

from *Master Merlin's Guide to Dragon Light* by David Memmott
(work-in-progress)

LESSON ONE:

“Inviting Correspondences with the Impossible”

We are all born connected to a dragon. This is not a well-known fact in our age of science with its technology, internet and immutable rule of reason. With our collective vision so totally fixated on “real” time instead of “dreamtime,” the only magic we witness anymore is conjured by Hollywood or the virtual worlds of computers and smartphones. Life is this dream seeking to become lucid. When the miracle of wholeness is obliterated in particle accelerators and our machines remake the universe, the dragons decline into lore.

Your dragon lives not far from you in a world you cannot see, a world that restores mere mortals from the delusion of passing time—time corrupted into hours, days and seasons. This parallel world I call Dragon Light is inhabited not only by dragons but other manifestations of life, energy, myth and lore. The laws of physics are not so immutable in Dragon Light. What you do or do not do in this or that world, not only changes you but your dragon and, conversely, what your dragon does or does not do here or there also changes you. Aside from the fact your fates are intertwined, you and your dragon are seldom aware of each other.

What happens to our dragons in Dragon Light might be of greater import once you understand our existence depends on them. If it wasn't for Dragon Light all natural forms would grow cold and brittle, its beat slower and slower until it has frozen in time. The archetypal frame for what we know as mountains, sea, forests, deserts, the ground beneath our feet, the sky above our heads, would break down, unable to hold its place. Without form, there is nothing to agree on.

When the doomsayers warn the world is ending, what I hear them saying is there's too few dragons being emancipated in Dragon Light.

Every dragon, for some reason you can't understand, is born into a cage and your dragon waits to be emancipated by its human correspondent, you. *Correspondents* often document experience in a strange world and describe the indescribable: your correspondence with your dragon influences all your relationships. Not only do dragons in their world correspond with humans in our world, but our thoughts on some level are entangled. I use the word *entangled* in a special sense first proposed by the physicist John Bell in his thought-experiment later tested in the laboratory to measure the effects of non-local influences on electron spin. Bells Theorem is all about dragons. Dragons can unite our world with Dragon Light and we can live in peace as two different expressions of the same thing. You should be cautioned as a new correspondent that measuring entanglement using an electron beam in a laboratory is very different from becoming aware of your dragon.

Dragon entanglement is not so much about gathering information from the surface, like picking up gold nuggets along a stream of consciousness, rather an entrance to a place deeper down where the intrinsic value of our Being is built into the very structure of our world, where we can learn the secret of our connection to Dragaon Light. The way deeper opens up in caves and wells, lakes and burrows, where life conforms to a different magic.

My studies of quantum physics and mythology lead me to consider the duality of light and the necessity of darkness. Light is both wave and particle, observer and observed. You can only be one or the other, never both at the same time. The magic that leads to your dragon is not so much a way as a shift from say one state to another.

Our educational system has dedicated too much energy to indoctrinating our correspondents into a particle paradigm and, therefore, fail to teach them the magic they need to bring about this "shift." Learning this magic is as essential to longevity as learning to breathe, not just autonomic breathing, but conscious breathing, the easy rhythm of *in* and *out* like a shift in current, a change in the tide, the Yin Yang of air and water.

The Shift requires another way of knowing that defies rule of reason. The Shift is the intuitive resistance to a scientific method that merely maps our reality and forgets Dragon Light. Dragon's

Light can be directed through any number of objects, but for our purposes here it's the Sorcerer's Key. The Key can absorb and reflect different features depending on your relationship with Dragon Light; some will be conscious relationships, some unconscious. With the Sorcerer's Key and knowledge of the Shift, we know how to find an entrance to Dragon Light, two worlds realign to each other. Think of the Key as a kind of GPS that constantly updates and recalculates your position relative to every Other, using materials like words, images and numbers. A good Key will resonate only for a particular correspondent. Finding the right key is no easy task if you pay too much attention to the numbers and not enough to the word. The Key will find you, will draw you to it and shielding you from harm even before you're aware of it. Through the Sorcerer's Key, a Fire-Tender will experience Dragon Light like breaking the sound barrier. Those on the ground look up at the sound but don't see you because you're way ahead of it. The jet fuel you burn in breaking barriers is a personal choice. Some burn more than others. If your choice doesn't reflect Dragon Light, the way there could be cut off to you; you will no longer see the entry point. The Way to Dragon Light is the result of a life-long process too often confused these days with mental breakdown.

