

# Dragon's Den

by Angie

*Hic sunt dracones (here be dragons) ..."*

- Inscription on old maps denoting dangerous or unexplored territories



Pascal regarded the shawl he had laid carefully on his bed. Rebecca had made it for him and he treasured it, while wondering how she had known he would appreciate it. The tunnel telegraph he monitored and administered had never (as far as he knew) mentioned his secret obsession.

He sighed. Yes, Halloween was the perfect time to wrap himself in this, and muse. The pipes would be quiet tonight; everyone who could would be was above, or telling stories in Father's chamber. He didn't mind being alone with his pipes. They were his life after all. And someone had to be here in case there was an emergency to be relayed. Someone would bring him a drink and snacks later. For now, he was unusually unneeded.

So he made his way behind a set of older pipes, and went into the quiet cubbyhole he had made himself, which also served as his bedroom, a place to escape most of the rattle and hiss of the pipe chamber, for it was lined with old wood shelves on bricks, which were stacked with books. He had a small metal clothes rack for his clothing, a bedside table for a lantern, and a small desk with a rank of candles.

There was no memento of dragons, but most of the books on the shelves revealed it to anyone who looked. No one had, as far as he knew .... but come to think of it, Rebecca could have. She was often the one who brought him his meals and treats. Pascal liked to read, and he read any books he could find on dragons - myths, fiction, illustrated histories, heraldry.

His pipes, with their sinuous lengths and many clanks, clangs, hisses and rattles, had been instrumental in his love of dragons. It was so easy for him to imagine that the mythical beasts lived somewhere in the tangle of pipes, or even inside some of the older and more mysterious ones, travelling through time and tunnels, unknown to the community below. And just as in the old maps, there was much uncharted territory among the pipes, many dangers, and no few opportunities for wonder.

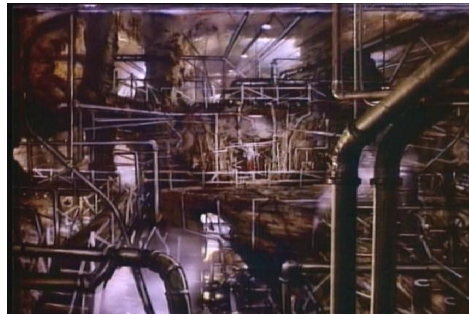
Tonight though, he thought he would write something of his own, a poem. He would not be

disturbed and he had the memory of many favourite dragon tales to call upon. Surely, he could convey some of the magic he had absorbed over the years.

He sat down at his desk and pulled out a pad of paper, a pencil and an eraser. He wrapped the shawl around his shoulders, sighed as it warmed his neck and back, and let his mind wander.

A particularly loud hiss from a pipe that ran above his door, made him smile. Shortly afterwards, he heard a scrape, like hard scales over rock. That was just a couple of loose pipes in their metal brackets, but Pascal silently thanked them for the inspiration and began to write.

An hour later, he had what he thought was a suitable tribute to his favourite creature, but left it on his desk and went back to the pipe chamber, looking around it with a slightly different eye.



Tonight he could see well in it. The conduits carrying the pipes were lit with a purple mist - which was not unusual in the chilly season - hot pipes and cold air often resulted in the unique fog - but tonight it almost seemed as if dragons were about to emerge from them. Some of the pipes seemed to glow gold, almost as if they were metamorphosing into something ... else.

There, between two old pipes against a sandy wall, he could imagine an eye. Over there, where several twisted together, he could see the hint of a scaly tail. And up there, surely that was a dragons claw forming from a v-shaped cluster of small pipes.

Pascal sat on his stool and looked around, fascinated. Without the usual tapping of messages to distract him, the pipes were louder in their unique noises. He got up and walked along the stone pathway that ended in a tangle of pipes and a large drop into .... well, a long way down. He had never been there. The tunnels here made little sense and climbing down the pipes themselves was not advisable.

He looked between the pipes for the first time, wondering what hid there. Not dragons, surely, but spiders, lizards ... and whatever fed them. He had only glimpsed that kind of movement out of the corner of his eyes, but had never actually seen what made it. The pipes themselves moved a little, so he had not concerned himself with it.

He reached a corner and looked between two large metal pipes that went vertically into the bedrock far above, and down out of sight below him. These were main pipes, ones used by sentries in distant tunnels to give warning. He knew every weld and rust spot by sight, yet there was a space behind them he had never paid any attention to. There was a little ledge of rock, and something caught his eye. He moved closer and looked, letting his eyes adjust to the dark. There was a piece of worn grey rock, but something was on top of it, something shiny. He reached his hand in and grasped it. It came back with a ceramic dragon, big eyed, crying, holding a handkerchief.

Pascal laughed. How long had this been there and who had made it? It was fairly crude, but also quite small. He would normally not have noticed it at all, back there. His concerns were always with pipes and messages, not what lay between or behind them - unless a pipe broke loose from a fitting and had to be repaired.

He laughed again. It was a fitting memento to his evening of poetry writing. He carried it back to his cubbyhole. A thermos and a small basket of sandwiches and snacks had appeared on his desk while he had been gone. He and placed the little dragon on his notepad. Yes, it was certainly appropriate.

It also inspired him to add another stanza to his poem. He quickly wrote it down and sat back, satisfied. It *had* needed just a little more, after all.

He poured himself a drink of William's Halloween grog and munched on a pumpkin cookies, happy in his little dragon's den.



END