# Chapter 243: The Dragon Was Back

Music Recommendation : Velocity by Romeo

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This time, Maverick had no intention of meeting Rhydian fist for fist. The dragon swung the moment they came within reach, a vicious hook aimed for the professor's head but Maverick ducked beneath it.

His fist sailed harmlessly over him, and before Rhydian could recover from the missed blow, Maverick pivoted behind him and drove his shoulder into his back. Rhydian stumbled forward.

Maverick gave him no chance to regain his footing. He hooked a leg behind Rhydian's and wrenched him backward. For a man his size, the dragon went down with startling speed, his back slamming against the cage floor with enough force for Aria to hear the impact from her seat.

Aetheris fell abruptly quiet while Therion did the exact opposite. The House surged to its feet with a roar as Maverick followed Rhydian down, but the dragon was already twisting beneath him. Rhydian drove an elbow backward, but Maverick jerked aside just in time, caught his arm and forced it away before Rhydian could turn completely.

Rhydian bucked hard beneath him making

Maverick nearly lost his position. So he shifted his weight, slipped behind the dragon and wrapped an arm around Rhydian's neck.

Aria leaned against the barrier, her attention fixed on the cage.

Rhydian reacted immediately. Both of his hands clamped around Maverick's forearm before the hold could tighten completely, his muscles straining as he tried to wrench it away.

Unfortunately for him, Maverick locked his other hand into place and pulled, forcing Rhydian's head back against his shoulder.

The reaction from Therion was deafening.

"ALPHA! ALPHA! ALPHA!"

The chant reverberated through the arena, every Therion beast already tasting victory.

Brittney was one of the loudest supporters.

"That’s it, Alpha Maverick! Put him down!"

She had not forgiven the dragon for that crow attack.

Practically everyone in their section, save for Karen and her girls, had abandoned their seats too, each adding their own voice to the commotion.

Several rows ahead, a Therion male turned toward the Aetheris section and made an exaggerated bow before pointing back at Rhydian trapped on the floor.

That went over about as well as expected.

Aetheris answered with boos and insults. One dragon made an obscene gesture in return while another one shouted at Rhydian to get the fuck up.

Aria should have been celebrating with everyone else. Maverick was winning.

Better yet, he was doing exactly what she had wanted. There was no senseless exchange of punches, and no blood being spilled across the floor. If Rhydian surrendered now, the fight could be over before either of them suffered anything worse than a bruised face.

Except Rhydian wasn’t surrendering, instead his fingers dug into Maverick’s arm.

Maverick tightened the hold and the strain became visible almost immediately. Rhydian’s chest expanded beneath the dark markings streaking Maverick’s forearm as he fought for room. His jaw clenched, tendons standing out along his neck while he tried to pry the wolf’s arm loose.

He couldn’t because Maverick had him. Aria’s relief should have come then.Instead, an unpleasant pressure settled beneath her ribs.

Rhydian planted one foot against the floor and tried to rise. Maverick dragged him back before he could gain enough leverage, tightening his legs around the dragon’s waist to keep him grounded.

Therion went mad all over again.

"Submit already!" someone screamed.

"Make him bow!"

"Finish him, Professor!"

Aria swallowed.

Rhydian's face had begun to darken with exertion. A vein stood prominently at his temple, and although he continued fighting the arm around his neck, his movements were no longer as controlled as they had been seconds ago.

Still, he refused to yield, which wasn't surprising. This was Rhydian. Aria doubted the stubborn dragon even knew how. Her fingers gradually tightened around the barrier as she watched him strain against Maverick's hold.

Fuck. She didn't like this.

Rhydian was suffering. But Maverick needed to win. She couldn't bear to see him suffer either.

God, why was this happening to her?

Rhydian's hand slipped from Maverick's forearm, and Aria's stomach dropped. He caught hold again almost immediately, but the brief failure was enough to send another triumphant wave through Therion.

Maverick paid no attention to the cheers as he adjusted his grip. Rhydian's head lifted, and somehow, through the bars of the cage, his eyes found hers.

