

Dragons

by Nathaniel Pitt

Ballet is beautiful and I have found where it's taught there are just as beautiful young male apprentices striking uninhibited aerial poses with a fluid delicacy that is downright sensuous. To insure their audience's lust they costume in colored tracing paper. Understudying Juliets, with some sense of modesty, camouflage their non-moving graces with a wad of party lace. But not our growing Romeos. Usually bare-chested, they cover their lower extremities with a highly elastic form of onion skin. This insures the onlookers an accurate knowledge of their developing virility: there is strong evidence they like it this way; their compact approach to theatrical attire occasionally rubs them the right way, and in those outfits you can tell when it does. If one had the chance he could develop an advanced addiction to peeling airmail stationery off male balletinas. Ballet has another major advantage in that you can lustfully view these sexy kids in mixed company without fear of arousing unwanted attention.

Alas, these pleasures are a bit limited in my home town. There are not many ballet productions in Jacksonville, Florida. As a matter of fact there are no ballet productions of any kind. The main entertainment, aside from the occasional Dolphin football game, in this city of sun and water, is glimpsing the juveniles purloin your neighbor's boat propeller while trying to "poke" his daughter on the back seat without the use of any digits. This is done without grace or artistic talent. I doubt, however, that any of our local daughters would know Grace if she seduced them.

If one is not a daughter he is subject to being pillaged, plundered and robbed by these same roving performers. Wanting to perform my own protective encore, I took up the one of Martial Arts, for even if available, ballet wouldn't offer much protection: I started to attend a late evening Shotokan, Karate class. It proved to be more than a ballet-watcher's substitute, and a principal component in the transformation of my existence.

I should tell a bit about the dojo studio itself, and the people I found

there. The walls were covered with a veil of bamboo weave broken only by a Japanese flag and two framed photographs of elderly oriental men sitting cross-legged.

The *Gi* (pronounced “gee”, with a hard “g”, traditional uniform of Karate) worn by the students milling about the studio, resembled a loose-fitting, arm-length white canvas shower robe fitted with string-tied, equally loose pants. It was the colored belts, I learned, wrapped twice around the hips and knotted in the front, that set the different students and instructors apart. The beginners wore white belts. Advancing up the rank structure came yellow, green, blue, brown and finally the coveted black belt. The colored belts represent “boy” grades; “man” starts with black belt level one and proceeds through ten, the tenth “Dan” being reserved for the founder. My naive instructor hoped I was not offended to be considered a “boy”. I assured him it was my treat.

He explained that his Master, Sense (pronounced “sin- zee”) Hansel, born in Florida of Scandinavian parents, had trained in Japan for many years and earned the high honor of Fifth Dan - 5th level Black Belt. The Sense himself, a well-formed, blond, blue-eyed Swede, conducted the opening exercises of this Far Eastern Martial Art. Art it was. The advanced students, aged 10 through 41, stepped forward on the meager multi-matted flooring, barefoot, and like Oriental dancers began to perform their graceful aerial acrobatics. They had balance, timing, efficiency – all due, as in ballet, to tight control over well-developed, thin swimming-type muscles.

Then it was my turn. Even with my bit of instruction I quickly learned that I couldn't stand, walk or even move my hands correctly – embarrassing enough when watching people half your age do all these things with the utmost ease, but especially so when you are being scrutinized by a handsome twelve-year-old blue belt.

Turn-about is fair play, and toward the end of the class all the students, including us Tyros, sat cross-legged in the circle around the center mats to study the more advanced blue through black belts “spar”, or free fight. I should explain that it's bad technique to actually hit your partner. You just “touch” vital spots with the same speed and force that would destroy him if you extend the blow another two millimeters. As with ballet I could now lustfully survey pubescent striplings engaging in their not infrequent sensual displays without fear of discovery: we were *all* sitting in a circle, looking at the lads, weren't we?

