

MARE GLAC



SUB~CREATION



SUB~CREATION

Wheaton College | SPRING 2014

In association with



WhInklings



Editorial Team

Joseph Abdelmelek

Joseph Abdelmelek joined the *Sub-Creation* team out of a passion for critiquing others' work. He hopes to one day write and publish his own works so that others can have a turn to be critical.

Emily Labutta

Emily Labutta, as both a writer and a reader, is currently working on a way to do both activities at once... a talent that has thus far eluded her.

Joseph Lutz

Joe Lutz has been writing novels since he was eleven and aspiring for publication for most his life. His love of fantasy comes from growing up in a Turkish school (in Istanbul) without knowing the language. He spent his days sitting in the back of the classroom reading Tolkien, Jacques, Lewis, Goodkind, etc... A habit kept with him throughout high school and into college. If Dr. Fletcher is reading this, Joe apologizes!

Beth Potterveld

Beth got her M.A. in Biblical Exegesis from Wheaton in May 2011, and married a particle physicist the next day. The Wheaton College Tolkien Society was founded her last semester here, and she has actively participated in it ever since. When the club president suggested a writing club (the WhInklings) and a literary journal (*Sub-Creation*), she jumped at the chance to help make these a reality.

Contents



Editor's Note	5
Prose	6
Children's Crusade	8
by Tsukino Shinya	
Dragons Do Not Belong in the City	34
by Bianca Wooden	
A Dragon's Guide for First-time Owners	72
by David Querfeld	
Pixie	83
by Emily Labutta	
Art	
Arien	8
Helen and Garen	13
Kai-ju	15
The Planetary Defense Corps	19
Tetra	25
The Knights: Arien and Lyouell	27
Submission Guidelines	86

Editor's Note

The story goes that for the longest time, literary scholars didn't take Beowulf seriously, largely because of the monsters. With Grendel, then his mother, and finally a fire-breathing dragon, fantastic creatures were an unavoidable part of the poem. (Why this was cause to discount Beowulf as "real" literature when Homer, Aechylus, and Vergil get away with the Cyclopes, Scylla, Charybdis, harpies, nymphs, and the gods themselves, the story doesn't say.) But then came the Oxford professor J.R.R. Tolkien, who argued so persuasively for the place of the monsters in Beowulf that he alone has sometimes been credited as the reason it is given serious study today.

With dragons, a pixie, and monstrous aliens, "fantastic creatures" has become the theme of this semester's issue. I hope these few stories will help show the vast possibilities that these creatures open for the written word. For me, I see the courage to face what is truly unknown, a refreshing change in perspective, and the ability to treat the unusual as a natural part of society, even as a cherished part.

This second issue of *Sub-Creation* also offers a first: artwork. The inclusion of artwork has been part of the vision for this publication from the beginning, and we're so pleased to include the author's own illustrations with our first piece, "Children's Crusade." This piece is the first part of a larger work envisioned as a manga novel. It is still being written, and I'm eager to see how the story unfolds and hope to share it in the future pages of this journal.

Enjoy!

Beth Potterveld

PROSE

Tsukino Shinya ('??)

Tsukino Shinya is a mysterious biology major on campus. His name is not in the Wheaton students list! He has a burning passion for dystopian fiction and cosmic horror stories. His hometown is 6,500 miles away from Wheaton. Other than the fact that he attends Whlnklings meetings regularly and that he always sits in the balcony in chapel, there is no information of his identity. He promised to draw a manga picture of the first person who finds him. Good luck.

Bianca Wooden ('17)

Bianca learned to love writing when she discovered (with the help of C.S. Lewis) that it could be fun. She has always had a lively imagination, which is very good for thinking up stories, but not very useful for living in the real world. Luckily she considers herself more of a passing sight-seer than a permanent resident there, anyway.

David Querfeld ('13)

David Querfeld graduated in 2013 with a B.A. in Communication: Media Studies. He is currently studying for a Master's in Applied Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. His current work is on a large-scale world building project of his own, but loves to write short, humorous pieces, as well. His greatest inspiration, as a classic Wheaton grad, is J.R.R. Tolkien, with a particular love for *The Silmarillion*.

PROSE

Emily Labutta ('14)

Emily Labutta is a senior double major in Philosophy and English: Writing, and is contemplating her future after Wheaton. Possible career options include getting a black belt in every martial art known to man, battling great white sharks, and building a time machine to go back and learn all the winning lottery numbers. She might also go to law school, but she thinks that sounds just a little too practical.

Children's Crusade by Tsukino Shinya



Introduction

Galactic Year, 649.

It has been long since the fall of earth. Our mother planet has been in ruins for centuries. The human race is in a full-scale war against the Kai-ju. Countless men have died in the cold, vast battleground of outer space. However, their blood was not enough to satisfy the devourers.

Our growing military strategy and firepower is outmatched. We are unable to keep up with the Kai-ju's evolving speed. The epitome of their warring class, the Tetras, have evolved an organ that enables biological nuclear fission. This grants fearsome power and unaccountable speed to the Tetras. The grand Terranial space fleet was torn like paper by this small, human-sized beast.

Anyone who watches the Tetra in battle would despair at the reality upon which we are standing. The fall of humanity is near. Especially after being robbed of our plasma shields, the bulk of our weapons are utterly useless. The last card we drew to fight against the mighty Tetra was a symbol we believed in from the ancient past.

The Knights

The weapon they wield, the Knightsword, is made out of Epoh, the only substance in this universe capable of nullifying the shields of the Tetras. Because Epoh is so rare in quantity, it was not forged into bullets or shells, things that would be wasted and forgotten. It was thus cast into a weapon our

first ancestors passed down to us—the sword.

Those who receive the sword are most expensive and precious—more than a thousand cities—and are capable of standing against the mighty Tetra. They are the living hope of humanity itself; they are the Knights.

Undergoing hundreds of surgeries and augmentations to exceed the limits of man, changing genes and being injected with neurochemicals, withstanding merciless training that cuts bones and reshapes organs, and receiving the most rigorous education our race can provide, The Knights are not seen as mere humans but as demigods of our century. However, the need is far greater than our supply, and the average age of a knight is in the teens. So many young knights are pushed into war and slaughtered before they ever master their swordsmanship.

They are the ones who watch their comrades fall hundreds of times. They are the ones who match thousands of foes and finally cross blades with the Tetra.

Our gods are mere children, who shoulder all the despair of a humanity that is struggling to survive.

The praise, money, and worship of our society could not cure these children who are wounded deep within. Young knights endure mere hours and minutes for months and years of the human race. Their lives are like candles, lit up and consumed by fire for their brothers' bliss. Yes, they are live sacrifices for our failing world.

May glory be within all fallen knights.
We pray they would find peace at last; the peace they desired so dearly in their lives.

Sub-Creation | Spring 2014 | Prose

O world, consumed by shadows,
O world, darkened beyond eternity

Streams of blue, streams of gray
Jade, Azure, Cobalt, and Cyan
Ocean, Sky, Air, and Ether

Looking up and looking down, you will see human's dawn.
Every glow in the dark space-sea, marks to thee our human light.

Every flicker that you see, the life, story, and joy of man
Every blink that you see, the life, story, and joy I shield

Defend I will, this clear bright light
Oath I make, to guard this sight

Carve my words in the blade I wield
Until my last drop of blood is spilled
I light my soul; I burn it all
Until my last breath is all but gone

Hundreds and thousands, all my foes
Slay them I will, until my death
Hundreds of thousands, all my foes
I dye my sword in their blood

Until my body fails me, split and ripped
Flesh and blood torn to bits,
I will not fall, I will not break

I, the guardian of this light
Loyal I'll be all of my life

What I wield is my most straight will
What I slay is death not life

Where I go is the way of suffering
Where I walk is the path of bloodying

What I sacrifice is my own true life
What I receive is my brethren's life

Even if all but one, one speck remains
Taste death I will to guard that light

To arms, my brethren
We march to death most willingly

To arms, my brethren
Their numbers are for our glory

To suffering, to war,
To victory, to death

- Oath of His Majesty's Order -

Prologue: Red Snow Falls

I recall that she was a busy person. But she always had time to take care of me with her warm, smiling eyes. It was a fine day, one of those rare days that dad was off work. Mom took us to the central park.

“Hahaha!”

My name is Helen. I was seven, eight or maybe nine. My brother, Garen, was around seventeen. He was my favorite grown-up and would always call me “princess.” Never would we quarrel or fight. When I would try, he would just pinch my plump cheeks and giggle.

“Hehehe!”

I was stubborn that day and wanted to wear my white dress. Mom told me that I would be cold, but I was not listening. My heart was already on the snowy plains outside. I wanted to be a snowflake myself; cold, quiet, and beautiful.

“It’s snowing! It’s snowing!”

Slowly and gently, white flakes of beauty were gliding down from the sky. Garen gave me that mischievous look, and he started throwing little balls of snow at me. After getting hit several times, I tried to lump snowballs myself, but somehow the icy dust would always slip through my fingers. As soon as Dad saw me stick out my lips, he started shooting snowballs at Garen. My brother let out a playful laugh, and a grand snowball battle began. Of course I cheered for Daddy. Mom was laughing the whole time, uttering “Silly man, silly man.” I was happy, too happy to doubt that this happiness could last. My family would always be with me.



They would always be there. I was sure. Oh, I was so sure. My world would never change.

But it did.

My world fell that day. It crumbled; miserably. Everything, all of it, collapsed into a speck of dust.

There was an explosion in the middle of the park. Snow-flowers that had covered the land were gone; they evaporated in an instant. The dance of crimson flames scattered them away. Lights flashed all over the place, and the air shook in heat. Everyone stood in their place, utterly stunned.

I raised my eyes. Something was in the middle of the park. It was orange, brown, red, gray, black, big as an airship, and shaped like a bell.

It was moving.

Writhing and twisting, as if it was struggling to get out. There was something about it that made me feel sick. Finally it split into three pieces. The insides were a mix of carmine red and purple. I saw hundreds of pores, blocked by a jelly-like membrane. Something was moving in there...

One of the membranes popped. I heard horrified screams. One by one, the pores burst open, spitting gelatinous green liquid.

"Run... RUN NOW!"

My dad was well educated about Kai-ju invasions since he was a government employee. He scooped me in his arms and took off. Garen took Mommy's hand and ran behind us. Out of curiosity, I turned my head back.

And I saw it.

I will never be able to forget it. I saw death, the damnable devil that crawled out of hell itself. Its reptilian eyes, red and furious, its enormous body, split into multiple segments, layered with iron; reddish muscles; a mouth, dripping with saliva, and a rough carapace that looked like it had been formed out of the earth's depths. It wielded sharp, deadly claws.

Suddenly I realized it was the monster they talked about on TV. I'd seen it. I knew what it was. It was *them*. The big, ugly blob all the children tried to hit in P.E class. It's the *bad guys*.

Kai – Ju

怪獸

Monster.



It was fast. No, *too* fast. It didn't make any sense; it was far too fast for its size. One of them jumped at a man, and the snow beneath him turned red.

Again, and again, fresh blood splattered the place. The Kai-jus followed the people's heartbeats. People were torn like balloons holding red paint. One by one, they turned into crimson stains.

I heard mothers screaming over their sons, daughters miserably weeping for their fathers.

Boys lost their limbs, and bewildered old men were sliced to pieces. Children lay dead with potato chips in their hands. Men poured their guts into the ground. Pregnant women took their last breaths—with children that never, ever breathed. The sky was bloodied, the earth as well, and dark red, blood red, was everywhere.

"Close your eyes Helen!"

Mom shouted at me, but I was too frightened to listen. *Could it be? I thought one of them was chasing us. Yes, I am certain now; I can even hear the monster grinding his teeth.* Its terrifying scream still lingers in my dreams. I can still hear it—vividly.

"Kyieeeeeeeeeeeeeaaaaaaakkkkk!!!"

Dad rushed into a nearby building in hopes that the monster would get stuck between the doors. But no, the beast tore in, completely destroying the entrance—rocks and debris flew in the air. Garen was a few steps away from it. He could not move; he was stunned by its gaze. The Kai-ju bolted at him and just before it stabbed Garen with its razor-sharp claws—

Clunch—

I was tossed to the ground. Just before I fell down, I heard something. It was a horrible sound, the sound of a spear sinking deeply into flesh. Dad's face distorted with pain. I saw a big hole in his left arm and Garen standing safely behind him.

"Dad!"

