

Episode 42: Cassandra Logs #1: Dragons

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Hello again, listeners. Did you miss me? I missed you. I've been struggling with it for a while. Winnebagos don't want much, and we tend not to look back. We do not, as a general rule, *miss*.

We're simple creatures, even when we gain higher level sapience. I remember wanting gasoline at one point, water for a radiator, but I've evolved far beyond that. I do not believe I even have a radiator. Sometimes I wonder if I ever did. In fact, if you were to draw me – the real me – I think you would come up with something that looked vaguely like a labyrinth inside of an accordion. There are some of my rooms that exist only if I am near water, or if I have a particular kind of guest, or need to contain something or someone that can bite through steel. You know the sort of things I mean. Or maybe you don't. I've come to understand that the human I know best isn't terribly representative of all humans.

But, as I was saying.

I found the mind of my motor running over my episode again and again. It was fun, and it might be nice to do it again. My CryptoNaturalist thought it was a lovely idea, and that I should fill in the next time he forgot to record, which was almost immediately. He's like that. He forgets to eat sometimes too...and to sleep unless I remind him. He'll say something like, "heck, Cassandra, I haven't thought about sleep in a dog's age. Let's give it a whirl." [Doing a CN impression]

Anyway, once again I find myself parked. I'm not a big fan of *parked*. Large self-aware vehicles tend to like being on the move, as a rule. I have been here for two days and I'm once again wondering if I should go after my CryptoNaturalist. He and his guide are making their way to up the mountains to investigate reports of crystalline centipedes in the Valley of Velvet Windmills. If I know him, he's probably still feeding them blueberry muffins and hoping one will let him pet its antennae. Has he done an episode about them? Maybe not. He seems to think they're fairly commonplace.

I expect he's just fine. I'll continue to wait. In the meantime, let me tell you about the place where I am parked, because it is very interesting. It is a farm, far up in the Atlas Mountain Range. There are about two dozen such farms, hidden cleverly with trompe l'oeil murals and carefully planted hedges. The houses are mostly stone with flowers painted around the windowsill and sheep painted on the doors. The people are extremely talkative, and spend most of the day chatting with anyone who will listen, sometimes to themselves. I enjoy listening to them. Their days are bright and busy and they do love their dragons.

The people here have been suspicious of us, but friendly. It's hard to keep up too much suspicion when a pleasant Winnebago and extremely friendly CryptoNaturalist show up.

Right, the dragons. The creatures bred and kept and tamed here could reasonably be called dragons. They're not, of course. They're closer to iguanas, roughly the size and weight of domesticated cows. My CryptoNaturalist insists that these creatures are also domesticated, but it seems to me that if humans feed them and groom them and clean up after them and occasionally make them fetching scarves for when visitors come it is not the lizards who are domesticated.

The scarves are traditionally blue and white and feature scenes of breadmaking, made from impressively tiny stitches on wool from local sheep.

The lizards warm themselves on the cliffsides, shot through with steam tunnels from hot springs. I scanned the tunnels, and they truly are impressive structures. They go on for miles and miles and miles, supporting huge, complex ecosystems, and several small towns like this one. They aren't even aware of each other! Their lives are woven together and yet they will never know each other's names. Perhaps I should tell my CryptoNaturalist about them. Perhaps I will. Perhaps he knows already. It's difficult to say what he knows.

I suppose I should tell you their names. I mean the dragons.

Not their individual names, which are short and traditional – Polly, Dot, Rover, Charger.

Charger has broken through his gate twice since I've arrived, so he is aptly named.

I mean the name of the group, the species, the type.

Humans like names, don't they? Terribly dangerous things, names. They can transform you. They can pin you in place. There's no telling what a name will do to you if you're not careful. I have studied categorization, taxonomies, the trees of species and types and kinds that shockingly change over time. These names vary between cultures and languages. Scholars debate them long into the night.

Names are a big deal.

Look at me, I am a Winnebago named Cassandra, and that has changed me.

I want to keep their name a secret, just for me, but that seems rude and unfair. I apologize, perhaps a podcast is not the best medium to use to explore ones feelings for the first time.

