

## Jawn

The Goblin giggled quietly as she carefully watched the camp-site.

“You’re going to get caught,” said a voice behind her.

“Wut?”

She spun. Behind her was a large scaly creature with wings. She was about as big as a ten-year-old Human, and the creature was about three times her size. It had long claws on its feet, and it yawned, showing a mouth full of sharp teeth. She didn’t expect it to attack her, because it could have done so without alerting her, but she tried to run.

“Glllrk!” The Dragon’s claw was hooked into her dungarees.

“Rushing off so soon, little Goblin?”

“Gerroff! They’ll catch me!”

“Hmm, good point. Let’s move away.”

They disappeared into the forest. Behind them, a dog in the camp-site started to bark.

“I’m hungry!”

“You’re hungry? What do you eat, whatever your name is?”

“I’m Jawn. I eat almost anything. I ate some tree bark once, but it didn’t taste very nice. Yuk! What’s your name, Dragon?”

“Me? Humanoids usually call me ‘Rax’. I have some meat back at my temporary nest. This way.”

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Rax watched Jawn scarfing down the gryphon leg. The little Goblin crouched over it, holding the meat in her long finger nails, and crunching on the bones. She licked her fingers.

“Have you got any more?”

“What about your manners? No ‘please’? More meat? Yes, sure. Here’s the other leg. How long since you last fed, Jawn?” Rax was amused. Most Humanoids didn’t like gryphon meat. Too tough and gamey for them.

Jawn gave the question some thought. “Um, three days and nights I think. Oh, I caught a rat yesterday. It made an enjoyable snack. Ahh!”

She polished off the second leg and sat back contently. The moonlight glinted off her jet black skull, her pointed ears and her angular legs and arms, breaking up her image and effectively hiding her. The Dragon’s large eyes could easily detect her, but a Human would probably walk right past.

“That meat was cooked, Dra—, sorry, Rax, Where did you steal it from?”

“The gryphon? I didn’t steal it! I caught it, um, somewhere else, and cooked it myself in the fire pit. I let the fire go out because it attracts Humanoids.”

“Fire pit?”

Rax huffed a short blast of fire out of his nostrils.

“Wow! That’s cool!” Jawn was impressed. She snorted, but the only effect was to make her cross-eyed for a moment.

Rax laughed. “Humanoids can’t make fire like me. How was the gryphon, Jawn?”

“Tasty!” She licked her lips and grinned. Even in the moonlight, Rax could see her impressive set of teeth. Jawn considered. “Thanks, Rax!”

“Even the bones?”

“Yeah! The bones are the best bit. Don’t you eat the bones, Rax?”

Rax thought back to when he was a hatchling. His mother had fed him and the rest of his brood with prime gryphon meat, but when he had left the nest, there were times when food was scarce. He’d eaten the bones and the guts, not to mention the skin, of the small animals that he had caught. Then he’d discovered where his mother caught the gryphons. He now knew what his mother meant when she said that she caught them... somewhere else.

“Sometimes,” he admitted.

“What are you going to do now, Rax?”

“Sleep.” He stretched. “I made myself a sleeping pit over there. Good night. Hang around if you want.”

He curled up in a circle and started to drop off. The Goblin was watching him as he slipped into sleep.

“Mmmrph!” He woke up a little in the depths of the night and found that the little creature was curled up next to him in his pit. She was snoring a little, and he couldn’t help but smile.

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“How did you get here?” The Dragon was astounded.

“Are those gryphons?” asked Jawn.

“Er, yes. One type. How did you get here?” Rax asked again.

The little Goblin was more interested in the gryphons. The flock wheeled and landed again. They had taken off in a rush when Rax and Jawn had appeared, and had circled around making squeaky caw noises.

Irritated, the Dragon said “Jawn!”

“Oh, er, yes. Um?” The Goblin thought for a bit. “You said that you were going to get some food, and disappeared. I just sort of moved in the same direction. Did I do wrong?”