One's imagination has greater room to expand when it can unwrap young male beauty clothed in bulky white butcher paper rather than tight

ballet tissue. I did it to at least three combatants, between the ages of 11 and 15. Such a brain game doesn't require all that effort of slowly pulling down sprayed-on toilet tissue to reveal a fragile boy: you just mentally tug on a single colored ribbon, twirling open a sweaty youth in an athletic supporter. Quite the treat!

The boys went at each other with envious energy. High kicks, spinning kicks – and hand movements of such speed that you knew, when alone, they could finish what had to be done in sixty seconds flat, without going blind.

I was sitting next to the dressing-room door, in an erotic daze, when all my senses jumped to full alert. Across from me, through the main entrance to the dojo practice room, appeared a stunning Levi- and T-shirt-clad dragon of the younger set. He seemed tall: 5 foot six inches, could not have been more than thirteen, button nose, light brown hair and a matching tan that made his blue eyes scream for attention. If there ever was a young stallion deserving of see-through apparel it was he. The boy bowed to Sense, Master, Hansel and received only a nod toward the shower room. He quickly shuffled by me and vanished into the dressing room, where the art of stripping was not merely tolerated but encouraged. Only through my intense oriental discipline, received from 45 minutes of Shotokan training, did I not pursue him into that den of humidity and offer to hold his clothes or whatever else he needed holding. Actually my intertwined legs were fast asleep and in any attempt to get up and follow I would have come off as an inebriated fool. Remaining seated kept the truth hidden.

For five minutes I watched two older blue belts roar and dance around each other, then the Levi mini-dragon made his appearance, outfitted in his *Gi*, and stood next to me. At a silent signal from Master Hansel, he sauntered to the center of the mats and I saw that the support around his lean waist was dark brown and the three thin white bands spanning the tip of one end indicated he was a coming Black Belt (which could be very entertaining out of context). This little Ganymede knew how to fight!

Little Dragon was being paired with a smug 19-year-old black belt at least 4 inches and 50 pounds the bigger. I took an instant dislike to him, not for fighting my new pin-up but because he seemed to share less the humility of the other combatants than the airs of our local daughter-ravaging delinquents who would, without a thought and in the name of Society, reduce me to pulverized venison were they to know my affections toward young beardless males.

After a modest bow to the Master, and a terse one to each other, the warriors struck their formidable fighting stances, turning sideways to expose only the less assailable areas, fists slightly extended at mid-body. Nothing happened for an eternity, roughly four seconds. Then, with deep-chested growls, and a bit of a squeak from Little Dragon, they moved. I was awed by the blinding motion of their appendages. In a lightning swirl of twisting and over-lapping kicks, shifts, punches and blocks, the adversaries pressed inwards, each giving no ground to his rival. An instant after the first movement it was over.

“Point, Tres,” Sense called. “Front punch, left kidney. Edwards nil, Tres one.” So that was his name. Little Dragon was Tres, and his last front punch had not been sufficiently thwarted. Turning away from the center mat, Sense Hansel repeated his judgment to the scorekeeper. A win requires two out of three points.

Tres, the dragon cub, was happy with the score but unsure of his assailant, and with good reason. Although Edwards was not physically wounded he was staring at Tres seething with hatred. There was blood in Edwards' eye which was unbecoming in a Black Belt. How I hoped, and probably everyone else in the class hoped, Tres would be victorious over such an ego!

But the next encounter wasn't encouraging. Before Sense's “start” was completed, Edwards flashed forward with a lightning high side kick of unchecked force, directed at Tres's face. It nearly overwhelmed his shorter competitor. The combination of a blazing right forearm block and a body-shift to the left, of mere inches, saved Little Dragon from an excruciating ruin. The brute force of the kick was absorbed by Tres's fending forearm, and as the pain and recognition of Edwards' malicious intentions sank in, the smaller boy's eyes widened: he now would be struggling to stave off serious injury.

Edwards followed his advantage with a deft combination of vigorous fist and knife hand techniques, driving Tres back towards me on the mats.

Sense Hansel made no move to stop the match. Managing a recovery, and with a coagulating howl, Tres unfurled a burst of fierce bellicose kicking attacks, effectively stunning Edwards. Then he spun completely around to the right to take an advantage of a new opening and thrust forward with a well placed palm-strike “touching” the bridge of Edwards' nose, thus clinching his victory.

