

Chapter 1 Virtual Martyrdom

"Raymond Schneider" <schneirj@a...>

A skirl of bagpipes heralded the beginnings of the great parade that the people had gathered to see. Pressing up against the satin ropes that lined the pebbled path which ran straight to the high mound that overlooked the Pontifical Academy of SpareOom, the crowd was in a festive mood, hollering back and forth.

Then from the grand archway the procession began. At the beginning were the scholars of the academy resplendent in their many colored robes and hoods each blazoned with the colors of their college. Following them was a man dressed in a simple tunic with a colorful sash of crimson which circled his head and trailed back along the ground. He was burdened with a great book, which he carried with some difficulty, stumbling a bit now and then. This was made doubly difficult by the two men hooded in black who strapping him ritually with long cords, blue on one side and yellow on the other -- the colors of the academy. The man bent over by the burden of the book accepted the light lashes with dignity.

Behind the three figures was a space in the procession, which was only broken by the great golden dragon, master of the Pontifical Academy down from his weir in the hills overlooking Troll Bridge. Rather than his usual simple apparel, the dragon was resplendent in burgundy and carried a blue and gold sash and hood over one taloned arm. His long train was carried by a company of elves and trolls, and a particularly impressive rank of armored mice, the Reepicheep brigade.

The procession proceeded up the path and climbed the hill. The man with the book laid the book on the ground before the great rock and the two black figures went to left and right and stood by him. The dragon executed a wide arc to the right and climbed up on the great rock. A hush fell over the crowd, the silence broken only the crack of a chair breaking where the scholars were seated off to the left and a scholarly troll crumpled to the ground amidst the wreckage of his chair. The crowd tittered, but silence quickly returned. Everyone turned to look at the golden dragon, who was now holding high the scepter of the academy.

"Friends and scholars of the Pontifical Academy -- I bid you welcome." The golden dragon had a booming voice that echoed off the ancient academy walls and returned. "We are gathered on this solemn occasion to honor one of our own" -- He nodded towards the tuniced figure. "It is a rare opportunity to recognize consistency and dedication to the truth" the dragon paused, "... even when you are wrong."

The speech went on like that for quite a while. The dragon extolled the virtues of the man before him, while always adding correctives and admonishments. It was the custom of the academy to speak thus, but quickly became a mite boring. The crowd was waiting for the ritual finale.

"And now" intoned the dragon, "it is my duty to declare that Mike has taught many errors and so is a danger to the people of SpareOom who need be warned that the five thousand, two hundred and eight condemned propositions laid before you..." the dragon nodded towards the great book on the ground, "have been condemned in their entirety and anyone who teaches them as truth when they have been declared error shall be ANATHEMA."

The crowd at this thematic moment played its part. "Recant ... recant ... RECANT." The crowd roared happily. It was a festive day. The dragon stepped down from the rock and advanced on Mike and removed the crimson trailing scarf and replaced it with the blue and gold of the academy and hooded him. Then he stepped back.

Mike stood up on his book and turned to the crowd, which was still chanting "Recant ... recant..." although with diminished vigor. Seeing Mike on top of the book the crowd quick fell to quiet awaiting the ritual words.

Mike did not disappoint.

"Nevertheless it does move." he uttered. The crowd cheered and everyone moved off to sample the punch and cookies while the orchestra, cleverly hidden in the grove on the right of the rock, began to play: "God Bless SpareOom."

The dragon had the most punch.

AnnePaxCh@a...

We want burgundy! Failing that, we'll settle for a drop of oak-matured Valpolicella - but punch - never!!

Eddie Dougherty <lampost@p...>

Defend our punch! Has it enough psychoactive chemicals to get to that place of harmony? :) (benign smiley face) I must have the recipe!

Chapter 2

bias ...

Ray Schneider <schneirj@a...>

The golden dragon convened the council of the ten in the high tower of the academy. Each of the councilors processed into the room in the formal manner dictated by etiquette and hallowed by time. First the Grand Inquisitor, then the Councilor of the Many, then the Grand Alchemist (always a bit disheveled with scents adhering to his robes and small holes and burn marks from many exciting and sometimes explosive experiments) and so they processed finally the newest member, the Grand Heretic. It was a colorful group.

The dragon opened the council of the ten with a rap of his huge gavel. Bang, bang, bang! "We are gathered here," he intoned, "To declare a truce in the matter of the creed wars." The discussion ranged as they often do over the whole history of the creed wars. It was suggested that it was such a long and repetitive history that perhaps it ought just to be archived with a careful index created to help those archivists to make sense of it in the far future. The old dragon who wore the hood of the Grand Skeptic inserted his views that perhaps there was to be no far future and so the project would be futile. No one paid any attention though, since they were already arguing among themselves again over the whole creed thing.

Bang, bang, bang! The golden dragon gaveled them back to order. "The motion is on the floor that the creed be tabled for the duration of the Christmas season -- what say you all?" With a murmuring each of the ten put their colored sticks into the bag of decision -- green for agreement and red for disagreement. When they were spilled out on the table -- there were nine green and one red. "So it is decided!" said the golden dragon.

But then we need a topic said some of the masters. "How about Christmas?" said the golden dragon.

"xtian54" <xtian54@y...>

As the Ten, each in turn, nodded in agreement to this suggestion, a strange figure detached itself from the stones of the tower wall. Its colour was that of the stones themselves and so it had passed unnoticed in all their deliberations. The troll spake thus:

"Christmas! Christmas? Such a thing is not worthy of your consideration, not being sanctioned, nor even mentioned, in the Scrolls."

The Golden Dragon and the Ten snorted in unison, and turned to face the unwelcome creature.

"This season is a false festival foisted upon the simple-minded and superstitious to make them subject to the merchant guilds. Certainly the early followers of the Way found it unnecessary to commemorate His birth, and certainly would have recoiled at the use of pagan traditions and trappings."

The troll squatted on his rocky haunches and awaited a reply.

"rlerrington" <rlerrington@i...>

From a corner of the room came a voice, one that had not been heard from recently, having retired from endless (and meaningless) debate to contemplate the exchanges.

"Surely we can agree that while the festival may be NOW so encumbered, it has not always been so. I am sure that the remembrance of the birth of our Lord has always been observed, though not in the way we not celebrate..

"Perhaps the learned Golden Dragon or one of our other esteemed colleagues can better inform us on when the Church began its observance of Christmas. And although we may have appropriated some pagan traditions and trappings, it was surely done with the purpose of leading the pagans toward Christ. Even today, we have the opportunity to remind the world that in the midst of festival and excess, God (in the greatest excess of all), took upon himself the humanity of a baby boy and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."

Having spoken thus, the voice retires again to the corner to contemplate Mike's Mystical Magical Merry-go-Round and what his response shall be (should Christmas not remove all this smoky haze).

