



# DRAGON RISING



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# DRAGON RISING

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SIMON & SCHUSTER

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*For our daughters*





## The Sea

The sea is full of mysteries. You never know what you might find hidden in its depths. Lying between the earth and sky, the sea is always moving, with secrets dwelling deep below. Waves crash on the shore, tides go in and out, but even when the sea looks still, the currents race and dance beneath the surface. The sea is an in-between place. And like anywhere in-between, it holds more than meets the eye.

Deep below the surface, down where it is cold and dark, there is a sudden explosion of light and energy. A creature emerges, roaring with confusion and alarm.

It does not know where it is.

All it knows is that it must get to the surface. It must find what it seeks.

It swims and swims through the sea, through that in-between space, and, up above, nobody knows that everything has changed.





## Blast at the Beach

Billy Chan missed his dragon.

It had been three weeks since he'd returned home to California. His three best friends that he'd met at summer camp had all gone back to their respective homes and now they were scattered around the world: Billy in San Francisco, Charlotte Bell in Atlanta, Dylan O'Donnell in Galway and Liu Ling-Fei in a small village in China outside Camp Dragon. That was where their adventure had first begun.

More recently they had defeated the Dragon of Death for good in Dragon City and returned to Camp Dragon, where they'd had the best summer ever. It was good to be back in their own time, in

their own world, after being sucked into a terrifying alternate future where the Dragon of Death ruled over humans and dragons alike. Billy sometimes imagined a world in which humans and dragons lived together in peace, but it didn't look anything like Dragon City. He still had nightmares about that place and what might have happened if they hadn't defeated the Dragon of Death.

After surviving the perils of Dragon City, and everything that had come before, Billy had known how lucky they were to be together, and to be back at Camp Dragon. And they'd still had their dragons, even if they'd been on the other side of the mountain. They had sneaked out to visit them through the mountain as often as they could, but the friends had also had fun at camp. Swimming in the lake, learning martial arts and trying new food in cooking class had been how they filled their days. Even the Mandarin language lessons hadn't been too bad. But the best part had been being all together, and knowing their dragons were safe and free once more. For the first time all summer, Billy had felt carefree, as if he could just be a kid.

Well, a kid who had his very own dragon. But that only made things better.

Since Old Gold, who had run Camp Dragon when they'd first arrived, had been banished into a black hole with the Dragon of Death, there was now a new camp director. She was kind and fun and exactly what you would hope for in someone running a summer camp. And she certainly didn't have any secret evil plans like Old Gold. He had originally set up Camp Dragon to locate the children who were the key to opening the mountain behind the camp and uncovering mythical dragons.

Despite everything, Billy couldn't hate Old Gold. After all, if he'd never started Camp Dragon, Billy never would have met Charlotte, Dylan and Ling-Fei. He never would have heart-bonded with Spark.

A heart bond was an ancient and rare connection forged between a human and a dragon who had matching hearts, and once the bond was made it could not be broken. Each of the four children had heart-bonded with a different dragon, and not only did the dragons have increased power and ability thanks to the heart bond, the children also gained a

unique power. Billy couldn't imagine life without his dragon. That was part of the reason he was having such a hard time adapting back to normal life.

He'd come home to California with new friends, improved Mandarin skills (which was why his parents had sent him to camp in the first place) and a humongous secret. The Billy who had arrived at Camp Dragon at the start of summer had morphed into a new Billy. His parents kept commenting on how much more mature he seemed. How much more confident. But they'd noticed he'd withdrawn from his old friends and preferred to spend his time surfing or in his room talking to Charlotte, Dylan and Ling-Fei online. Billy couldn't help it – he felt as if he had so much less in common with his friends from his life before camp. The things they worried about seemed silly to him now. He felt as if Charlotte, Dylan and Ling-Fei were the only ones who understood him. And Spark, of course.

'We know you miss your friends from camp,' Billy's mom had said. 'But right now you have to focus on getting ready for school to start.'

'You can all meet up at camp again next year,' his dad had added.

