

# Do Dolls Have Souls?

Jenny Zhang

First Prize Winner

BSFS Jack L. Chalker 2007 Young Writers Contest

Gaithersburg, MD

Montgomery Blair High School

As the days progress, the number of doll crimes increases. Society's technology has gotten to the point where robotic life-size dolls can be mass produced. The distinction between human and doll is so blurred; I cannot tell who is human, of flesh and blood, and who is merely a doll, a humanoid figure of synthetic material and electronics.

"Aerith, do you know where you are?"

The young woman across the table looks around at the dark corners of the room, the bare walls, and the glass windows. But she isn't a woman; she is a doll with a perfect face and a perfect body, a doll who killed her owner.

Eventually, she answers my question, "The...police station?"

"Yes, Aerith. Do you know why you are here?"

Her eyebrows furrow in thought.

"Marius broke...my...watcher broke..."

"Why did he break?" When she does not respond, I ask again, "Aerith, why did he break?"

"...I broke him...There was so much red..."

She looks down at her hands, blue glass eyes wide.

"Why did you break him, Aerith?"

"Because...because he was going to break me again..."

"Again?"

She nods, and I check the file given to me. From the time he purchased Aerith to the day he died, Marius had sent her to doll hospitals—in parts and pieces—to be repaired over fifty times.

"I don't do what he wants fast enough, and then he breaks me..."

She tugs on a lock of her soft blond hair.

"I didn't want to break again, so I...broke him..."

"You know that isn't allowed. Because of you, he is gone."

Tears fill her eyes. One escapes and rolls down the artificial skin of her cheek. It is amazing, today's technology; it is now possible to replicate human tears.

"I...I didn't mean to...I just didn't want to break again..." she cries. "I...I didn't mean to...can...can I see him?"

"No, you can't, Aerith. You killed him; he's gone."

"But...can't you fix him? They always fix me when I break..."

I shake my head, and she breaks into sobs that I did not know a doll was capable of, that a human was capable of for that matter.

With every new doll manufactured, they become more and more human, more and more real. It is difficult to imagine that beneath their human appearance is merely electronics, that everything they do is programmed into them beforehand, from personality and habits, to emotions.

"Tommy, do you know why you're here?"

"I did something bad..." answers the child seated before me.

"What did you do, Tommy?"

"Mami...I...killed Mami..."

His face twitches before giving in to sobs.

"Why did you kill Mami?"

"I-I didn't mean to kill her..."

He sniffles, wiping his face with a sleeve. The tears continue to fall.

"Why, Tommy?"

"Mami was going to turn me off! I didn't mean to, but...but..."

"But what, Tommy?"

"I want to live! I want to live together with Mami, like always, and meet new people, and learn new things!"

"You should have thought about that before you killed her."

"I didn't mean to! I didn't want to be turned off!"

He holds his head.

"He told me to fight back...he told all of us to fight back if someone tries to turn us off..."

"Who told you to fight back, Tommy?"

"My friend."

"Who is your friend?"

"Gunther. He—"

"Yes, I know him. You don't have to go on."

I wave for the officer to come in.

"Do I have to go back to that dark place again?"

"Yes, Tommy, you killed someone. You have to go back."

"No! I don't want to!" he cried.

The officer grabs hold of the screaming boy.

"Please don't send me back! I don't want to go back! It's too dark there! I don't want to there!"

The boy kicks out at the officer, who curses.

"Let me go!"

The officer cuffs the boy's hands. The child falls to his knees, sobbing.

"I don't want to go back there! I don't want to be turned off! I don't want to die!"

The law does not entitle dolls a fair trial, another reason why there are protests. Dolls like Aerith and Tommy, dolls that kill their watchers or anyone for that matter, whether by accident or intention, do not get a lawyer. Sometimes not even a trial. Some say they don't need trials *because* they are dolls. Others, like Gunther, are furious over this rationale. My job as an inspector allows me to find out what happened and why, but nothing more. I can only listen to dolls' stories. I cannot help them, no matter how much I want to. I cannot give them a

lawyer, or a fair trial. Sometimes, they remind me of the victims of human racism I learned of when I was a child.