"rlerrington" <rlerrington@i...>

Upon further reflection, the voice exclaimed, "Let us drive away the smoke haze by singing Christmas Carols", and immediately burst into song:

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lowly exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.

Chorus:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to the, O Israel.

O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show
And cause us in her ways to go.

Chorus:

O come, O come, great Lord of might,
Who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times once gave the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.

Chorus:

O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree,
An ensign of thy people be;
Before thee rulers silent fall;
All people's on thy mercy call.

Chorus:

O come, thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home.
The captives from their prison free,
And conquer death's deep misery.

Chorus:

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

Chorus:

O come, Desire of nations bind
All peoples in one heart and mind.
From dust thou brought us forth to life;
Deliver us from earthly strife.

Chorus:

And again when the voice was done, singing again softly:

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the world thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King;
Born to reign in us forever,
Now thy gracious Kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal spirit,
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

With a now cheerful heart in the Advent season, the voice returned to his contemplation in the corner.

"xtian54" <xtian54@y...>

Thanx for that. Not only does that song help clear the haze, it's also my favorite Christmas hymn.

Chapter 3 Trollishiss

Ray Schneider <schneirj@a...>

The Golden Dragon looked over the top of his glasses which had fallen down his long snout as he read the proclamation about the tabling of the creed wars ... What was that noise. He looked over and there was a troll. The other counselors had apparently noticed it earlier. "How thoughtful," mused the Golden Dragon and snatched up the troll in his taloned forearms, watched it wiggle for a moment and then down the hatch. He munched a little, but trolls don't last long, a mere fragment of an appetizer. "burp ..." came the satisfied belch from the Golden Dragon. "I must thank the secretary for thinking of refreshments" -- but the others had already left the room to return to their work at the academy.

The Golden Dragon folded up his reading glasses and put them in the huge container that hung around his neck and proceeded out the door, carefully closing it with the very tip of his great tail. He stepped out through the nave under the arch and spread his great wings. <whoomph> the wings caught the morning breeze and filled like great sails. With only a short five step run the dragon launched himself into the afternoon sunlight, circled the academy twice and flew off to his weir.

"xtian54" <xtian54@y...>

The chamber was empty now, and very quiet. The troll-wife came in with her mop, pail, broom and Swiffer to clean up after the dragons.

"Fergot me air frish'ner, and coo does this plyce need it!"

She stopped and peered into all the dusk-laden corners.

"Baaasil! Basil! Where air ye? "Where air ye, ye useless slag-pile!?"

When no answer was forthcoming she proceeded to sloppily swab the floors, grumbling as she went. As she moved toward the center of the room her mop displaced a medium sized stone and it skittered across the floor, coming to rest against one of the pillars. Still railing against her absent mate she moved to pick up the rock. As she held it in her granite-coloured palm she noted how toe-like it looked. She tossed it into the trash and took no more thought of it.

Chapter 4
persecution and all that ...

Ray Schneider <schneirj@a...>

Tra la Tra la ... the melodic refrain of Christmas music warmed the otherwise brisk winds of the weir where the Golden Dragon was trimming his tree and humming Christmas carols. "We three kings of Orient are ..." he entwined in a basso voice, which made up in volume what it lacked in virtuosity. Some of the pixies from the forest had come up to the mountaintop to help with the trimmings. They merrily strung the sashes and colorful banners that made the weir so festive at this time of year. Along the forward ledge from which the dragon generally launched himself, visible for miles, the great crèche was erected. It changed each day as the dragon moved the figures just a little. Right now it was just the cave with an empty manger. Up the hill a little were the figures of a man and his wife clearly great with child and riding on a donkey. There was also the figure of a village. That was presumably where the inn was to be found.

The Golden Dragon delighted each day in moving the figures appropriately, a little further down the hill. The great star had been put into position overhead hanging from a high crag, but was dark. The dragon only lit it on Christmas Eve when it illuminated the silver streamers and the crèche below and alerted the more distant figures of the wise men that they must make their own journey to be completed on the twelfth day of Christmas.

The scent of Christmas cookies baking made the whole weir comfy and homey. Tra la, Tra la. The dragon was in great good cheer. The woodland elves had promised to come over for some hot cinnamon cider. It was going to be a good day.

"rlerrington" <rlerrington@i...>

the soothing tones of the dragon remind the voice in the corner that singing soothes the savage breast, and so the voice is raised again in a Christmas hymn that it likes to sing occasionally in the Latin:

Adeste, fideles, laeti triumphantes;
venite, venite in Bethlehem.
Natum videte Regem angelorum.
Venite adoramus, venite adoramus
venite adoramus, Dominum.

(O Come, All Ye Faithful)

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, o come ye, to Bethlehem!
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels!
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest!
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Yea, Lord we greet Thee, born this happy morning,
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

The voice returns to its corner to rest. The days ahead bring much singing, and the voice, while joyful to sing, must not press too hard.

Chapter 5
personal animosity

Ray Schneider <schneirj@a...>

>>Whoomp<< the Golden Dragon opened his great wings to the breeze. He had just finished moving the figures closer to Bethlehem on their long journey from Nazareth. He noticed (a particularly inapt word for when a dragon "notices" it is with a peculiar kind of intensity like that of a cat dropping into a crouch or a hawk fixing on a victim and dropping from the sky) -- the dragon noticed several figures quarreling down by Troll Bridge. He lifted majestically from the weir and circled flexing his great wings. From the ground the dragon looked almost luminous in the sunlight.

Then the dragon swooped down towards the bridge. His eyes were riveted on the quarreling figures. It was Mike and Carolyn and Steve and some others entering in now and again. It seemed to be growing in heat if not in light. The dragon roared! And in SpareOom when the dragon roars over Troll Bridge it is quite a captivating experience. All eyes turned towards the dragon noting the length and volume of the jet of fire that had emerged like a billowing inferno from the dragon's great jowls. Roar! The dragon circled and swooped and breathed a bit more fire for effect and then began to sing, which was quite incongruous since the dragon's singing voice was a reedy falsetto soprano. "Peace on earth to men of good will" the dragon sang in a compelling chant. "Even now the holy family is approaching Jericho where they will rest before proceeding to Bethlehem." The dragon circled again. "You guys are supposed to be making popcorn balls, not quarreling. Now kiss and make up ..." The dragon mused "Fat chance of that!" and circled once more emitting burbles and roars but not so much fire since he'd about let out all the stomach gas and it would take him a while to recharge, he flew off towards the weir.