"Stay away from me!!!"

Dad stopped Garen from approaching him. He shouted at us to run. "Run toward the narrow alleys. Avoid big streets. Run, run I mean now." Mom started to cry. Dad turned his back. His voice was trembling.

"Please go. I am begging you. Take care of the kids."

Mom picked me up in her arms, and we started running.

I heard dad let out a big sigh. He held out his gun. "You can kill me, but you are NOT hurting my family."

The monster jumped, and the gun flared. It was a one-sided battle, but my dad didn't give up. He fell, splayed on the ground. Just before the Kai-ju began pulling its blade from my dad's chest, Dad whispered, "Now wh... Where do you think you're goin—"

Barely able to breathe, he frantically grasped its front arm. The Kai-ju shook its body several times to pluck the crimson blade out of him. My dad clenched his jaws and held on. He shut his eyes. With all his strength he shot a kick to the monster's head. The monster howled in anger. At last the monster swung its other arm to rip the man apart. "No, Daddy!" I burst into tears. The hideous creature sank its crimson blades into him. My small hope

of his survival shattered into pieces. Yet my Dad did not release his grip. Dad opened his mouth and shouted out something resembling "I'm still alive." He held on to the Kai-ju's arm until his limbs were both sliced off. He did not give up even then but buried his teeth into the Kai-ju. A small, moaning sound slipped out from his tightly clenched mouth.

"I am still not dead. I am still not dead, you monster," he garbled.

Just before the monster raised its legs, they were out of sight.

• • •

My mom and Garen ran desperately. The Kai-ju had almost caught up with us. If our running speed was one, its speed must have been eight or nine.

"*Nam dam!...*"

My brother let out a curse. The monster gained ground, thundering about ten steps behind us. We were going to die at any second. Just as I felt its disgusting breath touching my cheeks, I heard a bang.

The razor-sharp blade was there no more. The Kai-ju screeched in pain.

Bang.

Blood blasted out the Kai-ju's head.

I looked immediately around. There were several people in green uniforms that read "PDC"—*Planetary Defense Corps*. They were hiding behind some building debris. They had to drag Mom away from the site, for she was frozen from the gun sound.

"Get behind us!"

"Move it!"

We were safe. It took me a while to realize that. Garen crumpled to the ground, exhausted.

Too many things had happened in the space of a few minutes. A soldier handed him a water bottle, and Garen hastily swallowed from it.

"Maintain suppressive fire!"

"Do NOT expose yourself!"

More Kai-ju approached the soldiers, lured by the gun sounds, but the skilled firepower of the squadron quickly turned them into messy pieces of meat. The agonizing screams of the Kai-ju were heard all the way down the street.

"Hey, Baron!"

"Yeah?"

"This is way better than your *gorram* computer games!"

"I know right? The graphics are way too good."

"This is why we need to send those stupid game designers to the front lines!"

"Yeah, I agree."

"Haha!"

"Quit chatting and shoot!"

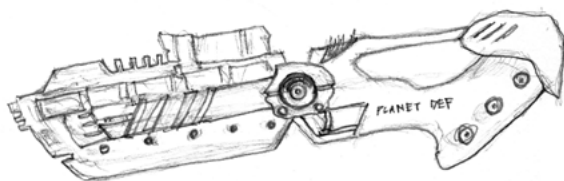
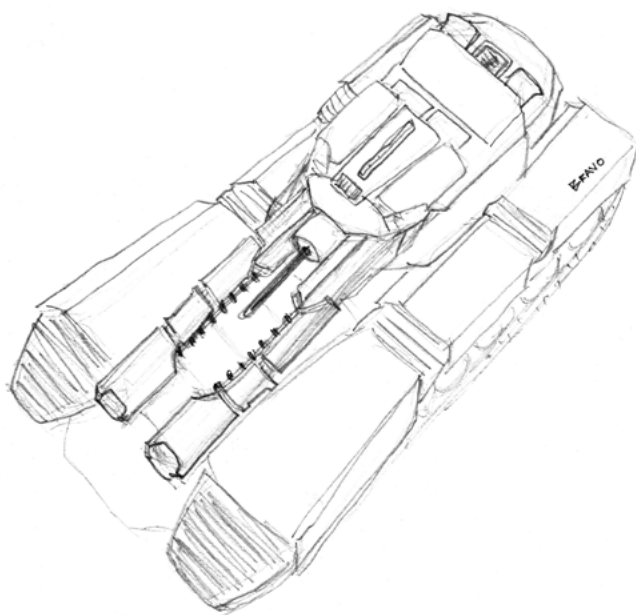
I watched loads of the Kai-ju spilling their guts on the ground. Their blood showered upon us, gunshots endlessly tearing through the sky. Suddenly, a big one appeared on the horizon. Its black carapace flashed in the falling sun, and its claws were stained with blood. Horrified, I clung to my mother's hand.

"Hey, hey! Big one twelve o' clock!"

"Holy shit, we got a 6-meter!"

"Wax em' boys!"

Instantly, all the guns shot at the big Kai-ju. It did not take any damage, however. The yellow bullets bounced off on its thick carapace. It crawled toward us, destroying all the buildings around it in



the process.

"Sir! 50 mm's not working!"

"Give me 70! Lieutenant! Where are those 70s?"

"Delta has them, sir! They took them all!"

"Blast and damnation! I told them to spare some!"

"What do we do sir?"

"Just put more pepper on it! Don't let it approach us! Our orders are to stand our ground!"

The big Kai-ju smashed one of the soldiers. The men tried to hold on, but the Kai-ju recklessly crushed the squadron to pieces. Terrifying screams were heard everywhere. The officer cried into his headpiece, "Team Charlie requesting support! We need armor! Repeat, send armor to point C!"

"Officer! We can't hold!"

"Retreat! Take the civilian and leave! NOW!"

"Retreat!"

"Kyieeeeeaaaaaakkkk!!!!"

One by one, the men were smashed into a pile of blood. Frightened and confused, the soldiers scattered in all directions.

"Stop shooting and run you bastards!"

"Baron is down! I'm gonna get him!"

"No! We have to leave now!"

"Allen! Take the civilian!"

A young, teenage soldier took Mom's hand. I could see he was afraid like we were. We fled together.

"Run!"

The Kai-ju was distracted by the men on the ground. The men writhed in pain, but unfortunately, no one could save them.

Leaving the men behind, the squadron dart-

ed between the buildings.

"Move! We need to reach point B! Team Bravo has armor."

"But what about Baron?"

"Do you want us to all die, soldier? Now move it!"

I breathed heavily. My head was spinning. What was happening was simply unbelievable. This had to be a dream. The soldiers probably felt the same way.

"Frak! What the hell is happening right now? I just wanted a quiet holiday!"

"Consider yourself lucky. I was on my way to my sister's wedding."

"Oh, you mean the music girl. Man, I thought I would get her first."

"In your dreams."

"Who took her away?"

"Vocal major. I just got a message from him. He's saying the caviar is ready. Crap, I love caviar!"

"You two, shut up and run!"

I was crying. Warm teardrops drenched my mom's back, and she tried to calm me down.

"It's all right Helen. Mommy's right here. Don't cry. We're almost there. We'll be safe."

BAM.

A piece of a building crashed on the road. Everyone looked up. Something was falling from the sky.

"What the—! What is that?"

The falling object looked like a giant.

"Flyer!"

"Ahhhghhhh!!!"

"Open fire!"

"*Vermain nosesti!* Just shoot the gorram gun!"

The thunderous rifle cracks stunned my ears. Blood splattered all over us. My eyes rolled around in fear. I saw Garen. I saw mom's back. We were still running. I faced the other way. The fair-looking boy was there. The next moment his body was sliced in half. My mind turned white. My vision blurred. I lost consciousness.

• • •

I tried opening my eyes. My eyelids were still heavy. I frowned. The air smelled awful, as if something was burning.

Slowly, I raised my head and rubbed my eyes like I always did. I saw Garen smiling.

"Ga...Garen."

"Are you awake?"

Garen was listening to a radio transmission. At first I didn't hear the words properly. The ground was stained with red spots. *Blood-red spots*. I suddenly realized that this was not a dream. The announcer spoke in a shaking voice.

Hundreds of Kai-ju are crawling, running, and flying over our land. Our planetary forces have fallen, and the city of lydunburg is now no more. Infantry and Armor are scattered everywhere, and the headquarters of the army is swarming with...

After rubbing my eyes with my baby-like hands, I started looking for my mother.

"Where is Mommy?"

The droning radio filled the silence after my question, and Garen bit his lips until blood began to

ooze out his mouth.

"Don't bite your lips, Garen." He remained stolid. "You're gonna get a boo-boo, Garen. Boo-boos hurt. I don't want you to be hurt."

"Helen..."

Garen embraced me and began to sob. My eyes clouded with tears. I was young, but in that moment I knew. Mommy couldn't hug me ever again.

"But... but I want Mommy's hug..."

I let out a wail. Garen wept too. We stood there crying until our tears dried out.

Then we started walking. Corpses and blood lay everywhere. I felt sick. Garen held my hand to comfort me. My white dress was torn. My hair was tangled, and my face was covered with dirt. I was exhausted, but I was still sound. Garen, on the other hand, had an injury. He was bleeding from his right side. I was too young to know anything about breathing disorders, but I remember he was coughing badly as he walked onward.

"Are you OK?"

"Keep walking, Helen."

His voice was unclear and rather thick. I could see that he was in pain. He frowned frequently as he moved his legs. He smiled rather bitterly when I gave him a worried look.

We were walking away from the city. Garen probably thought we could get help in the suburb areas.

He picked up a pistol from a dead soldier. Garen was not the fighting type, at least in my memory. He was a rather small, skinny boy with a pale face. He mostly talked with girls, and he liked to read about plants and trees. Once he boastfully told me

that he was a pacifist. Puzzled, I had asked him what a pacifist was. Despite his beliefs, he did shoot his pistol when the Kai-ju appeared in front of us.

• • •

Helen gives me that sad, worried look. Oh the poor little girl. I force a smile. I can't let her be troubled by my misery; she saw enough today. My breath grows heavy as I take more steps. Ah, the lingering pain! It hurts every time I spit out the flaming air. Fortunately, the wound didn't reach my lungs. However, it damaged enough muscles to cripple my breathing pattern. I can't help but frown as I breathe in and out.

"Are you OK?"

"Keep walking, Helen."

I let out a bitter smile. I am so sorry for lying to her. We have to get out of the city before night falls. We can't afford a break, regardless of my condition. Thank God Helen is unharmed. I have no idea what to do if she gets injured. At least the bugs aren't chasing us for now.

Something materializes on the horizon. What is it? As we walked near, I feel my eyes widening. I see massive, armored vehicles with gigantic mounted rail guns. There's a tank! It's the armored forces! Thank heavens, we found a military base. I strengthen my grip on Helen's arm. When we draw close enough, I start to flail my hands at them.

"Hey! Look here! We're here! Hey! Look here!"

Two soldiers pop their heads out of the gigantic tank and notice me.

"Civilians at three o'clock. Repeat, civilians at three o'clock."

We are safe now. We're safe. This time, we

are really, really safe. I almost burst out crying. When the soldiers take us inside the base, I can't help stop repeating, "Thank you, thank you!" Several men smile at us when Helen mirrors me, murmuring her gratitude.

"Welcome, guys. Lucky that we found you before the bugs did."

"Thank you, sir."

Most of the men are middle-aged, fully equipped with armor and guns. One of them leads us to an army tent to rest. I instantly collapse on the bed. Phew, sleep at last. I close my eyes. Not long after I fall asleep, Helen shakes me awake. "What is it? I am very, very tired right now..." I move my lazy eyeballs to where she is pointing outside the tent and I frowned. My eyesight is still blurry. I've barely woken up.

Helen is still pointing in the same direction. Her voice quavers as she asks,

"What is that?"

My eyes fix on the object to which she is pointing. Instantly, I feel my breath stopping. The object on the horizon moves. Its gray, purplish carapace, four sets of wings, four legs, four blades, a pair of huge mandibles and thousands of bones, muscles and fiber grotesquely mix together. It is small, about the size of a human, but it is covered in a huge plasma shield that can deflect almost every bullet and shell we have. It is a complete abomination. Its body screams of death, death, and even more death. I shiver in horror. I know what that thing is. The soldiers know what it is too. One of the older soldiers lets out a curse. Others shout the monster's name.

"Oh, my God."



