

Chapter 5: Cedric

I can't believe Ishir has met a dragon. They are supposed to be good luck. And that's about all I know of dragons. His knowledge far exceeds mine. I'm hoping that one day, I'll get to meet one. I'm sure they would make a powerful ally to my pack.

I have every intention of getting out of here next weekend, and I'm getting Tana out as well. If Ishir is right, I'll know if she's my mate when we are in the arena. Even if she's not, we're getting her out of here. We walk back to where we usually sleep, lying down and holding hands.

"The smartest move would be to get the lion to return and open the doors for the supes. The three of us have been in the arena and know the structure where the Commander and the other ranked members are. We know the weak spots and the best places to start the battle."

"I can go after the Commander," Tana says. "I'll start the re, but the lion has to get back down here right away. The keepers will try to take him out, so you or Ishir need to help him get through."

"It should probably be me. If the lion still holds a grudge against Ishir, he may try to kill him rather than following through on his part in this."

I see Tana nod. "Ishir can swing me into the stands, and then he can jump in on the other side, pulling the torches down and lighting another re. Once you help the lion get through the keepers, you'll have to come back and help us take down the chiefs and anyone else that thinks they can ght against us."

"Hopefully, we can count on some of these other shifters in here to help us once they are released. The three of us can't take out an entire arena of hunters and keepers," Ishir says from his cell.

In response to his statement, we hear several shifters announce that they will help once they are released. That's good. They may not come into the arena to help, but if they run outside the arena, they can pick off the people who are involved in this gambling ring as they try to escape.

Eventually, we all fall asleep. Early the next morning, we hear the Kestrel's chirping sound again.

"The lion says he's in," our Kestrel tells us. "He wants to know the plan."

We lay it out for him and receive his answering roar before we hear the Kestrel's chirping response that he agrees.

Not long after, the keepers are back. This is unusual since we only ever receive food after we win a ght. Ishir, Tana, and I all receive food and water. Tana's food is once again poisoned. They are serious about killing her or at least having her die in the arena. That's not happening on my watch. When they leave, I push my plate over to her. "Eat."

"Cedric, we talked about this. You need to keep up your strength," Tana says.

"We both do," I reply. "Now eat. I won't eat unless you do," I tell her, waiting for her to nally start picking some food off my plate before I start eating.

Over the next few days, we continue to get fed once a day, with Tana and I sharing. We begin talking about the cells ... about who can see the door locks and where they are located. We're able to get the needed information about where the lion will need to go to open the cell doors. There is more than one locking mechanism. The lion will have to unlock the rst set of doors and then run the length of the arena to get to the others. It's going to be a risk for the last group to have their doors unlocked.

Some of the other shifters offer to help in nding the mechanism. Everyone wants the opportunity to get out of here, and no one wants to burn alive. So, as the battle gets closer, more and more shifters begin to speak out about how they can help. Ishir was right. If this goes according to plan, it will be an amazing overthrow of authority, and we will burn this arena to the ground.

On Wednesday, they move me and Tana. If I had to guess, I'd say they put us all in a cell near an entrance. The issue for me is that now Tana won't have any food for the next three days, unlike me. Our keeper is now bringing me extra food since he's betting on me. I'm sure Ishir is also getting extra food since he's a fan favorite. I have no idea about the lion, but I know Tana will be starving by Saturday.

After we are separated, I can't sleep. I try, but the screams of the others around me keep me awake. When I have Tana near me, she calms the turmoil in my mind. With her by my side, all the horrors of this place and everything I've had to do here are manageable. Without her, I nd I'm struggling and wondering how she is doing.

I try several times to get word to her, but I can only get as far as Ishir. The Kestrel can get to the lion, but for some reason, no one can see Tana, or we can't reach the area where they are keeping her. I hope she isn't being held in isolation. As the day of our battle gets closer, I become more concerned about her.

On Saturday morning, the morning of our ght, our keeper gives me the largest amount of food I've had since my arrival. I am moved to a cage, and it is wheeled into the arena. From there, a large hook is placed on the top of the cage, and I'm lifted so that I'm hanging over the arena oor. As I look, I see Ishir and the lion are also being hauled up in their cages. I look across the stadium, and I see another cage being lifted, but unlike our cages, Tana is laying on the bottom of hers, not moving.