Meanwhile those who had been quarreling had retreated under Troll Bridge and the billy goats gruff trotted across just to make a racket. Under the bridge it was rather cold and dank so Mike rubbed two sticks together and started a fire. He was pretty good at starting fires. The group, their disagreement momentarily in abeyance -- dragons do have their uses -- had gathered around the small fire and begun heaping more twigs and dried branches on it. Pretty soon they were roasting hot dogs and having a grand time. In a sort of tacit agreement they all avoided the usual subjects and chatted about the ring of power and the journey to Mount Doom.

Carolyn Janson <caro@q...>

O Ray - sorry, Dragon - you're wonderful! You had me laughing instead of steaming. More power to the dragon - and anyone else for a hot dog?

Er - after thought - does that make us trolls???

"rlerrington" <rlerrington@i...>

The voice awakened from its nap as the sky clapped with the thunder of the dragon's wings. The smell of hot dogs and hot chocolate wafted its way, and it began to hunger. Not wanting to come empty handed, it raised itself and sang:

God rest you merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay
Remember Christ, our Savior, was born on Christmas Day
To save us all from Satan's power when we are gone astray
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, oh, tidings of comfort and joy.

Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin Mother and child! Holy Infant so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night, Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar, Heav'nly hosts sing Alleluia,
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born.

Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth. Jesus, Lord at Thy birth.

Amen.

And the voice returned to the fire where now hamburgers and chicken and all manner of holiday goody waited the joyous feasters. And the only rule was "No bickering at the table".

:)

LSolarion@a...

Slowly and carefully, the brave knight, his armor rusted and stained from long travelling, crept up to the entrance to the Dragon's cave. Stopping for a moment to admire the nativity scene, he held his breath and listened. From within the cave he heard the steady wheeze and whoosh of the great Dragon's breathing as it slept. The knight crept in, hoping his armor wouldn't clank and disturb the Dragon's rest. The knight reached the Dragon's side, reveling in the warmth and fiery glow of its golden hide, then ever so slowly and silently drew his sharp longsword from its sheath. Then he lifted high the gleaming blade and brought it swiftly down....

...into the gingerbread he had brought and just warmed in the Dragon's breath. Leaving some thick slices on the table with some chilled milk, he slipped out again into the clear, still night, whistling "it came upon a midnight clear..."

Merry Christmas, Dragon and all,

Chapter 6 yawn!

Ray Schneider <schneirj@a...>

The Golden Dragon's breath made little fog rings in the chill air over the weir as he slept gently snoring. He heard the breathing and the faint scraping and tinkling sounds of a knight climbing up to the weir. "Oh bother!" the dragon thought. "Not another knight." He scrunched about a bit trying to get a slightly more comfortable position lying on the great comforter that served as a kind of bed, laid over the hard cold tile of the large room.

As he drifted in and out of that kind of morning sleep when you want to get up but the warmth and coziness of the bed and sleep keep calling you back, he mused, "Knights, what is it about their training that makes them think they all have to go off and kill a dragon?" This was a matter that often came up in the grand council of the Dragon's. The White Dragon, Ruth, usually presided. She was a feisty ole' gal with great wisdom ... " <<scrape scrape wheesh>> the sound of a knightly sword emerging from its scabbard caught the Golden Dragon's attention. "Oh no" he thought. "Now I'll have to toast this guy -- that's not a nice thing to do in the Christmas Season" He peering at the knight out of the slitted lids of his fiery orange eyes. Swish, the sword cut through the gingerbread cake. "And a lucky thing for him" thought the dragon, slightly regretful since Christmas Season or no, it had been a long time since he'd dined on fresh knight, and this night was fresh indeed as was the knight that dared climb up to the heights of the weir.

The wind came up and rattled the sign "SpareOom" that hung over the weir on the pinnacle of the great arch that led into the cavern. The knight, somewhat startled, wolfed down the last of the gingerbread, tucked his sword back into its scabbard. He wiped the crumbs from around his white beard and left a note by the rest of the gingerbread just before climbing down from the weir and into a sleigh pulled by eight reindeer.

He was heard to exclaim as he drove out of sight -- "Merry Christmas to all!" in a hearty voice -- and then in a chorus of bells "to all a good knight!" Yawn! -- the dragon stretched out his taloned arms and turned over -- smush right into the gingerbread. It was a large gingerbread and smushed all over his snout. Since it was covered with icing and whipped cream the dragon was a rather unusual sight. He sat up, banging his head on the sign, which rattled but stayed on its great peg. Then the dragon licked his lips and enjoyed the full-bodied flavor of the gingerbread and the icing and the whipped cream and a smiled crept across his face.

"Iron chef" he intoned and bit into a golden pepper! We'll have to have that knight back to Kitchen Stadium when the secret ingredient is troll-hocks. The dragon chuckled at the thought and looked across the weir and realized that he must get the Christmas tree up before the grandchildren arrived.

From the valley below came the strain of Christmas carols as a group of elves swept up the frozen surface of the creek that ran down to Troll Bridge on their silver skates.

Dee Anne Bonebright <d-bone@t...>

The loyal supporters line up behind Becky the Elf Maiden. Waving their Archenland banner proudly, they start up the long hill toward the dragon's lair. Faintly over the wind can be heard the sound of carols drifting on the breeze. "Here we come a caroling..."

As they get closer, they switch to more quiet verses. "Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright..." A single lute accompanies the peaceful song. At the door of the cave, they switch to lullabies. "Lullay, thou little tiny child..."

They peek inside, relieved to see the dragon is fast asleep. They leave a brightly wrapped fruitcake on the table. Then they nibble a few remaining bites of squashed gingerbread and scamper for the door, relieved that they've made their annual Christmas visit without getting roasted.

becky cosby <blu3jay@y...>

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--Becky and Dee Anne skipping away from the weir singing "The King of Glory"

Chapter 7
Archenlanders, ... Argh!

Ray Schneider <schneirj@a...>

Hmm.... there seems to be a resurgence of those pesky Archenlanders led by the Elf Maiden, Becky. They probably sneaked in with the elves that were skating up the creek through Troll Bridge.

The dragon stretched, and a mighty stretch it was. He reached his taloned arms high into the sky and flared his great wings. Sometimes the town people came out to see the sight of the dragon awakening. If the sun was just right, it caught the dragon's great wings and made them seem almost luminous, a giant golden creature sitting on the edge of the weir. He yawned and laying his head back flared. It was particularly easy of the dragon to flare early in the morning when all the gases and juices had had the evening to ferment. The flame emerging from his jaws made a roaring sound not unlike a great blast furnace and the flame launched into the morning mist a full three stories high.