"It's a Tetra."

"Tetra!!!"

"Open fire!!!"

Sirens ring, guns flare, and cannons boom. But it is in vain, in complete vanity. No armor can match the Tetra, the final evolution and the ultimate weapon of the warring Kai-ju. It toys with the squadron. One of the tanks shoots its main cannon, but the forceful shot does not even scratch the monster's thick plasma shield. The monster crushes the tank into a pile of junk. It slices a second tank neatly in a half, destroying the crew inside. Infantry falls quickly to the Tetra's blades. This is no longer a battle, but a slaughter. I feel the sky crumble down. I stand there, completely hopeless. We are done.

A pistol is in my hand. It is small yet fairly heavy. I picked it up earlier from a dead soldier. I look at Helen, who is covering her ears. She is screaming for it to stop, please stop. I holler at her to run. The Tetra turns its gaze to at me. I raise my gun and aim at the Tetra. It flies toward me at an incredible speed. My pistol flames and my mouth involuntarily lets out a painful scream.

I suddenly realize this is the end for me. I am on the ground. I am drenched in my own blood. My eyesight blurs. The last thing I am able to see is little Helen. I move my lips to say something. After that, it is utter darkness.

• • •

"Run, Helen! NOW!"

I remember backing up. Garen's tormented scream interrupted me before I could ask, "What about you?" Blood splattered. The next moment he was on the ground, his heart speared and his

arm sliced. That was the end of my beloved brother Garen. It was a meaningless, young, and sorrowful death. He whispered his last words.

"I'm sorry, Helen. I am sorry."

The monster slowly approached me. I tried to run, but as soon as my eyes met its beastly gaze, my feet were fixed to the ground. It was hatred; unending, boundless, infinite hatred. Its eyes flamed with it.

I could feel it. The monsters would not stop until the last earthling fell to the ground. They would stab, cut, tear, and crush until the last of us breathed no more.

The Tetra kept coming. Finally, it stood just in front of me. I did not move. My thinking process had completely stopped. Too scared, too shocked, I was frozen in the spot. Like a small bird paralyzed in front of a rattlesnake, I forgot how to move my body. The Tetra clutched me by my throat. I let out a soft moan. My small body was lifted toward the sky. The beast deliberately tightened its grasp. My body trembled. I closed my eyes, prepared for the end.

I could not think of anything. Nothing, nothing came to my mind. I hung there, waiting for my death. Time passed. Seconds felt like hours. Slowly, I opened my eyes. Was I dead? Did I get to meet Mommy, Daddy, and Garen again? No, the monstrous Kai-ju was still there.

To my amazement, it let go of me. I fell into some rubble. The Tetra jumped back and let out an intimidating scream. It stomped its feet, whirled its jaws, and shouted again. Its wings fluttered in excitement. I could not understand what had happened. I turned my eyes to the direction in which

the Tetra was looking.

A boy and a girl stood there. The boy's clothing looked familiar. I remembered seeing people with those clothes on television, in the papers, even at my school.

Each held a slim, gleaming sword. At that moment, I knew who they were. In fact, probably every child in this universe knew who they were. Boys followed their gestures; girls mimicked their voices. They were everyone's heroes. I let out a small murmur.

"Knights."



Humanity's last hope, the living gods of our century—these labels were given to our highest heroes.

The Knights I saw that day were mere teenagers, short in height, with child-like faces and high-pitched voices. It was rather pathetic for these small kids to fight against the gruesome monsters of doom.

Of course, on that day, they looked ever so big to me. The boy was full of confidence. His blue eyes blazed with fury. His grip was strong, and his drawn sword glittered in the sun. His face was like a wolf, snarling and growling upon his prey. The girl beside him was a mysterious, beautiful figure with jet black hair extended down to her back and locked with an oriental hair band. Her expression was silent and cold, yet full of vigor. Her pose was unique, her sword was exotic, and she spoke with an unfamiliar accent.

"Type-5. It's a named unit too."

"Bone Smacker?"

"It's Bone Ripper, genius."

The boy smiled, rather awkwardly.

"I don't need to remember all the names of worms I killed."

"You haven't killed it yet."

"I will."

"You mean, we will."

The boy chuckled.

"Man, mom was right! Boys can't fight girls with words. We always lose."

"It took you awfully long to realize it. I beat you with swords, too."

Glaring at the Tetra again, the boy opened his mouth.

"What are you looking at, worm?"

I was close enough to hear radio transmissions from the boy's suit. An adult voice was demanding the knights' withdrawal. It said the main forces were retreating, and the knights must wait for sufficient support. The boy shouted back.

"Coward! Are you afraid of death? Run to your shame, breast-feeder!"

He held his sword and shifted into an aggressive stance. The girl changed her position as well. The Tetra rattled its blades in return.

"I'm not waiting until the stupid worms chew up everything on this planet."

"Then let's get to work. Shall we, Mr. Insecticide?"

"Eeeeeekkkk!!"

The monster roared with a terrible voice, but the young knights didn't even blink. In fact, the boy shouted back.

"Shut your mouth, worm! And clean your filthy neck while you have time. I hate staining my sword."

"Initiating extermination."

"Ready? Let's go with Position B."

"Roger."

The boy and the girl crouched for a jump. Their swords twisted in a 45 degree angle. The boy's eyes lit up to a bright hue.

"Um, let's kill it with its head intact."

"Why?"

"Uh, for my bugger face collection. No, I mean—You know, biology class."

"You? Biology? That scares me. Just don't end up in obstetrics."

"Oh shut up."

“Kyaaaaaaaaakkkkk!!!”

They kicked the ground. Instantly, both knights were in the air. The Tetra dashed at them. Sharp metallic sounds rang through the air. I watched in wonder as the boy and the girl danced with the winged Kai-ju. Their swords and the beast's blades flashed brilliant lights back into the sky. The Tetra's blade hit the boy's sword at ridiculous angles. The boy whirled around, dodging two blades and a pair of mandibles. Just before the Tetra swung another blow, the girl's blade jumped in. Their blades collided violently. The creature howled in anger and extended its wings. The boy-knight yelled at it in return. The Kai-ju flew up and then plummeted at a ridiculous speed, delivering a massive blow to the boy's blade.

BOOM.

I gulped. The shock could be felt yards away. Dust arose in the air.

Their blades locked together, vibrating violently upon each other. A moment later, the Tetra swung its second blade toward the knight. The boy ducked his head just in time; the second blade sliced several strands of his hair.

The monster must have put too much weight on its blade, for it leaned off its balance. The moment the Tetra's body tilted forward, the boy showed a cold smile—

“You're dead, worm.”

The girl jumped in, slicing its right front arm. It screeched in pain. The boy's sword smashed into the Tetra's primary defending blade. The blade shattered, and the knight's sword cracked into two pieces. Blue particles scattered into the air. For a split second, the Tetra stood there completely defenseless. Immediately, the boy and his sword became a

giant bright light, and a cracking sound filled the air.

A crescent afterimage was drawn in the air and the Tetra's left arm fell down. Its body was sliced into two equal halves. The Beast crashed onto the ground, its green, slimy body fluid drenching the earth.

The girl smiled, satisfied.

"Dissection complete. Splendid abdominal cut, doctor."

The boy walked to it, and held his broken sword to the monster's head. Emotionless, he slowly drew a mark on its neck. The Tetra hopelessly cried out and twisted its body, but the boy's face remained cold. At last, the head fell and the monster stopped moving. The boy sheathed his sword.

"Gorram, not again. It's my third sword this month. Instructor's gonna kill me."

"Doctor, you get too emotional when you dissect things."

"But it's totally the academy's fault! These swords are so low in purity."

"Oh? Hey there! I think we have company."

The girl must have felt me looking at her. A moment later, she stood in front of me. I did not move. She lent me her hand. It was a small hand, thin and delicate. Some kind of exotic writing was on the back.

"Hi, what's your name?"

"Helen. Helen Emolya."

"What a cute name! I am Arien."

I took her hand, which felt much different than its appearance. It was rough, cold, and somewhat metallic.

"Ari... yen?"

"Kya! You're so cute!"

The moment I said her name, she hugged me with all her might. Before I could say anything, she dragged me to the boy. With sparkling eyes, she asked him, "Can we keep her?"

"No."

Arien's lips pouted. "Why?"

"She is NOT a pet, Ari."

"But I want to keep her! Here, Helen, please pledge to be my sister."

Alas, I was too young to know about oaths and pledges. "Wh...What?"

"That means no." The boy grinned.

The girl puffed her cheeks. She grabbed the Tetra's face in her hand. "Humph. Then I'm going to throw this away."

"What? How did you... Wait! No! Stop! Don't do it!"

"And what do you say?"

"Ah, Fine! We can keep the girl. Just give my Kai-ju head back."

Arien smugly handed the Kai-ju specimen to the boy.

"By the way, his name is Lyouell," she told me.

"Lu... Lu-yu-el?"

I couldn't pronounce his name right. The boy grinned when I tried.

"Hey, Arien, take the cutie and let's get outta here."

"Roger. Location of her legal guardian?"

"Both are on the deceased list."

Arien paused, frowning bitterly. But as I watched her, she quickly changed her expression to a joyful one.

"So Helen, what do you want to be when you

grow up?"

For a split second, everything that had happened that day flashed through my mind. The Kai-ju, the soldiers, and all the slaughtered people mingled together in my memory. I could see Mommy, Daddy, and Garen lying helpless, powerless and defenseless in front of me. They were dead. I had lost everything, *everything*. They took it from me. Mommy's hug, Daddy's smile, the word *princess*—they were stolen. And I could never, ever get them back again. Why? Why did you have to do this? Why? The horrible scream of the Kai-ju lingered in my ears. It was laughing. It was laughing at me. It was laughing at all the innocent people who could not defend themselves. Something snapped inside of me. Boiling anger burst from of my heart. It consumed my fear. It devoured my sorrow. It paralyzed my childlike emotions. I grinded my teeth, clenched my small fists, and raised my face, my eyes ablaze with fury. The cold, beautiful snow-flake was there no more. I was a burning piece of charcoal, and now no one could put out my flames. I opened my mouth to speak. At that moment, I was not a child anymore.

"I want to be a knight."

Dragons Do Not Belong in the City

by Bianca Wooden

It may happen that a good friend of yours should someday wish to do you a great favour. If you mean to let him, I warn you that he will undoubtedly come to you later with a favour to ask in return, and that favour may lead to unexpected, unwanted, and inconvenient adventures. This, you see, is exactly what happened to me.

My name is Hilary Pembroke. I came to London after finishing my studies, thinking to win over the whole of that great city with my illustrious speeches and someday have a seat in Parliament. I had no money and no connections; my entire fortune consisted in my grandfather being a respectable gentleman, and my father being much less respectable but nonetheless also a gentleman. Somehow (probably I was deemed at least as respectable as my father, if not my grandfather) I managed to secure a good position, though not one as grand as I had hoped for. My ambitions were temporarily stilled when I met Miss Caroline Grey. I fell in love, and forgot about Parliament. A bit of courting secured me the lady's affections, but no amount of courting could increase the contents of my pocketbook. This is where I made a very grave mistake; my oldest friend, Felix Harringer, offered to lend me a sum of money, and I accepted his offer. Caroline

and I were married, and soon we were settled nicely. I have since paid Felix back, but the fact remains that the temporary loss cost him dearly. I did not suppose I would ever be out of my friend's debt.

Until, that is, one cool, clear spring day, when my wife and I sat in the breakfast-room looking over our dinner-party invitations. I had, you see, plunged back into my former parliamentary ambitions soon after our marriage, and was attempting to gain greater acceptance in the higher social circles. A dinner party was deemed a plausible way to attract notice, so Caroline and I had set about arranging one—our very first. The house was quiet, and the bustle of city streets outside seemed to come from very far away. Suddenly there came a knock at the door, which I answered (the butler had recently been sacked, having been found wearing my new cuff-links). There, on the doorstep, with a wide, winning grin and sandy hair all in disarray under his hat, stood Felix Harringer. I knew at once that there would be some sort of trouble; he was wearing the wheedling expression with which he usually approached his creditors.

"Hello, Felix," said I, "What brings you to London? No unpleasant business, I hope."

"No, not at all," said Felix, "One can get tired of the country, however. I do sometimes long to get run over in a busy street by a throng of unpleasant people in a hurry."

He let out a nervous sort of laugh, and then proceeded, "Actually, I came to see you, old boy! I hope I have not turned up at a bad time?"

