

The dragons were fearsome. They were all over 20 feet tall, with big ugly red eyes, giant claws and an enormous spiked tail with a harpoon-like point on the end. No one could stop them. Many felt that the principle reason they could not be defeated was the unique combination of a powerful mouth and a tiny brain. In battle, the horrible threatening shrieking dragons frightened off nearly all combatants. Those few courageous knights who stood and fought, then, had to cope with the fact that the dragon's tiny brain rendered any logical battle plan (based on some degree of rationality on the part of the opponent) useless. Sir John and his band were quite concerned about the announcement of the pregnancy of the Queen of the Dragons. In the past, she had always given birth to a litter, the babies of which would share common traits and therefore come to be identifiable after maturity, according to their physical characteristics and battle tactics. The full grown dragons, then, were divided into groups, such as the Dragons of MFT, the Dragons of MVT, the Dragons of VSI, the Dragons of VS2, the Dragons of TSO and the Dragons of CICS. These titles were acronyms but the original meanings have by now been lost to recorded history. It is true that some of these dragons had been slain (or weakened to the point where they could do no more harm), but many of them were completely healthy and still extremely dangerous. The fact that the Queen was pregnant again was disconcerting to Sir John's band because they were all trying to anticipate what monstrous new traits the litter would have. One comforting fact was that in the past, the birth never actually occurred earlier than one year later than the announced date, which gave them some extra time to prepare their battle strategy.

His first move was to travel to each village and inform the local town crier about the swords. In addition to giving the basic information about the swords, Sir John also told the town criers how to make the announcements. He told them when to speak loudly, when to speak softly, when to ring the bell, when to pause, when to cough, what to wear and when and where to scratch themselves as they made the announcement. Having completed this phase of his project, he then gathered together a band of lesser knights who lived in the village, whose names were Sir Robert, Sir Richard, Sir James and Sir Paul. He also engaged some knights from other villages; Sir Doyle who lived in the North with Lady Anne and Sir David who lived in the West with Lady Marlies, but they were not involved in the affair that follows.

In the year 1197, there lived an ambitious knight by the name of Sir John of Restome, who decided that he could solve a problem that had existed for years. The problem was that dragons terrorized the countryside and no one had developed an adequate weapon to stop them. One day he learned of a new type of sword being produced in the East; so, after discussions with representatives of the manufacturer, he set out to import the swords and sell them to the law enforcement agencies throughout the country; that is, the various barons and dukes who governed the villages.

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10-9-2004
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software 99

TO: software ag employees (ONLY)
(World-Wide)

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On this particular occasion, Sir John had arranged with a nearby baron to conduct a demonstration of the sword against one of the most dangerous dragons of all--the Dragon of CICS. What made this dragon so terrifying was the fact that it did not use typical dragon battle tactics, making it extremely difficult for Sir John's men to develop an effective defense. It had been rumored that even the other dragons refused to spar with the dragons of CICS, because they were so unpredictable. Sir John assembled his band and they proceeded to the appointed demonstration site, at the foot of a long sloping hill just at the edge of the baron's village. They arrived approximately 10 seconds before the demonstration was scheduled to begin (Sir John had been dictating a letter to the scribe, Lady Penelope, and they therefore got a late start). Sir Richard reached into his sack of swords, selected one and, handing it to Sir James, said "This is the one that the manufacturer said we should use." Sir Richard went on to point out that an adjustment had to be made to the handle before using it.

"What luck!" exclaimed Sir James, as he took the sword. "This happens to be the same sword I tested last night."

At that point, they all felt a slight vibration on the soles of their feet. Sir Paul said, "I think the dragon has started his attack." They peered up toward the top of the hill (about 1000 yards away) and saw a tiny figure moving slowly toward them. (The size and speed of the dragon was illusory, due to the distance.)

"Doesn't look as big as the dragons I heard about in the East." observed Sir John.

"Wait till it gets here!" replied Sir James.