“No, no.” It was the Dragon’s turn to think. “I didn’t know that Humanoids could do that. I don’t remember even hearing about Humanoids doing that! Anyway, stay there, kid. I’m going to catch some breakfast.”

He took off and so did the flock of gryphons, which wheeled and turned about in the sky. He caught a glimpse of Jawn, down on the ground, pointing and shouting. She was trying to help, and the Dragon smiled. He caught a gryphon and clamped it in his jaws until it stopped moving. He grabbed another one in his claws and killed it, then he spiralled down to the Goblin.

“Here’s brunch, Jawn. Can you get back?”

“I think so, Rax.” Jawn disappeared, so Rax ‘went back’.

“Awww!” Jawn wailed, holding her head.

“What happened, kid? Are you OK?”

“I walked into that tree! I’m OK, pal, thanks.”

“Yeah. That can be a problem.” The Dragon huffed the fire into action, while Jawn scouted for fuel. “Ack! These gryphons are the feathery kind. I’ll have to singe the feathers off the wing tips. I hate that!”

“Give them to me, Rax. I’ll get rid of the feathers.”

Rax watched as Jawn’s Humanoid fingers swiftly stripped the feathers from the legs and wing tips of the gryphons. He nodded. That was useful! Then they cooked and ate the gryphons.

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“Where are you going, Rax?”

“Umm? Me? Well, I’m always on the move. Maybe I’ll stop somewhere, someday.” He wondered why he hadn’t thought of it before. “Find a nice cave, somewhere. What about you, Jawn?”

“I don’t know. I’ve just been moving around since I left my brothers and sisters.”

“Brothers and sisters? No Mum?”

“No. We were very little. We tried to eat anything. Plants, trees. Beetles, grubs, caterpillars. Beni tried to eat a snake and got bitten.”

“What happened to him?”

“He died. We ate him.” She grinned at him. “We were little then, and we were hungry.”

“You ate him?”

She shrugged. “Yeah. It seems wrong now, but we didn’t know any better. We all split up after that. I caught some fish in a stream. And some rats. I didn’t know that they bit! But I found out that I could steal stuff from Humans. And from Dwarfs sometimes, but Dwarfs are cunning.”

Rax considered. He wasn’t shocked that Goblins sometimes ate each other. He didn’t know anything about them!

“Are you—“

There was a crashing in the bushes and another Goblin tackled Jawn and brought her to the ground. Before Rax could move, Jawn and the other Goblin were rolling over and over, kicking, biting, punching, and scratching. Rax waited for a second and then pounced. He stood up with one Goblin in each paw, his talons hooked in their clothing. For an instant, he wasn’t sure which was Jawn, but realised that one was wearing dungarees, while the other Goblin’s clothes were mainly skins. Sheep, he guessed.

The other Goblin spat out a tooth. “Let me down! I’ll kill her!”

“Not if I get you first, Xang!”

Rax gave them both a shake. “Stop it! If I put you down, will you agree not to kill each other?”

The two Goblin grumbled and glared at each other but agreed, so Rax set them down. He gave them each a gryphon leg.

“Who are you, Goblin?” he asked.

“She’s my sister, Xang. I haven’t seen her since I left my brothers and sisters. What are you doing here, you scrawny bit of garbage?”

“What’s it to you, Jawn, you useless waste of space?”

Rax sighed and flexed his talons. “Be nice to each other please!”

This idea shocked both Goblins.

“But...” started Jawn, but Rax glared at her.

“So, what are you doing here, Xang? And why did you attack Jawn like that?”

Xang shrugged. “She’s my sister. I’m on my way to the Coronation.”

“Yeah, she’s my sister,” said Jawn, as if that was sufficient explanation. “That’s my scar, next to the little pile of dung’s ear!”

“Well, that’s mine on your arm, you complete worm!”

“Hold it! Hold it! Do young Goblins always fight like this?”

“Yeah! Don’t young Dragons fight?”

“Not like this!” Jawn and Xang kept exchanging venomous glances, but stayed quiet.

“Goblins try to kill everything. When they are babies, anyway.” That was Jawn.

“Yeah! Other baby Goblins might steal the last cockroach or centipede.”

