

DRAGONS OF TIRENE: BOOK FOUR

QUEEN
OF
LEGENDS
AND
LIES

NINA FROST

QUEEN OF LEGENDS AND LIES

DRAGONS OF TIRENE SERIES

BOOK FOUR

NINA FROST



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BOOKS BY NINA FROST

Dragons of Tirene Series

[*Kingdom of Shadows and Wings*](#)

[*Court of Secrets and Flames*](#)

[*Crown of Betrayal and Blood*](#)

[*Queen of Legends and Lies*](#)

The Story Continues in Book Five

Empire of Reckoning and Ruin

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DESCRIPTION

The gears of destiny have been set in motion.

Lark Axton has failed.

Failed to save Flighthaven, the military school she attended before she knew she was a dragoncaller and the descendant of the true royal house of Tirene. Failed to kill King Xenon and stop his army of the drachen, who are taking over the world by stealing the free will of its people at the bidding of the mad god Narc. Worst of all, she failed to save Sterling: the Crown Prince Knox of Tirene, her perfect match, the cold to her fire, the man she loves...

And now, the enemy who wants to kill her.

With Sterling corrupted by the drachen, Lark—the only dragoncaller in world—will become queen. As the kingdom crumbles, the council is determined to keep Lark safe. However, a thread still connects Lark and Sterling, and she refuses to give up on him. The fate of the world rests on her shoulders, and she must somehow save Sterling, the dragons, and the kingdom before it's too late.

Danger lurks in the shadows, and with enemies closing in and time running out, there's only one option. She must defeat Narc once and for all, before

the vengeful god destroys her first.

Filled with nonstop action, heart-wrenching twists, and a love that defies the odds, Queen of Legends and Lies is the fourth book of best-selling author Nina Frost's enthralling Dragons of Tirene series.

CHAPTER ONE

Mygist's wings sweep through the air, carrying me to where the palace blooms out of the night like an exotic flower. Over the last few months, the sight of Tirene's crown jewel has come to fill me with a sense of awe. But tonight, despite the castle's majestic spires, pale stone walls, and cobblestone pathways that beckon me home, my chest tightens and my mind reels.

Tonight, I'm returning without the man I love more than anything in the world.

Every inch of my body aches from battling the Aclarian king...and from using every last ounce of my power to burn Flighthaven's eyril field in the hope that destroying the original source of the drachen's powers would eradicate the monsters once and for all.

But the hideous creatures still live. And now they're possessing the students, instructors, and soldiers of Flighthaven Academy. They grow stronger each day, killing and corrupting everything they touch.

They're also manipulating the love of my life, Sterling.

Worse, King Xenon controls both the drachen and the corrupted.

Finding my friends frozen and helpless as my betrothed held them captive under King Xenon's orders was gut-wrenching.

It still is.

A knot forms in my throat. Other than releasing the dragons from a life of captivity and abuse, the only thing I accomplished was watching helplessly as Xenon commanded Tirene's Prince Knox *Sterling* Barda, the man I fell in

love with at Flighthaven when he posed as “Instructor Sterling Thorne,” to murder my friend.

Inhaling a few shaky breaths, I push down the despair and hopelessness that threaten to consume me. After several painful attempts, I manage to lock down my warring emotions.

I focus on the beat of the black dragon’s wings. They sweep through the sky as we join the rest of the flight. Like a discordant drum line, the descent of the eclectic mix of two kingdoms’ dragons shakes the air around us.

We’re a ragged assortment of shadows, dragons and riders alike, carving through the darkness to land in the flickering torchlight of the courtyard.

Though dragons usually live together, they only fly in large groups like this for a reason.

Tonight, I am that reason.

All my allies—human and dragon—came out to help me. And I still failed. How am I ever going to defeat the drachen if burning the eyril field wasn’t enough? What will be enough? How am I going to get Sterling back?

The dragons land in the paddock tucked within the sprawling marble wings of the Tirene Palace.

Myriad emotions filter through my mind. Anxiety, uncertainty, exhaustion, relief. A sense of homecoming. Countless others as well—the emotions of dozens of dragons, all mingling with my own.

As a sure sign of their significant place in Tirenese culture, the paddock is located in the center courtyard and separated from the walking gardens by a moss-covered wall. Of course, the dragons tower off the ground at a height tall enough to peer into third-story windows and the arrow slits built into the palace walls.

“Easy, boy.” I send soothing thoughts to Mygist as his talons scrape the cobblestone paths next to the paddock. His obsidian scales ripple as his unease slithers into my mind.