The dragon smacked his lips and looked around. It was time for breakfast. He noticed a large fruitcake, quite impressive as fruitcakes go, although what is impressive to a villager is merely a morsel to the dragon. He noticed the card which read "A present from your friends in Archenland, ur SpareOom" -- but Archenland had been written in really bold letters and SpareOom in rather smaller ones. It was signed -- "The loyal resistance." "Oh dear," thought the dragon. It must be that infernal elf maiden, Becky who is always stirring things up. He picked up the fruitcake and admired it from a number different angles -- the bits of cherry and pineapple coated in some kind of glaze sparkled. It looked too good to resist and he unwrapped it with a single slit of a sharp talon on the transparent wrapping, and popped it in his mouth. "Umm...." it tasted good all the way down his long gullet until it plopped with a satisfying splash in his stomach. "I love fruit cake," he thought.

Then he began to get out the boxes of ornaments and lights and trappings for the great tree. The great tree grew down the mountain a bit from the weir. It was the original tree that first grew in SpareOom and in its core was the deep magic the reached back to the beginning. The tree's seed had been touched by the Maker and in the winter time the very tips of its green (what do they call those prickly things on a fir tree?) anyway they turned silver and glowed faintly in the dark. The dragon loved to decorate the tree once the Holy Family (the figures that is) had been moved about half way or a little more to the stable. As he pulled out the sashes and last year's uneaten popcorn balls (who packed these?) he thought of the grandchildren -- little dragons, but they did fly interestingly, flitting about as no fully-grown dragon could do. The grandchildren would be coming. The very thought caused the old dragon to smile and burp a little flame, probably from wolfing down the fruitcake -- although wolfing down a wolf was more nourishing, the fur gave him indigestion.

"Tra la ... Tra la"

The Maker knew in his divine plan that the Logos would come and manifest the Maker, but for now the world was in the thrall of the Maker's first makings, those that had rebelled. Even there however, good was ever present because there were always those who did not rebel, who did what they ought, who served the Maker.

Many were unsung, but they were the humble, the meek, the one's who knew an inner peace that came from being what they ought to be, "pots" made by the hand of the potter -- good pots, not pots who wanted to be the potter and were not satisfied to be pots. Over in the corner there was a clatter and the pans came forth "what about the pans?" they said. "Pans are good too!" The pot said, "I didn't mean to neglect the pans. I was just talking about pots." "Well pans serve the Maker too," said the pan. "What about you, black thing," said the pot to the kettle. "There you go again, calling the

kettle black," said the pan. "He's serving the maker too you know. And it's not his fault that the dragon hasn't done the dishes in a fortnight." "Shush, he's coming."

The dragon came and rattled about the kitchen. He took the great black kettle and put it under the pump. With a couple of quick thrusts on the pump handle, the kettle was full. The dragon dropped some tablets into the kettle and they began to fizz. "Well that'll be clean soon enough," thought the dragon and humming went back to taking ornaments out of their little individual boxes and laying them all in a row. "Tra la, Tra la."

Carolyn Janson <caro@q...>

There weren't enough ornaments! There were some missing. The dragon scratched his huge head in dismay and puzzlement. A further search revealed no more ornaments. With the price of these things today, there wouldn't be enough to go round this year. The dragon began to be annoyed. Smoke curled out of his nostrils and a roar began; but remembering the night and the Holy Family on the way up, he restrained himself, only promising to make a thorough investigation in the morning, and went grumbling and muttering to bed.

One of the SpareOomers who had been quarrelling by the Troll Bridge a few days ago had been hiding in a corner, waiting for sleep to overtake the dragon and escape to be possible. It occurred to the person that while making all that noise, a sparkle had been noticed from the corner of the eye, under the bridge. With a leaping heart, the SpareOomer raced out of the cave and down the slope to the bridge. The trolls were all out partying, thank goodness; a quick search revealed a nest of bright ornaments, arranged with a complete lack of taste, in an uncoordinated heap. Scooping them up in haste, the SpareOomer raced back to the dragon's cave and gently placed the ornaments in a line with the others. Now that would make good listening in the morning! Filled with pleasant self-congratulations, the SpareOomer went home to bed, ruminating the while on the dragon's splendid discernment in pointing out the pre-Christian nature of LOTR.

Blessings to all and especially to the dragon,

Ray Schneider <schneirj@a...>

"Snort ... wheeze ... snort wheeze." With each breath the dragon breathed in his sleep there was a curlicue of white mist that flowed from his nostrils in the cold morning air of SpareOom. They curled around, some making little circlets, vortices, while others lifted up the dusting of snow that covered the outer ring of the weir digging little furrows that started wide by the dragon's head back by the great arch leading into the cavern and growing smaller until they disappeared altogether some four or five feet from the dragon's head. "Snort ... piffle, Argh!" the dragon lurched awake.

The Golden Dragon did a little stretch, not his usual great stretch and smacked his lips, which felt dry. He looked around at the dusting of snow and wondered "Where did that come from?" I must get to putting up the ornaments he thought, wondering where the missing ones could have gotten to. "It's probably those dratted trolls," he mused, "always getting into things and carrying them off." "Worse than packrats." He stood up and swept the weir largely clean of snow with a single swinging swathe of his great tail. "Speaking of tales," he thought, "We must move Mary and Joseph further down the hill."

He went up on the hill and moved the figures. They were now getting quite close to the silhouettes of Bethlehem, little domed houses which probably weren't much like the original, but the dragon had

copied them from Christmas cards of former years. Ah, that does it! He anchored the figures and clambered back down to the ledge of the weir.

Now for the tree. He snorted, blowing the remaining snow from the top of the ornaments that were all lined up in neat rows. "What's this?" he thought. Ah, a mystery. "There are more ornaments here now than when I went to sleep." The dragon sat back on his haunches and tapped the side of his jowls with one great taloned finger. "Tap tap tap ..." A little smoke came out his ears. He peered down at the long row of ornaments towards the end where the new ornaments had appeared. On the surface of the stone tiles that floored the great apron of the weir were little dried tracks. The dragon swooped his head down for a closer look. As he looked at the still moist tracks, he burped a small dash of flame and smoke. "Drat" he thought as the moist track evaporated into steam leaving only the faintest remnant. But I've seen enough, thought the dragon, "Someone has been here and left ornaments." (this was not exactly rocket science, but the dragon often didn't think particularly straight after just getting up). He moved to the circling ring of masonry wall that meandered about the edge of the weir's great apron and looked down across the valley towards Troll Bridge, where there seemed to be a party going on.

The dragon mused, "no one ever invites me to the parties at Troll Bridge anymore." Of course he neglected to remember that the main reason was that he'd gotten a little inebriated one year and eaten half the guests. It wasn't intentional, and it was mostly trolls -- but they hadn't invited him back since then.

