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Opening extract from

Field Guide To Dragons

Written by

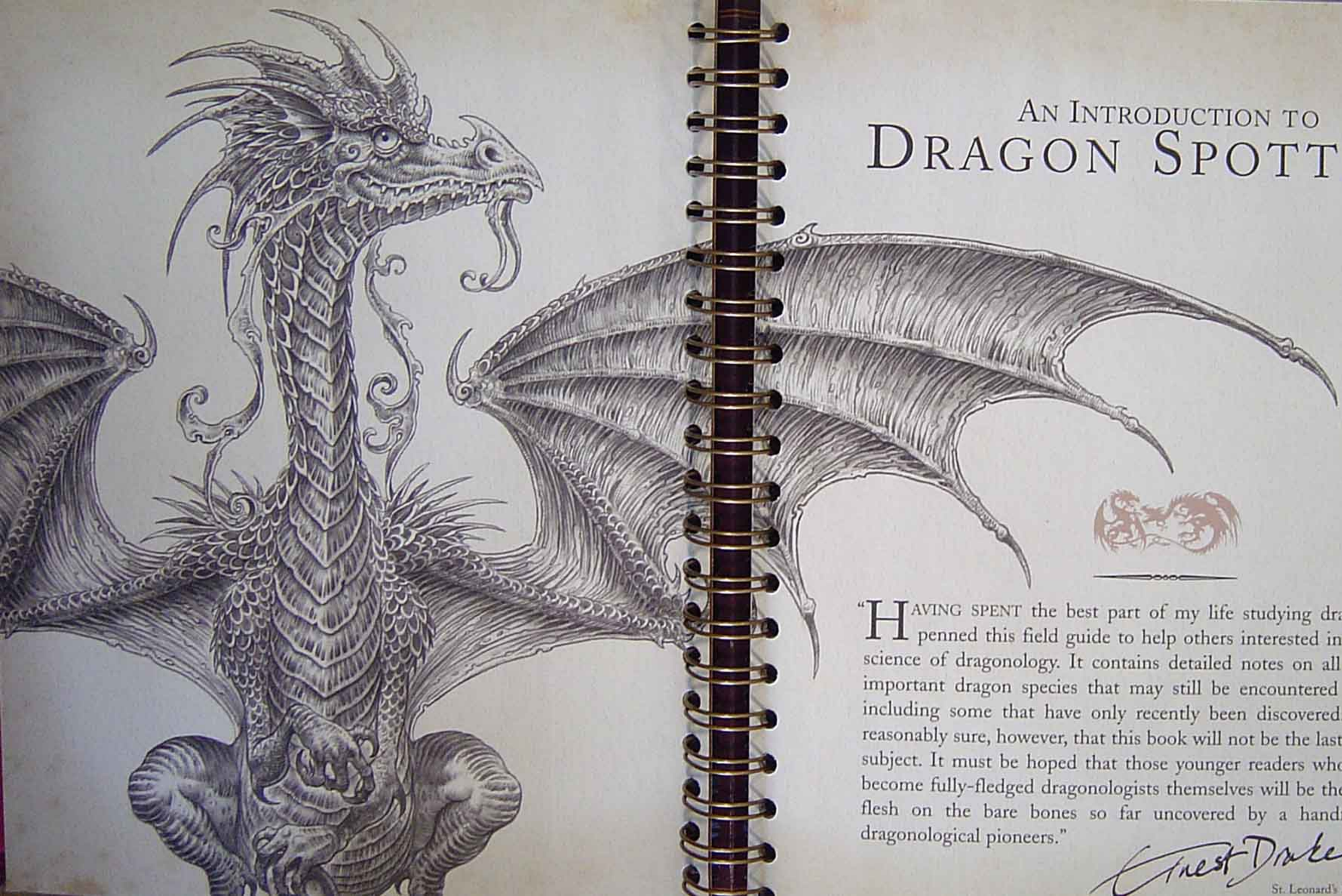
Ernest Drake

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An Introduction to Dragon Spotting.

"Having spent the best part of my life studying dragons, I have penned this field guide to help others interested in the budding science of dragonology. It contains detailed notes on all of the most important dragon species that may still be encountered in the wild, including some that have only recently been discovered. We can be reasonably sure, however, that this book will not be the last word on the subject. It must be hoped that those younger readers who grow up to become fully-fledged dragonologists themselves will be the ones to put flesh on the bare bones so far uncovered by a handful of brave dragonological pioneers."

Ernest Drake

St. Leonard's Forest, 1898

Migration and Habitats.

Short of tying a reluctant princess to a rock near a dragon's cave and hiding nearby, there are two chief methods of dragon spotting. The first is to scour the habitat where one supposes a particular species of dragon to dwell, searching for tracks and other telltale signs of dragon activity. The second is to look out for dragons passing high overhead during their seasonal migration.