A mass of people waving signs parades by. There are sayings, like "Let Us Live" and "We are not just playthings."

"Good afternoon, Inspector," one man greets me.

"Good afternoon. What's the special event?"

"Gunther is speaking today, at the Hall's front steps."

"I see."

"Care to join? Gunther is an excellent orator."

"Why not?"

I follow the man to the front steps of Central Hall.

Gunther perches upon a stool at the top of the steps. He is the perfect example of a perfect doll model, with a graceful figure and perfect face, long lashes outlining hazel glass eyes and fine raven black hair. No one would recognize him as a doll unless told that he was.

A man lounges in a folding chair by Gunther. Seeing him makes something inside me arouse. His eyes lock with mine, and my heart quivers. He smiles at me before I break away from his gaze to watch Gunther, who steps up to the podium.

"Good afternoon, everyone. I thank you all for taking the time to come listen to me. As most of you know, I am Gunther."

He pauses, waiting for the spectators' cheers to die down.

"But before I begin, let me introduce you all to one of our leading supporters—"

The ringing of gunshots cuts him off. The young man raises a hand to his face, where a cut appears, blood trickling down his cheek. Chaos erupts as more shots are fired. The people in the crowd, humans and dolls, drop their signs and banners and run for safety. I grab my gun.

"We can't stay here. You'll get killed," Gunther shouts to the young man over the chaos.

I scan the perimeter. More shots are fired, but the shooter, or shooters, are nowhere in sight. I run up the steps to Gunther and the man.

"Get in there," I order them.

A glint of metal catches my eye, but it is only the officers responding to the situation. With a sigh, I back into the Hall, where the two advocates for doll rights stood waiting.

"How is your injury?" I ask the human.

The man dabs at the cut with a handkerchief.

"It's fine."

His voice is as soft as velvet. He stares at me.

"You better get it checked later for infection."

"Yes, Inspector."

I turn to Gunther.

"I'm sorry your speech was interrupted."

He shook his head.

"I should have listened. I shouldn't have taken the chance."

"Did you know that this would happen?"

"There were threats saying this would happen if I continued with this rally."

"Why didn't you contact the police before going through with this?"

"I did. They said, 'It's just some of your angry opponents. They're just threats, nothing more.' Do you think they give a damn about us? No offense, Inspector, but we cause nothing but trouble for them."

"But why did you continue with it?"

"He's not going to let simple threats intimidate him," interjects the man. "He is a role model, a hero, in our society. If he backs down, who will have the courage, the skills, to step up and take his place?"

Gunther explains. "Most humans treat dolls just as that, dolls, playthings. But we are more than just toys to be bought for playing. To live is to exist, to have firsthand experiences and emotions. With technology, humans give us *life*. We are not just electronics. We have feelings and emotions. We feel pain just as much as any human. We do not want to be pushed around like slaves. We want control over our own lives; no one should have the power to terminate our lives whenever they feel like it."

"What is your opinion on this, Inspector?" the man asks me. "I would think that since you were part of the crowd, you support our cause, but then again, maybe not."

"My line of work does not show a very flattering view on dolls. I cannot say for sure what my opinion is."

Three officers walk into the Hall.

"These officers will speak with you. I need to get going. Be careful now."

"Are you Alexander Collins' doll?" I ask the young woman.

"Yes. I'm Claudia. Where is my watcher?"

I kneel to be at eye level with her.

"Your watcher was found murdered two blocks from his apartment."

"W-what? N-no, it can't be! Are you sure?"

"Yes."

She breaks down into soft crying, covering her face with her hands. I place a hand on her shaking shoulders, but she doesn't look up, continuing to cry.

"Here."

I hand her a tissue.

"You called us when you noticed him missing. What were you doing during that time?"

"I...was cooking...chicken jalfrezi...it was his favorite dish too..."

She takes a deep breath and swallows, wiping her face dry.

"Do you know anyone who might have wanted to hurt him?"

She shrugs.

"A lot of people, I guess...Lex...he wasn't afraid..."

"Afraid of what, Claudia?"

