

Wildfire
An Elementals Series Tie-in Novella
By F. R. Southerland

Please enjoy the following excerpt from this paranormal
romance/ urban fantasy novella:

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The heat was still there, along with the brightness that accompanied it. Avery opened his eyes and immediately shut them tight against the invading light. A groan slipped from him as he turned his head to the side.

Groggy, he tried to make sense of what happened. Everything was a vague blur of heat, fire, and screams. He tried to lift a hand to his throbbing head, but found he couldn't move it.

He blinked his eyes open. The world swam into focus above him. The sun bore down on him. The canopy of trees was gone and there was nothing but the clear, blue sky above.

Avery lifted his head to look down. His arms were bound with thick, heavy ropes, and so were his feet. His clothes were gone, replaced with a tunic and breeches made of a rough, itchy fabric. What had happened to his clothes? Why was he bound again?

Memories still foggy, Avery flexed his hands into fists and pulled at the ropes. They were tight. He winced in pain as they cut deeply into his wrists. He wiggled his ankles, only to meet the same result.

A prisoner again? This couldn't be happening.

His head fell back against the hard ground and pain shot through his skull. He winced. "Fuck." He closed his eyes again.

The haze of pain sent him in and out of consciousness. When he woke again, the sun was directly overhead. It nearly blinded him and he kept his eyes closed.

He tried to move as best he could. He was secured fairly well, but he was able to roll onto his side. The sand was coarse against the side of his face. When he exhaled, particles blew away from him.

Where in the hell was he?

Opening his eyes, Avery squinted. There was nothing but flat, dry land as far as he could see.

The Wastelands.

He rolled again with renewed vigor, forcing himself into a sitting position. This couldn't be possible. There was nothing but desert stretching before him, harsh and empty. He narrowed his eyes. Far in the distance, he saw an outcropping of rock jutting out from the unforgiving terrain.

When he turned his head, Avery saw the trees behind him. He was far from it, but it was still visible. Along the ground were footprints, partially obscured by the shifting sand.

Had they captured him and dumped him here? Was this some punishment? The last thing Avery remembered was the power flowing through him and then pain in the back of his head.

Pieces of his memories connected together, but there were still large blanks. Why was he here? Who had brought him here? Why?

They were all excellent questions. He needed to get out of here. Avery flexed his wrists. The ropes were tight but he could burn through them easily. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and focused his power.

The ropes began to smoke and loosen. He finally pulled and the ropes snapped apart. He spent a good minute rubbing the feeling back into his wrists before he worked to untie the bonds on his ankles.

As he pulled the rope free, he heard it. The sweeping of wings. The shadow crossed above him and the sand shifted with the air expelled from the powerful wings. Avery froze, fear gripping him.

The dragon swooped overhead and circled. Its massive tail flicked back and forth, its large head pivoting. The golden eyes caught sight of the prey on the ground and it increased its speed as it turned.

Avery stood and gauged the distance toward the trees. He would never make it there. The outcropping of rock was too far away. He couldn't make it there either.

The dragon rose higher into the air, stretching out its wings. It was an impressive display, but Avery couldn't admire it. If he didn't get away, the creature would tear him apart.

He'd seen it happen before and it wasn't pretty.

When they'd first traveled through the portal, another man had traveled with them. Levi. Avery scowled at the memory of the judgmental jerk. He'd worked for his family as tech and support, though he'd blackmailed his way into the position. It hadn't surprised him much when the man betrayed them to Mal.

The portal had sucked him through too and they'd all arrived in the Wastelands. Levi hadn't been lucky when the dragon swooped down. Avery still remembered the sound of its teeth crunching through bone, of Levi screaming.

Avery wasn't about to let that be his fate. His head lifted, eyes trained on the sky. The dragon was high above him, a small dot silhouetted against the sun. He squinted and once more surveyed his options. He didn't have a choice.

He took a few steps back before he turned and broke out in a run. All his years of training and playing the vigilante gave him above average speed. Would it be enough to outrun the dragon?

He really hoped so.

His feet kicked up sand as he raced for the trees. The dragon's screech sounded far too close but Avery didn't look back. He couldn't stop now.

He heard the dragon near, its great leathery wings beating fast. The wind rushed past him, creating a cloud of dust that swirled before him. Avery brought up an arm to shield his face and continued to run.

The trees were too far away, the dragon too close.

There came another terrible shriek. The heat of the flames engulfed him before the fire did. Avery immediately dropped to the ground and rolled. The heat was intense, fueling his power immediately. It coursed through him as he absorbed it.