“OK. OK. I understand. But there’s no need now! What’s this about a Coronation?”

Jawn shook her head. She didn’t know, but Xang smirked and said “I’m going to be a Princess! I met two other Goblins from our brood, Rigi and Stark, and they told me about the Coronation up north of here. It’s run by some older Goblins. I’m going to get elected. You’ll all have to bow to me!”

“That’s not going to happen,” muttered Jawn.

“Yeah, I’ll tell my soldiers, and they will make you!”

“Not if I get elected first!”

“Hold it! Hold it!” commanded Rax. “Surely you can’t just be elected Princess? What does that even mean?”

Xang just looked at him in confusion. “I dunno!”

Rax sighed.

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The Werewolves attacked without warning. Jawn and Xang were walking a little in front of Rax, and Rax guessed that the Wolves thought that the two Goblins were alone.

One of the Wolves came out of the bushes in front of the Goblins, while the other attacked them from behind.

“Er...” said Rax, but no one was listening to him. Jawn attacked the one in front. She didn’t seem to be worried that it was at least twice her size. She went for its throat, but the beast twisted, and she grabbed the back of its neck in her teeth, while raking the beast’s sides with the claws of her hands and feet.

Xang also was not daunted by the Wolf behind her and attacked it, grabbing its leg and knocking it down. She fell on it, biting and scratching. Both Wolves were squealing and trying to get away. They reverted, and Jawn and Xang found themselves fighting what looked like two scrawny young Humans.

“Jawn! Xang! Stop it. Let them go!”

“Wut? Let them go? They started it!”

“I know, Jawn, but just let them go. You too, Xang!”

The Goblins reluctantly let go of the two apparent Humans who sat in front of the Dragon with their heads down.

“Dragon eat?” asked the bigger of the two.

“What?”

“Dragon eat?” The Werewolf looked resigned.

“No! I’m not going to eat you.”

“But we might,” grinned Jawn. She looked at Xang, who also grinned.

“Stop it, girls! Why on earth did you attack two Goblins? I know they are kids, but...” He realised that the Goblins weren’t actually that small. Jawn had grown up since he had met her. She wasn’t fully grown yet, but it wouldn’t be long.

“We hungry.” The Werewolf scratched its armpit.

“Desperate, eh?” Rax gave them the remains of the gryphon that Jawn had been carrying. He saw Jawn move a little, but she didn’t say anything. The two Werewolves ripped into the gryphon,

gulping down whole chunks of the bird. He'd thought that Jawn was a messy eater, but these two pathetic Wolf-Humans were worse.

"Get lost!" Rax told the Werewolves.

"Huh?"

"Run away!"

They suddenly got the message and headed for the bushes, but Jawn stood in front of them.

"Say 'thank you'!"

"Huh?"

"Jawn, let them go!"

She smirked and stepped aside. The Werewolves disappeared into the forest.

Xang was speechless. "But, but, but..."

"They were practically starving, Xang," said Jawn. "No meat on them."

"Yes, but..."

"Listen girls. They were Humanoids. Pretty poor Humanoids, to be fair, but if you start killing Humanoids, the other Humanoids will band together to chase you down and kill you."

"But we're Humanoids too!" pointed out Xang.

"That won't make any difference!"

Xang sniffed but subsided. "But we've got no meat! You gave it all to those, those, those mangy Mutts!"

Jawn gave the Dragon a look. "Um, Rax, why don't you go and hunt down more of those birds. I'll stay here with Xang. We'll see if we can catch some fish in the stream."

Rax considered. Jawn didn't want Xang to know where the gryphons came from, and Rax was happy with that. "Good idea, Jawn. I'll do that." He stepped behind some bushes.

When he came back with two gryphons, Xang was sulking to one side of the clearing, while Jawn was smiling on her side. Jawn had a fresh scrape on her cheek, while Xang was wiping blood from her nose.

"She wanted to follow you," explained Jawn. Xang just gave Jawn a filthy look.