But Edwards was beyond the rules, now. With dazzling speed, he snapped a front kick deep into Little Dragon's stomach. Tres folded

around the foot and lapsed to the tarpaulin, unable to cry out.

“Point Edwards. Front kick to the stomach. Edwards one, Tres one.” Evidently he had missed the earlier palm-strike by Little Dragon. Once again Sense turned and repeated his decision to the scorekeeper, but this time, as he did, Edwards sneaked a sharp heel jab to the lower back of the defenseless form at his feet, extracting a reluctant, silent tear.

“Foul!” I cried, attracting the shocked attention of everyone in the room. “What type of honor does a black belt obtain hurting a fellow Shodakoner? Or in striking him after he is down?” I staggered to my comatose legs. “Tres should have won. He struck the first blow before this foul...” - pointing to Edwards - “...person deliberately injured him!”

Sense Hansel was furious. All the students were gaping at me in disbelief. Edwards glared venomously. *Help!*

“Is any of this true?” asked Sense, looking around at the pupils and to Edwards.

Silence.

I could hear the accelerated loathing build up around me – or was it my heart?

“You have turned my class into a circus with your accusations.” Hansel's voice firmed. “Tarnishing my school, my black belts, Edwards and my son Tres by attempting to exploit an accident. Why?”

Stunned! Tres his son? He did not see, he did not know? I was trapped between what I knew was right and a judge worried about his image and a jury blind to the evidence. I stood as tall as my floundering legs would allow, ready to go down supporting my ship as long as Tres was on it.

“Your son has been misjudged,” I responded, scuttling any chance of social escape, “and your honored black belt has the integrity of a common vandal.”

I bowed, left the room before I was requested to leave, sought the shower, dressed and departed. No one made so bold as to acknowledge my existence.

Once I was safely in the parking lot I leaned across the roof of my Porsche – and let the emotions rebound through my torso: hatred of Edwards for hurting Tres, Hansel for letting down his son, love for the Little Dragon I would never see again (could it be love so soon?). There was also my own embarrassment for having looked the fool...

“My father is only protecting the school,” said a delicate voice from over my right shoulder.

Straightening, I turned to see the thin figure of Tres, clad again in T-

shirt, jeans and tennis shoes standing in the dark near the rear of my car, a ribbon of light from a street lamp cutting across his face.

“Tres, Jesus, you all right?” I smiled.

“Sure.” He smiled back, stretching his mouth wide and flashing an even line of teeth. “I’m a brown belt, you know. Anyway, thanks for stickin’ up for me in there.”

“Edwards was after your hide, you know.”

“Yeah, I know. He got it, too.”

“Not an accident?”

“No accident.”

“Father know?”

“Don’t think so,” Tres said, frowning. “When it comes to me he don’t care much.”

“Want to talk?” I ventured, watching his eyes. Did they twinkle for just a second?

Little Dragon searched my soul for a moment with those marvelous blue eyes, neither of us speaking. Then he crossed to the opposite door of my Porsche and tried to open it.

“We can walk,” I suggested. “My house is two blocks from here.”

On the way, I suppose, there were the usual streets, a few cars, a scattering of road lanterns, but they were relegated to a sort of dreamy obscurity, for beside me walked Tres. And sooner than seemed possible we were sitting next to each other, on my couch, chaperoning a fresh blaze in the fireplace.

I put a hand on Tres’s shoulder and pulled. He resisted at first, then stole into my arms, back to my chest, throwing his sneaker-clad feet across the couch arm.

“Do you think my Dad likes me?” Tres asked, squirming around for more comfort.

“I don’t know him, but I’ll bet he loves you, in his own way.” I placed my arms under his and settled my hands on his stomach. “Does it hurt much where he kicked you?”

“Nah, just aches a little inside.”

His stomach muscles were tight. Fanning my fingers, I rubbed the Dragon’s belly through his shirt, with my right hand.

