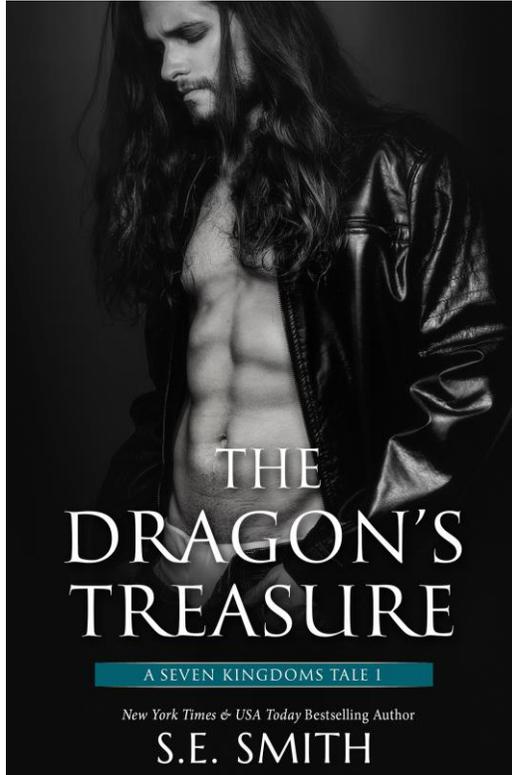


**The Dragon's Treasure**  
**Seven Kingdoms Tale 1**



**By S. E. Smith**

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my husband Steve for believing in me and being proud enough of me to give me the courage to follow my dream. I would also like to give a special thank you to my sister and best friend, Linda, who not only encouraged me to write but who also read the manuscript. Also to my other friends who believe in me: Julie, Debbie, Christel, Sally, Jolanda, Lisa, Laurelle, and Narelle. The girls that keep me going!

—S.E. Smith

Paranormal Romance

The Dragon's Treasure: Seven Kingdoms Tale 1

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Summary: A young woman seeking shelter from a storm finds herself in a magical realm where dragons live, leading to a series of events that will affect all of the Seven Kingdoms.

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## Synopsis

### **Choose your treasure carefully, thief...**

Drago, King of the Isle of Dragons, is the last of the magnificent dragons of the Seven Kingdoms. Bitter and alone, he abandons the emptiness of his realm and retreats to the caverns beneath the palace. In the form of his dragon, he remains hidden from the world, protecting the Dragon's Heart, the last legacy of his people – until he is disturbed by a most unlikely thief.

Carly Tate's trip to Yachats State Park takes an unexpected turn when she is caught in a sudden storm. Seeking shelter, she stumbles through a magical doorway into a cavern filled with treasure! Yet, as incredible as the piles of glittering gold and jewels are, her gaze is transfixed by the slumbering form of a magnificent dragon.

Carly's appearance begins a series of events that will not only change Drago's life, but will affect all of the Seven Kingdoms. Can a centuries old dragon protect his most valuable treasure, or will the evil that destroyed his race take Carly from him as well?

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## **In the Beginning...**

Long, long ago, peace reigned over the Isles of the Seven Kingdoms. Each kingdom: the Isles of the Dragon, Sea Serpent, Magic, Giants, Elements, Pirates, and Monsters were ruled by seven powerful leaders who watched over their realms. Each ruler was given a gift by the Goddess who created their world; a gift that promised harmony among the kingdoms as long as these gifts were kept safe and not used against each other. The rulers were fair and just, and understood their kingdoms needed each other to flourish.

Alas, the peace was not to last. One night a strange and brilliant light fell from the sky and landed in the ocean. Those that saw the meteorite streak through the dark skies made lighthearted wishes. One young sea witch saw the falling star and swam out to sea to catch it. She was unaware that something dark and evil lived within its core – a darkness that would slowly overpower her and threaten the very fabric of the Seven Kingdoms.

## Prologue: The End of the Great Battle

"Return to the isle, I will join you soon," Drago ordered.

"Drago, do you think it safe?" Theron asked, glancing across the waves at the man who had emerged from the inky blackness.

Drago released a growl of warning. His second-in-command tilted his wings and fell back, increasing the distance between them. Five dragons, all members of his elite guard, hovered close by. The three males and two females kept a wary eye on the water below them. Even with a dragon's eyesight, they could see nothing within the growing darkness of the storm clouds around them or through the turbulence of the waves.