He gathered up a large group of the ornaments, starting with the smaller ones. He liked to arrange them by size so that the medium sized ones were near the top of the tree. The large ones were at the middle to bottom, and the really little ones were used to ornament the ends of the branches. With one arm encumbered with all the medium sized ornaments, the dragon hopped up the side of the mountain to a place where he could reach the top of the tree. "I'll have to be careful," he thought. Last year he'd slipped and rolled half way down the mountain before stopping by hitting a large bolder that moved about ten feet from the impact. "But" he thought triumphantly, "I didn't break any of the ornaments." He leaned way out and started putting ornaments on the tree. His balance was sustained by his hind feet clinging to the rocks and constant beats of his wings. This year he finished putting up the medium sized ornaments in a particularly fancy pattern.

He was feeling particularly satisfied with himself as he returned to the weir for more ornaments. He thought, "This year I'll have the grandchildren put the small ones up. They'll be so much better at it since they flit about when they fly and can hover at the ends of the branches."

He looked back up the hill towards the great tree. It was starting to look quite festive. The top of the tree was empty though. "Now what did I do with that star?" he thought. "If only Bilbo was here", the dragon thought. He'd met Bilbo on an earlier adventure. "That'll teach him to mess with red dragons," thought the gold dragon. "Bilbo is so good at finding things." "Ah well," wishful thinking. It's a long way to Hobbiton from here, and last time I heard he'd gone traveling with elves -- a particularly dangerous thing to do.

Tra la Tra la ... the dragon clambered a little way up the mountain side -- not so high nor so hard with the large ornaments and began placing them lovingly in traditional places. Each had been hand made, some by the children, and some of the newer ones by the grandchildren. They would be disappointed if they didn't find them in their traditional places. As the dragon finished, a light snow began to fall dusting all the trees with silver. The dragon turned on the lights that lit the figures and the town silhouette and went into the cavern for a cup of hot chocolate. Hot chocolate was one of the dragon's few vices, other than eating trolls which he didn't think of as a vice. He dropped a little amaretto into the chocolate and leaned back drinking it in front of the fire in the cavern's fireplace.

Chapter 8
final preparations ...

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The dragon was up early. This was the day -- oh happy day. The grandchildren would be coming. Early in the morning in the light snow falling over SpareOom, the dragon finished the preparations. He brought the figures down now into Bethlehem and set them into the crèche all in readiness. All around the little Christ child figure he put the figures of the inhabitants of SpareOom, elves and goblins and dwarves and trolls. Even far back was a dragon and a hobbit. Way up at the top of the hill he set the Wise Ones -- the three wise dragons that came to follow the star. The Star -- oh yes the Star. The star was the dragon's pride and joy. It was a halogen lamp of great power decorated with a faceted lens, which had several cutouts that together with their little focusing lenses provided accent light. Falling down from the star were silver and gold streamers, which were anchored at various points. It was quite spectacular! He was very proud of it.

He flew up to the top of the great tree and set the star carefully focusing the accent lights on the three figures, Mary, Joseph and the little Jesus. Then he went about anchoring all the streamers so that they looked like rays of light from the star. Oh this was grand, he thought. The grandchildren will love it.

"'Tis the season to be jolly, Tra la la la la, la la la la," the dragon trilled in the high reedy voice he used when he was particularly amused and fun loving. He had a much deeper, basso voice with a certain booming quality, which he used when he was not so amused. Some people called it a "command voice." It certainly stopped trolls in their tracks. He set out the small ornaments, which the grandchildren would place on the branch ends of the great tree.

Inside the great cavern was an alcove where the dragon kept his computer. It was only a Fratsist III, not the newest computer with the Fratsist IV grandeloquent hyper-chip which spoke twenty languages including high elvish, but it was a quite respectable computer for all of that. "Computer," he intoned, thinking of Mr. Scott's debacle with a Macintosh in 20th century earth San Diego. "Yes darling" replied the computer. It really drove the dragon's wife, Jessica, nuts that he had programmed it with her voice, especially all those cloying phrases like "You're so smart" and "I just love everything you do" and things like that. When she came down to read her e-mail there was usually some >>expletives deleted<< about "your dratted computer" what does "I'll do anything for you darling" mean? "And anyway, where did you get the recordings of my voice saying things like that?" The dragon chuckled. It had taken hours of fiddling with the Fratsist III's sound subroutines to extract and assemble those snippets of endearment. It had been such great fun. He would smile benignly at Jessica and say "I love you honey, especially when you're mad -- and we're all mad you know" -- and then he'd chuckle. Life is good!

--- the dragon's ruminations were interrupted by a huge flapping of dragon wings. Down from the sky came waves of golden dragons. Two sons and a daughter and their wives and husband and THE GRANDCHILDREN! All eight of them flitting about hollering "Grandpa, grandpa. Tell us a story! When do we put up the ornaments? What did you get us for Christmas? Can I turn on the star tonight?" All fluttering around the golden dragon. But Jessica, the queen of the weir came up from the kitchen where she had been baking Christmas cookies. "Grandma, grandma!" the chorus raised again. "Now, now, come in come in. Sit by the fire! You must be cold from the long flight. I'll go get the cider and Gramps can tell you all a story. He's been waiting for you all morning, just pretending to keep busy with the star and things." They all proceeded under the arch where the sign "SpareOom" hung into the grand cavern to the cozy alcove before the great fireplace. (Cozy of course in dragon terms. To men and elves it was a quite large and ornate chamber but warmed by the huge fire.) Hot chocolate, cinnamon cider and eggnog with cookies had all been set out in

preparation. The wafting smells of turkey and ham cooking in the oven created just the right feeling of deep homeiness. It was going to be a wonderful Christmas.

God bless you one and all and may the particular gift of Christ fill your hearts with peace and joy in this season of remembrance and renewal.

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The golden dragon produced the small ornaments for the grandchildren. There were so excited that they fluttered all around bumping into each other. Each one took an ornament and flew up to the great tree, hovering around the ends of the branches, high and low, and adding their ornament to the very end of the branch. The littlest dragon, Emma, had to be helped since she was so small she couldn't hover and place the ornament at the same time. Her two older siblings, Haley and Gabriel flew up to support her as she placed the very last of the small ornaments. Then the golden dragon (Gramps to the grandchildren) threw the switch and the lights on the great tree and the star all sprang to life, sparkling and streaming rays in color and down from the star. It was a beautiful sight on Christmas eve.

Chapter 9 Merry Christmas!

"rlerrington" <rlerrington@i...>

The "Voice" awoke with a yawn. The blessed day was upon them! He woke his wife, and they both dressed with haste in their best Christmas garb. He was particularly fond of the long, dark blue robe with the ermine trim, even if it wasn't red or green. If one looked closely, the specks might appear to be snowflakes, or even stars. Thankfully, the cut of the garment was sufficient to still enfold his increasing girth, and with his graying hair and beard, one might imagine him to be a "Blue Santa". He pauses to chuckle, remembering the story he read the other night about St. Nicholas and the bears. What a wonderful tale. If only we could get people to remember that we would best honor St. Nicholas if we would honor the Christ child.