When I first attended Aclaris’s Flighthaven, I shared an unexpected encounter with this black dragon. Unknown to me at the time, we formed a

mental connection, and I freed his mind from the drugs that kept all the academy's dragons compliant. He escaped later that night.

I'm lucky he deigns to trust me.

Kaida, Chirean, and Tanwen follow suit, landing in the fire paddock. Their riders, Leesa Axton, Bastian Drago, and Agnar Kerrin, cling to their smooth, scaled backs. My adoptive sister, half-brother, and the Tirenese soldier who's like a brother to Sterling and me are the only reason I'm still able to think and not give in to the grief after tonight's events.

Dozens of dragons swivel their serpentine necks. They pin me with golden stares that gleam from within their triangular heads. The pale frills above their jaws—tender membranes that protect their earholes from the wind—undulate with the anticipation of the dragontenders bringing fresh meat after the long journey.

But even the thought of food isn't enough to distract them from my empathic outpourings. Mygist stills beneath me.

These creatures are the reason I'm still alive. If not for Mygist and the others, I'd have burned to death in the eyril field or died at Xenon's hands. Agnar, Bastian, and Leesa would still be captive or dead too. Just like Nick Pendrick.

A fresh wave of sorrow rolls over me. Nick escaped the drachen's corruption at Flighthaven, only to die at Sterling's hand. The image of his severed head and those vacant, glassed-over eyes will haunt me for the rest of my days.

Once again pushing down my grief, I try to focus on the positives in this screwed-up situation. No one else died tonight. Not even Helene Mortimer or Elijah Durand, the two uncorrupted fledglings who'd hidden out at Flighthaven until we found them and dropped them off at their families' estates. And though Sterling remains corrupted, I will get him back.

I refuse to consider the alternative.

We're a mess of dirt- and soot-streaked faces, our cuts and bruises and tattered clothes telling the tale of a lost battle. On Agnar, the image blends in with the stained battle gear stretched out over his broad shoulders.

Bastian, the male version of me with the same hazel eyes and rich brown hair, helps my sister down as she scales Kaida's foreleg. She takes after my adoptive mother with her wavy golden blond hair and brown eyes. Even the bump on the bridge of her nose mimics our mother's.

Chirean chuffs, brushing my mind with gentle reassurance. Tanwen and Ryu stretch, nodding to let me know I did the right thing. Mygist, the dragon that swooped down and stopped Xenon from killing me as the prophecy decreed, doesn't seem affected one way or the other.

My heart clenches like a tight fist. These dragons rescued me, but we all failed to free Sterling.

What should've been a triumphant return is a pyrrhic defeat.

I dismount Mygist, my right knee protesting as my boots hit the ground. For a moment, I lean against his side, projecting my gratitude for the rescue.

A hushed gasp draws my attention.

A cluster of well-dressed folks, likely coming from some late-night revelry, gives us wide berth. Based on the expensive silks the men and women wear, they've got to be nobility. Their saucer-sized eyes reflect the flames that dance in the sconces lining the walls, and I have to wonder if this is their first time seeing a dragon up close.

Or maybe it's the sorry states of the dragonriders that have them wrinkling their noses.

One woman clutches her pearls, and one of the men adjusts his tunic as if he could neaten away the sight of us. They all ruffle their wing feathers as they pass.

"Should we call the guards?"

The whisper reaches me, sharp enough to cut through my fatigue, and I stifle a laugh. They're probably older than my nineteen years, but we're worlds apart in experiences.

Mygist snaps his jaws, releasing a plume of smoke that sends them skuttling.

Yeah, call the guards on the dragoncaller and her dragonrider entourage. That'll make for quite the story over breakfast.

A sigh escapes me, my hot breath misting in the cool air. I should be angry. Anyone in the palace should be able to recognize me by now. The first and only dragoncaller in generations. Not to mention the betrothed of Tirene's crown prince.

But I can't muster any indignance. All I know is bone-deep fatigue and the weight of failure.

I watch the silhouettes of the nobles as they retreat into the darkness, their judgments still lingering in the courtyard.

Leesa catches my eye. A shared smirk passes between us at the absurdity of our situation. "They're about to summon the guards on their own dragoncaller." No matter how hopeless things seem, Leesa always finds a way to lighten the mood.

I peer down at my sooty clothing. "We must be a sight. Dirty and bedraggled like we've clawed our way out of a dragon's den."

Which isn't far from the truth.

From somewhere behind me, Agnar's gruff voice rumbles. "Calling the guards on the queen to be."

