

Once you're sure that you are alone you sit up. The room is very dark, but several narrow windows let a trickle of moonlight through and your eyes are adjusting to the gloom. You trace your fingers around the manacle, feeling the smooth metal, the ridge where the two halves lock together, the keyhole, the chain. You follow the chain a short distance to a solid ring embedded in the floor. There is no hope of breaking the ring, so you turn my attention back to the manacle itself. Perhaps the locking mechanism can be broken.

Your thoughts are interrupted by the sound of movement in the cell next to you. You had assumed it empty but someone is definitely in there.

"Hello?" You ask. If it is another prisoner they might be able to help you, the more You know about your situation the better. If it is a guard then your chances of escape are practically zero. A long yawn answers your greeting. You feel encouraged, a guard is unlikely to have been asleep when a new prisoner was brought in.

"You don't know how to get rid of these manacles, do you?" You ask hopefully.

"I might be able to help you with that, but it's not really in my best interests." The voice has a playful note to it, yet something about it sends chills down your spine.

A cloud must have shifted slightly because the moonlight in the cell brightens and you get your first look at your fellow prisoner.

The dragon stands about eight feet to the shoulder and its body stretches at around twenty feet in length. Its eyes shine in the moonlight and as you watch a smile slowly forms across its face. It is a smile that shows far more sharp teeth than you are comfortable with.

In a moment you are as far from it as the manacle will allow. The dragon pads quickly to the bars that separates you and lies down against them. The moonlight fades again and all I can see of it are its reflective eyes. Fearsome as its appearance had been, a barely visible dragon is somehow worse.

"You need not be afraid." You can just make out the creature's head. "These bars will keep you safe from me, for tonight."

Terrified as you are you realize it has a point, you are not in immediate danger and try to focus again on the manacle. You need to get out of here, to escape from this crazy town where dragons are kept in cells. The final part of the dragon's sentence suddenly sinks in.

"Tonight?"

"In the north part of town there is a building called the Pit. A circle of high walls with seats surrounding an open clearing. In the morning we will both be taken

there, you will be given a sword and shield then we will both be forced to enter the Pit."

You shiver. You've seen fighting pits before, but you've never seen humans being made to fight in them, or dragons for that matter.

"So I have to kill you before you kill me then?" You have never even held a sword before but the dragon couldn't know that and you hope that by sounding confident you will be able to unnerve your opponent.

"Not necessarily. The battle will only last one hour, after that we will both be allowed to leave and you will be set free."

"Then why fight, if we can both survive?"

A low rumbling came from the dragon, at first You think it is growling at you, then you realized you can hear its stomach.

"Heh, it seems my belly has answered for me. You see while I do get fed between fights it is barely enough to sustain myself on, and it has been some time since the last battle."

You stare at the dragon. Your eyes have become accustomed to the gloom and you could see its long body pressed against the bars. You pictured yourself inside it, a slight bulge in the dragon's midsection, just food for the powerful creature. That's what will happen if you can not escape, You return your focus to the manacle, trembling fingers running over the metal searching for any weakness in the keyhole or locking mechanism.

"Are you sure that's a good idea?"