"Return now," Drago ordered.

"Yes, my king," Theron reluctantly agreed, rising higher and issuing a sharp order to the other guards.

Drago kept his gaze locked on Orion. The Sea King gazed back at him with the same intense expression on his face. The large sea dragon that Orion rode shook its head, feeling the tension between the two men.

"Orion," Drago growled.

"I come asking for a truce, dragon. You are the last of the kingdoms. The others agreed to peace," Orion stated.

Drago snorted, small puffs of smoke swirled from his nostrils and blew away in the gathering wind, floating toward Orion. The sea dragon jerked in

alarm. A smile of satisfaction curved Drago's lips when he saw Orion fight for control of the huge sea dragon. The sharp, angry glare Orion shot him told Drago that the Sea King was well aware that he had frightened the sea dragon on purpose.

"What brings on this sudden desire for peace?" Drago asked in a mocking tone.

Orion's mouth tightened in irritation. "It was all lies," he replied.

"What were lies?" Drago demanded.

"I had no desire for your treasure nor to steal the Dragon's Heart, Drago. The Isle of the Sea Serpent has its own treasures. We do not need the enchanted gold and jewels of the dragons and I know better than to try to steal the gift of the Goddess," Orion said.

Drago snapped his teeth. "You claim that, yet I've captured your men who swear just the opposite. You also blamed the dragons for scorching your fields above the sea. None of my people attacked your kingdom and still they lie at the bottom of the ocean while their mates and children cry in sorrow," he retorted.

"I know, but I swear on the Trident that those who you captured are under a curse of dark magic, forced to do deeds they would never have done otherwise. I also swear that it was not my people who struck the dragons from the sky. They... Drago, they lay as statues, turned to stone by a spell I have never seen before," Orion replied, his voice barely audible above the sound of the wind and waves.

“You swear? Then who did such dark magic? The only ones with such power are those from the Isle of Magic,” Drago demanded.

Orion hesitated and looked out over the sea before returning his gaze to Drago. Drago could see the regret in the other king’s eyes. He could also see the sincerity.

“Nay, it was not the Isle of Magic, it was my cousin Magna,” Orion finally said.

“The Sea Witch?” Drago asked.

“Yes, something has happened to her. I have banished her, but I fear that is not enough. Her magic grows more powerful and must be stopped once and for all. It was her lies and treachery that started the wars between the kingdoms. She cast a spell – there is a darkness within her unlike anything I have ever seen before, Drago. It is unnatural. The more we fight each other, the stronger it grows. The only way to defeat the spell is to work together,” Orion said.

“I sensed the darkness in her when she came to me for asylum. I should have killed her then, but instead gave my word to protect her from you when she said you had gone mad. Know this, Orion, if I find her first, all the water in the ocean and her black magic will not save her from the fire of my dragon,” Drago swore.

“I hope it will not come to that. Do you accept the truce, Drago? I pledge to do everything I can to bring justice for the hideous deeds Magna has done,” Orion said in a solemn tone.

"Yes, Sea King, I have no desire to continue the battle – especially one that fuels the dark magic of the Sea Witch. There has been enough death and destruction. I accept your truce, Sea King, but be warned – the Sea Witch will pay for her treachery if our paths ever cross," Drago said, tilting his wings so the winds could lift him higher.

"I understand. Go in peace, Dragon King," Orion replied.

Drago watched Orion pull on the reins of his sea dragon. The beast eagerly turned and dipped its head. Within seconds, all that was visible was the turbulent sea. Lightning flashed, cutting across the sky, followed by the rolling sound of thunder.

Turning, Drago thought about what Orion had said – a truce, the end of the Great Battle. Peace had finally come to the Seven Kingdoms again, but not before there had been great suffering caused by one woman's greed for power. Rage burned deep inside Drago. He had meant what he'd said to Orion – he would show no mercy to the Sea Witch.

As king of the Isle of the Dragon and ruler over all dragons, it was his duty to keep his people safe. When the Sea Witch had washed up on the shores of the Isle of the Dragon, he had believed her lies. Her body had been shrunken and pale. She had sworn to him that her cousin had gone mad. Her claims that Orion wanted to steal the dragon's hoard of treasure to finance his bid to take over the Isle of the Dragons had sounded foolish until raiders from the sea were captured. They had all said the same thing.