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"I'm with them," said the Dragon. He scratched his chin with a long claw, while opening his mouth, showing his impressive teeth. The gesture seemed to impress Humanoids.

"Um, yeah, OK," said the Goblin guard hurriedly. "Right, right. Pass, em, Dragon."

Xang and Jawn went off to register for the Princess 'election' and the Dragon looked around. He towered over the assembled Goblins, but he spotted a few Humans in the crowd, as well as a Yeti, and one or two Ogres and a Dinosaur, probably a Stegosaurus.

"What are you doing here, sir?" A Goblin boy was watching Rax with interest.

"Hmm? Oh, hello, boy. Two of my friends are registering for the Princess election."

"Phht!" The Goblin boy indicated his opinion of the election. "I'm Rodi. Who are you, Dragon?"

"Rax."

"What do you think of this place, Rax?"

"Well... It's an old Human village, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Rodi, his voice brimming with pride. "We Goblins took it over, and now it's our biggest town."

"I see," said the Dragon. The Goblins may have taken over the village, but they hadn't bothered to set up any rubbish collections or done any maintenance. Piles of rubbish were everywhere, and many of the houses had broken windows. Still, Rax had never heard of Goblins taking over a village before, and the Goblin caves that Rax had seen were tidier than this. Maybe they would get better at being town dwellers.

"So, how does this election work, Rodi?"

"I dunno," sniffed Rodi. He scratched his shiny bald head and grinned at the Dragon. "The girls all go off somewhere and do all sorts of tests or something. It takes three or four days."

Rax set up a temporary camp in a small park near the centre of the village, where Jawn and Xang could easily find him when they were done. He asked Rodi to find out how the election was going and took advantage of the boy's absence to go 'somewhere else' and snag three gryphons.

"What are those?" Rodi asked, his eyes wide and gleaming.

"Gryphons. Any news?"

"Er, yeah. Two of the girls were eliminated. One of them had a broken arm I heard, and the other girl had a deep bite. Lots of blood!"

"It sounds more like a battle than a test. Did you get their names?"

Rax didn't have to worry, because his friends turned up just at that minute. Xang had a bandage on her arm, and Jawn had a bandage around her head, but both girls were grinning.

"Did you see that hit on that girl, Lidz? Wow!" said Jawn

"Yeah, and she didn't even have the ball thing, the Togger. I did!"

"Then that big girl bit you."

"Pfft! But you hit her hard!"

"Knocked myself out for a minute!" Jawn laughed.

"It's sounds more like a battle than a test," said Rax.

"Yeah, yeah. Sometimes it's like that."

"But you two are standing up for each other."

"Sure! We are brood mates! Of course!"

"Anyway, girls. Meet Rodi." said Rax.

The two girl Goblins froze.

"Rodi," said Rax. "The one with a bandage on her head is Jawn, and the one with the bandage on her arm is Xang."

"Yeah. Hi, Jawn. Hi, Xang. You're doing well, I heard."

Jawn unfroze. "Ah, yeah, Rodi. We're both through."

She was linking arms with him, and somehow Xang held his other arm.

"Er. Would you like some gryphon, Rodi?" Rax asked. He was having trouble not laughing.

"Yes, please, Rax," answered Rodi.

He sat down, and the girls sat down either side of him.

"Here's a leg, Rodi. Are you here for the Coronation?"

"Well, yes and no, Rax. I heard about it, so I decided to come and have a look. There are some competitions for the boys too. This meat is good, Rax. What did you call it?"

"Gryphon."

"I bet you will win all the competitions, Rodi," said Xarg, shooting an amorous glance at him.

"Of course he will," Jawn said, stroking his arm. "Say, Rodi, let's go for a walk around the town."

“Yeah, I need a walk,” said Xang, holding Rodi’s hand.

“Well, er, OK, girls.” Rodi. He scratched his head and threw an appealing glance at Rax.

“Sorry, boy,” thought Rax. “You’re on your own.”

He grinned at Rodi, and Rodi stood up. “Come on then, girls.”

The three young Goblins headed off, and Rax could see the two girls throwing venomous glances at each other behind Rodi’s back.

