

His Human Rebel: Bonus Content

Rake

Seven years later...

“What took you so long?” I growl as my brother finally drags his black horns through the prickly underbrush of our secret outlook.

I created this position for us three years ago, the moment our recent generation of Flagstone offspring started attending the local school. We’ve been watching them on and off, taking shifts, ever since, making sure our sons and daughters are treated correctly and that they treat others with respect.

Stella, Mica and Taylor disapprove of our “overprotective” conduct because they do not understand the importance of honor amongst vicious, young fire starters. None of the females have personal flame throwers, nor do they need them. This is because they were not born and raised on Tarvos and did not go to school here on this planet. As adults, they are left alone by all Hyrrokin and considered defenseless.

My brothers and I know the enormity of the situation at the school amongst young fire starters and are ready to give all our human or half Hyrrokin offspring a fighting chance amongst students learning to master their flames.

Thorn positions himself on the ground with a huff of smoke and gives me a wide, toothy grin. “Had to talk Mica into letting me drive the kids to school this morning. And then I was late, coming up with an excuse to be gone from the ranch for the rest of the day. At least I’m here. Where is Sten?”

“Here. I’m here,” my youngest brother huffs as he too, claws his way into the hideout. His tail flicks with agitation. “It was hard for me to get away. Taylor is demanding during pregnancy. I must service her often to provide relief.”

I look over with a grim smile. “Stella is pregnant again too, I understand.”

We take our positions, watching the scene below. Our offspring go to the same small school we went to as younglings, on the edge of the Fire Creek community. The school seems bigger than ever, due to the addition of new families in the area. The transporter and med labs have caused more Hyrrokin to move to the area than ever before.

Today we are here to see to the well-being of my human son.

“Gavin is about to enter the class,” I tell them. “Stella dropped him off and he has been playing outside with his cousins and a few others.”

Sten uses his field glasses to assess the situation. “I see no fire or inappropriate behavior.”

I nod in agreement. Gavin is easy to identify amongst the other red-skinned Hyrrokin with medium-sized horns who wander about on the playground. His tuft of curly “blonde” follicles on his head, blue eyes the color of sky and no flame, tail or horns, stand out in the crowd. He is a soft-skinned youngling without natural defenses but is still brave and strong, working on the ranch and he loves learning to ride the fire beasts as well as I did at his age.

All our other Flagstone offspring are half Hyrrokin with small horns, normal barbed tails and the ability to flame. Their human attributes include a lack of red skin, the additions of colored eyes, blunt teeth and human nails. But they can flame.

Gavin is fully human and sadly unable to flash flame.

“We are here today to make sure my son can protect himself,” I declare. “This is the second day of the new school year and my son came home yesterday with a singed ear and no reciprocal story of how he felled his enemy.”

A growl rumbles in Thorn’s chest.

“Last year there was no problem,” Sten remarks.

“None,” I agree. “His class was younger smokers. This year school started and he’s no longer with the small offspring, but with the larger classes and older offspring.”

“For the first time everyone can flash flame, but him.”

“I didn’t expect trouble so soon. We know all the offspring who go to this school and none of them are challengers.”

“Heh.” Sten uses the field glasses again. “Taylor told me last night that she’d befriended a human mate who’d recently moved into the area and was happy to discover that this female’s half Hyrrokin offspring go to the same school as ours... Look near the fire pit,” he points. “That group is new. They are the offspring of the Hyrrokin Royal Fire Society.”

Gray smoke wafts from my nostrils. “My son is being bested by fire saver assholes.”

Sten snorts and then puts down his glasses. “Grunt Sandstone’s son is there.”

The three of us remain quiet for a moment, processing this bleak information.

I tap on the weapon I brought with me. The weapon I handcrafted for my son when he was only a baby, readying for the day he’d need his own flame. “It is time for Gavin to have the fire blaster with him in school.”

“Principal Hardstone explicitly said we cannot give him a blaster on campus,” Thorn reminds us. “It’s against school rules.”

“But it’s not a normal blaster,” I snarl. “It’s been modified and only shoots flames, like we all do with our jaws. What is the difference if he has a personal fire blaster or fire escaping from his mouth?”