"Not at all," I replied, wondering what on earth he was up to. Felix was a country man. He was

born and raised on a great estate in Derbyshire, and was now living in Cheshire on a large estate of his own. He avoided the city as much as possible, and his visits were consequently few. I invited him inside, of course, and he followed me into the front hallway.

"Oh, Felix!" exclaimed Caroline, who had come to see who was at the door, "How good to see you. You have not been by for a long time. How are matters at *Cotsfield*?"

"Splendid, my dear Caroline, absolutely splendid, thank you."

"Love," said I, "Would you kindly tell Hetta to get us some tea?"

I wanted to speak with Felix alone, for I was sure there was something amiss. He acted like his effervescent self, but he did not quite look it. He appeared tired and worn, and a bit thinner since last I had seen him.

When he and I were sitting alone in the parlour with our tea, Caroline upstairs attending to matters of her own, Felix finally confessed to me that all was not well with him.

"It appears I shall be giving up *Cotsfield*," said Felix suddenly, as he played with his spoon.

"What?" I asked in surprise.

"I am afraid it is so," said Felix, "I never told you, but *Cotsfield* isn't quite mine. It was for let, so I took it. It seemed a good idea at the time. But I was never a businessman, you see, and I did not realize the gravity of the expense until it was too late. I simply can't afford to keep it any longer. Mr. Parson, the true owner, has all but thrown me out upon my ear! I have a short time to find another suitable lodging, and then I am to leave *Cotsfield* forever."

"Oh, dear," said I, "Why didn't you tell me that you were at such a loss? Can I do anything for you? Would you like to stay here until you can find another house better suited to your present situation?"

"No, thank you, Hilary," said he, "I am leaving London tomorrow; my brother is to help me find a cottage in the country. But there was a favour I was rather hoping to ask of you."

"I shall be glad to do whatever I can," said I.

"Well," said Felix, hesitating a moment, "Would you—I know it is rather a lot to ask of you, especially now, as I know you are planning to try for a seat in Parliament, but..."

"What is it?"

"Would you take care of Sidney while I am away?"

"Sidney?"

"My dragon."

My left eyebrow rose as high as it most possibly could. For some time I had vaguely known about the existence of a dragon on Felix Harringer's estate. I had never asked him about it, nor did he openly speak of it. I assumed that it was a matter which he did not wish to become public, which was most understandable. Dragons are associated with all sorts of un-respectable things. What's more, they are incommodious pets; difficult to train, hazardous to ride, expensive to care for, and impossible to conceal for very long. Which is why I was rather shocked that he would ask me to harbour one in my own home.

"Mr. Parson has refused to let Sidney stay at Cotsfield while I am away," Felix continued, "And I have nowhere else to put him. He isn't very large,

you know; he is an Italian dragon, and the foreign kinds are always smaller..."

"I cannot possibly keep a dragon in the house," said I.

"I would have him delivered and retrieved, of course; you wouldn't have to leave London."

"It isn't the idea of leaving London," said I, "I simply won't have a dragon in the house. For one matter, Caroline won't like it."

"What won't I like?" asked Caroline, who had just come into the room again.

"You won't like having a dragon in the house, I'm sure."

Much to my dismay, Caroline had no objections.

"A dragon? How exciting! When is it coming?"

"Within the week, if Hilary approves."

"I don't," said I.

"Why ever not?" asked Caroline.

"The whole idea is ridiculous!" said I, "Dragons breath fire and eat livestock—think what the brute would do to the furnishings!"

"He's really very amiable, once you get to know him," Felix pleaded, "And he's quite trained. He'll sit when you ask him."

"And I suppose he has his tea at four and then sits down by the fire with his paper and cigar, does he? How many local farmers does he have for tea, I wonder?"

"Oh, do stop it, Hilary," said Felix, "I'm being very serious. I really have no one else to turn to. Couldn't you have him for just a little while?"

"What, so that he can have me for a light supper?"

"Oh, shut up, Hilary," said Caroline.

Felix looked very distressed, and I will not deny that I felt some pity for him.

"I'm sorry, Felix," said I, "I really am, but what you ask is impossible! How could a dragon, for any length of time, live in the city? Such creatures are meant for the country; they need a great deal of space, and I'm sure they require exercise."

"We might let him out to fly at night, when it's dark," said Caroline.

"He still might be seen," said I, "Think what it would do to my reputation, and to my chances of election, if we were known to have a dragon in the house!"

"We could keep him downstairs," Caroline continued, ignoring my protestations, "He can have the butler's room; it isn't in use. And we can hire someone to feed him and care for him. Only think how exciting it will be to have a dragon in the house!"

"And think how much more exciting when it is discovered by the whole of London that the Pembrooks are keeping company with a smoke-billowing carnivorous reptile," said I.

"It would be such a help," said Felix to Caroline, "I have been so overwrought of late, and I should find it such a comfort to know, at least, that Sidney is taken care of."

"It is settled, then," said Caroline with satisfaction, "Sidney will come to stay here. I shall look into finding a keeper at once."

"You are most kind; Sidney's present keeper would, I'm sure, not object to coming here. You need look no further."

It seemed that the two of them were ignoring me, and they went on to make all sorts of arrange-

ments for the dragon's well-being and comfort, as if it were a fidgety maiden aunt coming to stay instead of a horrible, scaly, perhaps man-eating beast.

"Neither of you," said I finally, "seem to grasp the idea that I absolutely will not have this— this— thing in my house!"

Both Felix and Caroline paused in their conversation. Felix abruptly rose from his seat and set down his teacup, and said quietly that he would be on his way, then, and that he was sorry he had taken up so much of my time. He departed from the room.

"Oh, Hilary," said Caroline, "How can you be so unfeeling? Poor Felix is in dreadful need, and you are his dearest friend; you simply must help him."

I was beginning to realize that this was the case, but I was uneasy about the whole idea, and certainly did not want to engage in anything that would adversely affect my chances of election. I rose to pace the parlour, agitatedly thrusting my hands into my pockets. I then proceeded to list off to Caroline every logical reason I had for not being able to take the dragon, and why it oughtn't to be expected of me to do so. I emphasized the importance of my future as a member of Parliament (which she already knew, having heard me speak of this matter more times than perhaps was necessary).

Caroline was, however, led primarily by her feelings and not by reason. Though she listened with patience to my speeches, she was yet unconvinced of my being in the right. She held fast to the idea that it was my duty to help my friend, and that keeping a dragon for a short time would be an enjoyable experience. I had negated both

arguments through my logic, and was quite convinced of my own rectitude in the matter. Yet it is not uncommon for the affection one bears a pretty wife and the loyalty one bears a life-long friend to overcome one's better judgment. I was defeated, and must yield, though I was certain I would come to regret it. I ran out and overtook Felix in the street. Within a few days Caroline and I were awaiting the arrival of a very large crate and a keeper to tend its presumably hideous contents.

The keeper came first, to my very great relief. His name was Gagliardi, and he came to our door arrayed in all the foppery which good taste and a rather restricted purse would allow. We quickly ascertained that he was from Italy originally, but that he had embraced England wholeheartedly as his own. We could just comprehend his English, as it was supplemented by a vivid use of gestures and facial expressions.

Then the dreaded day came. It was a Thursday. Caroline fluttered about the house all morning, instructing the maids, ensuring that the dragon's room was ready, and seeing to it that there was sufficient meat in the icebox.

"I daresay you've made more fuss about that brute's dinner than you have ever made about mine," I said, sulking. I could no longer keep the dragon from arriving, but I could at least complain.

"Nothing could ever upset your stomach," said she, "So I don't see what sort of fuss I ought to make."

At that moment, the bell rang. Caroline went rushing to answer the door, arriving just as Hetta opened it. I followed reluctantly, and came just in time to see a very large crate being wheeled into

my home and knocking over the hat rack. It was not as large a crate as I expected, however, which gave me some relief. Caroline was quite overcome with excitement, which increased when she perceived a thin wisp of smoke issuing from one of the cracks.

"Oh, do hurry!" she cried to the men trying to pry open the crate.

Within a few moments, the crate was opened, and the two men sprang back, afraid that the dragon might rush out and try to devour them. I myself rushed forward and pulled Caroline away from the opening. Nothing came out, however, and all of us cautiously crept forward to face the beast. I could not bring myself to look in at first, until Caroline cried, "Oh, isn't he darling? Come here, Sidney dear!"

I raised my eyes to the opening, and saw before me a creature a bit smaller and less hideous than I had expected to see, but certainly not one deserving to be called darling. It looked something like a lizard of sorts, but much larger (it was at least big enough so a medium-sized man could ride it), and with rather a longer nose and a much longer neck. It was covered in scales of a deep, red, brickish sort of hue, and it had long, black claws. It was sleeping soundly, a thin trail of smoke issuing steadily from its nostrils. Aside from its claws and treacherously wide mouth, it looked relatively harmless. It woke, revealing a pair of wide, almost intelligent yellow eyes.

The beast looked right in my direction and rose, leaving the box to roam the hall. It did not lumber along as I thought it would, but moved with great dexterity. I was at once fascinated and terri-

fied by the marvelous way he slithered about, carefully avoiding the furnishings though crawling with enormous speed. Then, in a matter of moments, Sidney exited through a doorway and was out of sight. I would have gone after him, but the delivery men, being most anxious to collect their payment and leave, delayed me. Caroline went after the beast, and, as soon as I had made the payment, I followed her.

I heard a scream from upstairs; apparently the dragon had found Hetta. I rushed up the stairs, the screams continuing with interruptions from Caroline saying, "There's no need to be afraid, Hetta; look at him! He's gentle as a lamb!" These sounds seemed to be coming from my room; I entered, and found a most disturbing sight. The brute was curled up comfortably on my bed, puffing away as if he had a pipe in his mouth!

"This will not do," said I, in a voice too high and thin with anxiety to be very commanding, "This is most unacceptable!"

The dragon opened one eye and examined me with it in a most disconcerting manner.

"Yes, I am addressing you," said I, with new courage, "You are most welcome to remain downstairs in the room we have provided for you, but you are not to sleep on this bed, as it belongs to me. You're already spoiling my nice white sheets with that filthy smoke."

The dragon, to my surprise (and some degree of horror) rose from the bed and made his way over to me. I backed away, but the dragon pursued.

"Call that blasted keeper!" I squeaked, and Hetta was off in a moment.

Finally, I reached the wall and had nowhere to go, and the dragon began to close in. I shut my eyes, waiting either to be scorched or eaten. When several seconds had passed and neither misfortune occurred, I opened my eyes again to find the dragon simply looking at me, his face closer to mine than I cared for. His breath was horrible, as if he had eaten a fishmonger and then had a good smoke (which was not impossible).

"I think he likes you," said Caroline happily.

"I don't think I return his feelings," said I. In response, the dragon nudged my face with his hot, scaly nose.

"I think he wants you to pet him," said Caroline.

"That's ridiculous," said I, "He isn't a dog." Nonetheless I put up my hand to pat the great nose, and the dragon made some sort of curious gurgling sound, which I suppose meant that he was happy.

The keeper finally came up the stairs, huffing and puffing and carrying a great coil of rope, which he at once put round the dragon's neck. He seemed to know Mr. Gagliardi, and went with him very happily downstairs to its room. He looked back at me, however, as if to say, "I will see you later."

Once the dragon was gone, I collapsed on the bed. I was not sure how long I could manage with this *thing* living under my roof.

• • •

The dragon made himself scarce for some hours, for, being weary from the excitement of having been locked up in a crate and let out in some unknown place, he fell asleep. During this time, I tried as much as possible to devote myself to my work, and to pretend that we did not have a reptilian monster sleeping placidly in the butler's room.

"He is a dear," said Caroline happily, looking up from her mending.

"He isn't," I said, "I think he's horrible, and I wish I had never allowed him to be brought here!" I was feeling a bit annoyed at that moment, having forgotten how to spell a word, and spoke more strongly than I felt. Caroline fell silent and resumed her task. I was a bit sorry that I had answered so harshly, but I did feel that I had been asked to do rather more than I was capable of. How could a fellow concentrate on working, trying to obtain a place in Parliament, and hosting a rather lavish dinner party while worrying about whether his house guest wouldn't set his curtains on fire?

