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The Illuminated Dragon

By Sarah Prineas, illustration by Kari Christensen

3 June 2002

Rafe Greatorex thought he'd spotted a dragon. From where he stood on the cobbled street that ran between the leaning tenements, only a narrow strip of sky was visible. Rafe craned his neck. He was sure -- almost sure -- that something had flown by, above. A black shadow, an X against the distant blue.

He looked down again, rubbing his neck. No, it was nothing. Dragons had been outlawed thirty years ago. He must have imagined it. Sighing, he adjusted his glasses, took up the string bag of potatoes with one hand and the canvas bag of books and supplies with the other, and trudged on toward home.

Finding the supplies he needed for his work on the bestiary had been difficult. He must have walked for miles through the tangled streets of the city to get it all. Gold leaf was almost more than he could afford; he had a bit of it pressed between the pages of a Rationalist text in his breast pocket. The inks, he could still find, and the paper and parchment, but the brushmakers had cast furtive looks up and down the street when they took out their wares, had accepted his payment and scurried away into dark alleys. Of all the paraphernalia of illumination, the colors had been the hardest to find; they would be illegal soon, one pigment-grinder had whispered. "You must take what you can afford now, sir," the woman had advised, "for it may not be here tomorrow."

Rafe plodded on. Arriving at the open space before the cathedral, he looked up again. Still no dragon, and the blue sky had faded to the more typical glassine white which would in turn darken to heavy gray and rain before nightfall. Rafe sighed, switched the book bag from his right hand to his left, and went on. Then he stopped and looked up again. Something was different.

As usual, the cathedral loomed over one side of the square, buttresses sprawling. The body and the soul, Rafe always thought, when he saw it. The heavy gray stone of the massive cathedral was the body crouching beneath the weight of its sins, while the surprisingly airy filigreed-stone steeple strained toward heaven, the soul hoping for release from the gravity that bound it.

Rafe frowned. Something was missing. . . . The gargoyles. They'd hacked off the gargoyles. Just last week he'd come this way and the dragons and he-goats and demons had poked their smirking faces from drainpipes, from above doorways and along rooflines. But they were gone now; only stumps of stone

[Before Paphos](#)

by Loretta Casteen

8 January 2007

It starts again. The baby begins to cough and choke.

[Locked Doors](#)

by Stephanie Burgis

1 January 2007

You can never let anyone suspect, his mother told him. That was the first rule she taught him, and the last, before she left him here alone with It.

[Heroic Measures](#)

by Matthew Johnson

18 December 2006

Pale as he was, it was hard to believe he would

