

# Unremembered Loss

*For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss*

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Welcome to the newsletter. Don't forget to forward it on to your friends and help me build a following that will one day lead to Unremembered Loss being published. Sign up for the newsletter at <http://www.douglasgclarke.com/lists/?p=subscribe>

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# Dragons



Illustrations by Emma Clarke

Dragons have long sparked the imaginations of fantasy readers and writers alike. From an evil monster to a trusted mount, dragons have held down many roles.

Being a Christian Fantasy Writer, I have to look a little closer at the meaning behind the character and make sure it fits into my world view.

### **Embodiment of Evil**

It is easy to use a dragon as the villain in a story - a stand-in for the devil. The evil dragon fits in well with the Christian view of the eternal battle between God and Satan.

The evilness of the dragon can make the “good” guy or gal look even better by comparison. While the dragon eats young virgins, the hero can save them. The dragon is self-centered and the heroine is willing to risk her life to save someone else. A dragon may kill wantonly while the hero may regret killing the dragon, despite its evilness.

Just as easily the dragon’s evil ways may highlight some of the flaws in the hero. Does the hero stay calm - trusting in God - when things seem to fall apart around him, or does he try to take matters into his own hands. How does the heroine view worldly possessions? When she finds treasure does she see it as a gift or her due? A dragon can also

reflect the hero’s desire for power and fame, the hero’s tendency to be ruthless towards his enemies - not showing compassion or mercy - or cowardliness in the face of fear by sending others into the fray first - knowing that they will die.

As the embodiment of evil, it is easy to keep a dragon in its place. Evil exists and good must fight against it, but this black and white view of good and evil can seem either too far away from real life to be relevant to the reader or it can feel preachy.

Some see them as the embodiment of evil - caring only about themselves, eating young virgins, killing wantonly, and gathering hordes of treasure to sleep upon.

Others see a powerful ally - able to whisk the hero vast distances, defend him against powerful foes, impart great wisdom, and show him what loyalty means.

From my early days of playing Dungeons and Dragons, I saw dragons covering the spectrum of good and evil. The colored dragons were evil by nature and opposing them were the metallic dragons. The eternal battle between good and evil was reflected in the battle between the colored and metallic dragons.

The good dragons also reflected the internal struggle of

man - between doing what is right and doing what the heart desires.

### **Good dragons**

There seems to be a trend in current fantasy to turn traditionally evil creatures into good one or at least ones trying to be good - vampires and werewolves jump to mind. Dragons have joined the ranks of the good in stories such as Eragon, where the dragon is humble, loyal, and ready to serve his new rider.

In this way dragons can be used to show how far off the mark the hero is. The dragon can be patient, caring, and helpful while the heroine can be struggling with these.

Beside being a measuring stick, a good dragon can be a source of wisdom for the struggling hero - providing helpful words and a nudge in the right direction. It can also offer a perspective on a problem that can be the spark the hero needs to figure out what needs to be done.

But good dragons can be a problem, too. It is easy to have the dragon look preachy and unbelievable.

### **Dragons in the Middle**

Dragons are also making appearance in stories where they don’t carry with them the stereotype of being good or evil. They might be por-

trayed as animals that do not understand good and evil, or like humans who are called by good and tempted by evil.

Some of these dragons are even showing up as the main characters of stories where they are stand-ins for people and go through the same types of struggles that we all go through.

These “normal” dragons are the ones that are the most interesting to me. Instead of being a plot device or a measuring stick they can have depth and surprises. Even when being stand-ins for a person, a dragon still has some attributes that make them stand apart and can be used to contrast with or mirror the other characters.

### **Flying**

Flying giving the dragon the ability to quickly enter and exit a scene, surprise a foe from above, and be closer to God by flying in the heavens. Flight is one of the things man is most envious of. Flight makes a dragon seem better in the eyes of mere humans. It can show man's feelings of inadequacy, self loathing, and the covetousness of his heart.

### **Tough Hide**

The dragon's tough hide - covered with impregnable scales - can be used to show the weakness of man. In the

same light it can be used to show the bravery of the knight who dares to fight one. Whether this bravery is really a commentary of man's foolishness might not be revealed until the end of the fight.

### **Weakness**

Of course with every strength comes a weakness to balance it, be it a soft spot on the dragon's underbelly or a magical link with a human which causes the dragon to die when its rider does. This weakness can highlight man's own imperfections. Whether it is his fragile body, his wondering mind, or his lack of faith, man's weaknesses can cause his death just as quickly as the dragon's.