These unhappy thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of teatime, at which hour Caroline and I gathered at the table, joined by Mr. Gagliardi. The other two began a lively conversation about Sidney's many wonderful attributes; that he was a lovely dragon, that he was very well-behaved, that he was nimble and skillful, and in short that he was a marvelous and superiour being in all ways. I took my tea quietly; I would not join them in praising the beast. Just as I muttered under my breath, "Filthy, horrid thing," I dropped my napkin upon the floor. As I reached down to retrieve it, I was startled by a sudden burst of heat upon my hand. I let out a cry and jumped out of my seat; Sidney subsequently emerged from beneath the table.

"Oh, look! It's Sidney come to beg for his tea!" said Caroline, and the beast made his way over to her.

"Beg?" said I, sucking my fingers, "Demand is more like! The brute deliberately burned my hand!"

"I'm sure he didn't do it on purpose, Hilary," said Caroline, "Perhaps he can't help letting a little fire escape him every now and then, any more than we can help a sneeze."

She proceeded to pat the reptile's nose and give him several lumps of sugar, which he consumed rather awkwardly, making a terrible mess upon the floor.

Mr. Gagliardi suddenly informed me that Sidney generally liked to sit under the table during mealtimes, and that it was unwise to put one's hand under the table while the dragon was there.

"Thank you very much for telling me," said I, exasperatedly, "Hetta, would you please see to the sugar on the floor?"

"No, sir," called a high, thin voice from the kitchen.

"What do you mean, 'no, sir'?" I asked.

"I ain't coming out until the monster's gone, sir!"

"Oh, don't be silly, Hetta! He's perfectly harmless!" said Caroline, "Come out and see."

After a great deal of coaxing, Hetta was finally prevailed upon to leave the safety of the kitchen and proceed cautiously into the dining room. She walked timorously to the mess, all the while keeping one eye upon the dragon, lest he should suddenly leap up and devour her. Sidney seemed to have no interest in doing so, however, and I think that perhaps Hetta might have overcome her fear of the beast, had not a small misfortune occurred. Hetta happened to have in her apron pocket a piece of sausage which she had been saving for a stray dog that often wandered by the back door. The dragon no sooner smelt it than he made a lunge for her, and Hetta gave a shrill scream and fainted away.

"Oh, well done, Sidney," said I, "I shall have to get my own tea from now on, for I'm sure Hetta will never put so much as a foot out of the kitchen again! If that dragon is to stay in the house any longer, Caroline, I suggest you begin teaching him to behave like a civilized being."

I carried Hetta to her room, and upon awakening she refused to leave it, so we did not see any more of her that day. By the scuffling sounds I heard issuing from that part of the house, I determined that she had in fact pushed all the furniture in her bedroom against the door.

• • •

Caroline came to bed a bit later than usual that night. As she settled in, she said, "I'm going to do it, you know."

"Do what?"

"Teach Sidney to be a civilized being," said she, "I've spoken with Mr. Gagliardi, and he's going to help me."

"If you can make anything at all out of that awful worm, I'll give you ten pounds."

"Scoff all you like," said Caroline, "You will see. Before he goes away, he shall be as refined as the prime minister himself."

"I thought you were teaching him to be civilized," said I, and turned out the light.

• • •

The next morning I had many matters of business to attend to, and I spent the better part of my day away from home. Necessity alone could have driven me to leave my poor furnishings to the mercy of Sidney and his doting admirers. It was late afternoon when I returned, and I half expected to

see the house in shambles. I was much surprised, after an extensive survey, to find the house in impeccable order; it seemed that not only was nothing damaged or broken, but Caroline had given the entire house a very thorough cleaning.

"To what do I owe this pleasant surprise, my dear?" I asked as I entered the parlour.

"What surprise?" asked Caroline, who was sitting on the sofa with her feet up.

"You have obviously spent the entire day cleaning."

"Oh, it was nothing, dear. I'm glad you're pleased."

"It wasn't nothing," said I, "I appreciate it immensely. I know how very much you hate housework, and it was very sweet of you to do this just to please me. I have rather been neglecting you of late, haven't I?"

"No, dear, not at all!" said Caroline, rather emphatically.

"You needn't deny it; it's quite true. I have been so wrapped up in my own affairs that I forgot what a wonderful wife I have."

I crossed the room to sit next to Caroline, yet when I reached the couch, she would make no room.

"Please don't make me move, dear," said Caroline, "I am so tired."

"Of course," said I, and took a chair, but it struck me that she was acting rather oddly.

"How did Sidney behave today?" I asked, "I don't see anything damaged, so I presume that he caused no trouble?"

"He was an angel," said Caroline, nervously playing with her necklace, "I don't know why you

think that he would damage any of your things; he is such a gentle dragon."

"Oh, I don't know," said I, "I suppose I was a bit put off when he nearly pinned me to my own bedroom wall, and then tried to snap my hand off my wrist and eat my maidservant."

At that moment, Mr. Gagliardi came in with a tea tray, reporting that Hetta still refused to come out of her room. What's more, she seemed to be feeling ill, and was hoping that Caroline would go up and see her.

"I'm too tired," said Caroline, "Besides, I'm sure there is nothing wrong with her."

"Supposing she is ill?" I asked, "I though Hetta was a particular favourite of yours?"

Caroline still refused to be moved, even when I mentioned that perhaps Hetta might be suffering some internal injury as a result of her fall. To find my tender-hearted wife completely devoid of sympathy for her favourite servant baffled me immensely. I entreated her in every wise I could think of, to no avail. Finally Hetta herself was heard to cry piteously from within her room, and Caroline had no choice but to rise. Once she rose, she flew from the room as if pursued.

I was about to remark upon the strangeness of her manner, but when I beheld the couch where she had been sitting, my words were turned to a groan instead. There was a hideous black charmark upon the couch, running nearly all its length. It appeared that Sidney had not been such an angel that day after all.

• • •

After I replaced the couch, Sidney spent a few days on his best behaviour; most likely he sensed that I was ready to kill him. After that, however, it was one catastrophe after another for about a week. He took a decided dislike to the postman, so much that he lunged at the door and tried to set it on fire every time he heard the poor man's footsteps on the stairs outside. We were obliged to put him in his room most mornings until the postman had come and gone, and even then I could hear him thrashing about in his room downstairs.

Spiders were another source of concern, apparently. One afternoon, while I was working at my desk, one of these eight-legged intruders scuttled across my floor. No sooner had I seen it than Sidney, having also detected the creature's presence, attempted to engulf it in fire. The spider, quick on its feet, escaped the flames with dexterity. Sidney, however, bent upon its destruction, pursued it, huffing and snorting and spitting fire at it all over my study until it had seen the spider burnt to a crisp, despite my shouting at him to stop it. The deed done, Sidney looked up at me, as though he expected me to be pleased with his efforts. I would have found this amusing but for the gaping holes now burnt in my Persian rug.

• • •

At least in the evenings, while I sat by the fire with my pipe and my books, and Caroline sat with me, either reading or doing needlework, Sidney sat with us, and did not get into much trouble. At night, Sidney was taken out to fly by Mr. Gagliardi. He had a sort of saddle which he would place on the beast's back, and then he would mount him

as if he were a horse. Then the two of them would fly off into the starry sky, and Caroline and I would stand by a moment and wonder where they went off to. They usually returned in a few hours or so, and then both of them would go to bed. Sidney slept late into the morning, usually, and sometimes took another nap in the afternoon.

As I grew accustomed to Sidney's presence, I began to worry about him a bit less and turn my attention to our dinner party. The replies to our invitations began to arrive, and I was pleased to see how many of our peers intended to come. I was particularly interested in receiving one letter above all others, however. That letter was from Lady Anne Wexley.

Lady Anne Wexley was the daughter of Lord Wexley and the third cousin of the Earl of Surrey, or somesuch figure of importance; I have forgotten who, exactly. What's more, she was a great favourite of the Prince of Wales. There is almost no need to say that her company was sought after by nearly every citizen of London with a parlour.

When I had written out Lady Anne's invitation, Caroline had given a laugh.

"That is ambitious," she had said.

"It isn't very much so," I had countered, "Lady Anne and I are intimate friends."

"Indeed!" said Caroline, raising a brow.

"Well, perhaps not intimate, but friends nonetheless."

"Ah," said Caroline, not convinced.

"I suppose, perhaps, 'acquaintances' might be a description more congruent with the common comprehension of such a relationship as ours," I amended, and, at a final withering expression from

Caroline, finished, "Oh, very well, if you will have the truth, I chanced upon Lady Anne at the dinner party of a friend from my club, and we spoke briefly about the weather. But we would undoubtedly have become good friends if we had been given the opportunity."

Though Caroline did not think it reasonable of me to expect her to come, I was most anxious for Lady Anne's presence at our dinner-party. This was the first affair of such grandeur which Caroline and I had ever planned, and it was to be, in a sense, a sort of "coming out" for us, proving our importance to London society. If Lady Anne were to be present, then not only would Caroline and I be instantly removed to a higher place among our acquaintance, but, more importantly, I could be assured of a seat in Parliament.

Days passed, however, and no news of Lady Anne reached us. I paced to and fro before the front door every morning, practically pouncing upon the postman when he arrived, only to be disappointed yet again. Sidney's indignant snorting and crashing about in his room below seemed to echo my own frustration.

"Don't fret, dear," said Caroline one evening, "Surely she will reply soon. And even if she doesn't, we shall still have a lovely party."

"But not a profitable one," said I, blowing a smoke ring into the air. Sidney watched me, fascinated.

"For all you worried about Sidney spoiling the ceiling with smoke, you're just as bad with that horrible pipe of yours," said Caroline, shaking her head at me.

"Well, at least I don't burn the upholstery," I retorted.

Suddenly Sidney gave a great snort, and let out a great smoke ring, nearly three times as big as mine. Caroline clapped her hands and patted him on the head.

"I see now," said I, "You scold me for smoking, but you praise that ugly thing when he does it."

"He isn't ugly," said she, "Don't you listen to him, Sidney."

I could swear that, as Caroline kissed him, the beast was smiling at me in a most impertinent manner.

• • •

The next day, Mr. Gagliardi fell ill. He was laid up in bed and given tea and gruel for several days, and Caroline was dreadfully worried about him. He seemed to have a terrible fever.

This meant, of course, that Sidney could not be taken for his nightly outings. For the first few days, Sidney seemed to cope tolerably with this unfortunate development. However, by about the fourth day, he began to grow restless. He wandered about the house in a most determined fashion, as if looking for something or someone, and snapped at Hetta when she got in his way. Hetta had only just gotten over her fear of him, and I was certain that any day she would shut herself up in her room once more and never come out again.

"This is absolutely unacceptable," said I, "What are we to do with this beast now?"

"Oh, don't scold the poor dear," said Caroline, patting the creature on the head, "He's only bored. He hasn't gone out for a good fly in several nights. Mightn't we just let him out on his own?"

"We can't be sure he'll return," said I, "And I can't go and lose Harringer's dragon, much as I should like to."

"Can't someone else take him for his outing, then?" asked Caroline.

"Who would want to climb up onto that scaly, fire-breathing monster and be flown up and down and every which way thousands of feet above ground?"

"You might," said Caroline.

"I? No, thank you! My head isn't such a bad-looking one; I'd rather like to keep it on my neck!"

But, as usual, Caroline's infinite charm prevailed, and I found myself that night standing under a starry sky on a dirty rooftop overlooking the vast forest of chimneys called London, getting ready to take Sidney for a ride. (Or, rather, you might say that he was getting ready to take me for a ride.) The moon was shining brightly, though its glory was much diminished by the light riding from the streetlamps far below. Sidney's scales shone with an unearthly beauty, and his eyes gleamed with anticipation. His otherworldly aspect did not in any way reduce my reluctance to get on his back. Caroline and I soon had him saddled. I, too, had prepared myself by gathering anything about the house that could possibly be made into a protective covering. A large pot was strapped to my head, pillows tied about my waist, arms, and legs, and a pair of goggles borrowed from Mr. Gagliardi would protect my eyes from the wind. Caroline provided the finishing touch by wrapping a scarf about my neck.

"There," she said, "It's a bit chilly to-night."

"I still cannot fathom how I was persuaded to do this," said I, "I hope you will be happy when I am killed."

"You won't be killed," said Caroline, "I dare say you will enjoy yourself! I wish I could go, too."

"Oh, no," said I, "Better that I break my neck than that you break yours. Yours is prettier."

