



*Photo by Aaron Greenwood on Unsplash*

## **Brimstone**

‘Come now, gather round everyone!’ Anwen Lloyd sighed and pasted a bright cheery smile on her face as she waited for the stragglers to catch up. She knew that giving guided tours regularly was part of her role at the National Museum in Cardiff, but school parties really were her pet hate, especially the badly-behaved brats that seemed to comprise this party. She would much rather be back on her latest dig which looked like it would have some promising finds, judging by the artefacts they’d unearthed so far.

‘Here we have something truly unique. Can anyone hazard a guess as to what it is?’

'Dragon' shouted several voices, as well as 'An old carving', 'A waste of time' and a few other less savoury comments.

Anwen drew another slow breath to calm down. Only another ten minutes to go and then she'd say goodbye to the whole pack.

'This appears to be a lizard of a type not encountered anywhere else in the world and is a complete fossil. It was a very surprising find in one of the caves near Swansea. Has anyone been to the National Showcaves Centre for Wales?'

The pupils just gawked at her, clearly not understanding.

She tried again. 'I mean the showcaves at Dan yr Ogof. They have a dinosaur park there too, with over two hundred life-size dinosaur models.'

That elicited more smiles and nods and a burst of chatter about who'd been there when and their favourite dinos.

'Does anyone know what Dan yr Ogof means in English?' Noting the blank looks, she quickly answered her own question. 'It means under the cave and that's just where this fossil was found. You're right; it does look a bit like what we'd think of as a dragon. See the nubby lumps on his head, small scales building up to larger ones all the way down the back and the outline of wings. You can see he's all curled round with the end of his tail wrapped over his snout. We estimate his length at about six metres and he'd probably have weighed about the same as a small elephant.'

The children were peering more closely now and poking at the fossil.

'He's all wrapped round a lump by his bum. I bet that's a ball of pooh,' yelled one scruffy boy excitedly. The girl with blonde pigtails who had been touching that very spot screamed and backed away quickly. There was sudden pandemonium as she knocked over two other children and they all started shouting. The three teachers who'd been loitering at the back waded in to sort things out but it was several minutes before they'd all calmed down again. Meanwhile Anwen was conscious of other visitors hastily leaving the exhibition hall. She spied one child still sitting beneath the fossil and went to help him out, only to find him writing in felt pen on one of the legs.

'No! You mustn't do that!' she burst out. The male teacher, already flushed from his exertions with the rest of the children, stepped in and hauled the child out, leaving a green streak up the back of the fossil's leg.

Anwen groaned. Her boss would have plenty to say about that and it would take ages to clean off.

'The fossil was found in one of the farthest reaches of the underground cave system at Dan yr Ogof,' she said quickly, determined to get the speech out so she could be finished with the horrible group. 'When you go there to look round, you only see a fraction of the cave system. There are ten miles of mapped caves and at least that much again waiting to be discovered. While investigating, one group found their way

into a side passage and discovered this fossil. He's a type of lizard, but unlike any other that's been found in the entire world. No-one's sure why he was there as the rocks where he was found don't normally have fossils in.' The bored looks made her skip over the geological background.

'Dinosaurs vanished from the earth about sixty-five million years ago, so he's been around a long time but we haven't yet managed to find an exact age for him. It took a large team of people three years to extricate him from the caves. It was thought to be impossible until there was a landslide and rock fall in all the heavy rain last spring. The army came with a helicopter to winch him out.'

'So it's not a dragon then?' asked a lanky boy with jeans hanging at half mast.

'No,' said Anwen. 'The word dragon originally meant serpent or giant sea fish from the ancient Greeks. It's only since the middle ages they were drawn with legs. There have been many myths and legends about dragons including Welsh tales in the Mabinogion. Mostly they are stories about dragons getting killed by heroes like in Beowulf and Saint George and the dragon.'

'Yeh,' said the boy, 'If they didn't get burned to death with dragon flames they'd chop their heads off and there'd be gallons of blood everywhere that'd eat through armour if it dripped on you.'

'Now those are just stories,' began Anwen, trying to shut him up, but the boy just talked louder.

'And they all had a stash of gold hidden so I'll bet that's down in them caves too. I bet I could find it and I'd be richer than Simon Cowell!'

At once the other children joined in in a rising clamour about how they could find and spend all the gold.

With a loud crack Anwen slammed her clipboard onto a nearby display case. The sudden silence and all eyes snapping to look at her made her take a step back from the wolf-like stares.

'Um, er, right,' she stuttered. 'That's all for today, I hope that you've enjoyed your tour round the fabulous exhibits in the museum and I'm sure you'll find lots of interesting souvenirs in the gift shop. Thanks for listening and I hope to see you again soon.'

With a quick smile, Anwen escaped through the nearest *Private-Staff Only* door and left the teachers to cope with the little mob with a sigh of relief.

With the exit of the school party, the exhibition hall settled into quiet apart from the soft buzz of two flies in the corner where one of the children had dropped a bag of sticky sweets. The midday sun beat down through the newly installed skylights.

Brimstone slowly became aware of the warmth, as she had every day for the past fortnight. It felt good after such a long, cool sleep. Scents tickled her nostrils and she

felt the emptiness in her belly. It was time to rouse and stretch her wings which felt so stiff from long disuse. She had to find a warm spot to stash her egg. Firstly, she would need to feed. Brimstone cracked open one golden eye and surveyed her strange surroundings.

A low murmur of voices heralded the mob of children pouring back into the room to eat their sandwiches. It was lunchtime.

*Noelle Bryant*