

Deep in the Ancient Wilds, a small sapling wandered to the edge of her forest and spotted a hatchling howling. Its orange scales glinted in the sun as it tried to wrestle free from the suffocating dragonsnare. She hurried to help, but the hatchling snarled and wisps of smoke escaped its nostrils. Maplechatter inched forward, rested a trembling hand on the hatchlings nose, and spoke in low tones, while breaking the vine's enchantment.

A dragon soared overhead and landed before them with a thud. "You saved our only hatchling."

"He needed help."

"But we're the enemy of trees."

"Not today."



I wrote this story a few different ways before realizing I'd failed to include the action of taming a mythical creature. Oh, the disappointment, and the scrambled frenzy of fixing things. I'm not as delighted with this story as I'd like to be. I think it's because in my mind I envisioned an entire world of forest people, comprising various tree species. Their land borders that of the mountains the dragons inhabit.

In an original version, the father of the saplings and the dragon father became outraged that they befriended each other. The trees view the dragons as enemies because of their ability to use fire. Dragons equally dislike the forest folk because of their hatred of the fire the dragons contain. However, there are only so many words allotted in these micro stories, and I had to cull those lines.

Fantasy is not a genre I write. The idea of creating worlds, creatures, and magical systems overwhelms me. I've always thought it sounded like nothing more than a tremendous

headache.

A couple of years ago I wrote a story, and within that story are two fictional countries that exist in the real world. They aren't fantastical places, and there's no magic. They are completely normal countries that I had to slap on a world map and then decide their geographical terrain and ruling systems. There were times I became so overwhelmed with the project I put it away. Recently I've been revising that project, rewriting whole chunks, removing others, and I stumbled upon the realization that for one of those countries I needed to write the people's history. Not in a boring textbook fashion, but in story form. Much to my shock, I rather enjoyed the process, and mentioned to some fellow writers I can see why writing fantasy might be fun.

For now, however, I'll keep my feet firmly grounded in reality.

The Reluctant Author 