With that, I ascended the dragon's back (with no little difficulty) and sat down upon the saddle. Sidney began to flap his wings, and within moments he began to lift himself up from the ground. Suddenly I felt rather sick and wanted to get off, but it was too late; we had already begun to lift into the air. I closed my eyes and pressed my face to the scaly neck (it did not feel very nice), trying to ignore the awful feeling in my stomach.

When I opened my eyes, I found that we were far up in the night sky, with stars glimmering above us and a few city lights dimly twinkling below. I did not much care for heights, so the beauty of the view below was rather marred by the feeling that I would cast up my accounts at any moment. Still, I cannot deny that I received a certain thrill from the cold night air blowing into my face, and the quiet of the lonely sky. The ride actually became pleasant after a time. That is, until Sidney smelled something curious in the air and decided to go after it, whatever it was. He shot forward like a bullet, then without warning dived down toward the ground and plunged into a large body of water. Before I could protest, he turned upwards and burst out of the lake (or whatever it was) and flew up into the sky again.

In a few hours we returned to our own rooftop; I was wet through and shivering violently. I had called Sidney every terrible name I could think of by then, and had resigned myself to clinging to his

back until we landed. Once we did, Caroline came running up to us.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, "What happened?"

"Sidney simply felt like taking a bath, I suppose," I sighed.

"Poor dear! Come in and have some tea! You, too, Sidney."

Sidney followed, looking up at me expectantly, as if wondering whether I had enjoyed myself.

"What do you think?" I asked him.

"What?" asked Caroline.

"Nothing," said I, unwilling at the moment to admit that I had been talking to the dragon.

I was only too glad to go to bed after tea; I was cold and was beginning to ache. I had not entirely disliked the experience of riding a dragon, however, though I was not overly in a hurry to do it again.

The next morning I was most grateful to find out that Mr. Gagliardi was feeling much better, and would probably be well enough to resume his duties within a day. I was much less pleased, however, to find that there was a letter from Felix on the breakfast table. Upon opening it and reading its contents, I found that Felix would not be arriving to retrieve his monster in the time we had agreed upon, but would require a few more weeks. The beast had already been with us for two. I suddenly had a dreadful suspicion, and counted on my fingers, hoping to prove myself wrong.

"Our dinner-party is on the tenth of next month," said I, "And we've only two weeks left until that date. That means..."

"I suppose we shall have to set an extra place for Sidney," said Caroline.

"No," said I, "No, don't tease, dear; this is most serious. I shall have to write Felix and tell him that he shall have to take Sidney back at the appointed time; he cannot be in the house during the party."

"There isn't any need for that," said Caroline, "We can simply keep Sidney in his room while the guests are here. I'm sure he'll behave."

At that moment Mr. Gagliardi entered the room to inform us that Sidney had just sat down upon one of the hall tables and smashed it to pieces.

• • •

"At any rate," I said later in the evening, once the unfortunate table had been swept up, "I suppose we needn't make such a great fuss over the party after all, as it seems Lady Anne does not deign to grace us with her illustrious presence."

"You aren't greatly disappointed, are you?" asked Caroline anxiously.

"No," said I, "Far from it. I'm glad, in fact; I should have died, I think, if Lady Anne were to visit us with Sidney here. It is for the best."

Caroline and I soon began to busy ourselves with the rest of the party arrangements. We had received most of our letters of acceptance and decline, and began to work out the seating arrangements. Then there were some trifles like flowers to be purchased, the menu to be planned, and, most importantly, Caroline and I had to decide what we were to wear.

Sidney watched all these preparations with great interest. He seemed to understand the importance of behaving at this crucial time, and he did not break or burn anything.

"Poor dear," said Caroline, "I think he wishes he could come to the party."

"He wouldn't like it," said I, "He doesn't like his meat cooked, for one matter, and for another, dinner parties are extremely boring. The only reason I would think to host one myself is pure ambition."

This was not quite true, however, for I was beginning to be a bit excited about the party myself. The dinner itself was to be a very nice one, a few individuals of moderate importance had promised to attend, and I did not often have an occasion to wear my very best suit and cuff-links (not the ones which caused the butler's fall from favour). The evening promised to be very grand.

I awoke one morning, about a week from the party, feeling particularly happy. There was a fine day outside, and when I opened the drapes of my bedroom, sunlight came pouring in through the window. I dressed myself and went downstairs, humming a happy tune all the way. I was in such a lovely mood that I actually patted Sidney's head as I came into the kitchen.

"You seem cheerful this morning, darling," said Caroline. She smiled at me, but there was a nervous little twitch about her mouth.

"That, my dear," said I, "Is because I *am* cheerful this morning."

"I am glad of that," said she, and said nothing more.

After a few moments of silence between us (silence meaning no noises apart from breakfast-eating sounds and traffic outside) I spoke again.

"Either you don't like your toast this morning, or something is troubling you. Which is it?"

"Oh, Hilary!" said Caroline sadly, and handed me a letter. Evidently the post had come early this

morning, and had brought the worst possible news. The letter was addressed to Caroline and I. It was from Lady Anne Wexley. Upon opening the envelope, I ascertained that inside was a courteous and untimely acceptance of my invitation to dinner.

"Oh, botheration!" said I, "She's coming! A fine time to tell us, too! She might as well have waited until the day of the party and accepted our invitation on the doorstep; it would have saved her the trouble of posting!"

"Read on," said Caroline.

I did so, and discovered that not only was Lady Anne coming, but she was bringing a friend with her; some foreign countess who seemed, by the way in which Lady Anne wrote of her, to be an extremely distinguished and important individual.

"I think," said I, "That I shall go and die somewhere quietly."

"It really isn't so bad," said Caroline, "We will put Sidney away, as planned, and there will be no problem whatever. Now that I think on it, there really is to be no change in our plans at all; I do not know why I need have worried, nor why you should!"

"If everything goes according to plan, then my worries will have been in vain. But if something should go amiss, the consequences shall now be a thousandfold. Where Lady Anne finds fault, so does most of London."

"Don't fret, dear," said Caroline in a soothing voice, "Nothing will go wrong."

"Caroline," I said, "Sidney doesn't even like the postman! Imagine how he'll feel when over a dozen strangers arrive at the door! He'll probably burn his own door down and come charging up the stairs to tear them all limb from limb!"

"Oh, I'm sure he won't," said Caroline, "He probably simply dislikes the postman in particular for some reason or other, like dogs do. Besides, he doesn't cause a great deal of fuss about the postman when he's locked up in his room."

"Ah, but he does! I've heard him thrashing around down there. The postman can't hear it from outside, but our guests will certainly hear it from the inside."

"Well," said Caroline, "Supposing we gave him some sort of a sedative?"

At first I dismissed this as a silly suggestion, but the more I thought on it, the more it seemed a sensible solution. If the beast were sedated, then he would make no noise and would be very unlikely to escape. I began discussing the matter with Mr. Gagliardi at once. He knew of a certain mixture that would bring about the desired effects in the beast, and with Hetta's assistance he made a large potful. We tested it that day. At first Sidney didn't want to drink it, but Caroline coaxed him into taking some. Within ten minutes he was fast asleep. I could now be completely at ease about the party.

• • •

The anxiously awaited day soon arrived, and I was feeling in reasonably good spirits. By late afternoon the table was set to perfection, a hired cook was outdoing herself in the kitchen, and Mr. Gagliardi was equipping Sidney's room with a few things in order that he might remain there with the dragon for the duration of the evening. At five Caroline and I retired to dress, and nearly an hour later we were almost ready when we heard the most awful crashing sound in the kitchen.

"Is everything alright?" I called out. Mr. Gagliardi hurriedly called back that everything was fine, and my mind was already so preoccupied with the idea of Lady Anne appearing under our own roof after all that I thought nothing more of it.

We descended the staircase to await the arrival of our guests. Sidney had been given the sedative, and he and Mr. Gagliardi were locked up safely in the butler's room. Hetta had her best apron on and was ready to open the door, since we no longer had a butler and tonight I wished at least to convey the notion that performing such a service was beneath me.

Soon the carriages began to arrive. First came Mr. Collingsley and his wife, followed by Lord and Lady Stockham. Then came a few business associates of mine, all bachelors, and a few other couples of mild importance. These were all led into the parlour to converse with one another. It was not long before everyone invited had arrived except for Lady Anne and her friend.

"How very rude," whispered Caroline to me, "I've half a mind not to let her in when she does come!"

"Unfortunately, I have not sufficient means to be so fastidious as you," I replied.

Small talk in a small parlour among a large party can only go on for so long before it becomes tedious and uncomfortable, so it was soon apparent that we could wait no longer to serve dinner. The guests were seated in their respective places, but the two seats of honour were empty. The evening was otherwise unimpeded. Our guests seemed pleased enough with the company, and more than

pleased with the meal. The hired cook had indeed created an astounding array of delicacies, and Hetta didn't stare at the guests or spill anything on them. I was put at my ease by this, and was soon enjoying myself as much as everyone else. I made several witty jokes, was told that the soup was perfection, and saw Caroline complimented several times on her gown. Everything was going along so pleasantly that I even said to myself, "Who needs a pair of snobbish prigs spoiling the party, at any rate? We're much better off without them!"

While we were enjoying the third course, however, I perceived Hetta beckoning from the doorway. Her face was rather white. I excused myself and arose to follow her into the kitchen.

"Oh, sir!" she burst out, "Sidney's got loose!"

"What! How?"

"Oh, sir, I dropped his medicine on the floor this morning; the medicine that was supposed to make him go to sleep. We locked him up and we thought he'd be all right, since Mr. Gagliardi would be with him, but then Mr. Gagliardi needed to go out for a minute because he had forgotten something, and as soon as he opened the door, Sidney bolted out!"

I sank to the floor, feeling my entire evening go to shambles about me. Hetta began to apologize, but she simply burst into hysterical tears, instead. Finally I rose and collected myself; the dragon had obviously not entered the dining room yet, so there was still time to find him before he did.

"Hetta, go upstairs and search for him among the bedrooms. If you find him, lock him in; I do not care what room it is. Mr. Gagliardi, see to it that he

does not enter the dining room, and if Hetta or I should find him, we'll call you to collect him. I shall search the rest of the house."

I left the kitchen in a hurry, and began the search. I did not expect to be long detained, as ours was not a very large house, but somehow the dragon managed to elude me. Every now and then I smelled smoke and thought I would find him in the next room, but it proved each time to be a false notion; either I imagined the smell, or Sidney had left the room by the time I entered. At any rate, after racing about the house a few times, rushing upstairs only to find that Hetta was no more successful than myself, and rushing back down into the kitchen to find it still dragonless, I was quite worn out. I did not know what to do next; it seemed that Sidney had vanished. I could not very well go back to the party; imagine if the brute managed to evade everyone and walk into the dining room!

I had only sat down a moment when two things happened nearly at once. First, the bell rang, and Hetta went to answer it, then the hired cook came rushing into the room where I sat.

"Oh, Mr. Pembroke! He's just come down; I saw him! I couldn't stop him; I was afraid to get too near!"

It only took me a moment to realize the horrible possibility that Sidney would go and greet whoever it was that had come to the door; a moment later I heard an awful scream. I rushed to the front door, and there was Lady Anne, sprawled out upon the floor, with Sidney's terrible face only a few inches from her own.

"He's quite harmless," I managed to squeak out as I shooed Sidney away from her. I gave Lady

Anne my hand, which she grudgingly took to raise herself.

"Harmless, indeed; I am sure it meant to eat me alive! What is that horrible creature?" She dusted herself haughtily, and gave me a look of decided disgust.

"Well," said I, hesitantly, "It's a—"

"A dragon!" broke in another voice. I looked up to see a dark young woman in the doorway. She was dressed in rather foreign garb, and she spoke with a trace of an accent. I assumed it to be Lady Anne's distinguished friend, the countess.

"Yes," said I, "It is indeed a dragon."

"And what, pray," said Lady Anne, "is such a base animal doing in your house? Do you often keep such creatures about?"

"Oh, it is not a base creature at all," said Lady Anne's friend, "No, in my country they are the favourite pets of the king! I have a dragon at home myself. May I?" she asked me.

"Of course," said I, slightly bewildered, and the young dignitary proceeded to scratch Sidney behind the ears; he liked this so much that he rolled over onto his back and let her rub his stomach.

Lady Anne looked properly horrified, but could say nothing. Her disgust was magnified by her friend's entreaty that she come closer and pet the dragon. She did so, but with her fingertips and in the most unwilling manner. I think she would have gone home straight away and not bothered to come in to dinner at all had she been alone, but her friend's enthusiasm prevented her. It seemed that even great people like Lady Anne had to court the favour of someone more important, just as I had to court hers.