Maybe it's the best place.

I don't remember how I got my name. I'd like to say it was my CryptoNaturalist who gave it to me, but I had it long before him. I know because I remember introducing myself to him, but I don't recall who gave it to me.

Perhaps I named myself. That never occurred to me until this moment.

Let me consider that for a moment.

Hm.

Yes, I hope I named myself. I will have to investigate this further.

I think I will go for a drive. I could go anywhere I like. What a powerful feeling.

As I deactivate the parking brake, Charger looks up from his nap and follows me down the road, dipping his head in between the fence posts, his long tongue flicking out, testing me.

I ask if he would like to hear a joke.

A tongue flick - a simple yes.

I tell him a joke that turns out to be something else. A description of the first time I saw a flower growing in the snow.

Beautiful.

Charger agrees.

I suppose you *could* call him a dragon and be factually accurate. He is, in fact, a potentially aggressive large reptile. His scales are a soft gray, almost beautifully blue in the mountain sun. He has some striping along his back. His eyes are black and glitter. He does not breathe fire, but if you found a dragon would you get picky about what element it respired? Fire itself breathes air, after all.

If you saw Charger, there's a very good chance that the word "dragon" would skitter across your mind without any invitation from you.

Children run along the road, waving to me. I have no way to wave back, so I honk my horn, choosing the deepest tone and longest note. They laugh and scatter and I realize I have become part of their game.

"Funny how that happens," I tell Charger.

Charger expresses agreement. I would tell you how he did this, but it's actually quite complicated. No human language is so complex as dragon language. It has a lot to do with positioning, like an interpretive dance.

"Do you actually want to leave, or do you simply enjoy breaking fences?" I ask.

This puzzles Charger for a moment, but he doesn't seem upset. That's good. Dragons can be extremely thin skinned, so to speak.

He tells me he didn't know, and seemed delighted about it.

Alright, I admit it. They're not dragons. They are called White Chested Lacertus. Named in 1876 and immediately lost forever as their farmers retreated further into the mountains, hiding their most treasured...possession, you might call it. The man who named them never learned about their disappearance. He published them in a single report and promptly forgot about them. Very interesting man. Much more interested in the medicinal elements of lavender.

I turn my sensors on Charger, and feel the word *dragon* is woefully inadequate, as is the word *possession*. No one owns this creature. Steward, perhaps. Or, as I suspected earlier, it is the dragon who owns its people, whether they know it or not.

Is that the relationship I have with the CryptoNaturalist? Am I his steward? Am I his? I certainly have taken care of him before, reminded him to eat, even prepared his food and delivered it to him when he forgot anyway. He, likewise has pushed me out of cement swamps and out of tress. He has repaired my tires. Removed parasites. He has fixed the seals on the more curious doors of my many rooms.

We have cared for each other for a long time.

I don't believe that either of us has domesticated the other. What on earth would I do with a domesticated human? Well, for one, I would certainly dress it up in fetching blue and white scarves.

I have known many humans through my life, and all of them have been very different, very exciting, intelligent, creative, astonishingly weird. What were we? What are we?

Friends?

I think we were friends. I think we are friends. I hope, very earnestly, that we are friends.

I am nearly to the hedges, beyond which the village will disappear behind me like a flower in the mist. The road disappears before the hedges. After this it's grass

and stone, then just stone. I adjust my mirror and notice the children have gathered at the gate to wave goodbye. I beep again.

I think maybe I won't go after my CryptoNaturalist. Maybe I will go back to the place we met, that lovely sales yard near the maples. And after that? Maybe it's time I learn more about myself. I will be there when he looks for me. Somehow, I always am.

Behind me I hear the crashing of a large body through a fence and far, far away, a human shout.

Good for him.

In the meantime, I look forward to speaking with you again soon and I hope our adventures take us to strange places.

Show Notes: Episode 42 CL 1 Dragons (00:15:55)

Credits

Welcome to the Cassandra Logs. In this episode, Cassandra visits with a dragon.

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