A growl rumbles in Sten’s throat. “The principal doesn’t understand that it’s not a normal weapon and instead a way for Gavin to be able to flash flame, like any other Hyrrokin.”

“They need a demonstration.”

Thorn crosses his arms. “I agree. I would never suggest my young nephew bring a dangerous weapon to school, we only want him to have the same abilities all other students have. A demonstration of what we are trying to give him will indeed change minds.”

The bell rings and we watch as my oldest son strides into his classroom with the other students and the door shuts behind him.

Meanwhile we wait and monitor the hallways, as we did last year. We also take the time to reevaluate the new classroom that was added, learn who the other students are and their teachers, the layout of the new building and any other additions to the school campus. This special knowledge helps to make our sons and daughters formidable Flagstone flame throwers. We’ve gleaned much useful info during our time out here and use that info to go home and train our half Hyrrokin offspring on how to fight.

The lunch bell rings. We move to a better position to watch from a different vantage point and break out our lunch packs and eat and drink.

“This is like old times, the three of us together, hunting Fire Talons on the back ridge,” Sten laughs.

“Flagstones are good at stakeouts.”

“Mom hated when we’d come home covered in feathers and mud.”

“With char marks on our chest and faces.”

We laugh again and drink more Fire Ale.

“Oh hells, look, Gavin is being goaded by Grunt Sandstone.”

We watch as my young son is cut off from his two cousins. He is quickly surrounded for a moment by a group of males and females who we know are younglings from the Hyrrokin Fire Society, who recently placed a new outpost in this region.

“If he gets charred, I’m going down there and charring those other offspring myself, as a warning.”

Thorn takes a deep breath. “I want to do the same.”

“I want that too,” Sten remarks. “The three of us down there will put a stop to them all in the future. They will know he has our protection.”

“But on the other claw, they will know he’s weak and needs protection and reiterate that he can’t protect himself.”

A growl rumbles in my chest. “He will be labeled as weak his whole life.”

“This is unacceptable, Flagstones aren’t weak,” Thorn growls. “We are always the strongest Hyrrokin in the school. I was the strongest at University.”

“I was the same,” Sten agrees. “Flagstones are powerful with intense flame. Only those damn Fire Savers could best me and a few who later became elite soldiers.”

“Maybe some Flagstones should join their fire team,” Thorn laughs.

“No,” I say. “Never.”

“Never? You’d never volunteer or want any of our offspring to try out for the fire society?”

“Grunt,” I explain, with one simple word.

“Grunt,” they both agree.

Then we all laugh heartily.

We watch grimly as a teacher arrives on the scene. The group that was goading Gavin finally backs away and walks off to another location. A pack of students begin a flame contest. Gavin stands among the crowd, watching, with his Flagstone cousins all at his side.

Lunch ends and classes start again.

“I am going to give Gavin his flame blaster, so he has it before school ends. That’s when they will surround him again. My hope is that he will use it so well the staff will understand it’s value to a human becoming a flame thrower.”

“Good plan.”

Finally, it’s near the end of the day and the offspring in Gavin’s class go out again. Gavin places his backpack against the outside wall of the classroom, where all the other backpacks rest, while his class goes out with his teacher for fire training. I watch as all of them are given beginning lessons on flame acquisition.

The other students giggle when my son is unable to flame.

My face and neck heat up and boil. “Unacceptable.”

“Look, all the backpacks are along the wall.”

“Do you see Gavin’s backpack?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want me to plant the flame blaster?” Sten asks. “I’m the best at stealth missions.”

“I’ll do it.”

The other two are quiet, understanding it’s my responsibility as the father, to make sure my offspring can protect themselves properly and according to Flagstone traditions. Thorn and Sten, as Gavin’s uncles have the same responsibility, but mine is supreme. I created the small blaster for my son when he was an infant and showed it to my family and the community at large during Gavin’s adoption ceremony at the main ranch. All these years later, I’ve been keeping it locked up and only taking it out for training. Gavin hasn’t needed it while he was young because the other children his age are simply smokers. No adult or older children charr at younglings who are still smokers. It is against the law. But once a child is also a flamer, they enter the flame wars and they must be ready. He’s used it many times during practice on the ranch, but this is the first time he will have it permanently at his side, using it in real life.

Gavin must be able to protect himself.