### **Greed**

While not universal for all dragons, greed is often forefront in a dragon's life. It may be the driving force behind his evil actions or the stumbling block that hinders his good intentions. This can be used to show how men are likewise controlled or tripped up by greed.

### **Magic**

Some dragons have magical abilities - able to cast spells or breathe fire. Like flight, these set dragons apart as better than men - something to be jealous of. Magic can

also be used to show a connectedness with God (if God is the source of the magic) or a separation from God (if the magic means that God does not have to be depended on.)

### **Immortality**

For dragons that are portrayed as immortal, a powerful contrast can be setup between a man's decades of years and the dragon's eons. How would a dragon look at death if it can only come from unnatural sources? Would a dragon who has lived a thousand years be bored with life?

### **Misunderstood**

The attribute that intrigues me the most is how dragons are almost universally misunderstood. No matter what the heroine might think, she is almost always blinded by her preconceptions. This dynamic can show how quickly a person can fall back on her prejudices and make judgments. It can also be used to show growth in the main character as they come to understand they were wrong.

### **Two stories**

Following is a two-part short story followed by a standalone one that explore man's ability to let his prejudices guide his actions.

# Dragon Flight

I glided feet above the trees, the wind beneath my wings. My heart raced, not from exertion, but from exhilaration. When my feet began to brush the treetops I flapped my massive wings and launched myself upward, but soon I was gliding again.

To my left I saw a black patch of earth left by a farmer after he had finished his harvest - its updraft promising a free ride. I banked, stretching my wings as wide as they would go, determined to sail all the way there.

As I descended I watched for the edge of the woods. I almost made it, but I dipped too low and took off the top of a tree with my right leg. Below the land dropped away to a river and then a village. I dove down the hill trying to increase my speed, pulling up just before I reached the river, I gained the height I need to clear the village.

The village came quickly and its wall passed in a blur. Most of its buildings were small, but I had to turn and bank to miss the few of the taller towers. I saw the villagers pointing and waving as I passed over their market. Soon the town's far wall passed under me and I focused on the burned field ahead.



I made it to the field without flapping my wings again, but I was only a dozen feet from the ground as I passed that magical line. I could feel the power there as I approached. The wind moved towards it making my task of saying afloat that much harder, but the reward was worth it.

Suddenly I felt the rising air pushing me up. My spirit soared and I rose without

effort. I banked slowly to the right, going around and around. The farmhouse became smaller and smaller as I rose. The town shrunk until it looked like a pile of sticks.

As with all things, my ride came to an end, but I was higher than the mountain tops when it did. I fixed my eyes on home and headed off, leaving the town and the ever so helpful farmer behind.



# Attack

Bells rang out their warning. Dogs barked and Children cried. While everyone else was running for cover or frantically looking for their loved ones, I ran for the market. I wanted to see the beast that was coming. It's not like I wasn't afraid. I suppose I just believe in fate. If the town was going to be destroyed, and I along with it, why shouldn't I at least get a look at it.

I reached the market, my heart pounding and my breath left a block behind. A few people stood around, a few others were disappearing into nearby buildings. Then there was a deathly silence. Everyone stopped talking. Everyone may have stopped breathing. I could hear my own heart pumping and then even that faded.

A whistling began to fill my ears. Soon a rustling of the wind joined the whistle. Then someone pointed up into the air to the west. I followed their gaze and saw the beast. My body froze and I did stop breathing. My mouth dropped open and my eyes grew bigger.

There it was above the tree tops. Its wingspan was huge, perhaps a hundred spans of a man's arms. They were held out motionless as if they could not move. The dragon's body was massive, easily larger than the biggest building in town. Its four legs were drawn up tight to its body. Its neck stretched out in front of it, held high. Its head was covered his horns and even from this distance I could make out the row of gleaming white teeth that lined its monstrous jaws.

The dragon dropped lower and lower till he disappeared behind the trees. There was a collective gasp as all those around me took a breath. We stood there waiting. It felt like an eternity, but suddenly the red of the dragon's hide could be seen near the edge of the woods. Then it burst out of the wood, showering the air with a cloud of tree limbs.

It banked and dove toward the town. I heard people yelling in panic that the dragon was going to attack. More people ran, but some of us stood transfixed. The dragon continued its dive and then

disappeared below the roof tops. We waited, knowing that if it flew true it would fly right to us.