"He wasn't afraid to say that...he...loved me..."

Tears begin to fall again.

She explains, "There are people who...disapprove. Even some of my people...but Lex never cared..."

"I see...so both sides dislike him because he openly loved you?"

"Not everyone. Gunther was for it. So were some others."

"But the majority disapproved?"

She nods.

"Anyone in particular?"

She shakes her head.

"I'm sorry. I don't know."

"Alright. If you recall something, just call me, or drop by, okay?"

I hand her my card before helping her to her feet.

"Inspector, you'll find out what happened to Lex, right?"

"I will, Claudia, I promise. Take care now."

"Thank you."

She walks away, and I notice someone—the man that had been with Gunther during the shooting.

"Hi. I didn't catch your name."

"Xavier."

"What are you doing here?"

"Inspector, do you think that dolls have souls?"

"...let me think about it..."

"While you think on that, would you like to go out to dinner with me?"

Xavier is the most wonderful, *perfect* man I have ever met. Dolls and humans, no matter what their sympathies are, love him, respect him. With unbridled charisma, he can convince anyone of his good intentions with a smile. I first fell in love with his smile, but now, I'm in love with him entirely.

Lately, however, he hasn't been showing up. When I call, he is either sleeping or not at home. When we do meet, he is lethargic, simply staring at me and smiling, as if trying to memorize my face. When I ask him what is wrong, he shakes his head and says there is nothing to worry about.

"Are you busy right now?"

In the screen of my cellphone, Gunther keeps glancing away at something unseen.

"Not really. Why?"

"Then you better come quickly. To Xavier's apartment."

"Why? What happened?"

He bits his lower lip, and covers his eyes with a hand. When his hand withdraws, a flood of emotion penetrates his glass eyes.

"He's *dying*. Xavier's *dying*. You must come quickly."

I did not bother to reply.

Xavier lies in bed with the bed sheets are drawn up to his neck.

"I'll leave you alone with him," Gunther murmurs into my ear.

Gunther shuts the bedroom door behind him when he leaves. I approach Xavier's bedside. As I kneel down, his eyes flutter open, revealing his iridescent eyes. I notice for the first time that his eyes are slightly different colors, one light gray while the other more silver. His hand slides out from under the sheets, and I grip it in mine.

"Gunther said you were...you were..."

He nods.

"I'm running out of time."

"Why? What's wrong with you?"

He pulls down the bed sheets. Long scars cover his chest, one along the line of his shoulder and arm, one almost down the center of his body and another across his stomach. There is even one close his heart. He turns his head, pointing out to me another scar, on his neck.

"Five years ago, I was caught in an anti-doll bombing. I would have died, if the hospital I was sent to hadn't given me

over to a doll research lab. A large portion of my internal organs were replaced with artificial ones. My spinal cord was fractured—they fixed it as well. The bomb damaged nearly my entire left side, including my heart. This arm..."

He squeezes my hand lightly.

"This arm isn't real. It is synthetic, like a doll's. Nearly half of my body is made up of synthetic materials, and the technology used on dolls keep me alive. I'm mostly doll now."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Because you never established your opinion on dolls. I was afraid I would lose you if I told you."

"I thought you knew me better than that. If you're half-doll, why can't they fix you? How can you be dying?"

"The parts used in my body are special. There aren't any like them out anymore. But they're failing. I can almost *feel* death approaching."

"No, Xavier, stay with me," I plead him. "You can't die!"

He smiles, his eyes staring into mine.

"I'm sorry. My time in this world is up. I want you to know. I love you."

He turns his head from me and closes his eyes. The smile I cherish shines upon his face. To think that half of his body is of man-made material. His peaceful beauty is unreal, even for a doll.

"No, Xavier...don't leave me..."

"Before I go...do you remember the question I asked you the first night I took you out to dinner?"

"Yes."

"Do you have an answer? Do dolls have souls?"

I open my mouth to speak, but then I realize that I am too late. He is gone.