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“Climb on my shoulders, Rodi. You’ll be able to see better.”

“Oh, thanks, Rax.”

Rax looked at the roped off area where the candidates for Princess were seated on the ground. Three or four older Goblins, both male and female were talking to the candidates. Rax could only understand one word in three as the Goblins were talking rapidly in a dialect with which he was not familiar. Those girls who weren’t talking to the judge nudged and punched each other. Now and then large Goblins that Rax thought of as guards would break up a small fight.

“What are they doing, Rodi?”

“Questioning. In a moment they should... Oh, there they go!”

The crowd closely pressed up to the rope, but Rax and Rodi were at the back. They could see what was happening quite well, though, because of Rax’s height. The Dinosaur caught Rax’s eye and nodded to him. It also had a young boy Goblin holding on to its neck.

The crowd roared as the candidates leapt up and started fighting over a ball.

“Oh, there’s Jawn! She’s got the ball thing! Xarg’s there too. Oh, Xarg flattened that girl. They’re working together!”

Rax had little idea what was going on, but it was apparent that Xarg and Jawn, together with two other girls had formed an impromptu team, and about as many of the candidates had formed another. Xarg couldn’t prevent a hit on Jawn and Jawn dropped the ball. It was picked up by a girl who wasn’t on either team, but she was immediately tackled by Xarg. Now it was Jawn who was protecting Xarg.

“Say, I don’t know what is going on, but this is exciting, Rodi.”

“They’ve just got to hold onto the Scrogg, the ball thing, for long enough, and the game will be over, Rax. Oh! Xarg just got tackled!”

The Scrogg bounced free and several Goblin girls dived on it, and it was lost under their bodies. Someone blew a whistle and all the candidates stopped fighting. The Scrogg was retrieved and tossed into the air. A girl grabbed it, and apparently she was on Jawn and Xarg’s side because Rax’s friends started protecting her from the others. Xarg seemed to be directing the defence, but she got tackled by someone and was out of the fight for the moment and Jawn took over.

The battle raged on, and sometimes one group had the Scrogg, and sometimes the other. Eventually someone blew a whistle and the game stopped. Medics appeared and started patching up the girls. Claw marks and bites marks were washed and bandaged.

“Who won?” asked Rax.

“Won? It’s not that sort of game, Rax. I think that Jawn and Xarg did well. They must have collected quite a few points.”

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Jawn and Xarg were tiredly leaning up against Rodi.

“Last four tomorrow,” said Jawn. “Then you’ll have to bow down to me!”

“Not if I win.”

“Huh!”

The aggression was still there, but muted by the tiredness.

“You know, Jawn, we’re in the last four, and the other two, they’re brood mates too. Peri and Linzy.”

“Yeah. We’ve been working together, and I guess they have too.”

“Peri seems to be the one in charge. I say we take her out first.”

“Yeah, Xarg. But Linzy won’t be a pushover. When Peri was being bandaged, Linzy organised that hit on Big Lidz. She made a temporary alliance with Zoxx, and Big Lidz was taken out of the competition! I almost feel sorry for Big Lidz. She took two big hits in a row.”

“Yeah, I agree, Jawn. But I still reckon we take Peri out first.”

Jawn agreed. “Yeah, sounds good. What about defence?”

“What do you think, Rodi,” asked Rax.

“Huh!” Rodi realised that he had been put on the spot. He didn’t want to upset either girl. “I think that... Um. Er. I think that Jawn —“

Jawn ignored him. “Well, Xarg, I’ve been mostly following your lead.”

“Yeah. They will have noticed that. So you’ll protect me?”

“Yep. That sounds good.”

“Do you think that you will win, girls?” asked Rax,

“Dunno, Rax. They are pretty good. But if we do, it will be me against, Xarg.” Jawn giggled. “Then I’ll be Princess.”

“In your dreams.” Xarg scowled at Jawn, but she was tired, and the usual venom was muted. “Is there any gryphon left, Rax?”

