

CHAPTER ONE

ENCHANTRA - EVIL BEGINNINGS

As one cannot recognize the day but for the night, it's impossible to know just how good "good" is without the presence of horrific evil. It is easy to accept the conclusion of a day when the sun sets below the distant horizon, and the earth yields to the timely arrival of night. The cycle is predictable and expected. Fires, floods and earthquakes, are natural forces and, although destructive, are not the types of evil that should be most feared. The worst form of evil does not come into being naturally, nor of its own accord. The wickedest, most vile of evils must be created by intent, or by ill-fated incident.

Within Dragonshire was a doll maker's cottage belonging to Master Summons, one of the township's oldest and most beloved Jellybean Dragons. It is not known how long Master Summons had been a doll maker, or even how it had come to be that dragons were capable of creating items as delicate and as frilly as dolls. Master Summons did it, and did it well. His dolls were all sizes and styles, made of the finest porcelain, delicate but strong enough for young Dragonians to have a good play with them. That said, Master Summons spent a good portion of his work repairing dolls that would experience the occasional tumble or bump or over-excited squeeze from their young owners. As a life's ambition, Master Summons had envisioned creating a doll that would be more durable than that of any other he had made in the past. Therefore, it was on this late fall evening that Master Summons found himself laboring beyond regular shop hours to complete the new, improved model. Working late had become more of a diversion from life than a work routine for Master Summons. He had been alone for quite some time since his mate had... Dragons do not die exactly. It seems, after some hundreds of years when their energy declines and they begin to lose interest in those activities that had most interested them throughout their life, they become agitated and restless. Most seem to hear, or sense, what dragons refer to as *the final calling*. When it happens, there's no arguing,

no fuss and there's certainly no way to stop it from happening. These great creatures will gather a few of their most precious possessions, graciously say farewell to their loved ones, and begin an ultimate, final journey that all dragons must make. The *final calling* pulls them toward the distant mountains. Once they go, they are never seen again.

Master Summons' mate had received her *final calling* twenty-five years ago, and the anniversary of that date would come with sunrise. Each year that he marked her absence, he strained his ears in all directions almost yearning to experience a *final calling* of his own. As hard as he tried, he could not will it to happen, so he endeavored to work through the date pretending it did not exist. It was a pitiful, painful pastime as he was also surrounded by his mate's handiwork found in all the beautiful costumes she had sewn for the dolls he made. She had made so many, that Master Summons probably would not have ever run out. He found himself making dolls to fit their clothing instead of the other way 'round, as if his mate was there to direct his endeavors. He sorely missed her more with each passing day, and with each doll he made.

The porcelain process was tedious and sometimes daunting, but in his excited anticipation, Master Summons was also patient. He methodically worked through the project, step-by-step. This evening's task had Master Summons' recovering from his porcelain kiln, the last of the makings for the most extraordinary doll he had envisioned. It was to be the largest and most complex that he had ever made which meant he had to fire the doll's components, one leg or two hands at a time. The doll would be completely jointed from her ankles and wrists, to her knees and elbows, even her fingers could be positioned to hold tea cups and flower bouquets in an almost natural configuration. He had installed a series of complicated mechanical mechanisms, whose keys once wound, would permit the doll to do all sorts of wondrous things; walk, dance, wave, blow kisses, sit and stand up, and even nod with expressive motion. With the doll's body and appendages completed and articulated, tonight would bring forth the most important element to be added atop the rest... the

doll's head.

Master Summons carefully unlatched the hatch-lid of the porcelain kiln so as not to cause an accidental joggle of the contents. Such movement could cause disaster as he had learned many, many years ago. He knew the contents were still fairly hot, but he knew they would safely cool a bit quicker with the hatch-lid open. Peering in, he could see the doll's eyeless head, poised most delicately on firing blocks. It was perfect. The porcelain surface was unblemished, and absolutely smooth. It would be a flawless canvas for applying delicate pigmented glazes prior to its next firing.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, the tiniest of mice dashed from under a nearby work table, ran up Master Summons' tail, across his back, shoulder and down his arm. Surprised, Master Summons' heart skipped a beat as he gasped at the unexpected visitor. The old dragon felt an internal tug with a twinge of chest pain but thought little of it when he saw the tiny rodent, panting in terror, perched within his gigantic palm.