Choosing a Habitat.

If charity begins at home, there is no reason why the diligent search for dragons cannot begin there too. Provided the student has access to a local area of woodland or wilderness, a start can be made almost immediately. In the notes accompanying each of the dragons described in this book, the student will find clear guidance as to which kinds of dragon may be encountered in which habitats. Forests, mountains, sea cliffs, deserts, savannah, jungles and even the icy wastes of the polar regions all provide rich possibilities in the search for these rare creatures.

Initial Precautions.

Having decided upon which dragon is most likely to be encountered, a scientific dragonologist would do well to research two elements that could prove vital to his or her wellbeing. The first element is the food the dragon eats. For example, a knucker may eat a stray child if it is hungry. If you are a child, it is clearly wise to take *at least* one adult on a knucker expedition so that you do not appear to be stray. The second element is the type of attack the dragon will use should you upset it. It is no use hiding under a flameproof cloak to ward off the boring blows of an enraged marsupial. Likewise, wildly blowing a dragon whistle to call for help against a swarm of snapping dwarf dragons is likely only to bring more dwarf dragons upon you.

Further Preparation.

Armed with a reasonable idea of the dangers that may be encountered in the field, the dragonologist is almost ready to set out. His or her success, however, will still depend on a complete understanding of the species sought. All details about the dragon should be committed to memory and the physical form of the dragon studied closely. Any help in the form of reliable illustrations or models—particularly those that accompany this book—should be used. Only in this way can the dragonologist be sure of a true, positive identification of each and every species he or she meets.

Migrating Dragons.

The migration of frost dragons provides a good opportunity for dragon spotting since, at certain times of year, they can be seen with the naked eye flying overhead on their route from one pole to the other. Look for them in spring or autumn, in the early morning or at dusk. Juveniles fly in group formations. Being less adept at hunting than adults, they attack in packs. Any frost dragon sightings should be reported to the S.A.S.D. [Secret and Ancient Society of Dragonologists] to help build on our knowledge of these creatures. How they manage to fly thousands of miles to the same place each year remains a complete mystery.

Whilst adult frost dragons undertake their 22,000-mile journey from the Arctic and back each year as a solitary affair, juveniles often flock together to make the two-month migration as a group. Only the most organised fly in a consistent 'V' formation; 'W', 'S', 'X' and even 'O' arrangements have also been sighted.

Equipment and Fieldwork.

Briefly, two types of equipment are required for serious fieldwork: equipment used for tracking dragons and equipment used when dragons have been found. The student should also take suitable clothes and provisions. There being no space to cover this information in detail here, keen students are directed to seek out a book that outlines the basic principles of exploration and read it from cover to cover before starting out.

Tracking Equipment.

All that is needed to start tracking dragons are your eyes and ears. With these you can search for tracks and other signs of dragon activity and listen out for angry roars or the beating of enormous leathery wings. Useful additional equipment is listed below. Noting on a map details such as the position of tracks, scat or other signs assists in building up a picture of a particular dragon's range and helps to locate its lair. Other useful items include a tracking stick in order to follow tracks, and some plaster of Paris in order to take impressions of footprints.



Equipment for Encounters.

Equipment for dragon encounters varies according to the dragon sought but can include the following: a riddle book, a 'flameaway' hat, a heat-proof cloak, a dragon costume, some jewellery or other treasure, a quantity of fresh meat, boxing gloves, running shoes, or a book of mathematical sums as protection against hypnosis.

Signs of Dragon Activity.

- *Claw marks on the ground or on rocks or trees.*
- *Abandoned villages, probably destroyed by enraged dragons.*
- *Inexplicable mounds of charred skulls and bones.*
- *Evidence of abundant scorching.*
- *Tail-swishing marks.*



Items of Necessity.

- *A dragonological record book with a heat-proof cover.*
- *A field guide to dragons [such as this one].*
- *A large-scale topographical map of the area being searched.*
- *A compass and pair of binoculars.*
- *A heat-proof pen and ink or a 2B sketching pencil.*
- *Special, heat-protective clothing.*
- *A camera, in order to photograph the dragon.*
- *A tracking stick, to search for faint tracks.*
- *A spade and bag, to collect samples of dragon scat.*

Optional Equipment.

- *A dragon whistle, in order to attract dragons.*
- *A dragon horn, which makes a roar like an angry dragon, in order to scare away dragons should they get too close.*
- *Scat from a female dragon, to attract males.*
- *A freshly roasted chicken or other tasty morsel to act as bait.*

Aerial Encounters.

In order to encourage dragons to come out of hiding, it may be worth building a 'glider'. Hauled to a mountain top and launched, such a contraption may well so intrigue dragons that they fly up to meet you. But take care! You will need much practice to manage the diving and looping manoeuvres that a friendly dragon makes to show that it is not an angry rival about to launch a fiery attack.