Next, had come the attacks against the dragons flying to other kingdoms. Many had disappeared, having fallen to their deaths into the deep abyss of the ocean that separated each kingdom including his own parents. The Sea Witch, Magna, had whispered in Drago's ear that it wouldn't have happened if only he had the stones of the Trident. If he did, then not only would he control those beneath the waves, he would also have a treasure of unimaginable power.

Drago understood the dangers of controlling an artifact that was not from his realm – to do so could tear the delicate threads of magic holding the Seven Kingdoms together. There was a reason why dragons could not control the trident, just as there was a reason that the people of the sea could not steal the Dragon's Heart. The sacred stones controlled the very essence of each species – water and fire. Each kingdom had an ancient artifact.

His father had groomed him to always take into consideration the far-reaching consequences of his decisions. What good was it to have such a powerful treasure if the world no longer existed? Magna's quiet whispers finally became too much and he had threatened to drop her back into the sea and let Orion deal with her if she did not stop. She had disappeared the next day.

With a loud sigh, Drago soared along the water as fast as his wings could carry him. His body rose and fell with the building waves. Storm clouds swirled high above, and the rumble of thunder and the static

feel of the electricity building in the atmosphere warned of the severe gale about to strike.

He and his guards had been conducting one last patrol of the waters surrounding the island before the storm hit when he had seen Orion. A quick scan of the sky warned him that the squall was likely to turn into a full-fledged cyclone. As if to confirm his thoughts, icy spears of driving rain began to fall in thick, blinding sheets.

Drago was several kilometers away when he heard the first cry for help from his people. Confusion swept through him when more and more cries of terror rang out. Fighting against the savage winds, an uncharacteristic fear drove him onward, pushing him at a reckless pace to reach his home. The fear wasn't for himself, but for his people.

The anguished cries of his people resonated inside his head. His confusion grew when the sounds of their piercing screams suddenly began to fade.

Drago's blood boiled inside him. He snapped his tail like a whip, shattering the sound barrier with its speed, and the crack echoed through the air like lightning. He had been betrayed – but, not by Orion. Something else was attacking his people – something alien to their world.

The cries of the other dragons pierced his soul, making his struggle to reach them seem ineffective. As each voice grew silent, a sense of panic began to wash over him. When there was nothing but a black void where his connection to the other dragons had once been, the panic engulfed him completely.

“No!” Drago roared out, spying the Isle of the Dragon through the rain.

In the distance, he could see a figure on the rocky cliff turning to look at him in triumph – the Sea Witch! Her black hair swirled around her pale form. Dark threads of sorcery radiated outward from her fingers. Drago saw Theron and two other members of his elite guard flying toward her. The dark threads pierced them. Drago watched in disbelief as their bodies stiffened, turning to stone. As if in slow motion, each dragon fell from the sky. Two of the dragons tumbled into the sea and disappeared beneath the waves. Theron’s form crashed to the ground, tumbling over before coming to a standstill – the fire from his dragon frozen for eternity just centimeters from the Sea Witch.

“They are gone, Drago. You are all alone. Give me the Dragon’s Heart and I will give you back your weak, pathetic people,” the Sea Witch whispered, her words carried to him on the wind by magic.

“Never! Die, Witch!” Drago roared.

“I will have it when you are gone. A dragon cannot survive alone for long. Not even your precious treasure will keep you alive,” she retorted with a mocking smile.

Infuriated, Drago released a powerful ball of white dragon fire. The Sea Witch’s mad laughter rose above the sound of the storm as she dove from the cliff into the waves below, disappearing into the dark depths surrounding the island. The dragon fire exploded against the cliff, sending an avalanche of super-heated

rock into the sea below and scorching Theron's frozen form.

Drago scanned the edges of the cliffs. The still figures of his people stared back at him. Their faces forever etched in expressions of horror. All Drago could see was his failure to protect them.

He glided over the edge of the cliff. His powerful wings folded and he dropped down next to Theron and shifted to his two-legged form. He raised a trembling hand to touch his friend and comrade. Grief unlike anything he had ever known surged through him, encasing his heart as if in the same stone that had transformed his people. Tilting his head back, Drago released a roar of rage that spread across the Seven Kingdoms. Each ruler sensed the void and knew that while the Great Battle between them was over, a far deadlier war was about to begin. Fear reached out, wrapping its greedy hands around the hearts and souls of the other inhabitants, then the world stilled when the sound of Drago's roar faded to a deafening silence.