Aria froze.

There was no plea or fear in them. If anything, the sheer fury burning in his stare made it obvious he would sooner choke on his own pride than ask Maverick Nightshade for mercy.

But Aria couldn't look away.

Just surrender.

The thought came so quickly she didn't know which of them she was pleading with anymore. Maverick to release him, or Rhydian to give him a reason to.

Her chest tightened.

No. She shouldn't care. Maverick was her boyfriend and her mate. He was winning, and Rhydian had entered that cage willingly. Whatever happened between them was their choice.

Beside her, all her friends were too busy shouting encouragement at Maverick to notice the turmoil inside her. Everyone around her was watching the same thing she was and

seeing exactly what they were supposed to see. Their Alpha was moments away from victory.

Inside the cage, Rhydian's hand closed around Maverick's arm again. This time, he didn't try to pull it away, instead, his palm flattened against the floor.

Maverick's brow furrowed. Shit.

Rhydian planted his other hand beside it, and then, impossibly, he began to push himself up.

Maverick reacted accordingly. He tightened his hold and threw his weight backward, dragging Rhydian against him with enough force to halt his ascent. For a second, it worked. Rhydian dropped several inches, one knee striking the floor as a strangled grunt escaped him.

But Rhydian's palms remained planted. His arms trembled beneath the combined weight, muscles standing out along his shoulders as he pushed again.

Maverick gritted his teeth and hauled backward. While Rhydian grunted, Maverick strained. And slowly, painfully, the dragon's knee lifted from the floor.

Aria's lips parted. What the fuck?

Maverick was not a small man, and with his legs still locked around Rhydian and nearly his entire weight pulling in the opposite direction, the dragon should not have been able to rise.

Except he was. Inch by stubborn inch.

The veins along Rhydian's arms stood beneath his skin. A guttural sound ripped from his throat as he forced one foot beneath himself, then the other. Maverick adjusted immediately, wrenching his arm tighter around Rhydian's neck while using his weight to pull him off balance again.

Rhydian swayed, and for one hopeful second, Aria thought he was going back down. But his hand slammed against the floor. He caught himself and pushed again.

The noise around them began to change. Therion's triumphant chanting faltered as more beasts realized what was happening, while disbelief gave way to anticipation from the opposite side of the arena.

Rhydian got one foot firmly beneath him, then the other. His legs straightened. At this point, Maverick was practically hanging from his back now, still refusing to release the hold. His jaw clenched with the effort of dragging a full-grown dragon prince back to the floor.

It didn’t work because Rhydian rose to his full height.

Aetheris lost their minds but Aria could barely hear them. She was staring at Rhydian. For the first time that night, she truly understood the difference between fighting a beast and fighting a dragon.

Maverick had been faster and his technique better. He had taken Rhydian down and trapped him in a position that should have ended the match. But there were some things technique could only do so much against.

And Rhydian Drakhar was one of them.

Maverick must have realized the same thing. He released his legs from around Rhydian’s waist, probably intending to drop and put distance between them.

He was a second too late.

Rhydian reached behind him and caught Maverick by the arm. The other seized him around the side, and before Maverick could wrench himself free, Rhydian bent forward and ripped him clean off his back.

Aria’s heart practically stopped as she watch Maverick go over Rhydian’s shoulder. For one terrible instant, his entire body was airborne. Then Rhydian hurled him down.

Maverick struck the cage floor with a brutal thud and his cry cut through the arena.

"Maverick!"

Aria lurched against the barrier.

Maverick’s back arched off the floor, his face contorting as pain shot through him. One of his hands went behind him while the other braced against the ground, but for several seconds he could do little more than drag air into his lungs.

Rhydian stood over him, chest heaving. Then the dragon threw his head back and roared.

The sound was enormous.

He struck his fists against his chest, the savage display sending Aetheris into a frenzy.

Their section came alive with screams and triumphant shouts, all the frustration from moments before forgotten in an instant.

The prince was on his feet. Their dragon was back.