“Fathers usually lose track of their sons about your age,” I went on. “As you get older you’ll both come closer together.”

Sprawling further and resting his head on my shoulder, Tres closed his eyes. “That don’t help me much now, does it?”

At last he relaxed, possibly for the first time in months. No words

needed speaking. I advanced the area of my circular massage to let a few fingers slip from time to time under his beltless denims; with each pass they slipped a centimeter further under the trouser edge. I soon contacted a pair of Jockey shorts; to get beyond required a more permanent effort, so that now my rotating hand had to take up homesteading inside the denim. At last my index finger brushed, oh so very lightly, against the tip of a boyish trinket and, continuing my movements, I lapsed into mental bliss.

“Is this right?” Dragon breathed suddenly, sending shock waves through my nervous system.

“Is what right?” I recovered, and continued my massage.

“You know. Rubbing my stomach.”

“Do you like it?”

“No one has rubbed my stomach before.”

“Do you like it?” I asked again, making a daring stroke inside and taking matters fully in hand.

After an initial hesitation, the Dragon answered with deft flicks of his wrist opening every button down the Levi covering of his treasures. Then he asked, with touching worry, “Does this make me queer?”

“No,” I quickly assured him, “it doesn't make you anything.”

“Sure?”

“It just makes you feel good and more aware of what you can do with your body. The girls around here will have to watch out. I bet you'll know ten times more about what to do with them than any boy in town.”

Tres leaned his head back, looking up into my face, as I maneuvered my thumbs along his hips and clasped his breeches and briefs together on both sides.

“Yeah!” he boasted, raising his rear and allowing me to glide my snared hands to his knees.

I was resolved to make this the Dragon's night.

Whatever new thrills he could and wanted to explore we would. And we did. Before we finished he breathed fire.

Afterwards we lay together watching the flames play over the collapsing coals in my hearth.

“I don't think we should have done it,” Tres whispered at length.

“What?”

“It's wrong.”

“Tres, because something feels good doesn't make it a sin. What you did was as natural as growing up.”

“I’ll have to think about it. I’ll have to think real hard,” he went on. Then, “Why did you let me do it?”

There was panic, and it was beginning to rise. “Tres, I love you. I did it to express that love, to try to please...”

But I never finished, for the boy leaped to his feet, grabbed his Levis and pulled them on in what seemed like one single motion. Then he bolted out the door, but not before he hurled back at me the furious accusation: “Fag! You’re a lousy fag!”

For an hour I didn’t move. I was too stunned, at first, and then overwhelmed by depression. At last I glanced at the clock above the inglenook: eleven-thirty. Better recover my Porsche.

The street lamps near the dojo were out, except for the one by the approach to the parking area: its beam was haloed in the mist. Droplets were forming on my car. Tree frogs and crickets were singing their usual nighttime chorus.

But the chorus trailed off as I approached my vehicle. There was a rustling in the shrubbery; someone was lurking in the darkness.

“Tres?” My heart started beating as though it wanted to jump clean out of my chest. “Listen Tres, can we talk this out?”

“No we can’t!”

It wasn’t Tres, but Edwards, advancing into the light and towards me, hooking his thumbs in the front of his denims. He wore them cuffed at his hiking boots; the top five buttons of his shirt were loose.

“I been waiting for you to come back for your wheels. Thought you’d forgot about them.”

He pushed me hard up against my auto and continued, “People don’t do to me what you tried to do. We don’t need toads like you here. Get the message?” And he drove a fist into my abdomen.

Air, I needed air. I doubled over, gasping, sightless from tears. I reached out to steady myself, to find the car.

“Keep your hands to yourself!” Edwards shouted, and chopped me on the side of my head, staggering me to my knees.

Please God, I thought, don’t let this happen. Not now... not for this!

Edwards stood over me, laughing.

“You’re not so hot one to one, are you?” he mocked. “You know, you’d look good as a hamburger.”

I heard a click; a switchblade opened in his hand, gleaming surfaces catching the rays of the street lamp and breaking them into cold little stars.

I had to get up and get away. I tried to rise. WHAM! He pounded me back to the ground with a whip-like kick to the chest.

