



IMAGINE YOUR STORY

Tale of the Book Dragon

Written by Tara Lago, age 15, from South Beach Library

From my own experience, I can tell you that it was easier for people to hunt a dragon than read a book. Don't believe me? Well then...

In Ancient China, I was the son of the dragon Chaofeng. In Medieval Europe, I went on a quest to slay the Satanic beast. I have also listened to Merlin give a dragon lecture to a Welsh king. I have gone across the ocean to the Andes and survived the tremors of Amaru. And throughout this stretch of time, rarely did I see people read a book. Dragons are great distractions, after all. Too bad there wasn't any popcorn.

So see? This is proof that I am a credible source. I would have taken photographs, but, alas, humankind lacked such technology then. Despite their pitfalls, they made it up tenfold in their imagination and wonder, which is, with all due respect, sorely absent in the modern world. Dear reader of the Present, have you no faith? Have you no wonder and fear over the impossible and the mystique? Why are myths labelled myths? How did they become compiled into easy-to-read books when they possess dimensions of intricacies? Why is reality, a narrow-minded mindset, considered the correct view of our world?

Now, the dragons aforementioned are all extinct (Rest in Peace) due to our utter neglect of them. We neither put them on the Endangered Species List, nor did we make it illegal to poach them. The dragons who could fly choked on the polluted air, the dragons who could swim were poisoned on plastic, and the dragons who lived underground were displaced by oil drilling. Unfortunately, the dragons who hoard money are alive and thriving. What a shame!!

The past is in the past. Regret is the only constant throughout time, so we must use it to learn and to become better. (The unicorns are counting on it.) But believe it or not, (I prefer it if you believe it), there is a silver lining in this mess of gold. Because there is still one type of "fictional" dragon still in existence, one that is a friend and a foe, that is fawned and feared upon, that is discarded and treasured. I shall not tell you its name beforehand because it will ruin the fun! So listen carefully and listen well to the story I am about to tell you...

This dragon found its humble origins in the moon, specifically during the crescent phase. The dragon, formed from clay on the lunar soil, stretched its wings, and the stars then branded themselves onto



the creature in a brilliant dance of sparks and constellations. After several revolutions across the sun in solitary confinement, it decided to depart from the moon and enter the earth's atmosphere. Please note that no one fully knows why it chose to migrate or how it was able to travel through space for that matter. However, after studying the evolution of the dragon and its DNA samples, my fellow dragonologists and I hypothesize that the animal was searching for the Eve to his Adam. In other words, a mate.

His mate was birthed in wadj, her skin a thick armor of brown and beige with scales that glittered in ink. She, along with many of her kind, lived in the Egyptian deserts, and the harsh environment forced them to become resilient against the heat. When the moon dragon, also called the cuneus dragon, landed here, his would-be mate and her thunder of dragons welcomed him with hostility. (As they should. He was an alien, and aliens stereotypically bring Armageddon.) Yet they were intelligent creatures who saw how he could be advantageous to them. The unrelenting sun did not bother him, and he barely needed any food or water to survive. After shows of dominance from the head of her thunder, the dragon from the moon submitted to her tribe. Again, please note that these rituals are elaborate and social hierarchies differ from one species to another. There needs to be a whole study focused on dragon society, but I digress.

So once the moon dragon assimilated with the wadj dragons, it was smooth sailing from there, as smooth as it can be when it comes to survival. These dragons were at the top of the food chain, but their kryptonite was fire, which was caused by...you guessed it!! Humans. Please note that the cuneus dragon was the exception to this rule. However, keep in mind that these dragons and humans once had a commensal relationship. People are generally curious about anything unknown, so the ancient peoples studied the dragons, and the dragons, unbothered by their inquisitiveness, offered their knowledge. For instance, the cuneus dragon provided humans with an established code of law and the wadj dragons provided a manual of superstitions and spells to protect the dead. Their relationship was so successful that an extensive research facility was built to study these creatures. Humans coaxed these dragons into the study center with promises of food and shelter, but they were free to go when and if they wanted to. Some left immediately. Many others stayed and even had offspring there.

But, of course, this utopia was not meant to last. The facility became ravaged by flames, and thousands of wadj dragons, along with documents describing them, were incinerated. It was not a painless, quick death. The dragons' roars of anguish echoed even after the fire subsided. Unfortunately, the cuneus dragon and his adopted tribe perished in those walls as well. The great fire took a toll on the wadj dragon population, and even though they recovered slightly, this dragon species eventually faded into myth.

Dear reader, can you imagine this destruction, this immeasurable loss? Just thinking about it makes me sob uncontrollably because as a scholar there, I saw it firsthand. And to put myself in these poor dragons' shoes...the suffering they had to endure!! In their eyes, I see the building's structure toppling like dominoes, tearing the creatures' wings. I see how the fire swallows my thunder hungrily and greedily. I see how I, the cuneus dragon, shield my offspring with my wings as I roar, believing fire is like any animal, that it can be deterred by intimidation.

And now, back in the eyes of a scholar, amidst the smoke, I see the dragon protecting its young. I rush



in to save the children and their father. But their father refuses to leave and chooses to go further into the fury of the flames in search of his mate. Look at how love compels us to make valiant but foolish sacrifices!!

And with his offspring, I flee like a madman, knowing full well I could have done so much more. Perhaps I could have stamped out the flame before it was incited. But there were too many fires burning simultaneously, both literal and figurative ones. Even if I were a self-proclaimed Messiah, I would only have delayed the inevitable.

