

AUTHOR OF THE BESTSELLING SERIES DRAGONS IN OUR MIDST

BRYAN DAVIS

THE
FINAL
FLAMES

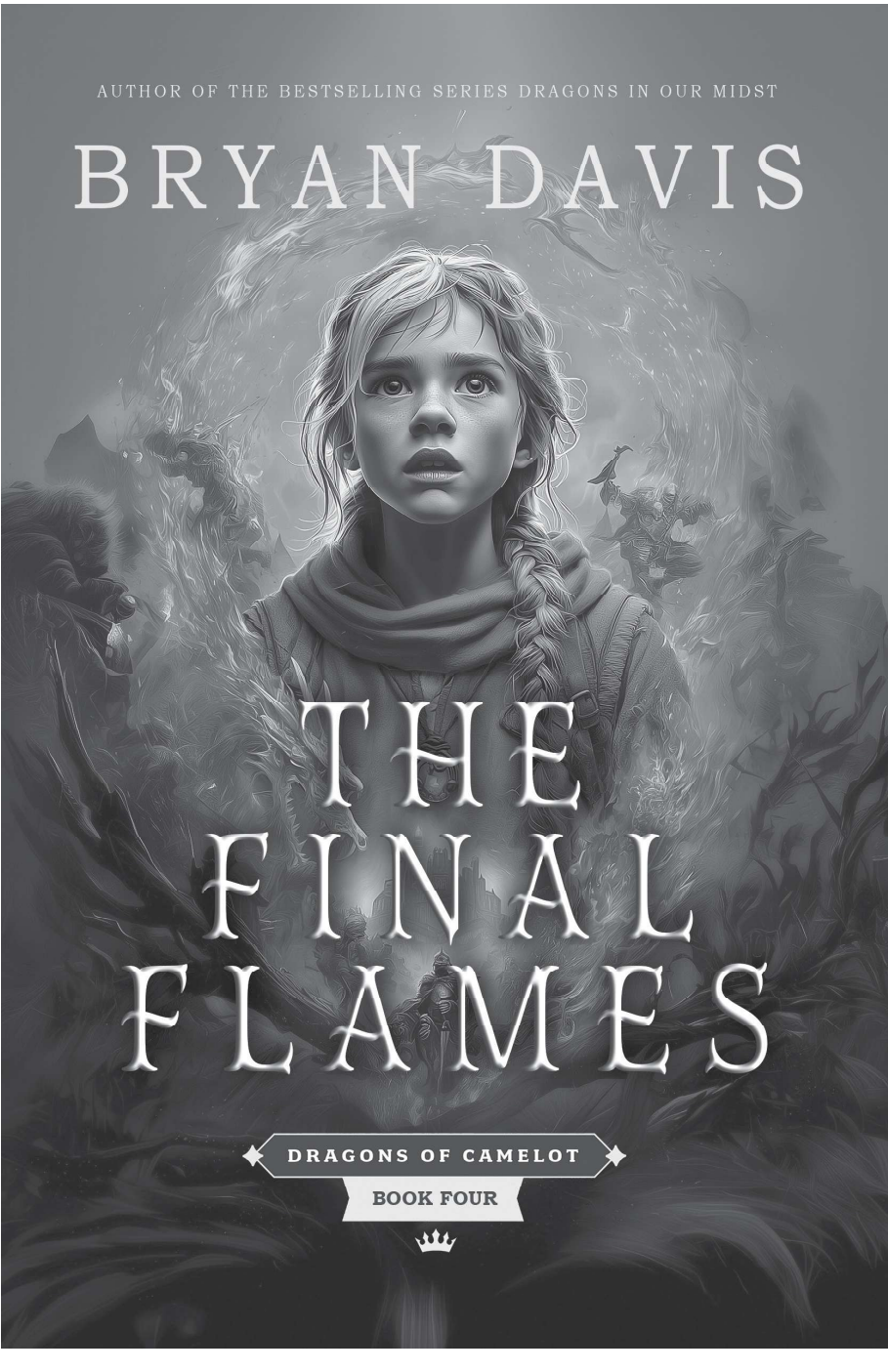
DRAGONS OF CAMELOT

BOOK FOUR



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The Final Flames

Book #4 in Dragons of Camelot

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CHAPTER 1

THE PLAN BEGINS

Something thudded nearby. Sabina sat up on her bed and looked around. The purity ovulum lay on the floor near the wall that stood across from the closed door leading to the rest of Merlin's quarters. The ovulum's transparent shell made it nearly invisible, though its dim glow gave away its location, providing just enough light to see the bedroom. Its song, usually too soft for anyone else to hear, drifted through the air.

