

The Treasure of the Dragon

by J. Munoz Escomez

An old sailor brought to my town the news of having seen, in a very distant island, a terrible dragon which guarded an immense treasure. Half of the body of this guardian was a fish, the other half a lion; it moreover had such powerful wings that it could rise to an extraordinary height. Air, water, or land were his elements, and when any ships came near to the coast they were soon attacked by that ever vigilant monster.

Many expeditions were made, but all succumbed to the talons of that invincible animal; moreover, the treasure was so splendid that it excited the envy of adventurers from all parts of the earth.

Among the innumerable precious stones which with thousands of gold bars formed those riches, there was a statue of natural size made out of a single diamond, and which was worth such a fabulous sum that all the treasures of the earth would not suffice to buy it.

The fear of the dragon did not lessen the enthusiasm of the lads of my town; on the contrary, it was a further stimulus to their bravery and daring, and so, in little less than a month, an expedition was formed of the bravest and most ambitious.

They set out on the 15th of September on a bark named the *Temeraire*—a handsome brigantine, the swiftest that ever glided over the waves. After fourteen days' sailing they found themselves at about a league from the island where the treasure and the dragon were. Behold what happened!

The members of the expedition met in council in order to take their measures, and agreed as follows: to launch some boats in order to land in three or four places at the same time; to carry a great quantity of ammunition so as to be able to fire upon the dragon; and, lastly, to divide the treasure in equal parts and to distribute it among the expeditionaries. There was only one vote against, that of a cabin boy, a youth of eighteen, who opposed the dividing of the party, believing it better to wait for the dragon on board the ship, and from there to fight it with cannons.

"If you are afraid, stay behind," they all said to him, and nobody paid any attention to the cabin boy's scheme.

As nobody trusted his companions, all embarked in the bunches, fearful of being cheated if they did not witness the division of the treasure, leaving on board only the cabin boy and the pilot, a very experienced old sailor who had not uttered any opinion at the meeting. The launches being full and the crews armed, they left the ship and rowed near to the coast.

Pascual, for so the cabin boy was named, prepared the bow-gun, loading it up to the mouth, and also seized a strong sharp spear. Then he sat down in the bows, and from there, with a telescope, watched the progress of his companions. The latter were about a hundred yards from the coast when a tremendous roar was heard; he saw the dragon fly up into the air and fall upon one of the launches. Several gunshots were heard, and soon the launch disappeared under the water. The bullets glanced off the skin of the terrible animal, which threw itself in turn upon the other launches and sank them.

Its work of extermination finished, the dragon returned to the island, shaking its wings, reddened by the blood of its victims.

The pilot, terrified, wished to go back to his country, but Pascual prevented it, and directed him to go at full sail towards the island.

The pilot gave way to the solicitations of the cabin boy, who now no longer thought of the treasure but of avenging the death of his companions.

They had arrived at some hundred fathoms from the coast when they saw the dragon, which was advancing towards them. Pascual rapidly aimed the small cannon, but the ball struck on some rocks, and the dragon, more irritated than ever, threw himself upon the brigantine. It described a couple of circles in the air like an eagle choosing its prey, and at length threw itself upon Pascual, who, mounted on a round house, valiantly waited for it.

Such was the violence of the attack that the dragon, on attempting to break the spear with which the heroic boy greeted it, sent it quite through one of its claws, and so great was the pain that it made a horrible outcry and rose up in the air full of terrible frenzy. The spear remained fixed in the claw, and to it hung Pascual, who, by his weight, increased the woes of the dragon. In vain the latter tried to get rid of that singular guest; all its efforts were useless, Pascual bestrode his spear like an enthusiastic gymnast. Then becoming furious, it threw itself into the sea in order to try to drown him. Pascual swam like a fish and dived like a seal; so his enemy was not able to liberate itself from him. Being now desperate, it went to the island, dragging the cabin boy with it; the latter had hardly touched terra firma when, using the spear as a lever, he gave it a turn with all his might, twisting the wounded claw in such a way that the pain deprived the monster of its strength and consciousness. Giving a cry it fell to the ground defenceless. Pascual then got out his jack-knife and looked with care for the joints between the formidable scales which served the dragon as armour. There he thrust it in many times, with the aid of a stone which he used in place of a hammer.

The dragon was now dead, and Pascual thought of his companions and went down to the shore to seek them. His search was useless, for he did not even find a trace of them. He looked towards the spot where he had left the brigantine, and that had also disappeared; doubtless the old pilot was afraid and had gone away with the ship.

Then our hero decided to seek the treasure, but in vain he went over the island in all directions: he found not the least sign of it. Then he returned to the spot where he had seen the dragon lying when they had approached the island, and he saw that there was an enormous stone which no doubt covered the entrance of the grotto where the treasure was to be found. He applied the spear to the joints and succeeded in moving it, and after some effort he brought into view a winding staircase, down which he hurriedly went. The first room to which the staircase gave access had its walls covered with rubies, the second with emeralds, and the third with pearls and diamonds. In the centre stood the magnificent statue made out of a single diamond, and which represented a very beautiful princess. Pascual was astounded at such extraordinary beauty, and burst into an exclamation of admiration.

Presently he noticed the pedestal of the statue, on which might be read:

"In a stone lies the disenchantment."

Then the cabin boy looked at all the projections of the room, and pressing one of them heard a

creak, and instantaneously, as the scenes in a fairy comedy are changed, the grotto disappeared; each precious stone was changed into a human being, and the beautiful princess, again turned to flesh and blood, came slowly down from her pedestal, and, giving her hand to the valiant lad, offered to reward his bravery by giving him all the riches of her kingdom, and with them her heart. Among the disenchanted beings were all his companions of the expedition, who embraced Pascual, and, what was very strange, did not envy him, recognising that his triumph was deserved. All the destroyed boats appeared on the coast, and in them they embarked, each one going to his own country and the cabin boy to that of the princess.

Pascual is now no longer Pascual, but His Highness Prince Pascual I., a very good man, according to what his subjects say.

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