



The Portal - How To Twist A Dragons Tale by Cressida Cowell

BEATRICE:

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I think there are very few children who don't know what a dragon is. Not many people have seen one but everybody, even in the modern world, know about the enormous, ferocious, scaly, scary, creatures we call dragons.

Hiccup Horrendus Haddock III is a Viking boy and he knows how to tame a dragon. The author Cressida Cowell has always loved dragons.

CRESSIDA COWELL:

"I first got interested in dragons as a child. I spent a lot of time on an uninhabited island of the west coast of Scotland, an island so small that when you stood on top of it you could see sea all around you. And it was nothing there, it was a very, very wild extraordinary place, you know, we were camping, there was no houses, no electricity, no nothing. And this wild and extraordinary place very much felt like it could have dragons living in the caves. And a lot of the stories of round about, the old stories that people used to tell, would be of dragons living in the caves. So even when I was little I was writing stories about dragons living in the caves on this island. And this island in fact was the direct inspiration for the Hiccup stories and the island of Berks in the stories. Because it was also the first place the Vikings came to in the Heber Dees when the Vikings invaded Britain a long, long time ago. So I used to sit on the top of the island and imagine what it would feel like if you saw a Viking sail on the horizon. So that was when I first started thinking of the story really, as a child."



MICHAEL GARNER READS FROM “ How To Twist A Dragon’s Tale”:

“Come on, Goliath, come on” muttered Gobber the Belch, “you great SLUG of a reptile, we’re going to be Viking hamburgers at this rate, get a move on... ah, here he is, Thank Thor.”

The great beast flew out of the flames up to the scabby pinnacle of mountaintop where the boy and his master were kneeling. The boy’s dragon, his Windwalker, was pressed up beside them both, with its wings outstretched, trying to protect them from the heat of the flames.

“On you go, boy,” growled Gobber the Belch helping Hiccup onto the mighty dragon’s back.

“Off you go, you Alligator-Featured Slowpoke!” he roared.

“out of my way then, Red-Sprouting, Jelly-Bottomed Walrus-Face” snorted Goliath in reply. The great Bullrougner spread its wings and prepared for takeoff.

Nobody saw the black shape sneaking out of the fire, leaping toward Goliath with a flash of swordlike silver held out in front of it, and springing back again.

It was as quick as that.

The powerful, roaring, barrel-chested dragon took two strides forward...and sank to its knees and onto his side.

He didn’t make a sound; he just closed his eyes for the last time as gently as a baby, as soft as a sigh.

“Goliath!” cried Gobber in surprise, trying to lift up the great buffalo head in his bare arms. “what are you doing you idiotic animal? This is no time for sleeping!”

“He’s not sleeping,” said Hiccup quietly, still sitting between the Bullrougner’s tail spines. He pointed to the terrible green wound on Goliath’s chest. “I’m afraid he’s dead, sir.”

Both boy and Master sat silently now, waiting for the fire to get them.

There was something moving in the fire. Panther-like shapes crept through the flames, prowling round them, hunting them, watching them as a cat watches its prey.



BEATRICE:

I'm fascinated by the stories that people have always told about different kinds of monsters. But just the name dragon is unlike any other. You have to imagine what they might be like. They often have wings and breath fire. Even though they are dangerous I think they are strangely beautiful as well. Do you know what ancient animal's name means thunder lizard? No? Keith will tell you.

KEITH:

Eragon, The Hobbit, .. dragons appear in some of our favourite fantasy stories. But were they just fantasies? How many times have you looked at a picture of a dinosaur ..and then a dragon....and.then back at the dinosaur.. and said aha..! Not very often maybe. But the word dinosaur means thunder lizard, which is a pretty good word to describe a dragon.

Many different cultures around the world include legends of dragons that are very similar, even though those cultures are far away from each other, like Wales in Britain and China.

Dragons fly of course, and breathe fire. There are theories that some dinosaurs had stomachs filled with gases that made them lighter, and perhaps able to float and which might catch fire if they were to.

There is a dragon living today, although it doesn't breathe flames. It is called the Komodo dragon and lives in Indonesia. These are the largest lizards alive and can be 3 metres long, and they can kill buffalo three times their own size. Fossils of a larger cousin have been found in Australia, just 20 000 years old. Greek myths include the hydra, a dragon with many heads, and there is a 7-headed dragon in the last book of the bible. In the middle ages people created fake dead dragons by sewing bats wings onto snakes and making money by showing them off.

One difference in the legends is that Chinese dragons are good and generous, while western myths have dragons that are evil and don't like people touching their treasure!



BEATRICE:

If you're a goth, emo or into punk music or 50's stuff , You should go treasure hunting in Camden Market, London.

Our reporter Pamela went there and met Michel and Luke who sometimes work with dragons. Pictures of dragons that is. Every weekend hundreds of people travel from all over the world to be tattooed or pierced in one of Camden's many tattoo shops.

PAMELA:

-Excuse me, sir. If I want to get a piercing or a tattoo, is Camden Town the place to be?

-Ye.

-And where should I go?

-There, tattoo and piercing.