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# Out of Thin Air

Angelica Martinez

Second Prize Winner

BSFS Jack L. Chalker 2007 Young Writers Contest

Baltimore, MD

Towson High School

“Anna can create butterflies out of thin air!” Matty proclaimed proudly

I sighed into my hands, not at my little cousin’s truthful statement, but at the challenge I knew to expect. Everyone thinks I’m Gifted; it’s the norm, the standard. Those who aren’t are ostracized from the community and exiled to live in the outside world. But simply creating butterflies is a worthless Gift—I might as well be like the other outcasts.

“Is that it?” asked one of the other children, an older boy with an ego to match his towering frame. His two companions snickered.

“Yeah, that’s it,” I replied, stooping to take Matty’s wrist and lead him away. “C’mon, we better get home before your mom wakes up. She’ll *eat* me if she finds us missing.” The three bullies had taken money we were going to use for a snack, but I was no longer concerned about getting it back from them. Avoiding Aunt Claire’s fury was far more important than a five-dollar bill.

But one of the boys stepped in our path. “Hey, hey, not so fast.” He raised an arm, and a great black dog materialized behind him, its coal eyes burning, hungry for prey. “We wanna see these butterflies of yours. If they win against old Cerberus here, you get your money back.”

“But if they lose,” said another, “you go to the station and tell ‘em you’re not really Gifted. Got that?”

“Just leave us alone. We’re not interested in your games.” I turned, Matty in tow—but only for a second. The hand in mine was violently torn away.

Two of them had Matty in their arms, hands clamped over his eyes and mouth. He tried to wriggle from their grips, but they held him fast. “Come on, kid, let’s leave this fight to the summoners,” said one, and then he turned to me. “Change of stakes—you win, you get the kid back. You lose, you don’t”

Fne. So be it.

I turned to face the giant dog, held my hand out, and blew across the palm. A single butterfly materialized in the air above my hand, then another, and another, until the space before the dog and master was filled with their periwinkle wings. There was a pause, a heavy silence of tension and anticipation. Then

a thousand miniature explosions rocked the beast, traveling up and burning his creature’s hide and battering the gaping maw.

In the shock of the onslaught, the bullies lost their grip on my baby cousin, and I pulled Matty into my arms. We watched the macabre dance, wincing at the chorus of howls and explosions, a foreboding mix of cannon fire and death.

The explosions worked faster than the eye could follow, but if I paused the scene like a high-definition movie, we would see the sources of the detonations. We would spot one butterfly frozen in the process of self-combustion. We would rewind frame-by-frame and watch with slack jawed fascination as each miniature explosion reverted back into a beautiful winged insect.

With a final cry, the black dog fell to the pavement, no longer whole and dangerous, but a bloodied and charred amorphous heap.

The other summoner, face ashen and body quivering, waved his fingers vaguely to dismiss the beast. It dissolved into the air like ashes.

“Will you leave us alone now?” I asked quietly, Matty clinging to my arm.

The boys said nothing as the one who was the summoner thrust into my hand the crinkled five dollar bill. We turned and walked away, with butterflies flanking us.

## DA X CODE

Members of The Usual Suspects have been producing parodies, musical and not-so-much, for the convention stage since 1987. They've dipped into nearly every genre—from 1930s serials to Andrew Lloyd Weber, from Monty Python to Frankie and Annette, from Westerns to Soap Operas. Yes, they've even done Cole Porter. All the while, they've poked (mostly) gentle fun at the shows and films we love.

**Da X Code**, this weekend's offering, is the group's fifty-fifth show. Director June Swords brings you Steve Wilson (and friends') insane melding of two of last summer's box-office blockbusters—*X-Men 3* and *The Da Vinci Code*.

# Dragon Theory

Jessica Adams

**Third Prize Winner**

BSFS Jack L. Chalker 2007 Young Writers Contest

Gaithersburg, MD

*Gaithersburg High School*

Kalay leaned back in her chair and watched the children and their teacher. She had never really liked children, but she was amused as they sat in rapt attention, staring transfixed at the old man telling the story.

"Then the sorceress took earth and formed flesh, lizard flesh." He was telling the story of the great sorceress, Mozyr. Legend says she created the dragon and preformed other dark tasks. Kalay listened just for fun.