About three steps away, Hawk sat on his bed, his back against the wall and his eyes open. "Could you not sleep?" Sabina asked.

Hawk ran a hand through his scruffy hair. "I slept okay until about an hour ago."

"What is keeping you awake?"

"A few things." Hawk stretched his arms and yawned, then winced. "One is that the burn scars on my back are sore, probably because of all the stuff we did collecting the ovula."

Sabina winced with him. "I was wondering about that, especially when we were running around in the cave gathering stones to solve the puzzle. Since it was pretty dark, maybe you hit your back on something." She held out a hand and raised a small fireball on her palm that sizzled and threw off tiny sparks. "Would you like a healing treatment?"

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“No, thanks. It’s not that bad, and I don’t want a healing to weaken you.” Hawk slid to the edge of his bed, making its wooden frame squeak, and set his feet on the bedroom rug. “Pain wasn’t the only thing that kept me awake. There’s been a lot of noise.”

“I noticed, but every time I heard something, I was able to go back to sleep.” Sabina copied his pose, her own feet now on the floor. “What sounds did you hear?”

“Early in the night, I heard Merlin working at his desk. You know, opening and closing books and muttering.”

“Yes. He stayed up later than usual.” Sabina inhaled through her nose. “And I smell the musty aroma of old books. Whenever he is studying the ancient lore, the dust seeps into our room.”

“True. But that’s not all. About an hour ago, I heard men’s voices. Marching boots. Chain mail. Like soldiers getting ready for battle.”

Sabina lifted her brow. “Slayers, maybe? Did you hear Sir Devin’s voice?”

Hawk shook his head. “But someone mentioned his name.”

“Does that mean he is going to try to slay Goliath at his cave today?”

“That’s my guess. And with extra soldiers getting ready, that means he probably doesn’t know that Goliath is already dead.”

“Good point.” Something flickered on the floor. Sabina glanced that way. The purity ovulum had dimmed, maybe half as bright as usual. “That is strange.” She rose and picked up the ovulum. Her touch made its glow brighten to its earlier level. She looked within the clear shell. The sparkles representing the locations of the other ovula were easy to see, six different colors huddled together in their hiding place in Hartanna’s cave. The seventh sparkle, the red one, glimmered separately from the others, indicating where Elam was keeping it at the moment.

Sabina imagined Hartanna guarding the ovula, breathing fire at anyone who would dare approach. Yet, even with her protection, Merlin had decided to keep the purity ovulum separate in case someone managed to steal a colored ovulum. If that happened, Sabina could use this one to track the missing ovulum.

She sat on the bed again with the ovulum in her lap. It flickered once more, then dimmed to a barely perceptible glow. Its usual song quieted, now almost inaudible, and an odd, gruff voice hummed, though lacking a melody. Sabina stared at it. “That cannot be good.”

Hawk rose from his bed. “What happened?”

“I do not know.” She looked deep inside. The sparkles from the other ovula were still present but now a black sparkle pulsed near the center. “I see something new—a black sparkle.”

Hawk walked closer. “A black ovulum?”

“No one ever mentioned a black one.”

“Do you still hear the purity ovulum’s song?”

“I did a couple of minutes ago, but just barely.” She set her ear near the ovulum’s surface. “It is the same song as before, but something or someone is humming as well. I think it is a man’s voice.”

Hawk peered at the ovulum. “I think I might know what you’re seeing and hearing.”

She straightened. “What?”

“Merlin mentioned a demon might be sleeping inside this ovulum. Remember?”

“The Silent One?” Sabina’s heart quickened. “Do you think he woke up? Does he have some kind of silencing power that is making the ovulum quieter? And is he the one who is humming?”

“Could be. He might be hurting both the song and the glow.”

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Sabina set the ovulum down and rose from the bed. “We should get ready to leave. Merlin needs to know about this right away. It could change his plans.”

“I’ll tell him now.” Just as Hawk reached for the door, it opened, ushering in brighter light.

Merlin bustled in, dressed in a dark cloak. Its hood flopped down, revealing his scattered white hair, a match for his mussed beard. His expression grim, he spoke in a low tone. “Sir Devin is on the move. I want us to be at Goliath’s cave when he arrives. Get dressed quickly, and be as quiet as possible when you leave our quarters.”

Sabina rushed to Merlin and tugged on his cloak sleeve. “I have something important to tell you.”

Merlin gazed at her with tired eyes. His lack of sleep had taken a toll. “Get dressed, and tell me when you join me in the outer corridor.”

“All right.” She released his sleeve and touched his weathered hand. “You are wearing your cloak. Is it cold outside?”