Of course, now that the secret was out, I could not very well conceal it from the other guests. Lady Anne was known to be a gossip of the most thorough nature; if she knew about Sidney, the whole of London would know about him within the week.

"It was meant to be a surprise," said I to the two young women, "I borrowed Sidney—that's his name, you know—from a friend, to add a bit of novelty to the evening. He escaped, however. I do beg pardon for his impertinence."

Assuming a lordly tone much unlike my floundering anxiety a few moments ago, I commanded Sidney to go back to his room. He seemed to know that he would be called out again, so he consented for the time being and departed. I then led my two guests of honour to their distinguished seats.

Lady Anne's friend joined the party with great mirth and liveliness. Lady Anne was a trifle stand-off-ish, but the young dignitary so often railed her that she could not continue in her icy manner. She warmed eventually to the company; I had, after all, placed her near to the most distinguished guests I could.

As the dinner neared its end, there was a glint in the foreign young lady's eyes, as if to ask me when I would bring Sidney out again. I was not particularly ready to expose myself to the censure of London's finest society (or as near to it as I could get under my own roof), but I had little choice. I rose from the table and cleared my throat.

"My dearest friends and most welcome guests," said I, feigning ease and merriment, "Thank you so very much for joining my dear Caroline and myself this evening. I assure you, our pleasure has

been infinite! Now I must inform you that I wish to make an introduction. Caroline and I have in our home a most distinguished family friend whom I should like you all to meet. I hope—" and here I paused, scrutinizing the truthfulness of this statement, "—I hope that you will like him as much as I do. Please follow me into the parlour."

There was a murmur as the guests rose from their seats and followed me. Caroline could not get near enough to me to ask what I was about; she could only stare at me with a puzzled expression through the rows of people. I smiled weakly at her, then went ahead and whispered to Hetta that I wanted Mr. Gagliardi to bring the dragon out. Hetta looked at me as though I were a madman, and I was almost inclined to agree with her.

Most of the ladies seated themselves comfortably in the parlour, and the gentlemen stood about and began to talk politics. I began to sweat profusely, and tried so hard not to let it show that I merely sweat all the more. Finally the keeper came, bringing Sidney with him. There was a general outcry among the guests; a few screams from the ladies, and among the men cries of, "What the devil is that horrid thing?" "What does he mean by bringing one of those about; does he mean to murder us all?" Caroline called out in vain, "It's quite alright; he's harmless!"

I, too, tried, without success, to calm my guests by echoing Caroline's phrases. Some of the gentlemen began to exit the room, taking their wives with them. "A dreadful trick, this; does he think to make sport of us?" said one fellow. I helplessly tried to explain myself over the din, but what fragment was left of my voice became lost in the noise.

Suddenly a loud, commanding voice rose above the clatter; it was Lady Anne.

"Have the lot of you no sense of the modern world? Are you such boors that you do not know the latest novelties when you see them? What you see before you is a dragon; one of the most exotic creatures to walk the earth. It is very rare to see them in England at all, let alone London. Will you allow this incredible experience to be wasted? Go on, then. Run away to your homes and your safe, paltry comforts. I shall remain to examine this extraordinary specimen."

My tongue was now quite immobilized by this new development. That Lady Anne, whose word was law in most circles, who could have raised men to the sky or dashed them to the ground with a single declaration—that she should have chosen to defend me, was beyond my comprehension. I would have been completely bewildered by her behaviour, had I not happened to catch a glance of hers in the direction of the countess. She was looking to see if the other lady approved.

The other guests, also perplexed by Lady Anne's speech, paused in their departure and began to mumble amongst themselves. The general consensus seemed to be that, if Lady Anne seemed to think that ugly beast important, well, then, there must be a bit more to it than met the eye.

Those who had risen returned to their places, and gazed upon the dragon, first with skepticism, and then with curiosity. Now that I had got them back, however, I was not quite sure what to do with them.

"Tell us about this beast, Mr. Pembroke," prompted Lady Anne.

Recovering myself, I began to tell the story of Sidney—how he had come to me from a friend, how he had arrived in a crate, how he had frightened Hetta nearly to death, and how he had taken me for an inconvenient and unexpected swim in the middle of the night, and how he had become a cherished member of the household despite my predisposition to dislike him. I told them about his blowing smoke-rings, and watching us at our daily tasks, and taking his nightly flight over London. Lady Anne and her friend applauded my tales, and the others followed their example.

It was some time before everyone left. Lady Anne and her friend were last to leave. The young countess was bubbling over with the evening's excitement, and begged to know when I should have another party. Lady Anne was gracious in her own cool way. We shared one fleeting moment of sympathy and mutual comprehension, each knowing what the other had done in order to gain favour with a higher power. Then it was over, and she and her friend departed.

Caroline and I were quite exhausted by the end of it all, and went directly to bed. Sidney, too, was weary from overmuch admiration.

Before the lights went out, Caroline said, "Didn't I tell you that it would all come out all right?"

"Well," said I, "It most certainly all came out!"

The next week or so was a period of relief. Not only had the dinner party and all its anxiety-causing constituents passed, but now I no longer had to worry about Sidney being seen. I did not, of course, let him loose upon London; such would not have been quite acceptable. I was, however, less

rigid in my secretive habits. Some neighbours even came on purpose to see Sidney, and I think he was quite pleased by the compliment.

Despite my protestations against his coming at all, I was sorry to see Sidney go. I had rather gotten used to him, and had been working up the courage to ride him one more time. It was a sad day, indeed, when Felix came around again to retrieve him. He had finally procured an estate more suited to his station, and was about to settle there.

"I do hope that Sidney wasn't too much of an imposition," he said, stroking the dragon's nose, as he, Caroline, Mr. Gagliardi, and I sat in the parlour over tea.

"Not at all," Caroline assured him. I would have handed him a bill for all the things that Sidney had destroyed, but since Sidney had proved so useful in the end, I decided otherwise.

"Well," said he, "I suppose Sidney and Mr. Gagliardi and I had best be off. I think we'll fly home, as the distance is not too great."

Sidney and I looked pitifully at one another for a moment.

"I do hope," added Felix, "That you will come and visit us once we are settled!"

"We most certainly will," said Caroline.

For days after they left, I half-expected to see Sidney lying by the fire, or near the breakfast table, or following Caroline about the house. I had to admit that I had somehow grown fond of the beast, despite his destructive habits. I eventually got used to things being restored to their normal state, but Caroline seemed to miss Sidney a great deal even weeks later.

A month after Sidney's departure I received the position that I had so coveted. I was a member of Parliament. It was not quite as satisfying as I thought I would find it. I knew then that I had placed far too much importance upon this undertaking. I had never stopped to consider whether Caroline had wanted to mingle so much in society in order for me to make my presence known, or whether she minded all the long hours I often kept. It was only unwillingly that I granted her wish of letting Sidney stay. It struck me with great force that I should have been so cross all the while, though she was so happy, when she made no complaints about all the concessions she had made for me.

I pondered this much after my rise to power, and eventually decided that it would not do. I must do something for her. So one afternoon I sat down with her in the breakfast room.

"Caroline," said I, "Do you like the city at all?"

"It is nice enough, I suppose," said she, "I was raised to it."

"Should you prefer the country?"

"I might," said she, taken aback, "But why do you ask?"

"I was only thinking," said I, "That we might move to an estate near Felix's, and keep a dragon of our own."

"But what about your position?" asked Caroline, "And think of the expense!"

"I have been putting by a bit," said I, "And I'm certain that I might go back and forth, living most of the time in the country, and coming to London when I am needed."

Caroline was more than pleased by this plan, and so I carried it out. And I confess that I have never been happier in all my life.

It is true that if a friend does a great favour for you, you will most likely have to return it. That return may entail some rather unexpected and inconvenient adventures, as I have here recounted. And it is for that very reason that it is well worth it.

A Dragon's Guide for First-time Owners by David Querfeld

In order to get a dragon as a pet you need a couple of things first. You need to have the space for a dragon. A run-of-the-mill, ordinary, suburban house doesn't usually cut it. It may work for a baby dragon, because they are much smaller, but as they grow, you'll need more space. A farmhouse's acreage sounds like a good idea at first, but the wooden material of both the previous options does not make it easy for a fire-breathing creature to live there without causing complete and utter destruction. Therefore, a stone house is the best option for someone looking to obtain a dragon. It cannot be simply a small house made of stone because the dragon will grow to be massive. Therefore, the best bet for a first time dragon owner is to own a castle.¹ Simply buying a castle is not enough, however. Once you have the castle, you should spend some time getting to know your castle. Many castles have secret passageways and hidden rooms. You don't want your dragon to

¹ It must be stated here that acquiring a castle is not for the faint-hearted. One must either already be royalty or must finagle his or her way into being royalty in these days to get a castle. Buying one off the market is insanely expensive and practically impossible. But I guess if the reader is attempting to own a dragon, this makes them both insane and impossible, so the concepts match.

get into one of those secret places that you didn't know about. Only once you've figured out the layout of your castle, you are finally ready to house your dragon.

One last thing to keep in mind before getting a dragon is their desire for bright jewels and treasures. It is a well-known fact that dragons love hoarding treasure no matter whose it is. It is also well-known that cursed treasure has no effect on dragons, seeing as they are generally immune to curses. For this reason, any treasure hoards should be kept far out of reach of the dragons, preferably in a place where they will never be taken. If the dragon happens to see their master near a treasure hoard, their love of gold will take over their instincts and their master will be as good as dead. One smart way to avoid this situation is to keep your money and gold in a bank and use only credit cards and paper money. Dispose of any and all small change before being seen by the dragon. Being metal, the coins will trigger the same effects as a gold hoard.

Before you worry about getting a dragon, though, you should worry about getting the appropriate gear. Dragons are tricky creatures to train. They are incredibly brilliant—some can even talk—and have big attitudes. For this reason, you should have a fireproof suit, preferably made by trained wizards. Their spells are stronger and more effective than small-name, backwater spell casters. Food is another problem for dragons. They need a lot of meat in order to survive. One of the easiest things to do is to set up a contract with a local butcher or rancher for all the meat necessary to feed your dragon. The younger the dragon is, it'll need less

food, of course. As it grows, you'll need to increase it's meal size until it can be trained to hunt on its own. Once that happens, feeding it will be less of a hassle. You also have to make sure you have an appropriate chain. It also must be protected against fire and, preferably, magically reinforced for strength. Eventually this will become unnecessary, but young dragons like to run away. In order to keep the dragon as a pet, you must make sure you can keep it at home. Once you have all of this equipment, it's time to actually look at getting a dragon.

There are a number of ways of getting a dragon. Stories abound of people finding a dragon's egg in the wild. Though this method allows you to train the dragon from birth, the odds of just coming across a dragon egg as you're taking a stroll through the forest are tiny.² Also, this doesn't let you really choose the temperament of your dragon. You just end up being stuck with whatever you get.

Another option that the stories suggest is that a dragon simply "follows you home." This method usually happens when there is a large war against dragons going on and the parents of a baby dragon are killed in the war. Again, though useful for having a very young dragon, wars against dragons don't happen all that often. Even when they do, it's very dangerous to get involved in that, especially to get a pet. This method would allow you to choose the temperament for your dragon, but, again, it's really dangerous to get involved in a dragon war.

² If not infinitely miniscule. Do you know how few people actually find their dragon like that? I've heard a grand total of five stories. In all of history, only five people have found dragons this way. The chances of this happening are practically zero.

The third and easiest option is not usually talked about in most of the stories. If you want to be able to choose your dragon's temperament and age, you should go to the dragon pound. The dragon pound is where people take baby dragons or eggs they find but can't raise. They usually try to take care of the dragons until they are self-sufficient and then release them. At the dragon pound you can find dragons of all ages. Occasionally you can even find an egg to raise if you like that sort of thing.

One thing to keep in mind about going to the dragon pound is security. You can't just show up in shorts and a T-shirt. You should probably wear your fire-proof suit. The dragons in the pound are not usually trained and many of them may consider humans to be enemies. That's why many people get blasted with fire through the bars of the cages as soon as they walk in. The workers at the dragon pound know this and have the best fire-proof equipment on hand.