What I'm telling you now I did not know when I was fifteen.

1.

In the fall of 1964, the year of the British Invasion, music was everywhere. The ionosphere crackled with radio waves. The Beatles set records on records, dominating the Top 40. I watched on the evening news as teenage girls trampled down barricades, screaming like wild cats, mobbing those mopheads from England. Their infatuated fandom sprawled on the fenders of black limousines as chauffeurs in dark suits sped off with The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Zombies, Dave Clark Five, Gerry and the Pacemakers, and The Animals. I practiced my Bundy student trumpet with newfound conviction and started saving up for my first electric guitar.

Sophomore year should have been my best ever. Prospects were good. It was the year I found my special talent, made my mark. I felt an electrical charge in the air around Boise, Idaho, transmitted like a virus through vinyl at the record stores, breaking through interference on AM transistor radios. A change was coming. Just holding a 45 rpm record imparted some forbidden knowledge that passed like magic through the thumb and forefinger as they gripped the record edges so not to leave prints. And we, the believers, felt the magic take hold long before we were dancing in the streets.

The controlled burn of the summer of '64 blazed into the full colors of fall and the maple trees turned suddenly red and orange in a stiff North wind. The magic in the air splintered on the sun-stunted trees shivering in a relentless cold rain. I watched my step on the maple mash thickening in gutters, wet and slick. I wonder why it took a spontaneous combustion to engulf me in fire before I recognized the ember that torched the tinder of my unexplored life.

The toughest guy in school, Richard Tanner, or "Big Dick" as my friends called him, sat behind me in 10th grade study hall flicking my ear and dropping spiders down the collar of my button-down checkered cotton shirts. By virtue of being held back two years running, Big Dick's five o'clock shadow and signed agreement with Juvenile Probation made him something of a celebrity on campus. Nobody messed with Big Dick. He was cast to the curb with all the other misfits and brooders with bad reps on smokers' corner. At that time, anyone outside the popular mainstream washed dangerously close to my circle of friends.

The constraints of high school with bell-ringing, class structure, and teachers taking

attendance put so much stress on Big Dick that by the last bell his thin humanity started to fray. Almost every night he dragged the gut, howled and prowled the streets at dusk in a chopped black '48 Mercury tudor tuned to Wolfman Jack.

One morning in study hall I heard a scratching sound and glanced back over my shoulder. Big Dick was intently carving the back of my desk chair. His desk was a masterpiece of pictographs, strange script and proud offerings of profanity. Since Big Dick had occupied the same study hall desk in the second row of Room 112 from the time I was in the eighth grade, I could argue he'd paid for his desk three times over in fines. His habit of carving dirty words and pictures into the wood with the fine point of his Bic pen are legendary. In fact, he not only owned his desk, but mine.

After much dedicated effort in therapy and detention, Vice Principal Damon Dudley heralded Big Dick as a model of diversion. Proud interventionists in the name of light bought him notebooks and pens for the promise of suspending all illicit woodworking. The result was this art that routinely horrified everyone from classmates to teachers to administrators. Big Dick was a prolific artist, producing page-after-page of vampires complete with blood-dripping fangs, or sexy nudes of Miss Swanson, the first-year Social Studies teacher, sitting in the corner on a stool in a Catholic school girl short skirt and dunce cap. Big Dick's marginal behavior, as far from the norm as it was, proved preferable to the more flagrant behaviors that earned him a reputation. Even with his habit of cutting class, hanging out on greaser corner in a huddle of brooding James Dean-types and finding good fun de-panting band members in the hallways, school officials took solace in the mission accomplished by providing Big Dick, contrary artist of the profane, a creative outlet.