“It’s quite warm. I am wearing this black cloak to avoid being seen in the early morning darkness.”

“I have a black tunic and trousers I can wear.”

“Same for me,” Hawk said.

“Perfect.” Merlin raised his hood. “I’ll see you in the corridor. Sabina, be sure to bring the purity ovulum and the memory mirror, but don’t use the mirror unless I tell you to. Hawk, bring the stealth whistle.”

“I will.”

“Good. I’ll see you soon.” Merlin walked out and closed the door.

Sabina and Hawk pulled their clothing bags from under their beds and, as was their habit, drew a ceiling-hanging curtain across the room so they could change clothes in private.

“Why do you think Master Merlin wants us to go with him?” Hawk asked. “He hasn’t even told us our part in his plan.”

Sabina pushed her arms through her tunic’s sleeves. “Seeing that he entrusted me with the purity ovulum, I think he will want us to do something with it and the other ovula. Also, since he asked me to bring the memory mirror, I assume he wants me to open a portal to get somewhere quickly if needed.”

“Like if things get dangerous. Makes sense. But why me? I don’t have any special powers.”

“Of course you do.” She buckled a belt around her waist. “You always come up with great ideas that no one else thinks of, like when we used the blue ovulum to sneak into Morgan’s castle. And when you grabbed the vines on the roof and told me to hang on to you so we could get away from the army of scorpions. And when you—”

“Okay. I get it.” He heaved a sigh. “Thanks for the reminders.”

“We all need reminders now and then. We are a team, and we should always stay together, no matter what.” Sabina sat on the floor and began putting her shoes on. “What I do not understand is all the silence and secrecy about where we are going. With the memory mirror, we can go in an instant anywhere the mirror has seen.”

“Maybe we’re going somewhere it hasn’t seen. But we can trust Merlin. He knows what he’s doing. Let’s just get ready to go.”

“One second.” Sabina pulled the memory mirror and its chain from her bag and draped the chain around her neck. When she rose, she picked up the purity ovulum and pushed it into a pouch attached to her belt, then grabbed a brush and quickly stroked her tresses with it. “Are you dressed?”

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“Yep.”

She drew the curtain to the side. “Do you have the stealth whistle?”

Hawk put the bone fragment into a belt pouch. “Right here.”

“Good.” She tied her hair into a single braid in the back. “Okay, I am ready.”

“Sabina.” Hawk pointed at the top of her head. “The white streak in your hair is wider near your scalp than it used to be.”

She touched the spot. “Here?”

Hawk nodded. “Like new hairs are turning from brown to white.”

“How odd.” She lowered her hand. “But we do not have time to think about it. We need to go.”

After they took turns using the chamber pot in an alcove in the outer room, they hurried from Merlin’s quarters and into the corridor. Merlin stood with his back against the opposite wall, a finger to his lips and his other hand clutching a walking staff. His hood down, his hair and beard appeared to be freshly brushed.

When they joined him, he whispered, “Follow me quietly.”

Sabina touched the purity ovulum’s pouch. “I need to tell you—”

“I heard someone close by, so you’ll have to wait until we’re outside and alone.” Merlin led the way toward the front exit, the corridor barely lit with only a couple of lanterns, unusual for such an important passageway.

When they arrived at the palace entrance, Conrad, the usual daytime guard, opened the door and spoke in a low tone. “Devin has eight of his best soldiers with him. They left ten minutes ago on foot, heading slightly east of north through the forest.”

Merlin patted Conrad’s shoulder. “Thank you, my friend.”

“You’re welcome.” Conrad gave Merlin an unlit torch and a pair of flint stones. “Here are two of the items you requested.”

“Thank you again.” Merlin put the stones in his cloak pocket and gave the torch to Hawk. “Were you able to find the final item?”

Smiling, Conrad detached a scabbard from his belt. “I had to take it from the king’s secret weapons cache. It wasn’t easy to find.” He pulled the sword a few inches out of the scabbard, exposing the blade. “Is this what you were expecting?”

Merlin ran a finger along the blade. “Yes. It’s staurolite.”

Conrad slid the sword back in place and gave it to Merlin. “I informed the king that I got it for you.”

“I’ll return it as soon as I can.” Merlin attached the scabbard to a belt under his cloak, raised his hood, and took the torch from Hawk. “We must be going now.”

Conrad bowed his head. “Fair journeys to all of you. Although I don’t know what your quest is, I know it must be dangerous. I will pray for God’s protection for you.”

Merlin glanced upward. “Yes, we’ll need as much help as we can get, especially divine help.”