and

sometimes murder—and then she slept some more. Which was about the same thing their parents did, just with fewer sighs. Lina did not want to move to Glassblower’s Gulch, and she made sure the whole family knew it.

It was nice that they were the only passengers in the travel compartment on the back of this Cloudflayer, a long-wing transport dragon. There was a separate freight compartment, but the passenger cabin had been chartered just for Abel’s family, paid for by the City Council of Drakopolis itself.

Officially, they were all moving together to support Silas, who, at only nineteen years old, would be the youngest lieutenant deputy sheriff ever appointed. It was a promotion from an undercover Dragon’s Eye agent pretending to be a Dragon Rider Academy cadet, which was his former job, until Abel’s trouble with the kins complicated things.

Unofficially, the family was being exiled to a remote town at the edge of nowhere. Each of them had, in their own ways, been involved in massive criminal activities with a variety of dragon-battling kins. The choice was either to go together into exile in Glassblower’s Gulch or to go separately to Windlee Prison for the rest of their lives.

So family exile it was.

The whole thing had been Abel’s fault for racing and battling dragons against all three major kins in the city—the Red Talons, the Thunder Wings, and the Sky Knights—and then releasing hundreds of genetically altered mutant dragons into the wild. He stayed pretty quiet on the flight. He wasn’t eager to remind his family that he existed.

But his whole family got reminded real quick the moment they

climbed down from the dragon's huge wing onto the landing platform in the blazing morning light of Glassblower's Gulch.

"Nice to meet you folks. I'm Sheriff Bina Skint, and I won't put up with any trouble in my town!" The sheriff stepped up to greet them, locking her gaze straight on Abel and scowling. She had mirrored wraparound sunglasses hiding her eyes, so all Abel could see was his own puny reflection in the glaring light off the glass around them.

"We don't abide kin activity here in Glassblower's Gulch," Sheriff Skint warned. "And no one touches a dragon without my express say-so, got it?"

Abel swallowed hard, prepared to answer, when Silas spoke for him.

"Yes, Sheriff," his older brother said. "I'll keep my family in line; you can be sure of it."

The sheriff broke off her glare at Abel to look her newest lieutenant deputy up and down, which gave Abel a chance to get a good look at *her*.

She had a weathered face and short green hair with blond spikes in it. Her uniform was dark green and wrapped with a black utility belt that held a stun gun and zip ties and all sorts of fearsome-looking law enforcement tools. Over it she wore a long gray coat with patches on the sleeves that had the Dragon's Eye emblem: a humanoid dragon with an eyeball for a head wielding a curved sword. On her chest she wore a silver badge shaped like a star held in a claw. It said SHERIFF in raised gold letters.

Sheriff Skint sucked her teeth at Abel's brother. "You're Silas, huh?"

"Yes, Sheriff," Silas said, his voice dropping deeper than usual

in an effort to sound more adult. Abel and Lina shared a quick eye roll at their big brother's expense, which Silas noticed. "It'll be my honor to safeguard the peace in your city from—"

"Some city," Lina muttered.

Silas glared at her. "From *anyone* who would cause trouble," he said.

"Well, that's nice," the sheriff replied, obviously patronizing Silas in a way he pretended not to notice. That's how Silas was, so puffed up with pride he was like a balloon blown too full. Even the tiniest prick would pop him. "I think you city salamanders will find our town rather quiet compared to Drakopolis. We don't have all the amenities you may be used to, but we don't have all the problems neither."

"What's 'amenities'?" Abel whispered.

"They're like perks," Lina said back, not bothering to whisper. "Movies and restaurants and indoor plumbing."

The sheriff swung her attention to Lina. "Oh, I think you'll find our plumbing quite adequate," she snarled. "Lina, is it?"

Lina nodded, and the sheriff spat onto the colorful cracked desert glass at her feet. It sizzled in the heat.

"Lina," she repeated with a breathy sigh. She knew exactly who Lina was. "You'll get to know our plumbing well during your time here. I know you were a dragon thief back in Drakopolis, and I wouldn't want you to be tempted into your old life of crime in our little town. So I've taken the liberty of getting you a job where you'll be far from any temptations: working in the sewage department. Hard to steal a dragon when you're up to your waist in muck, thirty feet underground."

Lina started to object. She even took a step forward, fists

balled, before their dad coughed and pulled her back. They couldn't make enemies with the sheriff. She wasn't just Silas's new boss; she was the law out here, and the entire family had to stay out of trouble. Punishment for any one of them would be punishment for all of them. That was one of the terms of their exile. For good or bad, they were all in this together.

Of course, as a family, they always had been, whether they acted like it or not. *It's us against the world*, Abel thought. *Not just me.*

Lina looked at her sneakers and seethed quietly.

The sheriff smiled, satisfied. "You'll see how our town works soon enough," she told them. "Everyone's got a job, and if everyone does theirs, we all get along just fine. We even have some fun, in our own ways."