“He’s been trained well,” Thorn reassures me.

“By the best,” Sten agrees because all three of us have trained Gavin with the flame blaster.

We’ve taken him on outings, just the three of us, into the wilderness, in the same way all younglings learn, in the way we learned from our father and uncles—how to know when an opponent is about to flame, the tell-tale signs in the jaw and body language. The flick of the tail or the difference in the smoke from the nostrils and what that means. The difference between attacks from females versus males, which isn’t that much different. And how to best your opponent in the Flagstone tradition, passed down for the last thousand years.

The bell rings and all the offspring leave and return to the classroom to pick up their backpacks and leave for the day.

Sten watches with the field glasses again. “He’s found the blaster...he’s grinning and looking around, but he can’t see us.”

“He knows we’re here.”

“He’s attaching it to his belt as we showed him. Now he’s walking out toward the side of the school, by the fire pit. He’s not even trying to run away from them but allowing them to corner him.”

I cross my arms. “He must have a plan.”

“Grunt Sandstone is behind him, along with two other younglings.”

My son stands near the fire pit.

“They are all older than him.”

“Where are the teachers and the principal?”

“None are nearby. Grunt has him cornered and alone.”

“This is exactly why he needs the blaster.”

I snarl and bend down, readying myself to hop back down and slide to the ground and come to my son’s rescue.

“No,” Sten thunders.

I pause, not used to hearing my brother speak so loudly.

“No,” he orders. “He must do this himself.”

“You know it’s true,” Thorn agrees. “I want to be down there too, but we must give Gavin a chance to take care of this himself. If he can’t that’s when we protect him.”

Black smoke wafts from my nostrils. “Give me the field glasses.”

The taller, older offspring stands in front of Gavin, with his feet spread wide and his hands on his hips. He sends a warning blast over my son’s head that must singe his human hair.

My heart warms at the sight of the other Flagstone offspring who come running to their cousin's defense. Sten's small daughter who is barely old enough to attend, and Thorn's three children, all four of them stand with him. The small ones can only smoke. Thorn's daughter stands close and lets loose a monstrous flame at the others.

Thorn chuckles. "That's my girl."

I nod in agreement. "But they can't be there always for him. And we can't either. Later, they'll catch him alone and char him worse than before."

My fingers tighten on the glasses. "Grunt junior is saying something and now the others are stepping away. He must have declared a one on one."

Gavin and Grunt stand alone, next to the fire pit and take positions. I take a deep, calming breath.

"A group of teachers is shouting and pointing at them, they're running over to intercept."

"They won't get there in time."

Grunt cracks opens his jaw wide to let loose a powerful blast.

Gavin pulls out his blaster and fires a shot of flame first, which perfectly hits the other student on his left ear.

Grunt steps back, crying out in surprise at such a counterattack. Then Gavin fires another blast that hits his other ear. The rush of flame is so forceful, it knocks Grunt to the ground, leaving him down and unmoving.

"I didn't teach him that move."

"None of us did."

"He's a natural."

The other student remains on the ground, staring up at Gavin in shock. His cousins, other students and the teachers stand back too, in awe.

Gavin holsters his weapon and steps forward. He reaches down a hand. Grunt takes his small human hand in return and stands. Words are exchanged between my son and his former aggressor, which none of us can hear. The two shake claws in the time-honored tradition of a well-played fire match. And then they walk away in opposite directions. And the crowd, including the teachers and the principal, quietly disperses.

“Now *that*, was a Flagstone domination dance.”

We chuckle together, shoot our own flames of joy and pack up and go home.

Six weeks later...

I turn around to see a shocking sight.

“Dad, I’ve brought along my best friend to training today. Is that okay?”

I look at the tall, contrite, young Hyrrokin at his side. “Grunt Sandstone’s son is your best friend? This is the Hyrrokin who tried to char you and said you were nothing but human. How can he possibly be your friend?”

“I apologize, sir. My parents said I shouldn’t have said that, considering I’m half human myself.”

“This is true.”

He brightens and gives me a wide, toothy smile. “Gavin said he learned his moves from his father and uncles. Can you teach me too?”

“I suppose I can do that.”

And then I put the two of them on the back of a riding beast and we head into the wildlands for a lesson.