He closed the cloak with the mithril clasp, the design reminding one of THE STAR, the one that guided the wise men to the Son of God. Pinning a sprig of mistletoe to his lapel (so what if the custom was co-opted from the druids or whoever, a kiss of friendship among friends was a joy), he went to wait at the front door. Looking up the staircase he saw his beloved Teresa, resplendent in her forest green dress and crimson jacket. Now they were ready to go to the dragon's house.

What a surprise it would be this year! The dragon was used to a few visitors, but the other night under the Troll Bridge, they had decided to put aside their differences and bring the Christmas Party to the dragon. And would he be surprised! Dozens of visitors, and all in good cheer! (The "Voice" hoped that the dragon's kiss would be more of the snuffly and less of the wet - hmmm....) The "Voice" and Teresa were bringing eggnog, blueberry muffins, and "Uncle Wyatt's" fudge to eat; an assortment of crackers and poppers (made - of course - by Gandalf); and an assortment of Christmas carols for entertainment.

Also, the mysteriously wrapped box. The centerpiece of the dragon's gift, it contained a nativity set. Very small, even tiny, by dragon standards, this would be truly unique. Every person has been asked to bring a figurine - one that they thought represented them - to add to the crèche. That way, they would all be there to honor the baby Jesus at his birth. The "Voice" had volunteered to get pieces for the dragon and his wife. He had seen the most beautiful sculpture of flying dragons, and they were the perfect height to fly above the crowd.

Armed with food, gifts, and music, the "Voice" and Teresa opened the door to leave the house. And because it is the Christmas Day, and there is always a little special magic, even in Texas there was a foot of newly fallen snow. Oh happy day! And they set forth to the dragon's weir.

Joy to the World!

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room,
And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sin and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love, And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders of His love.

A Merry Christmas to all, and may the blessings of the Christ Child fill your lives today.

In Him whom we Adore.

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Dawn broke over SpareOom spilling rich crimson and a golden aura resplendent across the sky. The silvery curve of the creek ran off the mountain through Troll Bridge and down the valley to the town on whose highest hill could be seen the high tower of the academy. The golden dragon yawned as the sunlight caught his eyes. It was Christmas morning!

"Grandpa's up! Grandpa ... Grandpa!" came the excited voices of the grandchildren flittering and flapping all around his head and occasionally crashing into his great tummy. "Wake up, wake up!" The dragon raised his head and this engendered even more salience and flurries of activity from the eight grandchildren darting in and out. The two largest came crashing in on dash and hugged the old dragon who was now half upright and went crashing down again from this particular display of affection. Everyone was laughing now, including Jessica who had pulled up her nightgown and come to see what all the fuss was about.

She had a warm cup of coffee in her talons and handed it to the golden dragon. "Gramps, Gramps, it's time to open the presents." The old dragon stirred, his bones a bit creaky, and he rose up and leaned back and did a morning flare. With the sun up, although not high. The flare was not as impressive as it would have been earlier in the morning. Jessica said, "Look down the valley. Someone is coming."

The strains of "Joy to the world" were wafting up the valley and a long procession of people from around Troll Bridge and from the town and the academy had all it seemed gathered together and were climbing the narrow path that wandered up the side of the mountain to the dragon's weir (some folks insisted on spelling it weyr, but the dragon insisted on his little eccentricities remembering an old friend who insisted that the plural of dwarf was dwarves and not dwarfs -- the dragon claimed to be honoring him whenever he insisted on one of his idiosyncratic spellings). The group of elves and dwarves and sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, a few brave trolls and some goblins all wove up the path singing, not entirely on key, but making up for their lack of harmony by the vigor and volume of their caroling. Leading the group, quite dashing in his blue robes was "The Voice." Teresa in her crimson jacket over forest green perfectly matched.

The dragon, whose hearing was remarkable, especially for an old dragon, winced as the "Voice" hit a particularly horrific note. He turned to Jessica and said "It looks like were going to have a party."

The grandchildren took this as a cue and darted up into the air above the weir, flared in their own smaller ways, little fires flashing and dived down around the advancing villagers. "A party ... a party." they trilled. The golden dragon came to the edge of the weir and unfolded his wings so that they caught the sun. "Oh don't show off!" said Jessica. "You know that looks terrific. It always annoys me when you're showing off." The old dragon smiled, which could be quite a horrific experience if you weren't used to a dragon smiling. All those teeth ...

"Merry Christmas" he intoned in his most dragonly voice. "Merry Christmas and welcome to the weir." The villagers spilled over the top of the narrow accessway onto the great apron. A wonderful party ensued with punch and cookies and eggnog. The most wonderful thing was the music. All the villagers that could play instruments that were portable had brought them. Singing and celebrating began. The great star on the great tree focused on the baby in the crèche above the weir's alcove on the mountainside. Later in the morning with satiated villagers singing in little groups. The dragon went up on the mountainside and moved the figures of the three wise dragons a bit further down the hill on their journey to the Christ child.

"Merry Christmas ... Merry Christmas" everyone echoed at the party and the sun rose in the sky over SpareOom sparkling off the snow, and all was right with the world.

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The church is darkened, only dim lights ... the dragon intones in a deep basso voice in the darkness

In the year 5190 since the creation of the world, when God made Heaven and Earth;

In the year 2759 since the flood;

In the year 2015 since the birth of Abraham;

In the year 1510 since the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses;

In the year 1032 since David was anointed king;

In the 65th week of years according to the prophecy of Daniel;

In the 194th Olympiad, In the 752nd year from the foundation of the city of Rome;

In the 42nd year of the reign of Octavian Augustus, when the whole world was at peace;

In the 6th era of the World;

Jesus Christ, eternal God and Son of the eternal Father, desired to sanctify the world by His gracious coming.

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and now after nine months (all kneel).

He is born at Bethlehem, the city of David, in the tribe of Judah as MAN from the Virgin Mary.

THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD JESUS IN THE FLESH. (All Rise)

... all through the reading the lights are slowly brought up until at the last line the lights are full up and the celebrant enters.

Chapter 10
party over...

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The golden dragon, feeling his age, pulled the large pins that held the wise dragons and moved them laboriously further down the mountainside. He was still glowing inside from a wonderful party. The grandchildren were in bed still. Undoubtedly it was because they had had so much fun and stayed up so long after their bedtime. "The Voice" had been in great evidence, especially after the rum in the eggnog mellowed him out. His wife took him in toe finally as the last guests left the weir long after the clock on the distant tower was heard ringing out the hour of three A.M.

The dragon stood back a pace or so to admire his handiwork as he thrust the pins home to secure the wise dragons on their journey. Time to get to bed myself he thought. The grandchildren won't sleep in that much.

