

FIRESTONE

Sarah Fisher

Book Two in the Dragonscale series

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Disclaimer

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, incidents and events, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

To my father, Ray and my brothers, Cameron and Daniel

Acknowledgements

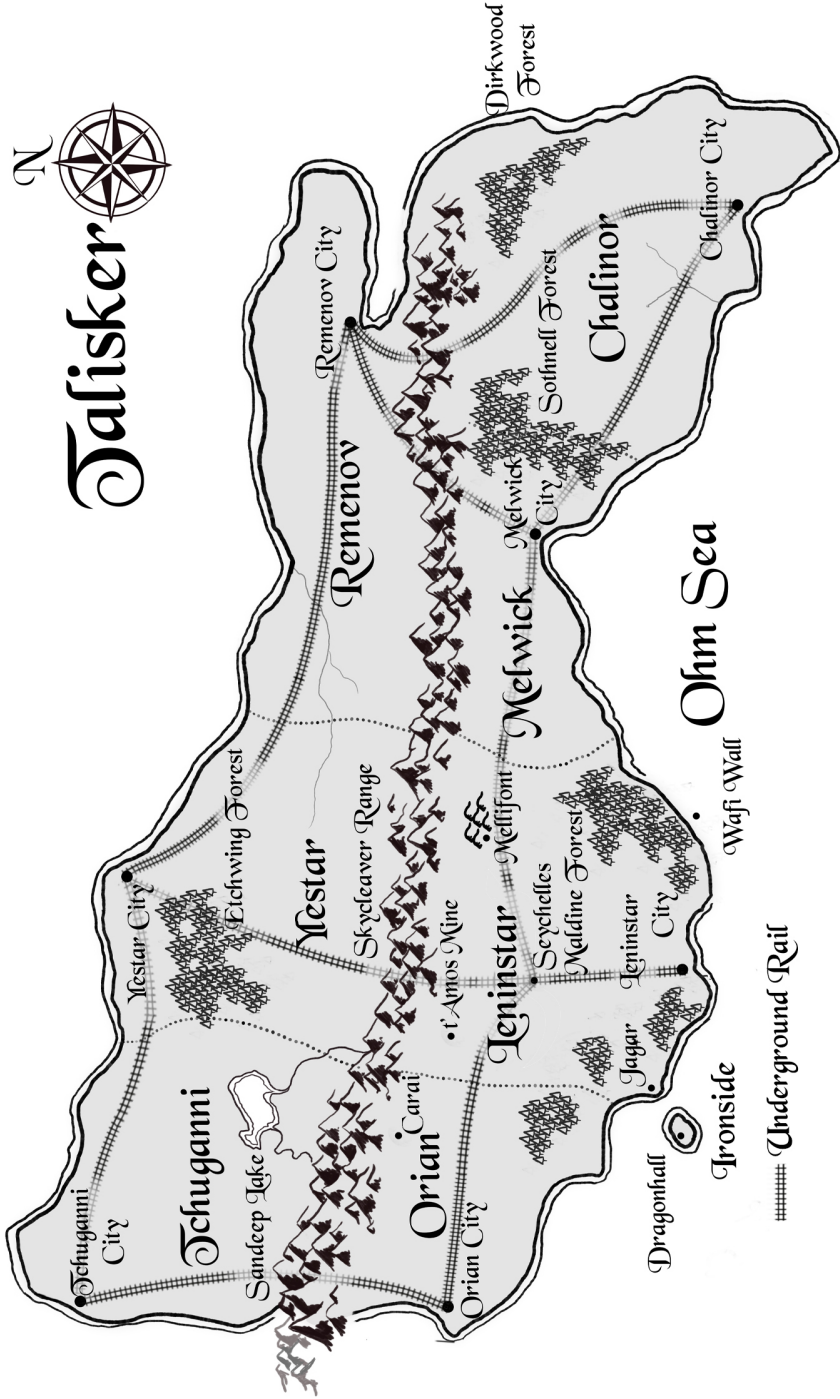
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Talisker



Characters

Royals

King Tambian, Leninstar
King Henrik, Orian
King Mallory, Melwick
King Tara, Chalinor
King Arissa, Remenov
King Franco, Ylestar
King Ulster, Tchuganni
Queen Rosemary, Leninstar
Princess Catriona, Leninstar
Prince Vernon, Leninstar

