

Treetop Shorts Collection
A Dragon's Duty - Requested by Revenant Silverlight

By Smokescale Aquatos

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It was always so boring around the lair when Rev left. Smokey huffed as he lounged in the middle of the floor atop a thick, wide rug, finding it far more preferable than the cold, hard stone underneath it. She wouldn't be back for hours. He had to entertain himself somehow. But how?

He could read a book, but he'd gone through all they had. He would need to see if he could scrounge up a new one when next he was out. There was music. Unfortunately the only instruments made were for humans and those were just too tiny, not to mention he didn't know how to play them. And singing was not really an option, though he did hum or whistle from time to time. Still, not terribly fascinating to a bored dragon. Maybe he could go take stock of the horde again. For the tenth time this month. That was getting tiresome. They hadn't added anything to it in months. It would be more tedious than stimulating.

He huffed again and rolled onto his side, pushing himself along the floor. It was a childish means of distracting one's self, and quite odd to watch a large blue dragon put into practice. It did do wonders to reach distant itches, though. Would there be no end to his mindless waiting?

"Dragon!" The voice was familiar, and angrily so. Or was the anger itself familiar? Smokey lifted his head towards the entrance to the cave, looking mildly confused, "I know you're in there dragon! Come out! My men and I will have justice done upon you!"

The blue fellow groaned and rolled his eyes. It was another one of those visits. He grunted and hoisted himself up, padding off towards the exit. As he poked his head out into the daylight, he winced a bit. It was brighter than he expected. The clouds that had swept through in the night had burnt off. Good flying weather. Provided he avoided human settlements.

"What are you claiming we've done this time?" He was annoyed already. This was a common occurrence at this point. Some young upstart out to make a name for himself would drag his friends out to their cave or that of some other mild-mannered dragon and have a go at slaying them. It was ridiculous. It wasn't as though they ever did anything wrong. Sure they frightened the neighboring villages from time to time, but never on purpose, and they always made up for it by frightening off the less pleasant, war-like nations daring to send their armies too close. But then these humans were always so strange in their ways.

"You and your mate have tormented my people for the last time! Too long have you two taken of their livestock and made meager the catches of the fishermen! By my own hand you will be slain and your treasure will be given to my king to prove my worth!"

"Hey, we always leave behind enough money for whatever we take. It's not our fault a cow wanders too close to our cave. And the fishermen started following me to my secret fishing

spots. Kinda hard to bring in a good haul when you're competing with a local predator. Tell them to try fishing somewhere I'm not." With that, he turned and began to head back into the cave.

"Silence beast! And present yourself properly! If you do not, I shall have to come in there after you and spill your blood on the walls of your own filthy lair!"

Smokey called back out from inside the cave, "You and what army?"

The young Captain grinned broadly as he sat atop his pristine white horse, "This one!"

He lifted a hand and gestured quite sharply and visibly, signaling the rest of his men to emerge from the trees. The sound of many troops on horseback found its way to the dragon's ears; hooves on the soft soil and grass, armor plates clanking against one another, weapons being drawn, and the calls and cries of eager young soldiers out to do their king and country proud. He groaned again, climbing back to his feet having only just flopped back down lazily.

In an unamused fashion, he returned to the entrance and poked his head back out, prepared for the brilliant sunlight this time. What he saw before him was a mass of fifty men, all atop their noble steeds. This was new for the dragon. Usually it was on the order of five or ten, maybe twenty if the knight was popular. But this was an impressive show of strength and influence.

"Wow, daddy must have had to pull quite a few strings in order to get you your own platoon. Do they all know what happened to the last few brave souls who tried to storm my cave?" He grinned toothily, hoping that might scare at least some of them off. It did ruffle a few feathers, make many of them look about uneasily, but none of them ran.

The Captain simply glowered, "We shall prove victorious where they all failed! I promise you this, beast; by the time the sun sets, you will be on your back feeling most uncomfortable! And only when I am satisfied with the look of terror in your eyes will I end your miserable life!"

"Hey, it's not miserable at all! I'm quite happy!" He paused, lowering the end of his muzzle in a somewhat indignant manner, averting his gaze, "Sure I'm kinda bored... but... you try keeping yourself entertained with nothing to do that you haven't done ten times over already."

