

BATTLE

The knight rode for miles across the wasteland before he found the dragon he had come to slay. It was a huge beast, black as a burnt coal. The moment it saw him it breathed out a blast of flame, they ran together, roaring.

Due however to the dragon's impervious scales, the knight could do it no harm. Also, due to the knight's excellent and fire-resistant armour, (a magic potion had been smeared on it), neither could the dragon harm the man.

The sun sank. The red sky cooled to darkest blue and a moon rose like a blind white mirror.

Both fighters slunk apart and sat down on the ground. Though unhurt, each of them was exhausted.

Finally the knight spoke.. "If you understand me, I suggest this: I will go back and tell them that I slew you."

The dragon, which did indeed understand human speech, answered in the same language. "I too," it said, "will tell my kind I killed you, and ate you, lightly grilled."

Then they lay back and slept until sunrise.

At first light the dragon flew away. The knight strode away. They told their stories of victory with heavy hearts, but were believed. When, thereafter, mankind noticed plumes of smoke and fire in the wasteland, they put it down to volcanoes. In the world of dragon kind, the evidence of human cities and towns was explained as large rat warrens, or giant ant-hills. Fights still occasionally took place, the participants having met generally by accident. But the outcome was always the same. Each gave up, departed, lied.

For all we know, just such a battle between man and dragon may have happened again only yesterday - for who, now, believes in dragons? Or, among dragons, who now believes in men?