Behind them, a dozen or so people scrambled to unload the cargo carrier on the Cloudflayer's back, hauling off all sorts of crates and supplies. Then a dozen *different* people hustled to load different crates and supplies back into the containers that had just been emptied. It looked like sweaty, bone-busting work, the kind that was done by dragons back home, not by people.

This is home now, Abel reminded himself.

The huge long-wing Cloudflayer laid her belly on the warm glass ground, absorbing the heat with a contented grin on her giant gray face. Her scales were glossy pale blues, grays, and whites, with three bright red octagonal streaks on either side, like bloody gashes in a puffy cloud.

In spite of their terrifying name and twenty-five-ton size, Cloudflayers were gentle dragons, or as gentle as long-wings got. They could still breathe a pillar of fire onto a moving target from a mile in the air and crush a dozen humans in one set of

claws if they chose, but they usually didn't choose to. Other than flying long distances, they were famously lazy dragons.

This one was already asleep.

A few brightly colored cockatrices scurried around the landing platform, their long, spiked tails swishing. Their feathery wings flapped them in awkward little hops away from the landing area. It occurred to Abel that he'd never seen a live cockatrice in person. They were usually plucked and roasted and hanging upside down in restaurant windows. The rooster-headed dragons were bigger than he'd pictured them, and meaner too. They shrieked and slashed at each other until the huge transport dragon opened one eye and roared at them. Then they scurried off the landing platform, leaving a few bright feathers behind.

"Don't touch their feathers," Lina whispered to Abel. "Cockatrice feathers are poisonous until they've been dried out or boiled."

Abel nodded. The poison in a fresh cockatrice feather could turn your skin to glass and, if you didn't get treatment in the hospital fast, your internal organs too. Working in a cockatrice processing plant was one of the most dangerous jobs you could get in Drakopolis, but at least there they were kept in cages. The ones here wandered freely. In Drakopolis, a cockatrice wandering the streets would get devoured by a dragon in seconds, but other than the Cloudflayer they rode in on, Abel didn't see other dragons anywhere.

Was this a town . . . without dragons?

"We are the main supplier of glass and raw sand for Drakopolis," Sheriff Skint told them. "We send shipments to the city once a week. And once a week we get supplies. Can't grow much here except sand for concrete and glass for buildings, but the city can't get enough of either. The money the city pays us, pays for

everything we import, even water." She looked Abel up and down. "So keep your showers short."

What is that supposed to mean? Abel wondered, trying to smell himself without being noticed. Did he stink, or was the sheriff just one of those people who automatically disliked kids?

"Silas, if you'll come with me, we'll get you all set up with your uniform and your new partner," the sheriff said. "The rest of you can make your way down into the gulch, where you'll find your new home." She handed Abel's dad a piece of paper with the address. "No phone service out here, so we do things the old-fashioned way."

"No phone service!" Lina groaned. Abel had planned to stay in touch with his best friends, Topher and Roa, back in the city. And he'd been texting with Arvin, the heir of the Red Talons kin, too, whom he'd only recently met in their last caper but had immediately grown fond of. Abel enjoyed having a powerful friend like that, especially after what they'd been through with the mutant dragons they'd freed. Now he'd be cut off from all three of his friends. Even Silas looked upset about his social life vanishing, but he did his best to hide it.

"What's wrong with you?" the sheriff asked him. "You look like you need to eat some prunes."

"Nothing, Sheriff." Silas fixed his face. His trying-not-to-look-disappointed face looked a lot like a constipated face. The sheriff was observant. Abel would have to be careful with her. Some adults didn't notice anything kids did, because they didn't think it was important. But some adults noticed *everything* kids did, because they enjoyed punishing them. Abel was pretty sure he knew which kind of adult the sheriff was.

“Don’t worry, kids,” Sheriff Skint laughed at them. “There’s so much work to do, you’ll be too tired to play on your phones anyway. Glassblower’s Gulch isn’t like the city, where dragons do everything. Out here, people do for themselves. So, you’ll want to get to your new home and clean up. You better get walking.”

She nodded at them again, then led Silas away. He cast one look back at his family and trotted after the sheriff over the shimmering hot glass.

Abel’s dad clapped his hands and put on a big smile.

“Well,” he said. “These bags won’t carry themselves. Luckily, I’ve got two strong kids with me!”

Abel and Lina shared a look. They’d been brother and sister for Abel’s whole life, but they’d also been partners in crime and enemies in battle, dueled dragons for rival kins, and betrayed those kins to protect each other. They’d even saved Silas’s life once or twice, despite him trying to arrest them at the time. They’d been through a lot together in the skies above Drakopolis, but now they were stuck here, grounded in Glassblower’s Gulch.

They didn’t know it yet, but things could get a lot worse.