By now, the dragon's roar and footsteps had become audible and the vibrations of the ground was increasing. Sir James got into position, taking a few practice swings with the sword--ZAP! ZAP! ZAP! Sir Robert asked him what the inscription on the handle said. With irritation in his voice, Sir James read the sword handle to Sir Robert: "Version 3.1.2.1.3.2.1." "Damn!" muttered Sir Robert, "I TOLD the scribe to tell the manufacturer that the official name of this version was to be SURE SLAY NUMBER ONE." "Damn!" he repeated, looking down at the ground shaking his head from side-to-side. By this time, the dragon's roar had become very loud, the flame from its ears and steam from its nostrils had become discernible and the motion of the ground was beginning to resemble an earth tremor. Sir James replied: "Sir Robert, do you really think the name on the handle is important at a time --"

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"SIR JAMES!" shouted Sir Paul "Did you test the point of the sword?" By now, they had to yell to communicate because the dragon was only about 100 yards away.

"OF COURSE!!" screamed Sir James, indignant at the thought that Sir Paul would even question whether he tested the sword. "I was up all night last night slicing rhinoceros legs with this sword!"

"THE POINT!" cried Sir Paul.

"Huh?" said Sir James, somewhat more meekly.

"The point of the sword--did you test it?"

"My God!" sighed Sir James, with a look of pained enlightenment.

The dragon was upon them.

Sir James thrust the point of the sword at the dragon's throat. During that split second, the thought raced through his mind: "This is the first time I've ever tried the point of this sword. I wish Sir Paul had kept his mouth shut."

The instant the point of the sword touched the dragon's throat, the sword snapped in two.

"DID YOU SEE THAT??" howled Sir James, screaming with laughter, as the dragon bit his right arm off at the shoulder.

"GOOD LORD!" cried the baron, as he watched Sir James roll around on the ground leaving red swirls in the grass and making a sound that could be interpreted as either unbearable agony or insane laughter. The baron said "He must be in a state of shock!", to which Sir Richard replied "I think he's laughing at how easily the sword broke." At that point, Sir Robert took the baron's arm and soberly explained that there had been a mixup in the shipment and that this sword was actually an older model which had been designed primarily for rhinoceros legs.

In a frenzy, Sir Paul leaped at the dragon to fight it bare handed. In his haste, however, he made a slight miscalculation and landed on top of Sir Richard, both of them tumbling to the ground. Sir Richard just sat there with an amused grin on his face.

Throughout this entire sequence of events, Sir John had stood motionless, observing what was happening but showing no signs of emotion.

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He now spoke.

"DRAGON!" he shouted "WHAT MAKES YOU SO UNHAPPY?"

The dragon looked down at Sir John. Its ugly red eyes grew larger and took on a shade of purple around the edges. It lowered its head until its chin almost touched the ground. Its giant claws came out and curved downward, digging themselves deep into the ground. Its enormous spiked tail arched slowly upward and then, with lightning speed, turned downward and drove itself five feet into the ground with a terrifying "THWONK!!" Then a very deep wailing sound began emanating from the dragon's throat. Its head rose slowly and, in synchronization with the upward movement of its head, the sound rose in pitch and volume. When its head reached the vertical, so that its ugly red eyes were looking skyward, the shriek it made rocked the countryside for hundreds of miles. When it reached the climax of this emotional outpour, one had the feeling that if the dragon had not been securely anchored by its claws and tail, its massive body would have lifted off the ground. (It is claimed that a small tidal wave formed in the ocean, 800 miles away.)

Having made its best effort at expressing the extent (if not the cause) of its unhappiness, the dragon looked down at Sir John expectantly. Although Sir John appeared to remain utterly calm and unafraid, microscopic beads of perspiration had formed on his temples. The dragon's big ugly red eyes stared into Sir John's small brown ones. Sir John stared back. Although not verbalized, it was obvious that perfect communication was being achieved.

Sir John lowered his eyelids, cocked his head to one side and, with a compassionate half smile, tenderly said:

"I understand."

The dragon blinked, turned and ambled back up the hill.

They all applauded (except, of course, Sir James). A broad smile of satisfaction spread across the baron's face, as he unfastened a sack of gold from his belt and thrust it into Sir John's belly, saying "I'll buy your swords."

They shook hands, discussed some of the details of the delivery and then bid each other farewell. Sir John's band gathered up their equipment, packed their horses and set out on their journey back to Restonne. As they rode off, comments were heard:

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"What happened?"
"What about the sword?"
"Stop laughing, Sir James!"
"How much gold's in the sack?"

Sir John did not participate in the conversation, however, for he was already mentally working on the instructions he would give the town criers to announce the success of this demonstration.

JUST THE BEGINNING!