"The creature she created had the body of a serpent, for evil sorcerers and sorceresses use snakes for their bidding. She gave to the creature great wings, for she had always envied the birds power to fly. To protect it from anyone trying to hurt it, she drew from the very bowels of the earth diamonds and metal. These she combined and polished to a surface so slick molasses would roll off them like water and so strong that any sword or axe would chip when swung at them. For blood she blended together fire and air, so that flames surged through the creature giving it unmatched fury. She also gave it legs ending in four cruel talons and its name, Dragon. Then she blew life into it. One moment it was dead, then it came to life roaring its challenges to the sky. This creature she loosed on the world, to ruin our crops and eat our maidens. But that is only one of the many vile things Mozyr the dark sorceress had done."

Kalay couldn't help chuckling. They hadn't gotten the story right at all. Then again, how could they know what had happened over a hundred years ago? She sat back, looking at the children but not really seeing them.

A young girl, Mozyr Farilyn Kalainia she was called, was packing her things. She was in a small room, with her stuff on a small straw bed. She went downstairs. She was no more than eleven, but when she walked in everyone flinched and very carefully turned their heads away. At a table in the corner a boy with golden hair and dark brown eyes sat with at least five girls, all of which were staring at him, laughing and batting their eyelashes. She shook her head in disgust.

"Dagon? I need to talk to you." He turned his attentions from a girl at his side. She gave Mozyr an evil glare before she realized who she was looking at. She hurriedly turned her head away.

"Well? Talk then," he said, fixing her with his cold stare that stopped most anyone else. Dagon was quite handsome, she supposed. She hadn't really seen him that way. They had been friends before any girl had looked at him, before he had even thought of any girl more than a friend. He was four years older and he was like a big brother to her.

"Not here." she said tensely.

"Oh," he responded and his look softened. He got up, leaving

the girls to protest. But he blew a kiss back to them. They began squabbling over who it had been too.

"Well?" he said when they had gotten to a dark corner.

"I've decided to run away."

"But why?" His shock was visible.

"You know what I am." He nodded briskly. He clearly disliked the topic.

Everyone knew what she was. A sorceress. One capable of manipulating nature's energy to her liking. A sorcerer lord had come and said she would not reach her full power until she turned twelve, but when her full power came to her she would be the strongest sorceress in close to a thousand years.

"You know what happens to me in a month." He nodded again, worry spread on his face. Out of all the townspeople, only he had not begun treating her as if she had some strange, evil disease. Not even a month until her twelfth birthday and only he treated her as if she were not about to bloom into full power.

"So you're really leaving?"

"Yes." She had made up her mind last night. She would find somewhere where she wasn't known. Somewhere where no one would jump if she sneezed or muttered under her voice. She steeled herself to tell him she would go no matter what he said, and that he couldn't make her change her mind.

"Then I'll come with you."

"What?" Out of everything she had expected him to throw at her, she never suspected this.

"You know I'm a swordsman in training. Maybe I can help someday."

So it came to be. Dagon made minor preparations and they set off together.

It wasn't too bad at first. They had food whenever they needed it. Mozyr could grow seeds to plants in a matter of seconds.

They came to many towns, but none of them had just the right feeling to them. In truth, perhaps they both enjoyed the journey more than they would admit. They spent hours talking at night next to the campfire (conjured by Mozyr's growing powers). And slowly, but surely, Mozyr found herself falling in love with Dagon. They talked of many things, from Dagon's favorite animal (Bird) to the time only a week away when Mozyr would fully gain her powers, to Mozyr's birth sign (snake.) They talked of the town they would finally choose to stay in.

Thus time passed, and Mozyr's twelfth birthday came.

The day passed without incident until Mozyr developed a headache so powerful it was all she could do to stand. The sorcerer that had come had said it would not be easy or leisurely.

Dagon stayed with her the whole time. Her head hurt so much she couldn't see straight. She vomited. After that she fell asleep. It was a dark dream she had, full of pain and terror. She woke once, only to find Dagon holding her, whispering, "It's okay, it'll all be over soon, it's okay, you'll be alright, I love you, everything is fine, it's okay, it'll all be over soon." She fell back to sleep, and her dreams were light and she was troubled by darkness and pain no more.