Since I was a trumpet player—soon to be guitar player, songwriter, rock star—I could appreciate the delicate question of how to channel such a temperament. But for some reason, Big Dick that day suffered a relapse. I could feel that Bic pen scratching through tormented wood onto my back.

This of course made me curious. What so compelled Big Dick into such a blatant disregard for all his progress? When he rose from his seat, dragging motorcycle boots over newly-polished hardwood floor to retrieve the hall pass for the boys room, I accidentally-on-purpose dropped my pencil. It clattered and rolled under his desk. I went down on my hands and knees to fetch it. When I came up, my jaw hit the floor.

Big Dick had carved over the previous carving in the backrest of my study hall chair and filled in with black ink: **RAT ♥ AIM.**

There was the answer: Big Dick was in love.

It took a minute to catch my breath and for my logical mind to catch up with my runaway heart. Not to worry, I told myself. Other girls at Boise High School had the initials of AM, and any one of them might have “I” as their middle initial. It wasn’t necessarily my older sister: Abigail Ivory Merlin. Maybe Big Dick was carving Amy Moore’s name and her middle name was Ingrid. Or Angela Miller’s middle name was Illanna. Maybe Addy May’s middle name was Ida. Addy Ida May? There had to be others: Irene, Irma, Immogene, Isobel, Inez, Ione, Iphigenia. There had to be others couldn’t even pronounce. Still, something toxic pressed on my bladder. I usually intuited things through my stomach or bladder. This was my first real inkling of a shift, picked up the scent of smoke in the electrified late-October air and smoke promised fire. I really needed that hall pass.

I didn’t see Big Dick again on Monday. He cut the rest of study hall, left the hall pass outside the door. At the bell, I needed to go so bad that I tore out of there like a cat with its tail on fire, kicking the hall pass down the hall. Every time I bent over to pick it up I farted and somebody kicked it farther until the bell rang. I was late for English again.

Outside of study hall, Big Dick and I couldn’t have been more different. Our circle of friends seldom overlapped without embarrassment to mine. Our temperaments, artistically, were as different as Mozart and Beethoven. I admired his talent for drawing the fantastically profane. He did not have the same self-censor that kept my Wolfman from showing his teeth. One day, if he didn’t end up in jail or forced to join the Army, Big Dick might earn a decent living drawing monsters for comic books, or designing posters for horror films, finely rendering all kinds of scaly monsters with half-naked fantasy dolls passed-out in their arms.

I will confess my mother programmed me that wasting the opportunity of study hall to get better grades was like shooting myself in the foot with a shotgun to avoid wearing ugly brown loafers. It had fallen to me to make my mother proud with honest effort. As smart as my sister Abby was, she had no ambition for higher learning. I would be the first in my extended family to enter those hallowed halls. Being a rock star did not fit into my mother’s possible outcomes for a successful college grad. It wasn’t easy convincing her that a music major might

better dignify my obsession if it lead to being a composer or symphony conductor. But my mother didn't only listen to me but my stepfather, Ronnie Johns. He rolled his eyes when he saw me writing song lyrics into a wire-bound notebook. I think it confirmed his fear of raising a pansy-ass.

While Big Dick applied himself in study hall to shooting spit-wads with rubber bands, looking up skirts and causing Miss Swanson to regret her choice of careers, I practiced diagramming sentences, demonstrating an acceptable knowledge of dependent clauses and perpetually overusing prepositional phrases. For every hour I devoted to memorizing dates and events for Mr. Howitzer's World History class, dates like 1066 A.D. for the Norman Conquest, Big Dick put two hours into the conquest of fine-haired blondes in cashmere sweaters. Experience leads to expertise, they say, but Big Dick and I were parallel lines that would never meet. And that was just fine by me.