-Thanks.

-Alright, love.

-Cheers, Thank you, mate.

I'm going down the narrow stairs, where the tattoo artists Michel and Luke work. There are pictures of dragons on the walls. Firstly I have to ask Luke if he thinks Dragons really existed.

-Years ago, millions of years ago, yes. Obviously. They're trying to say, like, about dinosaurs and stuff, but yeah. I reckon they were about some time.

'Cause then you wouldn't have the myth of the dragon and stuff like that.

'Cause people say it's all, like you say, it's all a myth and it's all made up, but where would the stories come from? So I reckon there was, yeah, back in the day, yeah.

With the whole tattooing stuff you have to know certain cultures for certain things, like...

-Well, you can put a dragon everywhere, everywhere, depends what you want to express. If it's a dragon on the ground, you can put them even on your feet, but if it's a dragon in the air you need to put it like on the chest or something higher. I prefer Japanese dragons.

-I like quite a lot of the fantasy dragons, 'cause they're not as plain as the Chinese dragons or Japanese dragons. With like the fantasy dragons, they got



wing and they breath fire and stuff, but with Japanese dragons, it's just a long snake with legs. And.Yeah. Fire breathing. But yeah, I'll go for a fantasy dragon any day.

-And it can be any colour really?

-Yeah. Any colour. It'd be pretty cool.

BEATRICE:

I might like a bright red dragon curled around my ankle.

Not only does Cressida Cowell write the books about Hiccup, she also illustrates them.

CRESSIDA COWELL:

-The illustrations, you see, there's lot of spats, it might be ink dains or blood stains. It looks very visually exciting to a child.

-...or dragon's black saliva..

-Exactly! Dragon's black saliva dribbled. I have such fun doing the illustrations. I kind of attack the page and I dribble ink spots. And sometimes I even, my children get very cross with this, I even set fire to the edges of the pages. They say, mummy!!! They're always worried about me setting fire to the pages. I do it in the garden, quite safe. Or I, kind of, put water to the pages. I find that very, that's a great fun stage of the book doing the illustrations. But I think that again makes the books look very lively and exciting.

- Very welcoming as well...

-Yes, yes. And I try to make the plot lines very exciting as well, lots of cliff hangers and a lot of adventurous, exciting story lines. But also put in some things, you know, to make them think."

MICHAEL GARNER READS FROM " How To Twist A Dragon's Tale":

Round and round the shapes circled, closer and closer, growling to each other in contentment, delighted with their victory.

Until finally one pushed its head through the flame. It was a dragon that Hiccup or Gobber had ever seen before. A dragon created by a god in a bad mood.

Fire licked from its blood-streaked eyeballs, came smoking off its forehead and crackling out of its nostrils. Its skin was semi-transparent, so that you could see the black veins bulging furiously in its temples, like a thick, pulsing spider's web.



*It held its paws up in front of its face and...
ZING! ZING! ZING! ZING! ZING! ZING!*

Six talons came shooting out of the ends of its stubby reptilian fingers, talons as long and broad and sharp as swords, and smoking hot.

Black saliva dropped slowly from its jaws. Green flames flickered up and down its talons. It bent down low in the fire, mouth agape, ready to spring at Hiccup, and...

...and an expression of acute surprise came across its face.

And it disappeared back into the flames as quickly as it had emerged. For another, even more terrifying figure had sprung up in the inferno.

The figure of a pure-white dragon, with a single horn set in the middle of its forehead, rearing up, wings stretched wide. Astride its back was a gigantic Man with a sword on either hand.

But what MAN could ride into a bonfire and live?

Perhaps, Hiccup thought, they had died and gone Valhalla already, and this was Thor or Woden riding out to greet them.

The black dragons had fallen back in shock, but now they re-formed, growling hideously, and in front of Hiccup and Gobber's disbelieving eyes, an astonishing fight began in the fire.

Hiccup had never seen a fight quite like it.

It was half dragon-fight, and half sword-fight, and the Man on the White Dragon was outnumbered six to one.

Hiccup had never seen a man fight quite like this Man.

His swords were there to meet every blow, every attack, every thrust.

"OK, Toothless come out now," said Toothless, in a muffled way from beneath the helmet. "Toothless need to do a p-p-pee-pee RIGHT NOW!"

"It's really not a good moment right now. Toothless," said Hiccup nervously holding his helmet firmly to his head. "You should have gone earlier..."

"Let me out! Toothless c-c-come out now or Toothless do a pee-pee on Mean Master's H-H-H-HEAD!" screeched Toothless, furiously drumming his heels against the metal.



BEATRICE:

The tiny little feet of the little dragon Toothless, Hiccups pet. The author Cressida Cowell always wanted a dragon as her pet, but she had to do with cats instead. But cats can be right little Dragons themselves when they want to. Pamela Taivassalo met Cressida Cowell and Michail and Luke in London Keith Foster looked into the world of Dragons Michael Garner read from the book How To Twist A Dragons Tale Sound Engineer Carl Nilsson I'm Beatrice Hallmark. For more, visit our website ur.se and look for the Portal.