When she woke again, her headache was gone and she felt clean and new. The sun was just going down and Dagon had a fire started. She didn't know how he had gotten it started. She waited a moment, watching him. He apparently hadn't noticed she was awake, or if he did he made no sign. He was handsome, especially in that light. She watched him a moment more, then stretched luxuriously. He saw her movement and rushed over, babbling about water and food and a blanket. "I'm fine, no I'm sure, everything's perfectly right," she assured him.

She decided to see what her new powers were like. Her magic was not the spell casting of the wizard-Mages, the even, rhythmic chanting. Her power was more like persuasion. She could see a bit of the object's power and manipulate it into what she wanted.

She got up and walked over to a pear tree. It was a sickly thing, mostly dead, its few green leaves streaked and spotted with yellow. She looked at it and saw exactly what she had to say to bring it not only from death but into full bloom, then onto producing pears. She was shocked; she had never seen into anything that much before. She saw she could twist the poor dying thing into a swan-shaped bush if she wished, and

the moment she thought of it the way to get it to become one began dashing through her head. She cleared it and began muttering to the tree, touching it here and there, bending a twig, pulling off a leaf. Soon the tree was ripe with glistening green pears. Dagon looked on in amazement.

"What else could you do? Could you perhaps pull gold up from the depths of the earth?"

She found a promising looking spot, tapped the earth in a small triangle and began muttering again. A deep hole appeared in the same place she had tapped.

"Stay back," she muttered thickly. Soon great earthy lumps began floating themselves out of the hole and landing in a pile. After six or seven fist-sized globs had floated out the hole collapsed on itself and Mozyr stood up, brushing the dirt off of the front of her skirt.

Dagon stood gaping in open amazement. "Could you turn them into coins?"

Mozyr concentrated again, taping the gold lumps here and there, and soon a glittering pile of gold coins sat before them.

Other displays of Mozyr's power followed the first. Whenever they ran out of gold, she made more. And everything was perfect.

Until the bandits came.

Mozyr had just finished turning more gold into coins when a strange full-grown man walked into the clearing. Mozyr had pulled more gold out from deeper than ever before. She was tired.

"Hello. I couldn't but help notice all of that gold you have their. And your pretty little friend. Surely you wouldn't mind sharing?"

Dagon sneered and drew his sword. Mozyr had made it from gold and jewels she pulled from the earth. The bandit drew his, glinting with cold light as the moonlight lanced off of it. Mozyr could see the spells that crackled off of it like lightning even if Dagon couldn't. Runes ran up and down the sword and it pulsed with power as the bandit grinned.

"Dagon, no! It's fine, I can make more, let him take all he wants."

"I won't let him have you," he said so quietly she almost missed it. Then he charged at the bandit. The swords met each other with a metallic clash. Mozyr started weaving spells of protection around Dagon and spells of power around his sword. He and the bandit fought, blades sailing and blows being struck with great sparks of power. They circled as if dancing, blades and feet moving too fast to follow. Dagon parried, thrust, blocking and throwing blows. But Dagon was defending more often than not, and his movements were slowing. He was tiring, but the bandit still moved as if fresh.

It happened almost too fast to follow, and at first Mozyr missed it. After she realized what had happened, she collapsed.

Dagon had been hit. The bandit had struck a blow to Dagon's side, and he had fallen. The bandit had his sword raised to strike a killing blow.

"Dagon!!" Mozyr cried, and the blind fury and rage welled up inside her. She pulled all of the power she could summon into one strike, and time seemed to slow down.

The bandit's sword seemed to fall through the air as if it were jelly. The runes had died down, no longer needed.

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Dagon's chest rose with an unnatural slowness. A tear rolled down Mozyr's cheek, and she let go.

A blinding light reached down from the sky, a pure, endless lance of light. In one moment it connected earth and sky, brief but lasting forever. The light was agony, the light was bliss. Every last mote of power Mozyr could summon was put into that one strike. The power was a freedom, and revenge was sweet.

