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Juvenile Fiction

The Dragonology Handbook: A Practical Course In Dragons
Dugald A. Steer
Candlewick Press
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"I am delighted to inform you that your application to take the Secret and Ancient Society of Dragonologists course in dragonology has been accepted," states the fictitious author Dr. Ernest Drake in his allegedly rediscovered text on the arcane lore of dragons. The publisher, winking, adds, "While we would still prefer not to claim that there was ever a real Dr. Drake, it seems that circumstantial evidence for his existence is growing all the time."

(The actual author, Dugald A. Steer, B.A. (Brist), S.A.S.D. (Secret and Ancient Society of Dragonologists) also penned the *New York Times* bestseller *Dragonology: The Complete Book of Dragons* and the "Snappy Little" series of pop-up books.)

Before progressing through Dr. Drake's twenty-one elementary, intermediate and advanced lessons, budding dragonologists are obliged to affirm this oath: "I … do solemnly swear to conserve and protect those dragons that still remain and in no way to harm them or reveal their secret hiding places."

As good students, neophytes must master the riddling repartee of all dragons. In Lesson III, they are challenged with: "Weight in my belly, Trees on my back, Nails in my ribs, Feet I do lack." If readers guessed "earth" as the answer to this brainteaser, then perhaps a career in accounting awaits. If a "ship" sailed the horizons of their mind's eye, then they just might have the gift of dragon gab. Linguistic loop-the-loops don't end there; hopeful dragon correspondents are also required to translate alphabetical Anglo-Saxon runes and grit through exacting penmanship circa AD 800.

It is not all bookwork though. In Lesson XX, daring advanced students may decipher power words through a looking glass that—if properly pronounced—would garner them a ride on the exterior of a dragon. If pronounced improperly, then the ride may well be conducted from the interior.

An antiquarian theme runs throughout this cleverly disguised tome, enticing young

readers with engrossing illustrations and authenticating smudges that complete the illusion of a book printed circa 1893. Accordingly, the curious will fail temptation and unseal three mysteriously weathered envelopes contained within. Four attached pages of stickers will ensure that dragons will soon be colonizing neighborhoods nearby.

If young readers have worn out their welcome with the gnomes in the yard or worried the monsters-under-the-bed out of the house, then *The Dragonology Handbook: A Practical Course In Dragons* (a recommended read for anyone with a dash of imagination) will find its way quite unaccountably into their hands.