So the first Friday in October when Big Dick's black tudor rolled into the A&W on State Street, riding so low the running boards scraped concrete, my sister Abby practically in his lap, my stomach gave a heave-ho and hardy shout to my adolescent brain. Even such a finely-tuned early warning system as my stomach could not act without communicating with a slow brain so I didn't get the warning in time. A slow brain cannot avert disaster. Take, for instance, the case of standing at the bottom of a steep mountain and hearing the rumble of an avalanche; you may not recognize it as an avalanche until it's practically on top of you. That's what this was: an avalanche. No time to get out of the way. Imagine, a guy in your class, three years older than you dating your older sister who would be graduating in six months. It would spell trouble even if the guy was a great catch—and Big Dick, I promise you, was not only the toughest guy in school but dumber than a cinder block.

Now I don't know what Abby Cat saw in Big Dick. Maybe she was impressed by the fact he knew how to change her oil. I mean in the most non-judgmental way as possible, but I tried to talk her out of it, or talk her down. You're too smart for that engine block, I told her. I know, she said. Going out with him will hurt your rep, I warned. I know, she said. Hang out with him and you will end up in jail, I said. I know, her defiant smile mashed my brain into plasma pudding. I finally realized if my smart-ass National Honor Society nose-in-a-book sister suspended all critical faculties smitten by bad-boy-in-black-leather-animal-magnetism and, literally, turned into a jellyfish at seeing the dude in a muscle shirt with Marlboros rolled up in his sleeve, what

chance in hell did I ever have in attracting a girlfriend? Maybe I should dye my hair black and slick it back into a ducktail, grease up my hands real good so I can stand with my back holding up a wall, casually cleaning under my nails with a switchblade. Maybe then I'd be attractive to blondes wearing cashmere sweaters. The only hope that lifted my spirits was handsome rock stars like Mick Jagger and Ringo Starr.

Abby's justification for her obsession with Big Dick was *the heart just knows things*. I waited for her to complete the thought. That's where it ended. By now I'm thinking *girl logic*. My stomach rumbled and rolled over, but my slow brain was not receiving.

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Abby Cat and Big Dick went together for all of three weeks. My friends at school tracked them down between classes and reported in to me with timely updates. They blissfully informed on the lovebirds, finking on them when they made-out in the hallway or necked in Big Dick's black Merc at Camelback Park or when they'd witnessed their faces stuck together in the balcony of the Ada Theater. It's like I had eyes everywhere for something I didn't want to see. The more detail I got, the more my guts twisted with disgust. Abby will come to her senses, I told myself, but I'd learned by now a story can just as easily conceal as reveal.

By the time Abby broke up with Big Dick, I'd become a sofa pilot on a "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea," running silent in the dark depths, hoping the world didn't end while I was submerged. I not only fretted about how I would ever get girls but how I would face my friends again. The former naturally trumped the latter worry because, after all, friends were supposed to stick by you no matter what. But girlfriends? It was hard enough to convince them to stick to a schedule, let alone to a guy with banty legs and weak ankles. Frankly, it wouldn't be an overstatement to suggest I was uglier than Paladin—*a knight without armor in a savage land*—cursed with bad blood that only a year ago boiled into...well, boils: hard boils filled with puss that ripened into squishy whiteheads, busting open when you least expect and oozing through long-sleeved, black and white, checkered shirts.

I managed the boils successfully for a while. I'll never forget the day Ronnie found out. He and mom surprised Abby and I with Schwinn Continental 10-speed bikes for Christmas. The stress of a whole nation faced with uncertainty after the Kennedy assassination weighed heavily on my shoulders. The thrill of getting my own 10-speed was balanced by my burden of boils. My bike was red: Abby's blue. Ronnie noticed I wouldn't sit down on the seat as I pedaled around

Julia Davis Park so when we got home he made me go into the bathroom and pull down my drawers. When his eyes fell upon my boiled-over butt, he said, “Good God son, why didn’t you tell me?”

Was he serious? I thought, blinking in disbelief. Because it’s embarrassing to have boils on your butt. Maybe because, even if my brain was slow, my body told me it would result in an unhappy, painful and humiliating process I call boil-busting.