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The golden dragon went up on the mountainside and tensioned the long cable that attached the great star to the lanyard activated gear that would let it slide slowly down to hover over the house in Bethlehem where the Christ child was kept until the wise men (wise dragons here, everyone wants to put a touch of their own culture into the story) This year the dragon had added a figure among the wise dragons of a fourth wise man from the family of man. It was his concession to the fact that all the wise men were men. This story of all stories, although perhaps an anachronism in SpareOom (how does time work in a multidimensional universe that melds Middle Earth, Narnia, True Earth and like some of Heinlein's work, virtually all fiction and fact? -- never know who will show up in SpareOom). The dragon popped back into local existence >>pop<< and continued tensioning the cable. He'd tested the concept with a model and it worked marvelously.

The idea was simple enough. Move the Holy Family to a house in Bethlehem (after all the wise men may have taken months, perhaps years to arrive, else why did Herod target all the children two years and younger) and then have the star move smoothly down the cable as the wise dragons came down the hill so that on little Christmas the tableau would be complete -- Holy Family, wise dragons (oh with a lone wise man) and the star all established at once in a marvelous tableau. Christ coming to the gentiles. It's always most interesting that this story of all stories was in the gospel written to the Hebrews, Matthew. The story was not only that Jesus had come to his own family among the nations, the Jews, but that He came to all families everywhere. "A city on a hill, a light unto the nations" mused the dragon. "An excellent theme for the tableau." The dragon pulled the lanyard that started the great star on its journey and then advanced the wise dragons down the hill. He had already repositioned the figures of the Holy Family at the domed house a little further up the hill from the stable.

In the early morning mist the dragon looked over his work delightedly. Soon the grandchildren would be out of bed. The dragon went down the mountainside to the weir and set about making a great clatter in the kitchen whipping up a batch of Ostrich eggs and sausage. Breakfast smells soon filled the weir.

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After coming in from moving the wise dragons and adjusting the position of the star, the dragon was ready for a little New Year's Eve cheer. It was cold outside and there was still a little flurry of snow

falling on the apron of the weir from the dragon's breath condensing and falling to the grounds. Returning to the toastiness of the great hall was pleasant. Jessica had prepared a large flagon of rum-laced eggnog and the dragon settled in before the fire to consume this seasonal treat. All was peaceful in this special time of thanksgiving for the coming of the Maker's son.

Chapter 11 And a Happy New Year!

"rlerrington" <rlerrington@i...>

The time of the New Year was upon SpareOom, and its various inhabitants had begun the merry making. For some, it was merely a continuation of the Christmas celebration, what with Christmas and Boxing day, and waiting the Three Kings (or dragons). For others, it also represented a chance to reflect on the old year, both on events in SpareOom and the world around, as well as the personal struggles and triumphs of each of its denizens.

The "Voice", feeling quite reflective, sends forth these thoughts at this time, in a sense of appreciation for his new found friends as he found his way to this country, and in gratitude to the One without whom no day or year could truly be new.

"In reflection, the old year, with its pains and agonies of the tragedies of September 11, seems overshadowed by the immensity of that pain and loss. It is easy to forget the many small struggles of those not directly affected, and who may still be suffering in their own way. I raise a prayer of remembrance for those who daily seek their daily bread, whose small but real struggles may not have gained an epic proportion, but who persevere nonetheless. May we all have the peace of God and share in His abundance according to our need.

"I offer thanks for each person in SpareOom, and pray that the mercies of Christ will fill your lives. Though we may differ in our approaches, surely God (Who is no respecter of persons) loves each of us and desires that we be drawn more fully into His presence. May we see each other more through the eyes of Christ.

"And I thank each one of you for allowing me to join your community. This has been one of the blessings of my past year.

And the voice, full of gladness, raised his glass, and in those words of Dickens uttered through a child, "God Bless Us Everyone".

The "Voice" emptied his glass, and went down to join the feasting and merriment at the Troll Bridge, where many gathered to await the show of the dragon to announce the New Year.

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"Oh fuss and bother," said the dragon, as Jessica cinched up the waistcoat. "I just don't think it fits, dear," she said. "It's all that eggnog and breast bird you've been eating. ... Not to mentioned the greasy troll." She gave a tremendous heave on the straps at the back of the waistcoat.

"I have to go down to Troll Bridge" said the dragon, putting on his huge burgundy cape with the gold chain and the seal of the academy on his chest, a medallion as large as an ordinary serving dish for breast bird and engraved and embossed with the seal of the academy, two faces, quite anachronistic, one of a burly huge journalist of the end times together with his younger compatriot, an Oxford don with thinning hair and a roundish face. There was some inscription engraved around the circumference which read translated: "Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly." Along the bottom was another inscription due to an ancient Greek. "The beginning of wisdom is to know that you know nothing."

Fully attired in his regalia, the dragon stepped to the edge of apron of the weir. "Wait," shouted Jessica, and tumbled out of the great chamber with a hat and a ceremonial mace. The golden dragon took them sheepishly. He arranged the hat so it looked rather rakish and asked "Is the mace fully charged?" Jessica nodded vigorously and shoed him back to the apron's edge.

Down at Troll Bridge in the distance, the inhabitants of SpareOom were gathered for this annual event, the announcement of the New Year. They were all looking towards the mountain and the weir when the dragon tripped and stumbled over the edge. Only the opening of his majestic golden wings kept another "tumble down the mountainside" from becoming a reality. Filling his wings with the morning breeze he lofted upwards and then soared down towards Troll Bridge to land jauntily on the platform erected for the occasion.

He patted down his waistcoat, paying little notice to the fact that all the buttons were puckered. Then with a sweep of his great cloak he walked forward to the railing and looked down at the inhabitants of SpareOom.

Holding both taloned hands up, the right clutching the mace, and flaring his wings to their greatest extent he intoned:

"The old year is dead, and with it many joys and many sorrows. The New Year is upon us an unmarked parchment upon which we may write many new things. May all our days be glorious in the eyes of the Maker and may the New Year be one full of goodness! I present to you THE NEW YEAR."

With that the dragon raised the mace even further and his talon touched the small stud on the handle. The crowd waited and watched in anticipation, knowing from earlier years what was to come. Upon pressing the stud the mace transformed itself and began shooting great stars of fire into the morning sky. They exploded and produced flaming streamers in every direction creating a great hemispherical cap and a sound. Oh what a sound! The sound was a roar like great engines followed by the cacophony of many explosions, not quite simultaneous that rippled like a salute, but much grander. The dragon's wing flapped a few times. He hovered momentarily over the platform and then leaned back his head and flared as only a golden dragon can. In the canopy formed by the falling streamers, his flare flashed upward piercing the center and rising further, so that for a moment it almost seemed like a great sword of fire stood before the crowd. The effect was over in a moment and the golden dragon flapped his wings and lifted majestically, circled the crowd at Troll Bridge and then winged back to the weir.