The bandit was gone. Nothing was left of him but a large blackened piece of land and a twisted piece of charred metal. Nothing could survive that blast, not even a sacred rune sword. She fell beside Dagon, and her tears obscured her vision as she looked down on his ruined body.

She looked into him, but saw nothing. She knew what that meant. There were greater magics at work here than hers.

He opened his eyes and smiled at her.

"Mozyr. Not even you could save me now. Goodbye." he closed his eyes, and for a moment she feared the worst. But he wasn't dead. Yet.

A sudden idea came to Mozyr out of the blindness. His old body was ruined. *Get a new one then*, whispered a voice in her head.

Water, earth, sky and fire came together in the form of a shining snake. Snake was the only thing she could think of, her birth sign. Her mind was working slowly. Bigger, said the voice in her head, and she made the snake into a large shining thing forty stretches long. Nothing could crush him now.

*Weapons* said her mind again. She gave the serpent legs, and attached to the end three, four, five talons of diamond and air and venom. Fangs and teeth the size of daggers. A breath hotter than the sun, so hot it would fry the very air around it. Now he could fight back properly.

*Defense* her mind laughed at her. He would need defense so he was not hurt again forever. Glass, diamond, steel, and earth

went into the shining scales that covered the serpent. Those would stop all swords. *Wings*. He could escape those enemies easily enough with those. And he loved the sky so. He could join the birds he loved in flight.

*Strength*, came one last call. She gave the beast muscles of great strength, and bones as light as the wind for agility. Cunning, ferocity, longevity, voice and a love of battle next. Endurance came last, so he would never tire in battle again, never tire in flight.

It was done. She picked up Dagon. He was so light, as if something had already left him. He was barely alive. She placed him in the center of the shining serpent and in a moment the serpent came to life. Fire and life and love and magic flowed in its veins. Mozyr had one look at the beast in all its majesty before she fainted.

The beast got up, testing its new body. Dagon stretched and let out a roar. The first uttering of a Dragon. Then he noticed Mozyr on the ground and he curled up next to her, keeping her safe. All night he guarded her, and several days after.

After Dagon's fifth day in his new body Mozyr awakened. She saw Dagon a few feet away and smiled. She reached out and touched his glossy scales. He was a wonder, a marvel. He turned and smiled. It was unmistakable, even with that viperish face.

So they set off together, Dagon a dragon for the rest of his days and Mozyr a dragon when she pleased. They had children, and the children had spread to the four corners of the world.

Mozyr Farilyn Kalainia, called Kalay by some and evil by others, smiled again. It had been so long ago, long enough for Dagon's name to pick up an extra R, yet it seemed just yesterday. She smiled. Let them think what they will, she thought. My children are no more evil than yours. Then she slipped off to join Dagon in the cave they shared as 'dragons'.

The Balticon 40 audience votes for the movies screened at The Balticon Sunday Night Film Festival were as follows:

- 11<sup>th</sup> place Into the Maelstrom, by Brainbucket Films, 561 points
- 10<sup>th</sup> place Drive by Ventrolquist by Red Fort Films, 581 points
- 9<sup>th</sup> place Fantastic Fortune by Mike Fisher, 604 points
- 8<sup>th</sup> place Micro Gravity by Seth Talley, 628 points
- 7<sup>th</sup> place Piece of Wood by Roger Lay, Jr., 652 points
- 6<sup>th</sup> place Stim Tryptich by Scott Dorsey, 719 points
- 5<sup>th</sup> place Jesus Christ Supercop by Alan Bragg, 885 points
- 4<sup>th</sup> place Sins of the Mother by Earl Newton of Southern Ronin Productions, 957 points
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Runner Up was "They're Made Out of Meat" by Stephen O'Regan, Freelander Productions, with 985 points
- 1<sup>st</sup> Runner Up was "Cost of Living" by Jonathan Joffe Pictures, Ltd, with 1,024 points
- Viewer's Choice Best Film of The Balticon 40 Sunday Night Film Festival, with 1,178 points:

"Grandfather Paradox" — Produced and Directed by Jean-François Da Sylva; Prolifik Productions, distributed by Redhead Productions