

THE ELEMENTAL'S GUARDIAN

by S. W. RAINE

Everything changed the day he ran into her with his jet thousands of feet in the sky.

Freelance pilot Ferenc Janos's life is turned upside down when Olivia Gillies, a woman who can control air and travel through lightning, tells him he's the guardian of the air elemental. Around the same time as her sudden arrival, masked figures have been appearing around the city with the ability to summon and control strange creatures. Their target? The homeless girl who happened to steal his wallet.

Ferenc doesn't understand his new role or why he feels a strange need to protect her, but if he can't set aside his skepticism long enough to learn from Olivia, then a much more powerful threat could be unleashed onto the universe.



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| Author | S.W. Raine | Paperback | 978-1-7348-7957-5 |
| Genre | Contemporary Fantasy | eBook | 978-1-7348-7956-8 |
| Pub date | February 2023 | | |

ABOUT



Raine is Canadian, born and raised, and constantly moved between Ontario and Quebec with her military family. She moved to Michigan, USA, in 2004, where she currently still resides with her husband and son.

She has always had a vivid imagination and loved reading and writing from a very young age. She took courses in Children's Literature through ICL in Illinois, and published her debut steampunk adventure in 2020. She has participated in NaNoWriMo for over a decade and was a Municipal Liaison for the Detroit region for six years.



LOOK INSIDE

Chapter 1 Ferenc

Ferenc felt most at home in the sky.

He couldn't remember exactly when his taste for flight started, but that love—that longing—for gliding through the air had always been there, deep inside of him.

The money wasn't his favorite part about being a freelance test pilot. While it definitely helped, the sensation of sheer bliss mattered most. Flying was like pulling a fast one over Mother Nature herself and getting away with it—to a certain point. Gravity was a cruel mistress.

Ferenc focused on the blanket of black clouds ahead. He'd successfully completed test plans through storms in the past, but this one didn't sit right with him. He had an excellent and natural feel for any aircraft he flew and could sense exactly how they behaved. While jets were easy to handle in most conditions, flying too fast in heavy turbulence sometimes caused structural damage—something Ferenc sensed this aircraft already had.

Lightning flashed inside the dark, dense clouds. Ferenc checked his radars and flipped a few switches before descending into the summer storm to finish the test plan.

A familiar British voice sounded through the headphones of his flight helmet: "Stick to the perimeter, Jazz-Nine-Two. Bring her home."

"Roger." His voice had been called "folksy" on occasion; he'd sometimes been told it held an infectious calm.

But a frown soon made its way to his face. There it was again, that barely detectable oscillation through the frame despite the buffeting turbulence. The jet was built to withstand battle damage, but that wobble made the skin beneath his flight suit prickle. He'd need to record it in his report.

As he slowed to maneuvering speed, a bright light illuminated his surroundings. He flinched back as something slammed into the front of the jet, rolled up the nose from the momentum, and came to a stop at the canopy. Ferenc froze as he stared into an equally surprised pair of emerald eyes.

All the training in the world could never have prepared him for a moment like this. It wasn't an everyday occurrence for people to fall from the sky, especially when the radars showed there was nothing around him for miles. Usually very level-headed, his brain simply couldn't compute the sight of this woman, soaked platinum-blonde hair whipping wildly about her, watching him with bulging eyes.

How she miraculously hadn't splattered like a bug against a windshield was beyond him. His head tilted, his mouth opening—to say what, he had no idea—but a shift in the aircraft pulled his

attention back to the larger issue at hand: while distracted by the sudden appearance of the woman, he'd forgotten what he was about to do and had lost control in the turbulence.

He'd have to worry about the woman later—if he didn't regain control soon, they'd both be in trouble. He reasoned that if she hadn't died on impact, she would manage a bit longer. Muscles tense, he slowed his speed as the jet jerked about, his skin going cold as the blood instantly drained from his face and body when the woman slipped from the aircraft.

As she fell, a large bolt of lightning struck down, briefly illuminating her form . . . and then she disappeared.

"Shit!"

"Jazz-Nine-Two? Report."

His heart racing, Ferenc tried to chase what he had witnessed from his mind in favor of his current situation. A loud clatter helped hone his focus.

"Jazz?"

"Lost control in air pocket." His undisturbed voice did not once betray the jackhammering of his heart or his concern with the loud rattling. "Maneuvering speed failing."

"Copy, Jazz-Nine-Two. Climb and maintain one five thousand."

Before he could reply, the aircraft gave a judder, and one of the tail stabilizers tore off, causing the jet to spin out of control through the air. Clenching his jaw, Ferenc pressed a few buttons and flipped some levers, but every time he attempted to slow down to regain control, the aircraft rolled. The only way to straighten it was by increasing his airspeed, which was what had gotten him into this predicament to begin with.

"Unable."

Another flash of lightning evoked fresh images of the woman, and Ferenc desperately tried to blink them away, but quickly found himself drowning. For the first time in forever, he couldn't think straight; he couldn't focus in the most critical of moments.

"All right, Jazz-Nine-Two, amend altitude and report."

"Unable, I'm in a spin." Despite being thankful for the British woman pulling him back to reality, it didn't matter what new direction she gave him; all chances of recovering and safely landing were no longer viable. He needed to eject. "Just lost a stabilizer. Bail out! Bail out! Bail out!"

Those last words tasted bitter. He was the best at what he did. He took on the dangerous jobs nobody else wanted for that exact reason. And never once had he needed to eject . . . until now.

"From the first page, it really hooks you and does not let you go — those are my favorite types of stories, and Raine always manages to come out swinging but also manages to keep me coming back." - Z King

"A contemporary fantasy with contrasting heroes, intriguing character interactions, a versatile magic system, and a slow burn mystery that kept me reading." - Janine

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