

A year ago October last, Lois Ream, living Matriarch of the Renfro Clan, and reigning Monarch of the Dukedom of Albuquerque by virtue of her union with the late Glenn of Ream, was suddenly and gravely stricken while washing her favorite steed. No longer able to personally conduct affairs of State, she remained, according to her wishes, in her private chambers at her residence on Cottonwood Road, attended by her daughter, the Lady MaryAnn, and her son-in-law, Sir Robert of Moulton, both of whom were schooled in the medical arts. The handling of her properties, accounts, and other affairs, both public and private, was passed to Lady Ream's only male heir, Fred of Cheraz, a skilled academician and Magi of the Calculus at the Central New Mexico Academy. Despite the efforts of her family, friends, and loyal subjects, Lady Ream succumbed to her afflictions on the 30th day of August Last, quietly, and in the company of her daughter.

Almost immediately, a conspiracy of Borgian nature sprang up. The Lady MaryAnn was falsely and secretly accused of providing substandard care for her mother, by a member of the Medical Guild, who to this day remains unidentified. This scurrilous charge was found to be without merit after extensive investigation by the Office of the Under Sheriff of Elder Respect. Despite this finding, the High Plenipotentiary of the Star Chamber of Physician Inquisitors has refused to issue a Finding of Probable Cause of Demise, making it impossible to settle the affairs and estates of the late Duchess, and placing undue hardship upon her heirs and assigns.

As if this were not enough insult to the memory of a fine and gracious lady, only a few weeks past the Winter Storm Gods of the Far Northwest sent an Ice Dragon to torment the Land of Enchantment. For three whole days it ravaged the Dukedom of Albuquerque, sending temperatures plummeting to near freezing, and depositing snow almost to the depth of a man's hand. It's great, gusting breath tumbling yard upon yard of privacy fence. Then, unable to maintain its anger against the sunny disposition of this favored land, it moved on to wreak havoc on the Midwest and Eastern lands.

With the departure of the Ice Dragon, we now find ourselves forced to toil once again in T-shirts and shorts, as we struggle to repair the damage to the battlements of Castle Ream, with only the evening barbecue and perhaps a cold mint julep for solace. It is already too late to prune the rose bushes.

I knowest not when the Machiavellian manifestations of evil bureaucracies may finally be laid to rest, and the ashes of Duchess Ream, Lois of Albuquerque, may finally be scattered alongside those of her late husband in their beloved Jemez Mountains north of the Duke City. When that day finally comes, perhaps the Lady MaryAnn and I will once again venture into the Lands of the Midwest and visit the Duchy of Des Moines. Until then, I shall keep my swords sharp, and like any good scribe, my quills sharper. And should you choose to travel to the West, know that you will be welcome. For here there be no dragons, except the few we have not yet slain.