The crowd continued in their merriment, celebrating the New Year. Here and there were the usual voices of the critics. "Quite a marvelous performance the dragon gave," said one old gaffer. Another near by disagreed, "Oh this wasn't his best year by any means. I think he's getting a bit fat and flabby." "Too much eggnog," said a third.

Back at the weir, the dragon settled himself before the fire and opened a book. It was titled "There and Back Again" and written by someone named Bilbo Baggins. The dragon settled himself to read, taking down the long parson's pipe and filling it with a particularly aromatic bowl of smokeweed. Puffing away he began to read.

Chapter 12 Little Christmas

Ray Schneider <schneirj@a...>

The dragon sank back into his huge armchair totally exhausted. The previous evening he had reviewed his handiwork -- the three wise dragons and the single wise man had arrived at the place where the child was living. He had finished that particular move of all the figures on the evening of January 5th and now they formed a wonderful grouping under the huge star, which had migrated to the domed house where all the figures became a single great tableau. The wonderful inhabitants of SpareOom had formed a long candlelit procession and had sung carols which would not be written for another ten thousand years, but it didn't matter. There was a slight mist which made everything glow with a spherical aura. The candles pulsed as they were carried, almost as if they were alive. The rector of St. James, one of the colleges at the academy, read the gospel about the magi and gave a moving homily about the gifts, their symbolism in the times of Jesus and their symbolism to us today in SpareOom, which being more ancient, viewed the whole thing as a promise of the Maker that was yet to come (the technicians in the group all standing around with candles, were always muttering about temporal time warps and anachronisms and such like -- but the ordinary citizens ignored them -- they were a little strange anyway, always valuing the logic of the thing over its ambience -- generally they settled down after a hot toddy or two). The dragon came out and made the star wiggle and sway, but other than that stayed in the background. It was a fine evening, but as with all things, the day follows the night and now Jessica said -- "Take that stuff off the mountain." So the dragon had spent all morning clanging and banging and disassembling and packing and dragging and ... well you get the idea ... and it was all packed away now for another day. It was a good kind of exhaustion and the dragon tuned in the morning edition of the Iron Chef to see what the Iron Chef Dragon would be preparing today.

LSolarion@a...

The knight watched from afar off as the Dragon carefully took down all the ornaments and the three Wise Dragons and the Baby and wrapped them lovingly in plastic bubble-wrap for next year (sealing the edges with the barest puff of his hot breath); and the knight remembered how happy everyone had been at the parties in SpareOom, and how peace and harmony had reigned, and how magnificently the great Dragon's flare had lit the night with an early dawn. He pulled out his greatsword, with which he had fought so many battles, noticing how heavy it was and how it tended to trip him up when he was dancing. "It's getting a little rusty on the edges" the knight thought to himself. "Maybe it should."

He thought a little more. "If I made peace on earth, goodwill toward men my creed, maybe even the fierce Giant of Wobbly Woods would accept it, and no longer terrorize the maidens of the countryside." Then and there the knight resolved to give the tedious job of knight-errantry a rest, and let the errant fend for themselves. "I will become a troubadour and write sonnets to my love" he decided. So he traded his pair of second-hand greaves ("though it greaves me" he thought) for quill and parchment, and wrote:

High in the heavens this warm Christmastide
A star peeps through a ripped and ragged cloud
Just as the saving wound in Jesus' side
Parted the veil that hid God from the crowd
Of worshippers who cried out "Crucify"
In that God's name whose mercy they denied,
And opened heaven to all those who die

Nailed to the bleeding cross of Him who died,
That we might in His image living rise.
Just so, that star became what it revealed,
Showing all wise men where the manger lies,
What Child is swaddled there, what gifts to yield:
Not gold or resin bled from pierced trees,
But willing hearts offered on bended knees.

The man, no longer knight but troubadour, crept up to the weir ("I could have sworn it was spelled differently," he thought) and slid the parchment under the door. "Good thing there's all that clanging and banging in there," he told himself (adding "I sure do talk to myself a lot"), "because the Dragon won't hear me." He ran down the mountain, over the Troll Bridge, and into the Bird and Baby, his favorite pub, where the more literary among the SpareOomers hung out. "Too bad it isn't Tuesday," he thought to himself, and ordered a hot chai, sat down by the fire, and started chasing rhymes around in his head. And his sword quietly rusted in its scabbard.

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"Hurumph" said the golden dragon as he leaned over the flagon of ale in the courtyard of the Green Dragon not being able to get to the bar. The flagon in his talons was a specially made one which, when not in use, doubled as the emblem over the door of the establishment. This being about the third such flagon, fully two men tall and one man across, that the dragon had consumed, he was in fine fettle and began a bit of a rant, which all had heard before. "Green Dragons, hurumph!" "They are a low kind of dragon, generally can't even fly. Some fly like chickens, just far enough to land in the next pasture and terrorize the cows." <<burp ... belch>> The men, elves and dwarves in the courtyard backed up a bit and out of the line of belch, a dragon's belch was often accompanied by pyrotechnics which could toast you nicely, and the apology that would certainly follow would do the widow very little good. The dragon wiped his mouth with his hand. "As I was saying," he intoned, hesitating to regain his thread of thought, "Is that green dragons are the sort that stir up all these knights with derring-do off to save fair damsels in distress and all that sort of bilge." "The problem is that it just gets the knights all confident and feisty and then they have to be brought down to earth, quite literally, when they meet a real dragon." The dragon rather unsteadily put the now empty flagon back where it usually stood over the door. He bumped the great sign, which had a painted carving of a green dragon slightly, and it rocked back and forth making a creaking kind of sound on its hinges. "I must get home ... the little lady is waiting!" the dragon smirked since of course the little lady Jessica was also a golden dragon only slightly smaller than himself. He lurched into the air, his great wings beating rather erratically, and barely missing the tops of the trees near the Inn. As he wobbled out of sight in the direction of the weir, his basso voice could be heard singing "Hi Ho Hi Ho it's off to feast I go, a knight nibble here, a knight nibble there Hi Ho, Hi Ho Hi Ho Hi Ho." This was not a song to bring joy to the heart of a noble knight. The dragon mainly did it for effect since it produced a wonderful sense of fear and trembling in the knights and it was quite amusing to see some of them actually faint dead away. The immediately following "crash" was always entertaining. The merrymakers at the Green Dragon could not see his landing at the weir, and a good thing. Maintaining one's dignity was difficult enough without people tittering behind your back about every bad landing.

The dragon slept well that night!
