

Dual with a Dragon

*I*t was a typical sunny Saturday morning in Campaneenee, a quite village in the foothills of the Gespachio mountain range. There were a few people hanging out in the shade of the market place, an octagonal wooden structure open on all sides with a slate roof, set, not quite, in the middle of the village square. The heavy slate roof provided some shade for the few merchants who had set up their stalls already. They eagerly awaited the residents of the small village, each hoping for a good turn out on such a fine morning. A few children were playing in the dusty square, their games disturbed, occasionally, by a carriage or cart lumbering through.

A shadow drifted across the ground, one of the children looked up and shouted "Dragon!" The rest of the kids ran screaming for the shelter of the market. Unfortunately as they did so, Brother Albert, who ran a rather famous monastery, was so startled that he poured some of the monastery's famous product on a customer rather than into the large stoneware jug he was holding. The customer was not well pleased. Brother Albert, known for his convivial nature laughed and patted the nearest child on her head.

"Not to worry there's plenty more in the keg."

"I know that, but now I smell like I've been bathing in beer!" Grumbled the customer.

A few adult heads looked out from the shade of the market place but the sky was crystal clear and as blue as it could be, with just a few fluffy clouds floating in the light breeze.

"Don't be telling fibs, trying to scare us, Cedric, or I'll tell your father!" admonished one of the adults. The other kids drifted back out into the sunshine and restarted their games. A few more people entered the square and headed for the market place.

Once again a shadow drifted lazily over the ground.

Once again Cedric yelled "Dragon!"

Once again the other children ran for the shelter.

Once again Brother Albert became startled and the unfortunate customer had, once again, a large quantity of Brother Albert's Succulent Sustenance poured over him. Of course most folks who enjoyed a few pints of Brother Albert's Succulent Sustenance just called it beer.

Once again heads looked out from under the shade of the market. "That does it Cedric. When your father shows up I'm going to tell him..."

Once again the shadow drifted over the dusty ground. The adults looked skyward. A couple of them rubbed their eyes. The woman who had been admonishing Cedric, looked at him, blinked a couple of times, looked back at the now clear sky. The adults all withdrew to the shade, closely followed by the children, including Cedric. Many of the adults took a large drink of Brother Albert's beer.

No one spoke another word for almost a full minute. It had been a long time since a dragon had been seen in this part of Paassda. It had been so long that nobody believed there were any more dragons.

Suddenly there came a chorus of:

"Nah..."

"Trick of the light"

"Must have been one of those, big, green and blue dreagles..."

"More beer anyone?"

"Yeah, that's it..."

"Definitely not a *real* dragon..."

"Refill anyone?" Asked Brother Albert.

"Yeah... some kid playing with a dragon shaped kite..."

"A very big dragon shaped..."

"Very big..."

"Half price on the beer?"

For a few moments the dragon was forgotten and Brother Albert became very busy filling a wide variety of containers with half priced beer.

As this was going on a young man peered out from a window in the Hungry Hog Inn, which was across the street from the market place. As he did so the shadow once again drifted lazily over the square.

No one moved, except for the young man in the window. He slowly backed away from the upstairs window as he watched the dark shape that cast the shadow. A second later the young man darted from the doorway of the inn and looked up into the sky. He caught sight of a strange barbed object as it disappeared behind the rooftops across the street. He scurried back inside without saying a word.

None of the villagers noticed the young man so no one remarked on how one moment he was not there then he was there and just as suddenly once again he was not there.

Once again the shadow returned but this time it did not drift away, it grew darker. With an earth trembling thud a huge dragon landed in the village square, her scales glinting in the bright sunlight. She flapped her leathery wings once, sending a cloud of dust billowing in all directions as she lazily folded her wings along her sides and looked around the now empty square.

The few villagers, who were unlucky enough to be in the square when she landed, had scattered in fear of being roasted alive. Other than the swirling dust nothing was moving, well Brother Albert was counting the money he had collected, otherwise the only sound was the deep rumble of her breaths.