A roar of wind proceeded the dragon's approach. Suddenly it appeared over the roofs. It couldn't have been more than 40 feet above as it flew over. I expected to hear something other than the wind. I expected to be knocked down by gusts from its wings. But nothing happened. In less than a second it was overhead and then it was gone.

We all spun around and watched its tail disappear over the town's wall. I was suddenly afraid. I think the certainty of my death had made fear unimportant. But there was no attack. No fire. No death. I stood there terrified that it was going to come back and take just me. I thought to run, but my body wouldn't respond.

When I saw it again, it was slowly banking and going up. It went around and around. My eyes were fixed on it as it slowly became only a dot in the sky. Then it flew away leaving me to wonder if I ever had anything to fear.

# Dinner

Evening was coming. I can fly at night, but I prefer not to, so I started looking for a place to land and maybe grab a quick bite to eat. As luck would have it, a farm appeared in a clearing ahead. I made my approach, coming in low, and at the last moment flapped my wings twice to stop and dropped onto the field.

I looked around quickly to see if I had been noticed - farmers often take offense at me using their fields. But this one was empty, the crops having been harvested already, and had just what I was looking for - holes.

I'm sure you've heard stories about dragons eating livestock and fair maidens. While I'm sure those stories have some basis in truth, they are not true for all dragons. No, I like freshly harvested fields for their holes. Not that I eat the holes, that would just be silly.

I looked around and found a fresh hole; a small mound of damp earth next to it. I approached it slowly. I gently moved the dirt away from the hole and lowered my mouth to it. I took a long slow breath in. The aromas filled my senses. Then I blew with all of my strength.



The ground rippled as my breath raced down the tunnel. Dirt flew into the air from holes that had been plugged. I continued to blow and the tunnels exploded around me sending ribbons of dirt into the air. Then the gophers started flying into the air.

This is the point where experience makes the difference. How long do I keep blowing. If I blow longer, then more gophers will be sent skyward, but every second I wait the ones already in the air are getting closer to landing and possible freedom.

I blew, counting to three, then whipped my head into the air. I snapped and then flipped my head towards the next one. Six times I nipped at the air and each time I was rewarded with a tasty morsel. I think one got away, but I knew that there we're plenty more to be had.

Without warning, a slapping sound pulled my attention to my rear. I pulled my wings in tight and rocked onto my back legs ready to leap into the air as I moved to see the source of the sound. The sound continued in a rapid secession of slaps. I followed the sounds to their source and saw a small child standing near a fence post. She was clapping her hands together and smiling.

I relaxed a little - no knight in armor.

"Again," she yelled still clapping.

It took me a moment to realize that she was talking about my particular way of eating. Since she didn't seem a threat, I decided to humor her - it was after all what I was planning on doing anyway.

I moved a hundred feet down the field and found another hole. The little girl followed me, staying close to the fence. I blew up my dinner and she started clapping again.

I looked at her quizzically, but she just laughed and giggled and started yelling, "Again."

We repeated this process two more times and now she was rolling around on the ground and laughing. I didn't know why she was laughing so hard and I decided to ask her.

"Why are you laughing?" I asked her.

She continued to laugh and hold her sides. I decided to wait for her to stop and sat down. It didn't take too long for her to stop, but as soon as she did, she ran over to a hole. She brushed the dirt away from it and then stuck her head against it. I heard her blow. She blew again and again.

Of course with her little lungs nothing happened. But with each blow I giggled a little. Then my giggles turned into a laugh. She pretended to catch gopher just like I had. I fell over in a fit of laughter.

She kept jumping and blowing. I don't think I've ever laughed so hard. Then she started laughing, which only made my howls worse. Eventually we stopped laughing and lay panting on the ground.

"Foul beast. Leave my daughter alone," came a scream from a farmer.

I looked over at him and started laughing again. The farmer was standing there wearing only a pair of pants and a shirt. He brandished a pitchfork at me, acting as if he meant to stick me.

He yelled some more at me and then at his daughter. I didn't like the way he was treating his daughter so I stood up, towering above him. He took a few steps toward me and stabbed at the air.

Suddenly his daughter was standing between us. "No, Daddy," she yelled at him. "He's a funny dragon." She waved her arms back and forth, like she was keeping the pitchfork from me.

Her words touched me and I stepped back. Her father took a step back as well.

The little girl turned to me. "Fly away funny dragon so my daddy won't hurt you." Then she made shooing motions with her hands.

I looked at the farmer and smiled. He took another step backwards. "You have a very special daughter," I told him. Then I launched myself into the air. I flew the rest of the way home that night - no other field look quite as inviting.