My stepfather patiently monitored those boils and when the hard whiteheads softened, ripe and ready, he’d surround it with his two strong thumbs and squeeze until they popped, the puss and blood spurting. The goal of this torture was to heal it by gutting the boil of its core. Ronnie said that was the only way to get them to dry out and go away.

He was right. His extreme and painful treatment did work just like he said it would, but they left small craters all over my arms and on my butt. The scars made me so body-conscious that I took ROTC as a Sophomore instead of P.E. so I didn’t have to dress down but dress up. Standing at attention in a funky uniform until you puked was far better than being naked in front of the fraternal order of muscle-shirts. Better a pansy with an M-1 was better than being a pansy without clothes.

Abby’s going out with Big Dick was equally traumatic. So when she finally broke up with him, the relief was orgasmic—speaking now, you understand, as one whose research on the subject had only come at my own hands—and it wasn’t a feeling that lasted.

On Monday, maybe a week after my sister broke up with Big Dick, my best buddy, Buddy Brocklin, pushed horn-rim glasses back up his nose and wiped down his #3 Bore Connquest slide trombone with an oil cloth in band class. Buddy’s Connquest was a professional instrument of machined precision that made my dented brass Bundy look like a butt breaking out with boils. He looked up from its hard-shell case and said, “Big Dick’s looking for you.”

That sounded ominous.

Buddy was a tall, lanky, brainy kid who physically resembled the scarecrow in the *Wizard of Oz*. Buddy found it easier to make fun of himself before anyone else did. He was good at it. We all laughed when he took off his glasses and purposely ran into a wall or took a prat fall in front of Heather Lang, the junior flautist, who only noticed him when he made her laugh. Unlike the scarecrow in *Oz*, Buddy enjoyed all kinds of privileges. He never acted superior or anything though he was smart and his dad had money, but sometimes he came off as a know-it-

all, if you know what I mean. His unsolicited encyclopedic litanies on any subject were usually preceded with a standard disclaimer of “Well, I really don’t know much about {rockets, differential equations, football, earthquakes, women—insert whatever you want here) but it seems to me,...” then he’d open his book of too-much-knowledge leaving innocent bystanders with red faces and anything from mild resentment to suppressed rage. It was an irritating habit.

I scratched the back of my ear. “Are you sure Big Dick’s looking for *me*?” I asked, blowing incredulity from the spit-valve of my Bundy. Buddy was something of a joker. What were the chances he ever carried on a conversation with Big Dick anyway, at least without ending up headfirst in a trash bin?

“I think he’s lookin’ to settle your hash, Robbie.”

“Settle *what*?” I asked. “I can’t stomach hash.”

“What’d I do? I’m not the one who broke up with him.”

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To my mind, Abby Cat’s coming to her senses had next to nothing to do with me. She never listened to me before. Why would she start now? What worried me most was why Abby would tell that lumbering brick head that breaking up with him was somehow *my* idea? My God, my big sister wouldn’t stoop that low, would she? Maybe I’d miscalculated how deeply ingrained her life-long resentment of me really was. The breakup apparently so bent Big Dick out of shape that he wanted to break something...or someone. Peer pressure, social taboo and all that prohibited him from wailing on my sister so he turned his brooding male ego rage against little brother. He knew I wouldn’t dare tell anyone. I felt confident if I only had the chance to explain things, boy to man, so to speak, the power of reason would prevail, and Big Dick could be dissuaded from giving little brother a thrashing to get back at big sister.

After all, I hated her too.

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Laying his trombone slide reverently onto soft red felt, Buddy just shrugged.

When the bell rang, I flew out of the band room annex on the west side of the gymnasium, trumpet case like a battle axe swinging in front of me, sheet music fluttering in slipstream against the tall louvered windows of the north portico. No use hanging around inviting confrontation. Discretion is the better part of valor, and all that.

I checked over my shoulder to make sure Big Dick hadn’t followed and sprinted to the

bike rack. My lungs wheezed like old bagpipes. The red Schwinn Continental 10-speed was gone. I searched up and down the rack. The slot where I'd left the bike stood empty. Its chain lay on the ground, padlock closed around the link directly beside the one that had been cut.