The dragon's jaws snapped but only just missed snagging him. He continued to roll until he was on his back. The dragon lifted back into the air and circled him again.

Avery drew the flames into himself until they extinguished. He tried to catch his breath as the dragon remained in the sky. He wasted no time in climbing to his feet again. The dragon wouldn't waste time either.

Renewed with the energy from the fire, Avery took off again.

The dragon moved quickly. This time, he looked back to see it as it dove from the sky. He cursed beneath his breath and pushed himself to run faster.

The sand swirled again and Avery braced himself for the dragon's next attack. It dropped down and with a heavy thud, landed before him. Its wings outstretched, the span of them both impressive and terrifying. The black and gold creature opened its wide mouth, rows and rows of dangerous teeth bared. Smoke rolled from deep within its jaws.

Avery skidded to a halt and backed away. His heart thudded in his chest. He feared making any sudden movements. He had to think. Fast.

A low rumbling growl resonated around him. Avery swallowed the lump in his throat and remained perfectly still. His eyes darted. If he could dive beneath the dragon's belly, maybe he could evade it long enough to reach the trees. There was the tail and the feet to take into consideration. He hated to take a wrong step and end up becoming a pancake on the ground.

The dragon lowered its head and Avery stiffened, resisting the urge to run. He gulped.

The midday sun glistened off the dragon's black and golden scales. Muscles rippled beneath the thick armor. It shuffled its feet, digging its claws into the earth. Its feet and claws were massive. It could easily swipe at Avery and rip him in half.

Its teeth were even more dangerous. The fangs were incredibly long, rows of them revealed when its mouth parted. Heat blasted out from its mouth. The dragon belched out a plume of smoke.

Avery saw opportunity and moved. He didn't think, only reacted. The smoke was his only cover and he dropped to the ground, rolling. He found himself beneath the dragon's underside. It shifted and the ground shook with its heavy steps.

He stayed low to the ground, crawling and avoiding the dragon's claws. He rolled to his feet, and ran again.

The dragon's roar was deafening. Avery brought his hands up to cover his ears. He wasn't going to make it. This was a bad move. A very bad move.

He couldn't berate himself just yet. If he lived long enough, he'd have to do that. For now, Avery ran and didn't look back.

The air shifted around him and the dragon's shadow loomed overhead. The ground shook as, once again, the creature landed before him. This time, it opened its jaws wide and let out a piercing screech.

Avery came to a halt, lost his footing, and fell to the ground. He pressed his hands against his ears, but it did little to muffle the sound. It left a ringing in his ears.

The dragon snorted, lowering its great head. Its eyes were large and serpentine, staring at Avery with a steely gaze. This time, he didn't dare move. He didn't dare to breathe.

This was it. He was a dead man. He thought of Loren, with her big, grey eyes and soft brown hair. He thought of how she chewed her lip when she was nervous. He thought of how she laughed and blushed when she was nervous. How she smiled at him. . .

He thought of Callum, his older brother. His blue eyes often regarded Avery with disappointment and annoyance. There hadn't always been bad blood between them. After all, they were still brothers and they'd stood together through thick and thin.

He thought of Eva, the sister they'd left behind. He knew she was strong and could face any peril and adversity thrown to her.

It hurt him that he couldn't say goodbye.

Avery braced himself for the dragon's attack. Its breath was hot against his face. It sniffed, then snorted and he winced, forcing himself not to recoil.

It didn't lunge at him. Instead, it sniffed again and drew its head back. It made a noise in its throat—part growl, part purr—as it pulled away. Its feet shuffled in the sand and its tail flicked once before it settled.

Avery stared up at the creature. There was intelligence in its eyes. This wasn't some mindless beast. This creature understood.

He gulped. "You—you're not going to eat me, are you?" he asked, his voice trembling with uncertainty.

The dragon kept its head level with Avery. Its stare scrutinized him. He felt uncomfortable beneath its gaze. It was almost as if it expected him to do something, or it was trying to figure him out. Whatever the case, it made Avery even more terrified.

Its wings lifted. It took two steps back, putting distance between them. Slowly, it lifted its head.

Wings outstretched, it pushed off from the ground and lifted into the air. It flapped twice, and the undercurrent of wind gave it enough lift to bring it high into the sky. It let out another small screech before it took off, tail swinging.

Avery released his breath. "Damn," he whispered, keeping watch. The dragon soon became a small dot on the horizon and he didn't move until he was sure the dragon was far enough away.

He scrambled back to his feet and raced for the tree line. The dragon had let him go. But why?

Avery didn't dwell on the question. The forest was in sight and he ran as fast as he could, not daring to look back for fear the dragon may have changed its mind.