Take a moment to contemplate this loss of lives and research. Thank you. I have composed myself now, so let us continue. The offspring that I saved were fledglings, which meant that they were at the adolescent stage. I had to train them to fly long distances because they were no longer safe in this part of the world. It was grueling work since they were stubborn and were trying to cope with the trauma of losing their parents. But as any modern trainer would tell you, the key is repetition. They soon improved their endurance and understood that they had to leave. Perhaps their father left the moon not only for a mate but because a disaster forced him to flee. Oh how his children met a similar fate.

This is where things get murky, dear reader. Until recently, it was unclear to me whether any of them succeeded in going to a different place and settling there properly. But the fabulous DNA technology of today enlightened me to the point that I was nearly euphoric. You see, I initially thought they would travel together to arrive at the same destination, but like boy band fads, they disbanded. Was it because of a civil war? Or did the leader, or the group, collectively agree that they would have better chances of surviving separately? How desperate was their situation? Were they at the brink of cannibalism? I am uncertain if wadj dragons sense familial ties, but if they did decide to part for the betterment of the whole, then I underestimated the strength of their camaraderie entirely. My chest will swell with parental pride if that's the case.

There were six dragons, and they divided themselves into pairs of two. Each pair permanently stopped at Pergamon, Rome, and China, respectively. Keep in mind that dragons can live up to 1200 years, and so their migration spanned several centuries with detours along the way.

Once one pair of dragons settled in Pergamon, their diet changed from meat and plants to goat, sheep, and calf meat only. Their skin turned into a darkened leather, and their claws and teeth became sharper. Though food was more plentiful, the change in diet helped the wadj dragons, better known as Pathica dragons in this region, withstand the heat and water. These dragons flourished in this area, and Herodotus, a prominent historian who wrote *Histories* and who I had the pleasure of meeting, remarked that these dragons were commonplace during his time (I can attest that despite his title "Father of Lies," his other accounts of mythical creatures are true).

The second pair of dragons inhabited Rome, and their skin changed from smooth, light beige to blocky wood. The place was plentiful of bees, and their wax had great healing properties for the dragons, now referred to as Stilus dragons. Teachers found these dragons useful for teaching their pupils how to write



and how to read.

Last but not least, the final pair of dragons became herbivores with meals consisting of mulberries, bark, and hemp. Their skin became thinner and delicate, and so they gave up flight, turning into land-bound creatures. In this area of the world, they are titled Xylographies. These dragons had wonderful illustrations decorated on them along with religious texts and calendars in intricate calligraphy.

In Pergamon, Rome, and China, the human inhabitants' curiosity was naturally piqued, and these dragons became popular pets with nearly no casualties (except the occasional swallowed human). I find it surprising that these creatures' domestication came so easily, but these dragons were unique among other species. They evolved quite quickly to cater to the needs of their environment, and yet their Achilles heel dreadfully remained: their flammability.

Dear reader, are you bored yet? Does this sound like a dull textbook in which I drone on and on about the development of these dragons? Were you expecting knights and damsels in distress and gold and monstrous creatures, a fantastic story of cliché adventure? If the answer is yes, then leave. You are not welcomed here, but I want you to know that you have contributed to the demise of these species. Bear your guilt with pride. It would be cowardly not to.

Yet in all relationships with humans, there is both a seen and unseen vie for power. As these dragons became more accessible to all walks of life, people in power, or those who took their leadership by force, found it difficult to control the masses. These dragons, just like the wadj ones, held an invaluable source of knowledge, and that was the match needed to light a fire. I witnessed both the triumphs and tragedies of human interactions with these dragons. And though I'd rather focus on the victories, disregarding the horrors will make it seem as if they are acceptable, forgivable, justifiable even!! They cannot and will not be water under the bridge because the proverbial bridge will burn if we forget them.

These creatures, as well as innocent human victims, were collateral damage in numerous wars. So when you hear the crinkling of their wings in flames, dear reader, that is the sound of evil's laughter, a gaping maw of orange and yellow. Think this is far in the past? Think again. It is as near as the 20th century. When some of these dragons became black sheep in a white flock, they were silenced and burned. (Some would describe this dreadful practice as Orwellian.) The majority of them tried to escape to no avail. In the olden days, they were the ultimate rulers of the sky and could find refuge there, but artificial dragons took to the air. And they, the hellish devils of the earth, slain them one by one by one. It was a holocaust!! Oh, the horror!! The horror!! The horror!!

The sensation of the fire licking me and covering me in a veil of a sinner's ash has never left me. Because as always, despite being an experienced draconologist, I was powerless. I hopelessly tried to save as many dragons as possible, but it was inadequate, a half-empty glass that remained half empty no matter how many times you poured water into it. In these cases, the last resort would be to fight fire with fire. I reluctantly accepted that and disappeared in the shadows, endlessly observing, like the perpetual bystander I was.

Those terrible, terrible days finally ended. But they are equally resilient as these dragons, and they will



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return. An arsonist will cease to be a criminal, but a hero, and a dragon will turn from a victim to the “real” enemy. And nowadays, the internet has encroached on our focus. Scroll and scroll and scroll and scroll and scroll. Watch a five-second video. Watch another and another and another. These dragons are pushed to the time out corners of our minds.

But dear reader, keep your chin up. As long as we use our voices and advocate for these dragons, these creatures of complicated beauty and knowledge, we shall wield a different type of fire, a fire that brings warmth within. That fire is hope.

So can you guess the universal name of the dragon? Surely you already know. You’ve most likely seen these dragons in school, in cabinets, and yes, even at home!!

The most wondrous things are hidden in plain sight. The hunt for the dragon does not need to take place in a gloomy forest, in a tumultuous sea, in an arid desert, or even on the moon. I went to all of these places, and it was unpleasant, to say the least.

Rather, just take a quick look through a bookshelf, and when you open a book, do you see pages, or do you see dragon wings?