"Ahh, grown tired of the she-devil have you!?"

"Not at all! She's just... out... at the moment. It's a little lonely when she's gone. But she'll be back soon enough! And when she does, oooh she'll be sore at you! She doesn't like little boys like you trying to play war on our doorstep! Now go away! If you're lucky, I won't mention this to her when she returns!" No longer wanting anything to do with this, the dragon turned and went back in for a second time. This made the Captain very cross.

"How dare you show your back! We will have glory even if we must come in after you!"

"Fine, go ahead. It'll make the Missus that much angrier when she gets back!" With so many, Smokey didn't expect them all to come charging in at once. So, he flopped down again, this time relatively close to the mouth of the cave, nose pointed towards the entrance, grinning.

The Captain growled and looked back at his men in their neat formation, "You heard the scaly devil! After him! Charge!" His bellow reached the trees, frightening off only the nearest birds.

A terrifying roar surged forth from the cave, scaring away the remaining winged creatures for a good ways. It gave the cavalry reason to pause. Again the Captain rallied his troops and ordered a charge. The first wave advanced, making sure to squeeze together four wide to fit through the mouth of the cave. The heavy thundering hooves rushing towards the entrance betrayed their distance and speed. Just after they vanished into the darkness of the cavern, cries of dismay followed, along with a great deal of clattering and hooves suddenly skidding atop stone.

Soon, all grew quiet. The silence was then punctuated by a noisy belch.

The Captain was now furious. He ordered the second and third waves, eight men each just like the first, to rush the beast. There was no way he could defend himself now if he had done what it sounded as though he had. No creature could be such a glutton and still manage to fight. Sixteen men cried out and raced forth.

As they entered the cave, the blue dragon that had addressed them earlier stood before them on all fours, his belly sagging under him and wriggling with the weight of eight men and their horses. He hiccupped and looked down on the advancing group with disdain. He opened his mouth and brought his jaws screaming down upon the first of them. In only seconds, he'd stuffed the human into his throat, his horse half-lodged in his mouth. He tilted his head back and rocked forward, gulping hard. A sizable lump formed in his throat as the stallion's hind hooves disappeared past his lips, the bulge gliding down easily to join the rest of the mass in his gut.

The rest of the men lashed out with their weapons, but were cast aside by a swing of the dragon's tail. Half were thrown to the ground, relatively harmlessly, where they lay stunned for a moment. The other half attempted to cross the 'field of battle' without trampling their own men. It was slow going and treacherous, leaving many of them open to attack, which the blue beast took advantage of. He snapped up three more before they could blink, pinning their horses which he then gobbled up immediately after.

Many of those who had been unhorsed climbed to their feet and rushed the dragon. Two big paws fell atop several of them, three per palm, keeping them from affecting any sort of attack. They were easily taken out of the fight for the moment. Many thrown to the ground had lost pieces of their armor and even some had been disarmed, their metal leavings strewn about the cave. Smokey would have to clear it all up before Revenant returned home.

The battle continued, leaving the Captain outside to fear the worst. Before silence could fall again, he commanded the rest of his men, the remaining half, to charge and render aid to their fallen brothers. The Captain himself even led the charge this time.

Their war cries echoed off the hard rock, filling the cave with the sound of their hate as they came upon an even fatter blue dragon, finishing off the last few men he had trapped under his palms. He groaned seeing so many little invaders, knowing it was going to be a huge mess before the battle was over.

Again Smokey swung his tail, managing to unhorse many of the soldiers and sent them sprawling. At this point, his strategy was to keep as many of them busy and thrown off balance as he could at any given moment, and wear down their numbers through attrition. And consumption. The Captain was one of the more tenacious troops, refusing to give up, swinging away furiously, unfocused, not realizing that his sword was just bouncing off the hard dragon scales he desired to deeply to cleave through.

More of the men were devoured, as well as their horses. The beast's tail lashed out, not just sending the soldiers skittering along their backs, but coiling around one or two of them, or maybe a stray horse, only to lift what he had caught to his lips and pop his catch into his mouth. The ease with which he had managed to so successfully fend off the lot of them was impressive to say the least. And terrifying to any who remained outside his stomach, though they didn't remain that way for long.