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The four Goblin girls circled, watching their opponents warily. An older Goblin man reading some documents followed them onto the field. He looked up and realised that he might have an unscheduled scrap on his hands. He hissed.

“Sit down, girls. Sit! Sit on your marks! Now!!”

The girls sat down, glowering at each other.

“Do they do that Questioning thing, Rodi?”

The Goblin was sitting on Rax’s shoulders again. “Yes, but it will be shorter this time.”

The Yeti that Rax had seen earlier, patted Rax on the shoulder and roared at him. It was the typical Yeti roar, and Rax nodded and roared back at him. They roared backwards and forwards for a moment.

“What was that?” asked Rodi.

“Oh, he asked me if my friends were still in the competition. His friend had been eliminated in the previous round. He was wishing the girls luck.”

Rodi leant down towards the Yeti. “Thank you, sir!” he said, and the Yeti gave Rodi a thumbs up, and smiled. He roared at Rodi.

The Goblin judge was talking to the candidates in the Goblin dialect, and they were answering him the same way. In the end he addressed the candidates and walked away. An elderly female

Goblin tottered out of the crowd and waved a knotted stick at the girls. She addressed them, waving the stick at them.

“It’s the current Princess! She got her Sceptre!”

“Sceptre? What’s happening, Rodi? I don’t understand all the words!”

“Oh, the Princess is giving a summary of how they have done in the competition. Then she will give it to one of the girls.”

“Then she will be the new Princess?”

“No, she has to hang on to it for thirty seconds! Oh, she’s given it to Peri, Jawn and Xarg are going to have to...”

Jawn and Xarg knew what they had to do, and moved to attack Peri, but Lindzy blocked Jawn. Xarg was wrestling with Peri for the sceptre, but Jawn dumped Lindzy on her backside and joined Xarg in wrestling with Peri.

Peri lost her hold on the sceptre, but it popped out of the scuffle and Lindzy grabbed it. Jawn held onto Peri for a moment or two, keeping her out of the contest, and Xarg tackled Lindzy. Lindzy dropped the sceptre and fell to the ground. Xarg’s head had contacted Lindzy under the chin, and the girl was out for the count.

A whistle sounded, and the medics rushed onto field. They checked Lindzy out and shook their heads. The Goblin judge pointed off the field and the medics took Lindzy away. The judge gave the sceptre to Xarg and whistled again.

Peri wrestled the sceptre away from Xarg, dodged Jawn’s attack, and headed off up the field. She dodged and weaved, using up time, and it seemed that she was going to win. Xarg and Jawn looked at each other, nodded and attacked together. Peri was lifted off her feet and crashed to the ground losing the sceptre in the process. She didn’t get up.

The judge whistled again, the medics came on, and Peri was eliminated.

“Oh, it’s Jawn or Xarg now. I wonder how this will go!”

Rax nodded his agreement.

The judge took the sceptre and handed it to Jawn. He blew his whistle. Jawn held the sceptre and looked down at it. Xarg was charging down towards her, but Jawn didn’t run. She turned and tossed the sceptre to her brood-mate. Xarg slowed to a stop. She looked from the sceptre to Jawn, then back again.

“You have it, Xarg, I don’t want it!”

“What!”

“You have it.”

“You mean it”

Jawn nodded, and bowed ironically. They waited, facing each other as the time ran down, and the judge blew his whistle.

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“I’d have pummelled you, Jawn.”

“Dream on, Xarg.” They both giggled. The venom was gone.

Rax handed them a gryphon leg each. “Well done, girls! But why did you not fight for the sceptre, Jawn?”

“Eh, well. Xarg’s the one who’s good at ordering people around. She’s an organiser. Me? Not so much.” Jawn took a big bite out of her gryphon leg.

“What?” Xarg was enraged and surged to her feet.

“Cool down, Xarg. You wanted it more than me. You persuaded those other girls to help us in the early rounds. Then, when we were winning, you suggested our strategy, and we got through.”

Xarg subsided. “I suppose. Say, look at this place!” She gestured at the park where Rax had been camped out. Rax’s camp-site was tidy, but there were piles of rubbish in all the other corners. “I’m going to get someone to clear all that up!”