Academy adepts

Professor Noah Chord, viola
Major Sachin, flute
Major Maggie, clarinet
Major Anok, lyre
Doctor Alan, recorder

Goblins

King Nerili
Shar, King's guard
Liah, King's guard
Frost, King's guard
Jacin, King's adviser
Gisa, King's adviser
Rankin, King's adviser
Ulan, King's adviser
Grave, Army Commander
Iron, Army Commander
Princess Severine
Prince Sandor

Others

Raven Chord, Leninstar's Army
Commander
Emir Delorian, King Tambian's
adviser
Jaxon, Emir's brother
Gillette, Emir's nephew
Montana, High Priestess of
Talisker

Chapter 1

As the door hinge shrieked its displeasure, Noah looked up from her sewing table.

‘Someone should oil that,’ Gillette said as he dumped his school satchel on the floor.

‘Probably,’ Noah said, ‘but if it squeaks then no one can sneak up on me.’

The boy’s face crinkled into a frown. ‘You’re the king’s tailor, Noah. How many people want to sneak up on *you*?’

‘You’d be surprised,’ Noah said, returning her attention to hemming the queen’s new gown.

‘I could oil it for you,’ Gillette said. ‘I could do it right now, in fact.’

‘Do you have homework?’

‘Not much.’

‘Wouldn’t you rather get that out of the way first?’

Gillette opened one of the doors on Noah’s sewing cabinet. ‘It won’t take long. I’ll just use a bit of sewing machine oil and it’ll be good as new.’

Noah shrugged. ‘Okay.’

Having found the oil he needed, Gillette wound his way back to the external door of Noah’s studio and got to work.

Noah watched as he oiled the lower hinge first. ‘What is your homework?’

‘Something boring.’

‘Boring how?’

Satisfied with his work on the bottom fitting, Gillette turned his attention to the top one. Unlike most ten-year-olds, he didn’t need a stool to reach the hinge. He’d sprouted over the summer, and though he sometimes had difficulty coordinating his rapidly growing limbs, he revelled in being the tallest in his class.

‘This is the main offender,’ he muttered.

‘Boring how?’ Noah said again.

‘We have to tell the story of Talisker’s creation in our own words.’

Noah waited to see if there was anything else.

‘If Chase was here, I’d pay her to write it,’ Gillette added.

‘Don’t you think your teacher would notice the difference between a story by a professional writer and one by a fifth-form boy?’

Gillette swung the door back and forth. ‘Perfect,’ he said. ‘Not a sound.’

Noah sighed. Her last day on homework duty promised to be less fun than being stabbed in the eye with a fork. *Emir should be doing this*, she thought. *He’s the uncle*.

Gillette recapped the bottle and returned it to the cupboard before taking a seat next to Noah.

‘I reckon that’s worth five dinah,’ he said.

Noah glanced at him. ‘Maybe so, but don’t think I’ll be paying you. Palace maintenance – you’ll have to talk to the king about that. You can ask him at dinner tonight if you like.’

‘I’ll do that,’ Gillette said. ‘I’ll just make sure I get to him before you start throwing prawn shells at him.’

Noah turned to him. ‘I have a needle in one hand and a pair of scissors within reach of the other – much more dangerous than prawn shells. Do you really want to go there?’

‘Oh come on, Noah. Everyone loves that story.’

‘No. Not everyone,’ she said as she tied off the thread with a double knot.

‘Raven tells it best,’ Gillette said.

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Noah rolled her eyes. She didn't see what all the fuss was about. She hadn't done it on purpose. Everyone knew peeling prawns was tricky. Twisting off the head first without spurting goo everywhere was the first challenge. And she'd passed that test. She'd removed the legs and peeled away the shell from the body without incident too. The last step was the problem – squeezing just above the tail to press out the last bit of meat. As she'd squeezed, her fingers had slipped, firing the tail across the table and hitting King Tambian in the eye. *Raven tells it best.* Her brother embellished the story with each telling. The last version made it sound like an assassination attempt.

Glaring at her young charge, Noah said, 'You're not going to live to see dinner at this rate. Go and get your homework journal.'

'I don't want to do my homework,' he grumbled.

'Well, that's up to you,' Noah said, 'but you know you don't get to see your father tomorrow until it's done.'

She re-threaded her needle as Gillette drummed his fingers on the table.

'Will you help me write it?' he said.