With a gentle kindness as large as his being, Master Summons considered the mouse. "Well, where did you come from, little one?" said Master Summons. "Did you not find the cheese morsel I left upon the table?"

The old dragon's low-pitched voice terrified the mouse. It leapt into the air, toward the open kiln and straight for the porcelain doll head. Seeing what was obviously about to happen caused the old dragon to start. The mouse would fall into the kiln, and perish in its heat. The doll head would most likely be set off center, tumble and be damaged. The calamity would be disastrous. Unsure about what he should do, Master Summons' moved perhaps a bit quicker than a dragon of his dimension was intended to move. He wanted to save the mouse, and protect the porcelain, but his heart couldn't cope with all that Master Summons was asking it to handle. It stopped. The great dragon slumped and his unsupported weight carried him forward. Somehow the mouse managed to grab onto one of the falling dragon's talons, swing itself to safety, and disappear into the shadows of

the shop.

It was not the mouse that triggered the porcelain head to tumble and crack, but the hand of the doll's dying creator. As Master Summons' body fell to its final resting place, his hand landed directly within the hottest area of the kiln. What happened next was something that had never happened in the history of dragons. Dragon bone was suddenly bared to extreme heat. One digit was seared, scorched, and charred. It disintegrated and exploded into a sparkling, fine powder that showered that one small area of the doll maker's shop. With its falling, the fine particles landed upon the porcelain head, then the doll's torso. It was no less of a wonder that the fine particles failed to touch anything else in the shop. Upon contact, the powder instantly infused intelligence, conveyed consciousness and beget life into the porcelain forms. This unlikely, unintentional enchantment gave rise to a malevolence the world had never known.

The next morning, Master Summons' body was discovered by a passer-by who noticed the shop door was left half open. The old dragon's death was mourned by all who had known him, and during his few hundred years of existence, that truly meant everyone throughout Dragonia. The old dragon's remains were respectfully laid away in a deep, mountain cave as it was unclear as to what the proper etiquette was for a dragon who had died without a *final calling*.

Much discussion and debate occurred as citizens of Dragonshire tried to determine the exact circumstances of Master Summons' death. It was deduced that the old dragon's heart had suddenly, inexplicably failed and he had fallen where he had been standing. His hand had accidentally fallen into the open kiln, and had been damaged by the heat. The conclusion was well thought out and mostly correct. The only detail that all failed to realize was that Master Summons' very special project was nowhere to be seen. Not a trace. Not a remnant. No one knew that dragon bones contained a type of magic that could bring life to things that should not be living.

The shop was shuttered, its door closed and permanently locked. No one noticed the occasional, momentary dim glow escaping from behind the shutters from the kiln's periodic use.

The shop was inhabited by an unnatural, magical mistake.

That which Master Summons desired to create, had, on its own, become something more than he would have wanted. In time the animated, porcelain doll gave herself the name, *Enchantra* but she shortened it to "E" when addressing herself in the mirror. She completed her assembly as best she could, basing her appearance on the finished dolls displayed around the doll maker's shop and images she saw in old doll-crafting magazines and catalogs. When some portion or part of another doll struck E's fancy, she pilfered it and incorporated the item onto herself. The magic made it possible. She filled the empty orbs of her head with lustrous glass eyes Master Summons had in his inventory. It would have been impossible to prove if those mismatched, shiny eye-marbles actually imbued Enchantra with the sense of sight. She functioned equally well when one, or both, would loosen and fall back into her empty skull. It was their sudden rolling and rattling around inside her head that gave clue to Enchantra that her eyes had become dislocated. At times, she would just allow them to roll as they would, then with a sudden toss of her head, and jerk forward, she caused them to pop back into their sockets; their varied positions provided Enchantra with an interesting array of expressions.

With each "improvement," E was only temporarily satisfied. Therefore, she would routinely add and modify, delete and exaggerate until she had become a little bit *more* of everything. When one appendage broke, she would replace it with whatever tool or conveyance that filled her current need. If she needed another, she added, or created one that performed a specific task. Had she been capable of experiencing feelings, she most likely would have felt unsatisfied, unfinished and incomplete. Her overall appearance was, at best... hideous.