Billy had known there was nothing he could do or say to convince them that these new friends were so much more than friends. That without them, he wouldn't have survived the summer. That without them, he couldn't have saved the world. He had heart-bonded with his dragon, but he had a special bond with Charlotte, Dylan and Ling-Fei too, because of what they'd been through together. A bond almost as unbreakable as his bond with Spark. Sometimes he couldn't quite believe that it had all really happened, but having his friends in his life made it real. After his family, they were the most important people to him. So instead he had just nodded and tried to remember what life had been like before.

But every morning when Billy went surfing, he wished that he were riding a dragon instead of a wave. Surfing almost felt like flying. It took patience, but it was always worth the wait when he caught the perfect wave. Before Billy had ever ridden a dragon, he'd thought it was the closest he'd come to flying. Now he knew better.

There was a small, secret cove that he'd recently discovered and it was the perfect place for early

morning surfing. The only way to reach it was on foot, down narrow trails winding along steep cliffs.

His parents didn't know that was where he surfed and Billy knew they would almost certainly forbid him if they found out. They thought he went down to the main beach, where there were other people around if he needed help. They didn't know that he had faced far scarier things than waves and survived to tell the tale. But Billy didn't want to be around other people. He might have wanted to share the beach, and the secret of what had happened this summer, with his brother, Eddie, but he had already gone back to university for a summer course, so Billy was left with his own thoughts. He didn't mind too much though. He liked being out alone on the waves, where he felt the most connected to Spark. There was something about being in nature that made him feel closer to his dragon. When he was floating in the ocean, overwhelmed by how vast and powerful it was, it reminded him of the dragons. It gave him the same sense of awe. He'd always loved the water, but now it drew him more and more, connecting him with his dragon who was far away in the Dragon Realm.

Billy had grown used to the ache that came from being separated from his dragon, the dragon that he was heart-bonded to for ever. It felt like a dull pain now, always there, but easy to ignore. And it was worth it to know he was still connected to Spark, even across the realms.

There'd been only once when he hadn't been able to sense her, and that was when she had betrayed Billy and the others and joined the Dragon of Death. Their heart bond hadn't truly broken, only death could sever it, but when Spark's heart had darkened, she had blocked their connection. It had been awful. He'd felt as if he'd lost a piece of himself.

At least now, even with Spark far away in another realm, he could still reach her through their bond. The distance meant that her responses were delayed, but it was better than nothing. They used to be able to communicate instantly in their minds; now it felt more like sending telegrams. Billy didn't know how long it would take for his messages to reach Spark. Sometimes it was hours before he had a response from her and sometimes even days. He knew why it took longer now, but it still made him anxious. He couldn't

help but worry that one day he'd try to reach her and she wouldn't be there.

But then he would remind himself that there was no point in worrying about things he couldn't control. Surfing helped with that. It helped ground him and keep him in the moment. That was one of the reasons he tried to go every morning. Right now, as he looked out at the sea, he took a deep breath of fresh air and sent a thought to Spark.

*Good morning, he thought down the bond. Maybe it isn't morning where you are. Whatever time it is, I hope you're okay. I'm out surfing. I think you'd like how the sunrise looks on the sea. Nothing else to report. Tell the others I say hi. I miss all of you.*

This morning Billy wore his favourite blue and black wetsuit. He wished he were wearing his super-suit made of magical dragon fabric, but he and his friends had left their super-suits deep inside Dragon Mountain, in case they ever went back and needed them again.

Even in his wetsuit, the water of the Pacific Ocean was cold and biting this morning as he waded into the waves. It made him miss the warm and lemon-scented



waters of the Forgotten Sea in the Dragon Realm. But still, he was glad he lived near the sea. Close enough that he could go by foot from his house early in the morning without needing to ask his parents for a ride or take the bus. Something had drawn him one day to this spot, the cove he had named Secret Cove. Not the most original name, he knew, but it was apt.