'No.'

His eyes widened. 'But you have to – you're my *favourite* aunty.'

'Two things – I *don't* have to and I'm *not* your aunty.'

'But Emir is my uncle so that makes you—'

'Your uncle's girlfriend,' Noah finished.

He folded his arms across his chest. 'You're mean.'

'You started it,' Noah said.

'What?'

'You brought up the prawn thing. That was mean.'

Gillette laughed. 'Okay, so we're *even* then.'

'Maybe.'

'We *are* even,' he said, 'so now will you help me with my homework?'

'I have to finish this hem so I'm not writing it for you.'

Gillette jumped off his seat to retrieve his journal. 'That's okay. You just tell me what to write and I'll write it.'

'How about ... you tell me what you know about how Talisker was created and I'll try to spice it up a bit?'

Gillette settled himself back on his stool and opened his journal. 'So there were two gods who were brothers and they had a fight about something and then a dragon ate the evil one and the good one built a world around the dragon – and the evil god too obviously, because he was in the dragon's belly.'

Noah checked her watch. 'Dinner's in three hours. We'll never make it.'

'Don't be like that ...'

'Do you even know any of the names?'

'Of course I do!'

Noah waited.

'Elani is the good god, Jong is the evil god and Xan is the dragon,' Gillette said.

'Good. Now let's start where Jong is fighting Xan.'

'But that's near the end of the story. Why aren't we starting at the beginning?'

'Because Chase says you should start with action,' Noah said. 'Now, you like sword-fighting, right?'

Gillette puffed out his chest. 'Yes, Ma'am I do! Raven is teaching me and I practise every chance I get.'

'Have you ever imagined fighting a dragon?'

He shook his head.

'Well that's what you're going to do,' Noah said. 'You're going to imagine that you're Jong—'

'Why do I have to be the bad guy?'

'Because he's the one who fights the dragon,' Noah said. 'Now close your eyes and I'll help you get into character.'

Gillette wriggled on his seat as he closed his eyes.

Noah cleared her throat. 'Now imagine you're sheltering in an abandoned castle on a faraway world. The weather is terrible – the wind is howling, driving icy wind through the gaps in the stone where the mortar has long since deteriorated. There's no life left on the planet, which is no surprise to you. This is yet another of Elani's failed creations. It sustained life for a few millennia but when the weather system failed, life disappeared.'

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Gillette opened one eye. 'But it might come back,' he said hopefully.

'That's what Elani would say,' Noah said, 'but you're Jong. That's not the way Jong thinks – he's the master of destruction.'

'Oh. Right.' He closed his eyes again.

'So you're getting cranky because your trusty dragon, Xan went off hunting on a nearby world and has not yet returned. You're keen to destroy this world and move on but you can't do that until you have transport. When Xan finally does arrive, you're even more annoyed because she's brought Elani with her.'

'Am I still inside the castle?'

'Yes.'

'Are they inside the castle?'

'No,' Noah said, 'they've just landed outside. You're looking out a window. What would you say?'

'*Elani! Get your own dragon!*' Gillette cried, punching the air with his fist.

Not quite what she had expected. Noah checked her watch again. 'And?'

'*What are you doing here?*'

'That's better,' Noah said, 'now I'll be Elani.' She lowered her voice. '*Xan asked me to come. Why don't you come out here so we can talk?*'

'*Talk? Okay, let's talk.*' Gillette opened his eyes. 'I think I'm getting this, Noah. Now, I'd go outside and confront them. They'd try to kill me—'

'*Xan would try to kill you, remember? Now that Elani has shown her beautiful places she's angry at Jong for all the destruction they've caused. She thinks she needs to destroy her master to save Elani's creations.*'

Gillette frowned. 'Yeah. Okay.'

'What's wrong?'

'I'm thinking about my sword ... if I was a god, would I really fight with a sword?'

'Your teacher said you could write it in your own words didn't he?' Noah said.

Gillette nodded.

‘Well, if nothing else,’ Noah said, ‘at least your teacher will know you wrote it.’

Snatching up his pencil, he said, ‘This is going to be the best sword-fight ever.’

‘So remember that during the fight, you need to show the reader what they’re fighting about. We started where the action is, but you need to weave in the background information.’

‘Do dragons talk?’

Noah shrugged. ‘Up to you.’

Gillette held his pencil out like a sword. ‘This dragon is going to talk.’