Enchantra's prolonged existence depended upon the enchantment that had given her life, the

magic that kept her body and appendages intact and functioning. She called the powdered magic *Ticky-Tacky* and the more she exposed herself to it, the longer the effect would last and the stronger, more *intelligent*, she became. Ticky-Tacky was her sustenance... her life's energy. It, however, did not improve her temperament nor her temper. The kiln process did not produce as much Ticky-Tacky as E had come to crave. With her frustration, she devised a plan and it required more room than the doll-maker's cottage would allow. Over time, she discovered an ideal location to implement her idea.

Without anyone noticing, at a distance away from Dragonshire in the middle of Yucky Muck Bog, Enchantra built a fortress that housed the device that would produce the stuff of her existence.

Ticky-Tacky effected different materials in a variety of ways. Although metals would animate with exposure to the magic, Enchantra discovered how to control the way metals behaved. Working through the winter, both day and night, she caused discarded scraps of metal to join, bend, re-form and construct of themselves the device Enchantra called *The Big Machine*. The gigantic contraption provided a fairly efficient method to produce from dragon bones -- from dragons -- the essential magical energy her evil existence relied upon. It was superior to steam power, similar to electricity, but far more useful and more powerful than either.

Enchantra needed a supply of dragon bones. At first, she gathered bones from the old doll-maker's cave-grave, and, although they would last a good, long time, Enchantra knew she would eventually need more. During one trip to acquire Master Summons' bones, she found herself looking at the old dragon's remains. His body was fairly well preserved. The gentle old dragon's face held a kind, peace-filled expression as though he was simply sleeping. She waved at it as if to say *hello*. A momentary, inexplicable warming seemed to fill Enchantra's internal workings. The fleeting sensation took her aback and made her *feel* weak and small. Although she didn't know why, the strange feeling angered her.

Her first words were directed to the dragon responsible for her animation, and her existence. Enchantra's voice-sound was metallic and mechanical, as if formed from the warping of metal gears that scraped against each other.

Enchantra had no way of knowing her history before the old dragon's bone-magic enchanted her, and brought her into being as she asked, "Why did you make me? Why did you not finish me?"

Receiving no response from her creator, the frosty chill original to her being quickly displaced the internal warm remnant.

Frustrated, anger overtook her as the words "I hate you. You and your kind," seethed from somewhere deep within her abrading mechanics. She swiftly recovered the largest dragon bone she could carry, and left.

With Enchantra's retro-fitting and replacing of various appendages, each of her eight arms had taken on distinctively different appearances and personalities. On the way out, the last original arm created by Master Summons tugged at Enchantra and caused her to jerk around. Out of kindness or etiquette, the armed caused Enchantra to blow a kiss to the dead dragon as Master Summons had designed it to do.

"Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!" Enchantra commanded as several other hands struggled to bring the *kissy* one back into place "where it belonged." The struggle between her many arms continued as Enchantra headed for Yucky Muck Bog.

After the *Big Machine* was completed, securing a steady source and supply of dragon bones was Enchantra's principal ambition. She would need to either find them, or devise a strategy to bring dragons to her. Requiring less effort, less energy, the latter seemed more efficient. Constant, but discreet observation of Dragonshire, its inhabitants and their habits, provided Enchantra the means from which she contrived a plan. Late one evening, Enchantra entered an extraordinarily special room in Dragoncourt Castle, and stole a crystal amulet the dragons had relied upon for centuries. She

knew they would risk *life and limb* to recover it and Enchantra plan would to seize both.

Before long, the dragons came, one-by-one and several at a time, to recovery their precious amulet. The *Big Machine* processed those dragons and their bones with efficiency -- bones in; Ticky-Tacky out, to be collected and stored in gigantic glass reservoirs. The Tick-Tacky storeroom was a magnificent sight to behold. The process produced a by-product of fine powdery mist that was expelled into the air from the Big Machine's exhaust chimneys. Enchantra called the powder *Itchy-Mist* because coincidentally, it irritated dragons triggering their eyes to water, noses to run, and skin to itch. Their adverse physical reactions provided Enchantra an alert of their presence. She considered the system to be fool-proof. However, Jellybean Dragons were not a foolish, nor was Enchantra's system as dependable, as Enchantra would soon learn.