Jawn and Rax looked at each other and laughed. “She’ll do OK,” said Rax, and Jawn giggled. “Wut?”

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“Do you really not mind that Xarg became the Princess and not you?”

Jawn twirled a twig into a gap in her teeth. A new tooth was already budding in the gap. “Are you kidding? It might be fun for week or two, but nah! I’m glad. Xarg’s always been the bossy sort. She’ll love it.”

“Have you ever wanted to fly like me?”

The Goblin girl pondered. “Yeah, but, no wings, pal!”

“Climb on my shoulders, Jawn.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. You’re going to be too heavy soon. You’re growing fast! Let’s go.”

Rax was just able to take off with the Goblin clutching his neck.

“Yayyyyyyyyy!” Jawn yelled as they skimmed the trees and gained height. “I can see forever!”

“Girl, you are heavier than I thought,” puffed Rax.

“It must be all those gryphons. Rax!”

“Huh!” Rax twisted and turned, using all the skills of his species to gain height without too much effort.

“I can see for miles!” exulted Jawn. “Wait! Isn’t that Rodi? Rax, you’ve got better eyes than me. Is that Rodi? Can we land near him?”

She pointed, but slipped from Rax’s shoulders.

“Ahhhhhhhhhh” she screamed, but Rax’s claws grabbed her dungarees just in time. Rax spiralled down towards Rodi, and Jawn swung beneath him. She was giggling, and not at all fazed by the little incident. Rax was a little annoyed, so he let her go a metre or so from the ground, and she landed in front of Rodi with a thump.

“Oooooof! Uh, hullo, Rodi. How are you?”

“Are you OK, Jawn?” He helped her up, but didn’t let go of her hand or remove his arm from her shoulders.

“Erm, yes, thanks. Did you see? I was riding on Rax’s shoulders.”

“Rax let you ride on his shoulders, you mean, girl!” said Rax, Neither Jawn nor Rodi commented.

“Yeah, I’m OK, thanks,” Jawn answered Rodi. “Soooo. You didn’t stay in the town with Xarg?”

Rodi snorted. “Nah! There were several guys sucking up to her five minutes after she became Princess. That’s not for me.” He gazed into Jawn’s eyes, and she gazed back into his.

“Hrrumph! Would anyone like a gryphon?” Rax was getting a bit irritated.

“Oh, sorry, Rax. Yes, please.” Jawn was still looking into Rodi’s eyes.

“Please,” said Rodi. “I’d love a gryphon leg.”

Rax raised what in Humans would be his eyebrows, but just then Jawn pulled her attention away from Rodi.

“Thanks for the ride, Rax. It was awesome!”

“You’re welcome, kid. I’ve never heard of one of my species giving a Humanoid a ride. Probably because you guys can be a bit heavy. And you slide off easily, too.”

“Yeah! That was fun.”

“Fun!?”

“There are some gryphons just down the road,” said Rodi, and Rax and Jawn turned to look at him.

“Wut?”

“Yes. In that stretch of heathland over there. Why are you looking at me like that?”

“We need to have a look, Rax. Yes?”

“We sure do!”

Sure enough, a small flock of gryphons took off as they turned the corner.

“Back in a minute,” said Rax, launching himself into the air.

Rodi and Jawn watched the Dragon twisting and turning, chasing the gryphons round and round.

“What’s the big deal with the gryphons, Jawn? Both you and Rax jumped when I told you about them.”

“Er, It’s a secret, Rodi. Sorry. Rax... Ask Rax. It’s his secret.”

“That’s OK, Jawn.” He turned and pulled her towards him and hugged her. “I’ve seen the Humans do this,” he said, and kissed her.

Goblin mouths are wide and toothy, and not suited for kissing, but they managed.

“Nice! But it’s not for Goblins, I’d say.” She put her arm around his waist and nibbled his ear.

“Ouch!” laughed Rodi and Jawn giggled.

They stayed with arms around each other until Rax returned with three gryphons.

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