"I'm going to like doing this," he said. Then there was a hoarse scream and he struck with his knife across my right cheek.

I didn't feel the slice. My body was numb. Reaching to cover the wound, I found there was no blood.

The scream I'd heard was not from my assassin but from Little Dragon as he landed a flying kick to Edward's shoulder, preserving my face from destruction.

But the black belt rolled with the attack and was on his feet quickly. Windmilling a leg from behind he slammed a hiking boot into The Dragon's side. Tres went down. Edwards sprang on Tres with a murderous kick to the base of his ribcage.

But Little Dragon miraculously bounded up and backwards and avoided the assault. Edwards, however, suddenly landed a roundhouse kick to his arm, putting Tres down again.

But from there Tres slammed a punch to Edwards's right kidney. There was a scream of pain. Jumping to his feet again, Tres struck, again and again, with punch after punch and at last Edwards fell screeching and holding his sides.

"Get up and fight!" Tres yelled, magnificent in his fury. Edwards's reply was a slash with the switch-blade across his right shin. Tres stumbled in pain. Edwards climbed to his knees and drove the knife deep into the Dragon's left shoulder. I bled with Tres as he screamed.

Edwards left the blade plunged in his prey, staggered to his feet, bringing up a large stone with him. He stepped toward Tres, raised the rock over his head. I pushed my right leg, with both hands, across the killer's path, and he tripped, went down, and Tres kicked, with all the force of a wounded beast, landing his heel in our attacker's groin. Then, tightening his muscles into granite, Little Dragon again fired his foot, this time at his chest, and Goliath jerked once and lay, unable to move any more, breathing heavily.

I crawled to Tres and drew the steel from his shoulder but I don't remember much else. There was a black haze, penetrated, as from a great distance, by sirens and lights. Then nothing.

I regained my senses in a hospital, needless to say; in a semi-private with an empty bed beside me – and, as I looked around, with a big bowl of flowers and a note. I rang for the nurse.

"What's that?" I pointed.

The note read:

My deepest apologies for doubting you, and my most heartfelt gratitude for saving the life of my son. Don't worry about costs: my insurance will cover everything. Recover, get strong, and I look forward to welcoming you to my home as an honored guest. - Tor Hansel.

So Tres was alive. And so, I discovered, was Edwards, which information didn't affect me much one way or the other – I doubted, in any case, we would be having trouble from him, since he was recovering in police custody.

I lay back and slept some more, and then, about noon I was awakened by a hand on my shoulder and opened my eyes to see a kindly middle-aged face looking down at me and saying, “I am Dr. Perkins. We hope you don't mind, but you're going to gain a persistent roommate. As a matter of fact he's been pestering us for hours to be put with you.” He stepped aside and the nurse wheeled in a bed with a smiling but well-bandaged Dragon.

“Tres!” I exclaimed. “Am I glad to see you!”

“Me, too.” He grinned impishly. “You look O.K.”

“You're not so bad yourself, except for that mountain of dressings.” There was heavy gauze around both arms, hands and right leg.

“You can't do nothin' with your hands tied up. I can't wait till it comes off, but that won't be for a couple of weeks.”

Then alone, finally, we relived “the heroic battle”, as the newspaper were calling it, every tiny maneuver.

“I'd never thought I could of done it,” Little Dragon admitted. “I was so mad when I saw him kick you I just attacked.”

“Why didn't you call the police?”

“I had to protect my friend first.”

“Friend, am I, now? The way you evacuated my apartment, well, I thought you hated me.”

Tres shook his head. He was suddenly serious. “Things were happening too fast. Things you showed me and things you said. I was mixed up.”

I gambled: “What about?”

Tres looked away. “That you love me, and all.”

“I'm afraid I do,” I said, hoping not to provoke another outburst.

“Yeah, I know.” There was boyish affection in his voice.

Understanding swept through my veins like fire as he continued: “Why don't you get up and lock the door. My hands are out of use...” Then, grinning like the Cheshire Cat, he added, “and rub my stomach.”