In only a quarter of an hour, Smokey had managed to stuff himself with every last troop the Captain had brought with him. He huffed as his stomach churned and writhed, the sounds of his many morsels clamoring for freedom audible through his belly, though greatly muffled. He panted a little as he closed his palm around the Captain, having kept him pinned to the ground for the duration. Just as he picked him up, he caught sight of the pristine white horse he had ridden in on. Quick as a flash, his tail coiled around its barreled chest, hoisting it off the ground as it complained and cried out in fear.

"No! Don't you dare! If you harm one hair on that magnificent creature's mane, I swear you will live only to regret it!" Strange how the little man was only concerned with the well-being of his horse and not the forty-nine men squirming away in the depths below. Smokey didn't listen. He simply opened his mouth and daintily slipped the noisy stallion in. He gulped a few times, forcing it into his throat until the bulge was all that remained. He paused, grimacing a bit as this particular horse's struggles were quite strong, and the fact that he was already so very full, almost to bursting.

The Captain watched in horror as the wriggling swell in the big blue beast's neck slowed. It didn't stop completely, but it was clear the horse was tiring. When the motion slowed, Smokey swallowed again, sending his latest meal down to join the huge bloat of his stomach. His lips parted as he sighed, tongue hanging freely, half in relief, half in response to the monstrous stomach ache he was developing.

"Okay... so, that's all your men and your horses. All that's left is you, my angry little fellow." He hiccupped loudly, trying to keep everything down.

"You monster! If you intend to eat me, you'd best bite me in half! Otherwise, I promise I will cut my way out of that disgusting gut of yours!" As he spoke, the overstuffed dragon reached over with his free paw, pinched the blade he held, and pulled it from the Captain's grasp.

"No you won't. Now, you're not the first who's tried to do this. I'm getting tired of it," He paused, letting a burp escape, along with one of the soldier's helmets, "You come out here and terrorize us for no reason except for your own 'honor and glory'. You don't actually care about the villagers or anything like that. If you did, you'd know that we leave them plenty well enough alone. Even give them a little help now and again. So," He hiccupped once more, "It falls to me to teach you a lesson. With any luck, you and your men might just wake up in bed back home thinking this had all been a terrible dream. If you're smart, you'd take that opportunity to do something more fulfilling, like taking up knitting or maybe learning how to sculpt. Hell you could write a warning to others who might try this same thing, maybe break the cycle."

The Captain glared harshly at him, "I will never stop hunting you to my very last breath. If I am able to, I will seek you no matter where you are and I will not rest until you lay dead at my feet!"

Smokey shrugged as if he had not been listening, "Or maybe you won't wake up at all. Hard to say. Down the hatch." He grimaced again, not fond of the idea of yet another snack, but it was the best way he had conjured up so far to try and ward off would-be attackers. He opened his mouth and lifted the Captain to his lips. The unpleasant little man wriggled in his grasp, screaming obscenities as he fought to free himself.

His voice was quieted as the big blue's mouth closed around him. Almost the entirety of him fit in the dragon's maw. His legs kicked away before Smokey gulped. The lump that formed in his throat fought harder than any of the other men, but it slid down to join the rest just as easily.

His deed done, the blue dragon flopped onto his back, huffing heavily as he groped at his enormous gut, groaning in discomfort as it gurgled loudly, "Ooo... looks like you kept your promise little man."

The hours passed as the sun began to set. Another dragon sailed down out of the sky and padded into the cave, this one of white with a lovely blond mane with streaks of violet running through it. What she found shocked her. The room was in shambles, the rug torn to pieces, mud everywhere, metal plates and weapons strewn about.

Smokey himself leaned against the far wall, looking taller than normal. He had to use that size-changing spell she taught him to deal with what was below. He sat on his haunches holding his enormous, loudly gurgling belly with one paw. The bulge was so vast it forced his legs apart, and had grown soft, smooth, and squishy to the touch. His legs, spread as far as he was comfortable, pressed in against the huge dome. It grumbled and burbled strongly enough to be heard just outside the cave. The other paw held the Captain's sword, picking his teeth with it.

"Welcome home, honey. Sorry for the mess," He paused, frowning a bit as he felt a rumble come from within his bloated stomach. His mouth opened and a mighty belch shook the cave, bringing a blush to his cheeks once it had settled again, "Excuse me."