With a nod, he set about his task and stuck at it for almost an hour. When he was done he pushed his journal across the workbench to Noah.

‘All done?’ she said.

‘Yep. Read it.’

Noah squinted at the page. ‘Do you have something against punctuation?’

‘The teacher said it had to be in my own *words*,’ Gillette said. ‘If he wanted punctuation too, he should have said so.’

Finding no suitable response, Noah started reading ...



Jong drew his sword as he stomped across the frozen ground towards his brother.

‘What’s going on here?’ he demanded.

‘I won’t be part of your destruction anymore, Jong,’ Xan said.

‘But I am your master,’ Jong said. ‘If I say you must, then you must.’

‘I am no longer your servant,’ the dragon said.

‘Why not? We’ve been destroying failed worlds – like this one – for ages. Why the change of heart?’

Elani spoke. ‘They weren’t all failed, Jong.’

‘Life could come back here,’ Xan said. ‘There is hope. That’s what Elani has showed me.’

Jong spat. ‘Life? Hope? Absolute rubbish!’

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'You should change your ways, Jong,' Elani said. 'This is your chance to be a creator rather than a destroyer. Work with us.'

'Us? *Us!*' Jong screamed in rage. 'There is no US!'

'Calm down,' Elani said.

'Fight me,' he said, challenging Elani with his lethal sword.

Elani shook his head. 'No. I won't fight.'

Anger exploded inside Jong and he lunged at his brother. 'If you won't fight, then you will DIE!'

Xan stepped in between the two gods. 'Stop!' she commanded.

Jong slashed at the dragon and his sword scraped across her scales. Sparks flew. The god overbalanced and fell over, skidding on the icy ground. He stood up. He was really angry now.

'Jong, you don't need to do this,' Xan said.

Jong set his stance and raised his sword ready to strike. 'Stand aside, Xan. This is between me and my brother.'

The dragon crouched. 'If you want him, you'll have to get through me first.'

'Okay,' Jong said and thrust his sword at her shining scales.

Xan swiped at him with her claw, easily blocking him. Jong kept his balance. He slid one foot across the other as he looked for a better position. He needed to find a soft spot to strike. Unfortunately it was cloudy so he couldn't use the sun to blind his opponent. Xan lashed out with her talons and Jong parried. *Be patient*, Jong told himself.

Jong and Xan circled each other while Elani watched on. Jong kept his sword raised as Xan swished her long tail. Suddenly, Xan crouched and then sprang at Jong. *At last*, Jong thought. He ran forward and caught the dragon by surprise. As Xan landed, Jong raised his sword over his head and it pierced the dragon through her shoulder joint. Jong twisted and wrenched his sword, trying to cut off Xan's front leg. The dragon roared in pain as she collapsed on the ground. Jong jumped out of the way just in time and then stabbed Xan in the eye.

But Jong underestimated the dragon. Xan flicked her head up and he was thrown into the air. Up and up he went, still clutching his sword ... and then down and down again. He looked down and screamed. The dragon's open mouth was below him.

When Jong landed in Xan's mouth she swallowed him instantly and then collapsed on the ground again.

'Help me,' she said to Elani. 'Jong is still fighting. Help me to stop him escaping.'

Elani patted the dragon's head. 'I will put you to sleep and then remake this world around you, Xan,' he said. 'You will be safe and Jong will not escape. And even better – your blood and scales will warm up this world and life will return.'

Xan wheezed a puff of smoke. 'Do it,' she said. 'Do it.'

And that is how Talisker was created.

The end.



'What do you think?' Gillette said.

Noah turned to him. 'It's wonderful, Gillette. Exceptional actually.'

'Did you like the swordfight?'

'Very detailed,' Noah said. 'I think you should show it to Raven.'

'I will,' he said, eyes gleaming. 'Is there anything in the story you'd change?'

Noah picked up the pencil and drew a line through the word 'end' and replaced it with 'beginning'.

Gillette picked up his journal and reviewed Noah's amendment. 'Neat,' he said at last. Hugging the book to his chest, he added, 'I can't wait to show this to Dad when he gets home tomorrow. He's going to be really proud of me.'

'He definitely will be,' Noah said. 'He'd probably really like it if you'd bathed too.'

Gillette shook his head. 'You don't *actually* think that's going to work, do you?'

Noah sighed. 'It was worth a shot.'