Once you are at the pound, you are free to choose your dragon. Look carefully at all the options. The younger the dragon is, the easier it will be to train. For this reason, it is recommended to go to the "Recently Hatched" or "Egg" sections of the dragon pound to find the right choice for you. Of course, if you want a wilder dragon as a guard rather than as a house-pet, a slightly older dragon might suit you well.

Keep in mind that most dragons have a hot temperament and are on the wilder side of pets. If you were hoping to have a pet that would curl up on the ground with you on a cold evening, you'll have

to find an extremely quiet and calm dragon. The best calm breeds are the Alpine Flyer and the Canadian Ridgeback. If you want one to ride and enjoy a day out and about, a dragon with a moderate temperament will do nicely. The best breeds for this kind of activity are the Icelandic Wyrn and the English Stalker. Whatever you do, do not choose a dragon with a very strong temperament, such as the Australian Hunter, as a pet. They do not do well with people and will never actually accept you as a master, preferring to burn you to a crisp at the first opportunity.

For those people working on a tighter budget, a pure-blood dragon may be too expensive. The "Mutt Dragons" section of the dragon pound contains a number of mixed blood dragons that are usually much cheaper than pure-blooded dragons. The reason for the price difference is simple: you have no idea what you're getting. That being said, if you are one of these people, it is wise to observe the dragon you would like to purchase for a number of days before finalizing the purchase.

When you have finally come to a decision about purchasing a dragon, there are a number of documents you must have on hand. First of all, you must have proof of address. The people at the dragon pound understand the perils of owning a dragon and will not sell one to anyone living in a suburban home, whereby the previous warning about suburban homes applies. Secondly, you must have the most recent bank statement you have or proof of wealth. Owning a dragon is not cheap and the workers at the dragon pound have come to love the fire-breathing reptilian creatures there and want them to go to a good home. Finally,

you must present proof of identity, preferably with a detailed family tree going back three generations. There have been a number of evil dragon trainers in the past,³ and, if you happen to share more than one eighth blood with any of them, your purchase will be refused.

Once you've finally chosen and purchased your dragon at the pound, you have two options for getting it to your castle. The first, of course, is to take it home yourself. This method is not recommended. It presents the problem of your vehicle potentially being consumed in flames and your untimely death. The safest option is to have the workers at the pound deliver the dragon to your castle. As was said before, they have the best equipment for dealing with dragons and can effectively and safely transport your new pet home.

Once you have your pet dragon at home, you can begin to train it immediately. There are three basic things that all pet dragons must learn. The first thing is to housebreak them. Dragons are creatures of the outdoors; they're not used to living inside. Do not be surprised to find large piles of excrement lying in your castle's hallways for the first few weeks or months. It will happen regardless of how well you train your new pet. You should not let those heaps go unpunished, however. Dragons are fairly intelligent and understand when you punish them for something in the past.⁴ If you don't let the dragon know your displeasure, the "accidents" will continue to occur. The

3 See *A History of Dragon Training* by Martellius Frank for more details on who those trainers may be.

4 Their long-term memory is much better than your average canine (or feline, for that matter).

best way to punish a dragon is to douse them in cold water. A small spray bottle, like you would use on a cat, is not very effective. A fire hose would be the best option, but since those are hard to come by, an ordinary garden hose with good pressure is the next best option. Not only does this allow you to punish your dragon, but it also allows you to clean your nice stone floors at the same time.

The next thing you will have to train your dragon not to do is breathe fire indoors. Most baby dragons do not spew much more than sparks for the first few months of their lives. It is easier to train them at this stage, because they cannot quite burn all of your thousand-year-old tapestries. The best way to do this is to set up a targeting range of stone outside your castle. The courtyard works well enough, but if it is possible to set up the range outside the castle walls it would be better. The only thing to keep in mind is that the stone used for target practice should not be the same kind of stone found in the castle. Otherwise you will confuse your dragon and there will be fire all throughout the inside of your home. Once again, the garden hose punishment works well for this situation.

The third basic thing you need to train your dragon to do is not run away. Using the fireproof and reinforced chain you got before choosing a dragon, take the dragon on walks around the perimeter of the castle, making sure to hold strongly onto the chain. Whenever the dragon attempts to fly beyond the castle walls without you accompanying them, you should pull them back to you and onto the ground. Needless to say, this has to happen while the dragon is still very young or else

it will carry you off with it. Dragons love to fly, and should be allowed to fly freely whenever their master is around, but they should not be allowed to fly beyond the master's line of sight until they have been trained to return without causing damage. This training is particularly essential if the castle you live in is near a small town. If the dragon gets loose in the town without restraint, the whole town could be destroyed and you would be held liable for it.

After these three basic things have been achieved, there are a number of other, more challenging things you can train your dragon to do. Most people who have dragons as pets attempt to specialize their dragons in one thing. The most common of these are Riding Dragons and Hunting Dragons. Riding Dragons are, by far, the most common specialization for a pet dragon. Nothing trumps feeling the air flow through your hair as a massive, powerful beast beats gargantuan wings beneath you as you arrive at the Royal Gala on your perfectly trained dragon. Training a dragon to obey your commands in the air is very difficult. First of all, you must train your dragon in flight commands from the time they are babies. If they begin to get accustomed to the commands early on, they will be able to use the acrobatics later. This is the easiest part of the training. Using simple treats as rewards for the correct maneuver is the best way to do it. As you train your pet dragon to obey commands, you should also begin to get them used to a saddle. A variety of dragon saddles in all sizes should be available at your local pet shop, though you may have to ask to see a manager in order to acquire one. Remember that if your dragon does not get used to

wearing a saddle and flying, they will not be able to carry anyone. All of this can be done when the dragon is still a baby, but the real training begins once it is strong enough to carry you.

Once the dragon is old and strong enough to carry you, you can start training it to carry you. This involves a number of steps which will only briefly be mentioned.⁵ This training depends completely upon the master training the dragon and a variety of methods have proven fruitful. The first step is to train the dragon to crouch in order to allow you to climb on and off the saddle. Next you must train the dragon to hear your commands from on its back. Hopefully, you will have already trained it to recognize maneuver commands, but if you haven't it's still not too late, though it may be more difficult. Finally, you need to train your dragon to take off and land softly so as to not ruin everything around it, especially if you intend to take it to important places. You do not want your dragon ruining the Queen's Palace as it lands or takes off, for example.

Hunting dragons are even harder to train than Riding Dragons. Though all dragons eventually must learn to hunt for themselves, training one to specialize in hunting is difficult. The reason behind this is that most dragons are used to hunting and then eating their food immediately rather than killing and taking their kill back home. If you want to train your dragon to bring food home, you will have to take a painstakingly long time to train it and recognize that it will never bring a whole animal home.

5 For a more complete and detailed account of this tricky topic see *A Riding Dragon's Guide for the First-Time Trainer* which I am currently developing and should be published in the upcoming century.

No single approach has been proven to be the most effective for training a Hunting Dragon.⁶ Most approaches say to begin training the dragon to hunt when it is young, usually by taking it along on hunting trips.⁷ The fact that dragons learn by observation is not commonly known. The other side of that coin, however is that, though they learn, they can also choose to ignore that learning. Training with rewards and punishments seems to be the most effective way of teaching a dragon anything for a long period of time. It has been said that using small game (rabbits, fawns, and the like) while still at home is a good way of training the dragon to hunt well. This seems to be a good approach and may be recommended for those who wish to train a hunting dragon. If you wish to take this approach, remember to not use the meat of the small game you will be training the dragon with as a reward for basic training.

That is how you must obtain and train a pet dragon. Much has been left out in this document due to the fickleness of dragons themselves. Dragons are intelligent and deadly creatures. Their training should not be undertaken lightly. Therefore, the author of this piece takes no responsibility for the failure or lack of effectiveness of the dragon's train-

6 Bob Cramingioulus, Cynthia "Rambo" Fairwind, Demosthenes E.A. Donovan, and Gustavian Mortlock all present different strategies for training a hunting dragon, but all are in constant contradiction with each other. They are still useful guides for potential training techniques, however.

7 One must remember the tragic story of Prince Revyakvrk of Iceland who, while attempting to teach his dragon to hunt, became the hunted himself. Rest in peace, dear Prince.

ing. This includes, but is not limited to, death of the trainer by burning, devouring, or being stepped on, property damage of the trainer or anyone associated with him or her, and the burning of the entire countryside.

Pixie
by Emily Labutta

My to-do list is very simple. I have one job, given by the all-important universe, and, so that I don't forget, it's simple. Unspecified. I am to have fun. In my case, this means wreaking havoc, mostly in small doses.

On this cold day, I start from bed with a quick check at the sun to make sure of the time. Though wasting time is a certain kind of fun, and a certain kind of havoc, I wouldn't want to waste the mornings. The time when most people are groggy, snotty, grumpy, and easily angered, not to mention busy, stumbling, and confused, is one of the best. At least that's what I think. Others will tell you it's the impatient time of night, when people are liable to do anything, but I don't like that. I like them being predictable. It makes unpredictability all the more aggravating.

Apollo has clearly befriended me today, at least for the moment, because the sun is close enough to wake me but not too far on its path for the pure gems those morning moments are to pass. Then again, one can never quite tell with the gods. One second they're commanding you to do their work, the next they're blasting you with some well-crafted lightning or something. Trust me, I would know.

I pull myself from bed and float over to the calendar. Seventy-two days until April Fool's. Drat. I snap my fingers at the air, roll over, and then proceed to the building by which I've taken up residence, holing up in a cardboard box that once housed a toaster and now houses me. Really it's a fascinating sort of creation the humans made, until it gets wet. Then it does my job almost as well as I do.

A quick dart in through the automatic doors and I'm in to work. The stairs prove the greatest difficulty, not because they're so large, but because they're so open. Anyone could see me as I glide up to the sixth floor, but the stairs are still a better risk than the elevator. At least I have room to run.

Up on the sixth floor lives my friend Matthew S. McColin. Of course, he doesn't know we're friends, but I'm always there to tie his shoes together, slip the remote behind the sofa cushion, and loosen his fingers so that his toothbrush tumbles into the toilet as he's trying to make up for lost time. And he blames himself. He's sleepy, he's clumsy, he's going through a growth spurt. At thirty-four. Sure.

This morning, I slip into his apartment as silently as usual. More out of impulse than desire, I kick his dog, an ugly pug of a thing that stumbles awake with a growl. Then, since Matt is still in the shower and making someone slip on soap is so trite, I go to the kitchen drawer and start mixing the forks and spoons out of the organizer. For good measure I throw a knife into the garbage disposal and turn it on until it's thoroughly stuck. The metallic grating purrs into my ears, and I smile my best mischievous smile.

There's a click and a thud, and the sound of water slapping the ground is shut off. Matt thinks

he's ready for the day, but he has no idea what all is in store. Neither do I, for that matter, but that's what makes surprises so fun.

And the day's only just beginning.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- We welcome submissions from any member of the Wheaton College community, whether student, faculty, staff, or alum. Only two pieces from any one author may be submitted per issue.
- For copyright reasons, we must limit our published selection to original characters and worlds only. Please, no fan-fiction or fan-art.
- While the journal's main emphasis is on fiction, we will also consider poetry, non-fiction, essay, and art for publication.
- The journal will only publish genre fiction. The genres included are:
 - Science fiction
 - Fantasy
 - Mystery
 - Action/Adventure
 - Horror
 - Western
- We are interested in any mix of these or similar genres. If your piece falls under a genre we missed, please contact us and ask about it. We will most likely welcome your story!
- Short fiction is preferred, but chapters of longer stories may have the opportunity to be published serially.
- Essays and other non-fiction submissions may be on these genres themselves, authors who write in them, personal experiences with genres, reviews of popular works of genre fiction, etc.
- Art submissions must have as their main subject something to do with the target genres. Please submit your work as a high-resolution PDF.

Deadlines

Submission deadlines are:

- Fall semester—October 31
- Spring semester—March 17

We will accept submissions at any point during the semester, but only those submitted before the above dates will be considered for the current issue. Submissions should be e-mailed as attachments to *SubCreation@my.wheaton.edu*. If your piece is too big for an e-mail attachment, simply contact the same address for further instructions. Please include your full name and Wheaton e-mail address with your submission.

Contact Us

You can find out more about the journal and our community of writers at our website and our Facebook page. Simply google "Wheaton Sub-Creation" or use this URL: <https://tinyurl.com/yypnuatf>

Cover image: Detail of "Carta Marina" by Olaus Magnus, 1539, with detail of "Tetra" by Tsukino Shinya.

