

Dragons I Have Known

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I will begin by answering a question I get frequently from my readers, who send me such wonderful letters.

Many of them ask: How do you describe a dragon? The answer is I use the same process as I do to describe any other character. That process has three layers. First, I start by describing the dragon by using all five senses – what it looks like, sounds like, feels like, and (very important) smells like. Second, I describe its daily life – what it does on a typical Tuesday, what is its place in the dragon society, what stories it most loves, what it prefers to eat, what makes it laugh or cry. Third, I go inside the dragon and describe its inner hopes, fears, and dreams. At the very end of this process, the dragon will whisper to me its deepest, darkest secret!

The other question I have received from readers is: Would you have a dragon as a pet? The answer to this is easy. Nobody has a dragon as a pet! Only as a friend. Dragons are highly selective about the company they keep. They are also incredibly wise, as well as learned in many languages (including very difficult languages such as those spoken by elves, fairies, and even Americans). They are also witty, sassy, and always hungry (so be careful!).

My dragon friends like Basil would be great to take along on a camping trip. There would be no need to worry about making a campfire, because the dragon can always start one. And the dragon can share favorite stories long into the night.

A dragon's voice is quite distinctive. You can tell much about the dragon's personality from his or her tone of voice. For example, here is a brief passage that opens the first book of the *Merlin's Dragon* trilogy. Basil himself introduces the story with these words:

Look here, I know it sounds far-fetched—impossible, even—that such a huge story could have such a tiny, unremarkable beginning. Call me a liar if you like. But that's how it was. I know, believe me. For I just happened to be right there, when everything began.

Finally, being a dragon friend brings a life of adventure. Here is a condensed passage from the third book in the trilogy, *Merlin's Dragon 3: Ultimate Magic*:

The great dragon Basilgarrad flew over the high peaks of Olanabram, his enormous wings stretching wider than the blue-tinted glaciers below. Much as he would have liked to fly even faster, the dragon held his glides

between strokes as long as possible, riding on the whistling wind, so that he wouldn't outpace the others. As it was, he could hear their labored breathing not far behind as they struggled to stay with him.

Below, his shadow floated over the glaciers, snowfields, and summits of the peaks. Basilgarrad watched the changing scene, noticing how his jagged wings seemed to twist, shorten, and expand as the shadow moved across the steepest slopes. Just as he reached Hallia's Peak, the summit where he'd parted with Merlin all those years ago, he felt a familiar tap on the edge of his ear.

"Good to be back here, old friend." The wizard's voice, spoken right into the huge, pointed ear that he was holding tightly, rang louder than the whistling wind. Merlin ran his hand affectionately over the long green ahirs that lined the ear's edge, as if he were stroking a puppy. "We've seen quite a few adventures down there, haven't we?"

"We have," boomed Basilgarrad, nodding his massive head as he flew. "Starting with your wedding."

"Right! I'd almost forgotten you were there—seeing as how you came disguised as a puny little lizard with dried up leaves for wings."

The dragon's throat rumbled with laughter, sounding like an approaching thunderstorm. "The smallest package can sometimes hold the biggest surprise."

Merlin stroked the back of his friend's ear. "Indeed. You'd have said the same about me if you had known me as a bumbling young man."

"As compared to the bumbling old man you are now?"

At that, the dragon and the wizard laughed together.

Above them, the sky began to ripple with rays of golden light, the daily display of starset. As the stars of Avalon grew dimmer, bright hues painted the sky as well as the snowy lands below. Basilgarrad's shadow seemed to sail across a frozen sea whose waves glittered with gold.

"Basil," said Merlin, a new urgency in his voice, "I think we should stop somewhere for the night."

The dragon's brow furrowed, bending the green scales under the wizard's feet. "But our time is short! Something horrible is happening down there, even now. I can feel it."

“So can I,” answered Merlin. “But we must wait until dawn before we attack.”

The dragon tilted his enormous wings and angled downward. Swiftly, the night deepened around them. The world grew darker, broken only by the faint glitter of starlight on his scales. He seemed to be descending into another world—one made of darkening shadows.