This morning, the water was calm, but he knew he wouldn't have to wait too long for a wave to come. He sat up on his surfboard, legs dangling on either side of it into the water, and gently bobbed up and down in the sea as he gazed out at the horizon. The rising sun spread its rays across the sky, and he heard the familiar cry of seagulls soaring above him as the wind sprayed salty seawater in his face.

In the distance, he thought he saw a series of dark waves crest and then disappear back under the water. He frowned. They didn't look like waves usually did.

A strange, unsettling sensation spread through his body, and he felt cold. As if the water surrounding his legs had suddenly dropped in temperature. He swallowed and brushed his hair out of his eyes, keeping his gaze on the horizon. He reached down

the bond towards Spark, even though he knew she wouldn't hear him in time to be able to do anything.

*Spark, something weird is happening.*

The wave-like shapes rose up again, and this time he was sure they weren't waves. Was it a shark? A group of sharks? No, it was far too large to be a shark fin. A huge whale breaching? Whatever it was, he needed to get out of the water, and fast.

But before he could turn and swim back to shore, everything went quiet and the ocean itself seemed to still.

Then a huge spike emerged from the ocean, water sluicing off it. Another spike appeared behind it, and then an entire head burst out of the sea. Billy reared back on instinct, nearly falling off his surfboard, but he couldn't take his eyes off the creature.

Its head was enormous, dark turquoise and glistening in the light, with the dark grey spikes that he'd first seen going from the top of its head all the way down its thick neck and body. It kept rising like a huge snake unfurling itself and stretching for the sky. On its face, giant webbed flaps fanned out from its cheeks, almost like wings. Its eyes were round

and huge, glowing a bright turquoise. And staring straight at Billy.

Billy knew with a sudden calm certainty that it was a dragon. Not like any dragon he'd ever encountered before, but a dragon all the same. On one level he knew he should be petrified, but his overwhelming emotion was stunned amazement. What was a dragon doing in the Human Realm?

Suddenly, the giant sea dragon unhinged its jaws, showing rows and rows of sharp teeth, each tooth bigger than Billy, and let out a mighty roar, louder and more ferocious than Billy had ever heard. As it roared, a bolt of true terror coursed through Billy.

He winced and covered his ears, but strangely the sound went over and around him, as if it was seeking a target. Billy looked up and, to his amazement, realized he could *see* the sound travelling through the air in a shimmering, trembling spiral, heading straight towards the cliffs on the beach behind him. He followed the trajectory and gasped as the blast of energy and sound hit the top of the cliff, knocking off chunks of it onto the empty beach below in a thundering crash.

It wasn't just *any* dragon that had made its way into the Human Realm. It was an aggressive, powerful one. Billy glanced back at it and saw that it was lowering itself into the water, eyes still on him, as if it was about to charge. It was still far from Billy, at least a football field away, but he knew how fast dragons were. It would catch him in moments. He knew he had to stay calm – if he panicked, he'd be done for. But he could feel his palms sweating and his heart pounding in his chest.

Where was a wave when he needed one?

He flipped around on his board, paddling as fast as he could away from the giant sea dragon and back towards the shore. His arms ached as he swam faster than he ever had, and he felt the telltale spark of energy run through him – the one that meant he was using whatever was left of his Lightning Pearl power of speed and agility.

He glanced back to see where the giant sea dragon was, and instead saw a cresting wave that rose up beneath him, propelling him forward back to shore. As he let the speed of the wave carry him, he glimpsed a dark-haired girl he'd never seen before standing

knee-deep in the water and staring wide-eyed at the ocean behind him.

‘Get out! Get out!’ Billy shouted as he skidded past her on his board. ‘Get out of the water now!’

She seemed to snap to her senses, shaking her head and turning and running out of the surf. Billy leaped up off his board and grabbed her hand, pulling her the rest of the way. Sand had never felt so good beneath his feet.

‘It’s . . . it’s gone,’ the girl said between gasps.

Billy looked back at the sea.

She was right. The giant sea dragon had disappeared without a trace.