My bike had been stolen.

I knew immediately who'd taken it. Instead of sitting down then and there on the wet blacktop and bawling, I instead wondered where Big Dick was hiding. Was he watching me now? Laughing? Waiting for me to cry? Well, I couldn't let him have that satisfaction.

I started walking home, taking the back streets and alleyways to avoid him.

It was a well-established fact in my family that I didn't own a lot: dented brass Bundy, Ted Williams baseball mitt, boxes of TOPPS baseball cards, teen magazines, transistor radio, all the clothes I earned mowing lawns, a portable monaural record player for my collection of 45 rpm hit records and, of course, that ten-speed bike.

I kicked through a carpet of red and yellow leaves from shade trees losing their shade, checking behind me every few seconds, fuming the whole way about the toughest kid in school wanting to beat me up—all because of my sister. I fretted about why Abby would do that to me? Within three blocks, even my slow brain came up with a mental list of injuries and injustices perpetrated against me by my sister. I'd always wished I could be more like Abby; she blew-up let off steam and then melted into this sweet blissful sack of memory loss. I hung onto every grievance no matter how small and chewed on them long after they'd lost their flavor. I wouldn't say I carried a grudge exactly; let's just say the scenarios replayed in my head until revised into more satisfying outcomes. My sense of justice limited responses; if you accepted disrespect, the next thing you know you lose self-respect.

Ducking down alleyways to avoid Big Dick's panther prowl, I strayed too close to the back fence of this house in an area where I'd never been before. Suddenly a large German Shephard exploded out of nowhere, barking and lunging repeatedly at the wire fence, snarling viciously. I stumbled back and fell onto the seat of my pants in a puddled pothold, leaving a big wet spot on my butt. I regained my feet, blew down the alleyway and came out onto a side street. A couple of blocks later, while double-tonguing distractedly into my fist, nerves fried watching for dogs, I failed to detect the low rumble behind me. The black Merc's horn nearly blasted me out of my muddy brown cords. I took off at a dead run, trumpet case bruising upper thighs as it pounded my flesh. I couldn't feel the pain.

I flashed on the dream image of my father, Terrance Matthew Merlin, running through the dim corridor of the high school, sheet-metal hammer in the loop of his green coveralls thumping the outside of his leg as he ran toward the exit.

My heart beat wildly as I raced through the alley to the next street, up the next side street into another alley, and finally emerged on 29th street only a few blocks from home.

The two-story yellow house on the corner under the Big Leaf Maple came into view and my breath slowed to an easy rhythm. I again heard the Merc's horn and looked back over my shoulder. Big Dick squinted through the window glare, low forehead and bushy eyebrows narrowed into Neanderthal intensity, icy blue eyes erupting with ball lightning. Big Dick leaned toward the open passenger window, arm draped over the back of the bench seat. "You need a ride, little brother?" The bright afternoon sun streamed through the windshield and ignited his Brylcreemed, jet black hair sculpted into an unflappable ducktail, black curls lolling off his forehead like sun-struck snakes.

"You stole my bike," I seethed, the words shredded by clenched teeth. An adrenalin rush spread warmly through my body; my head felt like the pressure gauge on a boiler, needle pushing into red.

"What? You think I stole your bike? Why would I do that? I have a car." Big Dick's eyes flickered for a moment then settled into a steady blue as cool as they come. "Maybe you misplaced it. What did it look like?"

His denial so stunned me I couldn't answer. Before my brain shifted out of "park," the Merc pulled away from the curb with a deep growl. Its tires burned tread marks into wet layers of autumn leaves. It occurred to me then that there had been no witnesses. Why didn't Big Dick beat me up then and there if he wanted to so badly?

Handlebars like legs of a gazelle protruded from underneath the Merc's heavy trunk lid. I glimpsed Big Dick shaking his head in the rearview mirror as he pulled away. He was smiling.

"My bike looks sort of like *that*," I told the trees. They shivered in response, letting down more leaves that lazily twirled in the shock-stilled air.