A mouse ran from a corner of a building, instantly the dragon's huge yellow eyes focused on the mouse, her head snapped around as a thin stream of fire shot from her right nostril. The mouse, slightly quicker than the dragon, disappeared back into the building it had come from, brushing at its singed tail.

A strange sound began to emanate from the shadows of the Hungry Hog's doorway. The sound was like pieces of old metal slowly rubbing back and forth across each other. The dragon's ears swiveled in the direction of the sound closely followed by her huge head.

From the doorway out stepped a lone figure, clad in a suit of armor. The armor had seen better days, it did not glint in the bright sunlight. Patches of rust could be seen all over it except where the arms rubbed against the sides of the chest plate. The chest plate bore all the signs of age and abuse; it was covered in dents and deep scratches. His helmet clearly was too big for his head, for it wobbled with every step. With every step it was easy to see that the legs and shoes were less than snug. He had to stop and wiggle his foot back into one of the shoes. In his hand he carried a long spear, the shaft of which had clearly been repaired more than once, the point looked as dull as the suit of armor. As he stepped from the shadows he looked around, he did have to turn the helmet with his free hand so he could see through the eye slit. What he saw was, in the windows of every building were frightened faces of the villagers. A few cowered in the doorways of various shops, the occupants had locked the doors and were not about to open them to let anyone else in.

The dragon glanced contemptuously at the knight for a moment and then shifted her weight, raising her head on her long neck; she put one eye within inches of the nearest window. Purposefully ignoring the lone knight as he rattled towards her. The people inside the room of the nearest window, scrambled over each other trying to get away from the eyeball that now filled the window.

The knight began to circle around the square to stand directly in front of the dragon. Unfortunately he tripped over a parcel someone had dropped in their haste to find shelter. He landed with a clatter. Instantly the dragon swung her huge head to within inches of the prone knight. She smiled, baring a glistening set of teeth that could easily crunch through an elephant. A large globule of drool slowly dripped from her lower lip splattering on dusty ground between his legs.

As the knight struggled to get back on his feet, waving away the stench of the dragon's breath, she once again reared her head to its full height and took in a lungful of air. Just as the knight got to his feet and looked up at the massive head, thirty feet above him, a fireball the size of a large carriage erupted from the dragon's mouth and hurtled to the ground.

The knight leapt to his left as the fireball hit the ground where he had been standing. The force of the resulting explosion knocked him over. He did lose a shoe, exposing the hole in his sock that allowed his big toe to get some fresh air. The shoe was soon turned to a small glowing lump of molten metal. The shaft of the spear he was holding burst into flames. He dropped the burning spear and drew a small dagger from his belt.

When the dragon saw the dagger she laughed sending a series of small fireballs up over the buildings. The knight once again began to circle around the dragon looking for an opening. The dragon's tree trunk like legs stumped around trying to keep the knight in front of her. As she swung her massive body her tail followed and knocked the roof from the market place. A few screams from within soon turned to moans as most had spilled the last of Brother Albert's Succulent Sustenance over each other.

The knight knew he had to stop the dragon before she could do any more damage to the village or its residents. But he had to admit the beer smelled so much better than the dragon. He feinted to the right and ran at the dragon, she reared her head sucking in another lungful of air, as the fireball descended, the knight suddenly stopped. The fireball engulfed the suit of armor.

The villagers could not believe their eyes, more so they could not believe they now would be the victims of the dragon's pleasure.

The fireball lifted and faded into the sky. All that was left of the knight was a rusty suit of armor that was now glowing a bright orange.

Some of the more sensitive villagers turned away from the sight. Others watched in disbelief as a small dagger spun through the air, sparkling as the sunlight caught the blade. The dagger hit its target with surprising force and accuracy, the tip slipping in between the edges of two steel hard scales.