\*.\*.\*

Several days later, Drago stepped back to survey his work. He had all of his people that he could find inside their homes to protect them from the elements. Those that lived and worked in the castle, he had moved to inside the great hall.

He turned his gaze to the figure nearest him. Theron stared back at him. He raised his hand and

ran it over the black streak along the side of the dragon's neck in remorse.

He paused and closed his eyes as the familiar, agonizing shaft of pain ripped through him again. For a moment, he wished it was powerful enough to strike him dead. The pain, emptiness, and feelings of helplessness and remorse were almost more than he could endure.

All of his attempts to locate the Sea Witch through magic had been fruitless. It was as if she no longer existed. Without knowing how she was able to transform his people to stone, there was no way of reversing it. There was nothing else that could be done. Not even the Dragon's Heart had the power to break such a spell – he knew because he had tried to use it. Drawing in a deep breath, he opened his eyes and stiffened his shoulders in determination. One day, the Sea Witch would resurface and when she did, he would be ready. Until then, he would protect those that could not protect themselves.

Drago turned and walked through the doorway of the castle's great hall, shutting the massive doors behind him. He uttered a spell to lock the doors of the room before striding through the double doors leading outside. With a whisper, he cast a spell to enchant the castle. He would do the same for the entire Isle of the Dragon. No one would be able to set foot on the island – not even those of the magical realm. It was a spell no others knew. Those unlucky enough to make their way to the shores would perish, trapped between the high cliffs and the water.

Shifting, he launched himself up into the air. He circled the isle five times, re-enforcing the spell until the mists grew thick and heavy. Only when he was satisfied did he return to the castle. Landing on the top tower, he scanned the isle one last time. This would be the last time he would see it.

Drago blinked and turned his gaze to the ground. Pushing off of the turret, he swept downward. A moment before he impacted with the hard surface of the courtyard, the ground opened and he disappeared inside. The chasm was nearly thirty meters deep, and as he shot through, the opening sealed behind him. He curved his body, swooping down the elaborate stone staircases and through the arched doorways to the massive cavern below. In the deepest chamber, he swept over the sea of treasure until he landed on a mountain of gold coins and jewels. His body slid down the avalanche of treasure to where a large platform towered.

Drago stepped up the stairs to the top. With a swipe of his tail, he brushed off the coins and jewels that had fallen onto the stone platform before turning in a circle and lying down. His gaze swept over the immense wealth of the dragons. In the distance, he could see the replicas of his father and mother. They had been the first to disappear, shortly before the Great Battle had begun. They had traveled to the Isle of the Monsters to see Nali. Their loss had hit him and the other dragons hard.

"I let you down, Father, but I will not give up," Drago vowed, gazing at the statue of his sire. "I have

nothing left to protect but the Dragon's Heart that you hold. I will guard it until the very end."

Drago lowered his head, closed his eyes in grief, and as the silence grew, began the task of guarding the treasure of his people. Soon, hours passed into days, and days passed into weeks. The weeks blended into years, and the years faded into the chasm of emptiness that grew inside Drago. He eventually grew tired, sleeping more as his loneliness and the magic he needed to use to keep his body strong began to take its toll on him. He briefly woke when a slight disturbance shook the isle. The ground trembled beneath him, but he did not sense another's presence and he soon fell back to sleep.

The Dragon's Heart glowed brightly, shimmering as if the Goddess was aware that the last of the dragons was in danger of perishing. Drago was unaware of the huge blood-red diamond rising from its resting place between the claws of his father's statue. Lost in the realm of his dreams, he slept as a nearby passage slowly opened to another world.

## **Additional Books and Information**

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If you would like to read more S.E. Smith stories, she recommends [Touch of Frost](#), the first in her Magic, New Mexico series. Or if you prefer a Paranormal or Western with a twist, you can check out [Lily's Cowboys](#) or [Indiana Wild](#)...

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\*Free Audiobook of The Beast Prince is available:

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## **About the Author**

S.E. Smith is a *New York Times*, *USA TODAY*, *International*, and *Award-Winning* Bestselling author of science fiction, romance, fantasy, paranormal, and contemporary works for adults, young adults, and children. She enjoys writing a wide variety of genres that pull her readers into worlds that take them away.

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