Oh. Right. There's that. Another result of my failure.

Fail hard enough, and you'll get a kingdom.

Bastian steps closer, his hands finding and squeezing my shoulders in a reassuring gesture. "How are you doing?"

I force a smile and try not to think about Sterling and the hundreds of corrupted people at Flighthaven. "Fantastic."

The downward curl of Bastian's mouth signals his skepticism.

My long-lost half-brother only came into my life a few months ago, but those months have tested the mettle of everyone involved. After spending hours researching together in the Royal Archives, traveling together to the Lost City and the Hidden Valley, and surviving both drachen attacks and court politics, he understands me well enough to know when I'm lying through my teeth.

"Thank you." I stroke Mygist's cheek. The sleek warmth of the scales beneath my fingertips grounds me. "You're always welcome here."

He cocks his head before launching into the sky. Though tired and hungry, Mygist is leery of remaining here long enough to recover. After seeing snippets of his memories, I can't say I blame him.

Turning back to Bastian and Leesa, I nod toward the paddock where Dame has landed. "Would you mind making sure the dragontenders bring plenty of meat? I'm certain the Aclarian dragons are too weak to hunt."

"Of course, Lark." Even in disarray, Leesa's hair is a golden wave. She appears remarkably healthy for someone who was just healed of her corruption only a handful of days ago. "We can take care of this. You need to report in. Then get some sleep."

Bastian nods his agreement before pointing toward the palace. "You see that lit window? That's the council chamber." He then points to the second tallest tower, where firelight dances behind narrow windows. "They're waiting for news about the prince."

My heart thumps a bit harder with the realization that someone's burning the midnight oil. I swallow the knot in my throat and nod, tucking away the fear that threatens to unravel me. If the council's awake in the early hours of the morning, they're eager for answers I'm not sure I have. But I've got to try.

For Sterling.

For Tirene.

For whatever threads of hope we've left dangling in the wind.

"I'd better not keep them waiting then." I set my jaw and step toward the fate that awaits in the Council Tower.

Ready or not, your future queen has arrived.

I stop and spin back around to face the dragons. Their scales glimmer faintly in the moonlight. I focus on the connection I have with these incredible creatures, and as best I know how, pour out my gratitude. For coming to the rescue at Flighthaven. For having faith in me. For everything.

Emotions bombard me in response. A knot lodges in my throat. I'm thankful for this dragoncaller bond we share.

Chirean stretches his neck, showing off his white underside against the darker orange along his back. With a grace that belies their size, the dragons, both Aclarian and Tirenese, lumber toward the rows of doorless enclosures along the back of the paddock, where the scent of crushed stone and sand speaks of home.

Vainly, I try to brush the ash and dirt from my clothes.

Turning to Agnar, I catch his grumpy scowl, his eyes still fixed on the spot where the nobles gathered. “Hey. You look like death warmed over. Why don’t you get some sleep? We’ll regroup after we all get some rest.”

His scowl pivots to me, but it softens into a smile that brings out those faint freckles on his battle-scarred face. If anything, the scars render him more attractive. “Says the person covered in soot. And you’re favoring that leg.” He gestures toward my right leg. “Wouldn’t hurt for you to see a healer.”

I shrug. “Maybe later. Right now, I need to check in with the queen and the council. And I wasn’t almost frozen to death like the rest of you. I’m fine.”

He shudders, agony flitting across his features. “Sterling wasn’t himself. He would never—”

“I know.” I reach for his hand and give it a squeeze, taking comfort in the human connection. “Xenon forced him. Or the drachen did. Hells, I don’t know. But we’re going to get him back, and I’ll heal his corruption. Then, we’ll figure out what to do about Xenon and the drachen.”

“We will.” He pulls me into a brief hug before stepping back and resting his hands on my shoulders, resolve in his piercing blue eyes. “We absolutely will. Good luck with the council. You know how to find me if you need anything.”

“Good night, Agnar.”

While murmuring something unintelligible, he disappears into the shadows cast by the palace spires.

Deep breaths, Lark. Time to face the music.

Alone, I stride across the courtyard, battered boots clicking against the stone. The Council Tower looms ahead, its firelit windows both a beacon and a warning. The towers of the palace go as high as seven stories, the sloped roofs stretching for the skies.

Thankfully, this one is only five stories. I square my shoulders. Once inside, I find the guarded steps and start the climb to the top floor.

If I'm going to save Sterling and cure him of his corruption, I'll need help. And I hope to find it here.

CHAPTER TWO

As I approach the Royal Council Chamber, a palace guard pushes open the heavy door. Bright light shines from inside.

This is my first time here, and the space is nothing like I imagined. I'd expected something like the king's chambers or even the public sitting room in the crown prince's apartments.

This has less grandeur, more urgency. Unembellished walls. Efficient rather than decorative chandeliers with their explosions of candles and crystals. With the large windows closed, the air is stale with the smell of old parchment and a hint of smoke from the twin hearths. The ceiling reaches the pointed roof, forming a cone above us.

A scattered ring of low-backed chairs surrounds a round table in the center of the area, along with a nearby array of benches.

A couple of the royal councilors take up two of the chairs. Lord Serle Hamilton, a mid-level earl, and the not-at-all-pious Vicar Moise Lent. They halt their hushed argument when I enter.

I don't even have a moment of privacy to collapse or catch my breath...or bawl my eyes out or scream curses into a pillow. No, I step straight out of the fire and launch into the frying pan.

With his dark hair and pale blue eyes that dart around above his simpering smile, Serle has the appearance and mannerisms of a bullied squire. His tucked arms and stiff back convey unease. The vicar, on the other

hand, has a classic manly sort of beauty going for him, with high cheekbones and dimples. They both, however, seem startled to see me.

Did they miss the unprecedented gathering of dragons that just landed?

Maps sprawl across the table between them, smothering the surface in miniature mountain ranges and rivers of ink. Platters of drinks and nibbles sit nearby, indicating they've been up for a while. Moise's calculating green eyes flick past my shoulder as if hoping I'm not alone.

Oh. I get it. They're shocked that it's me and not Sterling.

My gut twists.

Explaining my failure won't be easy. Hopefully, though, doing so will convince them to rally the military for another rescue attempt. Sobbing while laying out the shitty situation isn't an option, so I'll need to remember to breathe slow and swallow my emotions.

Like a mouthful of broken glass and whiskey.

"Your Highness!" Serle rushes forward with enough eagerness to churn my stomach. "You look dreadful. We must call for Healer Luci immediately. Will Crown Prince Knox be joining us?"

I shake my head.

"Well then." Vicar Moise isn't far behind, though his concern seems as forced as his smile. He's a follower of the gods and always acts as if the foibles of man are beneath him. I have no idea why someone like him would even want to be on the council. "We should summon the Lady of the Bedchamber to tend to you and see to your comfort, Your Highness."

I flinch at the address. These men have taken one look at the situation and have already shifted to embrace the change that my solo return has set in place.

Sterling—better known in Tirene as Crown Prince Knox Barda—is the last of the late king's children. The law decrees that, without a direct royal heir who's of sound mind, the throne defers to a dragoncaller, if one exists.

Sterling's corruption disqualifies him from contention, and I happen to be the only dragoncaller.

“Stop.” I hold up a mud-caked hand, dried blood wedged beneath every nail. Curling both hands into tight fists, I tuck them behind my back to halt the trembling. “Healers and ladies can wait. We have a lot to discuss.”

They share a glance. And I don’t miss the flicker of doubt or the uncertain shuffle of feet. They might not say so out loud, but they’re questioning my abilities, wondering if I’m truly capable of leading Tirene through the trials ahead.

I can’t even blame them.

Straightening my spine, I shake off the exhaustion clinging to my limbs like cobwebs. I won’t let them see me stagger. Not now. Not when so many lives depend on me.

If they’re savvy enough to already be calling me by my new station, maybe they won’t pick a fight.

“Please, sit down, Your Highness.” Serle gestures to one of the cushioned chairs like a sycophant eager to please. “I’ll summon the rest of the council.” After writing a few quick notes, he hands them to the nearby servants.

I drink in the pristine room, the high ceiling, the intimidating expanse of that circular table, already burdened by the weight of the crown that’ll soon rest upon my head. It’s heavy, laden with the expectations of a kingdom on the brink of war.

The messengers practically trip over their own feet to scurry out the door, but Serle’s voice cuts through the hustle like a sword through silk. “Your Highness, shall we wake Queen Alannah?”

I pause, thinking of the frail dowager queen. We could wake her, yes. But what would I say? That I’ve returned without her son? “Let her rest.”

Silent relief spreads across the middle-aged earl’s features. “Very wise.” He guides me toward a chair that seems too soft and welcoming for someone covered in grime and failure.

My legs beg for mercy, and I collapse into the seat with an embarrassing lack of grace.

He fusses at a side table, pouring drinks and offering food. It’s a strange sort of dance, him with his solicitous hovering, me trying not to react like a