

In days of yore, when Brian ruled...

In days of yore, when King Brian the Glib ruled the northern realm, the great dragon Deficit ravaged the land.

On moonless nights, when all was still, the monster would emerge from the murky Swamp of the Dismal Science and lay waste. Dollars were eaten away, livelihoods ruined, megaprojects delayed. All manner of evil fell upon the kingdom.

The people were in shock. While the beast prevailed, King Brian and his predecessors had to dip deeper into their subjects' pockets. Taxes gouged from the citizens were used either to hire soldiers to fight Deficit, or to buy treats that were left out to distract the dragon, from juicier prey.

The monster had ranged the kingdom before Brian came to the imperial throne. Indeed, it was his promise to slay the dragon which enabled his followers to overthrow his predecessor, King John the Unfortunate.

At first, the new sovereign had some success. The dragon was confronted and a limb hacked off. It was not a victory, merely a start. But after a period of calm, the dragon returned. A new leg had grown in place of the missing one.

And when Brian tried to raise dragon-fighting funds by taking back money from the kingdom's elderly, things began going wrong.

One day, as Brian strolled about the courtyard, an elderly woman stood before him. She wagged a finger, and was heard to utter: "Goodbye, Charlie Brown."

The king retreated in fear. So ended his First Crusade.

At first, the guardian of the king's treasure, Sir Michael the Bland, could not understand what had occurred. Brian seemed to have lost his courage, his taste for battle.

MAGIC SPELL

Sir Michael concluded that the old woman was a witch, and her words a magical incantation. Brian was under an evil spell.

The dragon's depredations seemed to be getting worse. So, the king and his wise men and women sought out a treaty with a powerful neighboring kingdom in the hope it might provide some distraction for the people.

The alliance, Brian hoped, would also provide increased riches with which to fight the beast.

For a time, it worked, and behold, the people once again rallied to the king's banner.

Yet no sooner had he triumphed, than people - including many of his own devoted followers - began talking aloud about the peril of the dragon again.

The merchants, who had always backed him, gathered together. "The dragon Deficit must be slain," they declared. "It matters not what our losses in battle will be, but this beast must be laid to rest, or we shall never live in peace again."

Many of the merchants offered to fight. They rode to the royal palace, clad in heavy armor, and mounted on gaily decorated chargers, to pledge their allegiance. They clashed their gilded swords against burnished shields and vowed to slay the dragon in its lair.

HEAVY BURDEN

But then, someone recalled that to kill the monster, they would have to cross the Dismal Science Swamp. Burdened by their armor, the merchant-knights and their horses would sink in the mire and be useless in combat.

"Of course," they said, "we're willing to do our part. But it would be better if the dragon were to be slain by more manoeuvrable foot-soldiers who, with light trappings and weapons, can skip across the bogland to the dragon's lair."

And so it came to pass that the king commanded all the low and middle-income footsoldiers and militia to his palace. When they arrived, he surveyed them.

They were a motley lot. Their weapons were broken or bent swords, scythes, and rusty pike-poles. Their unkempt uniforms left even more to be desired.

"They don't look like an army to me," King Brian muttered to Sir Michael. "And their clothes! Phew!"

"Still," Sir Michael urged, "they are the way to kill the dragon."

So, with the king's blessing, the ragtag army began the march across the swamp.

Not long afterward, a few stragglers returned in defeat to the king. "The dragon destroyed us, sire," they wailed. "We are the only survivors."

Soon, the worst fears of the king came true. The fearful dragon's appetite had been whetted by the tasty footsoldiers, and the beast became ever bolder. And soon the merchant warriors began disappearing, one after another.

Knight, after knight, after knight...

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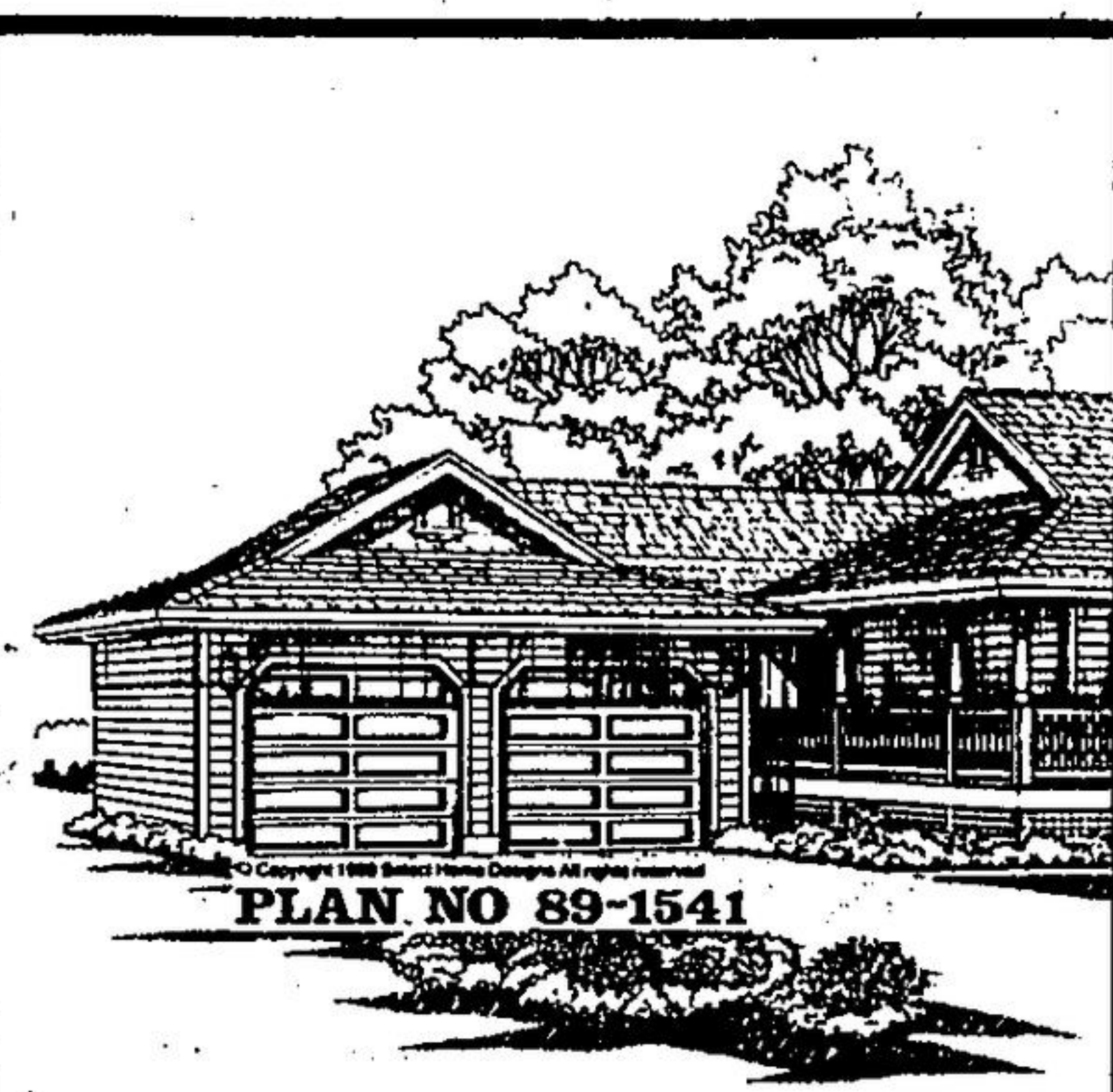
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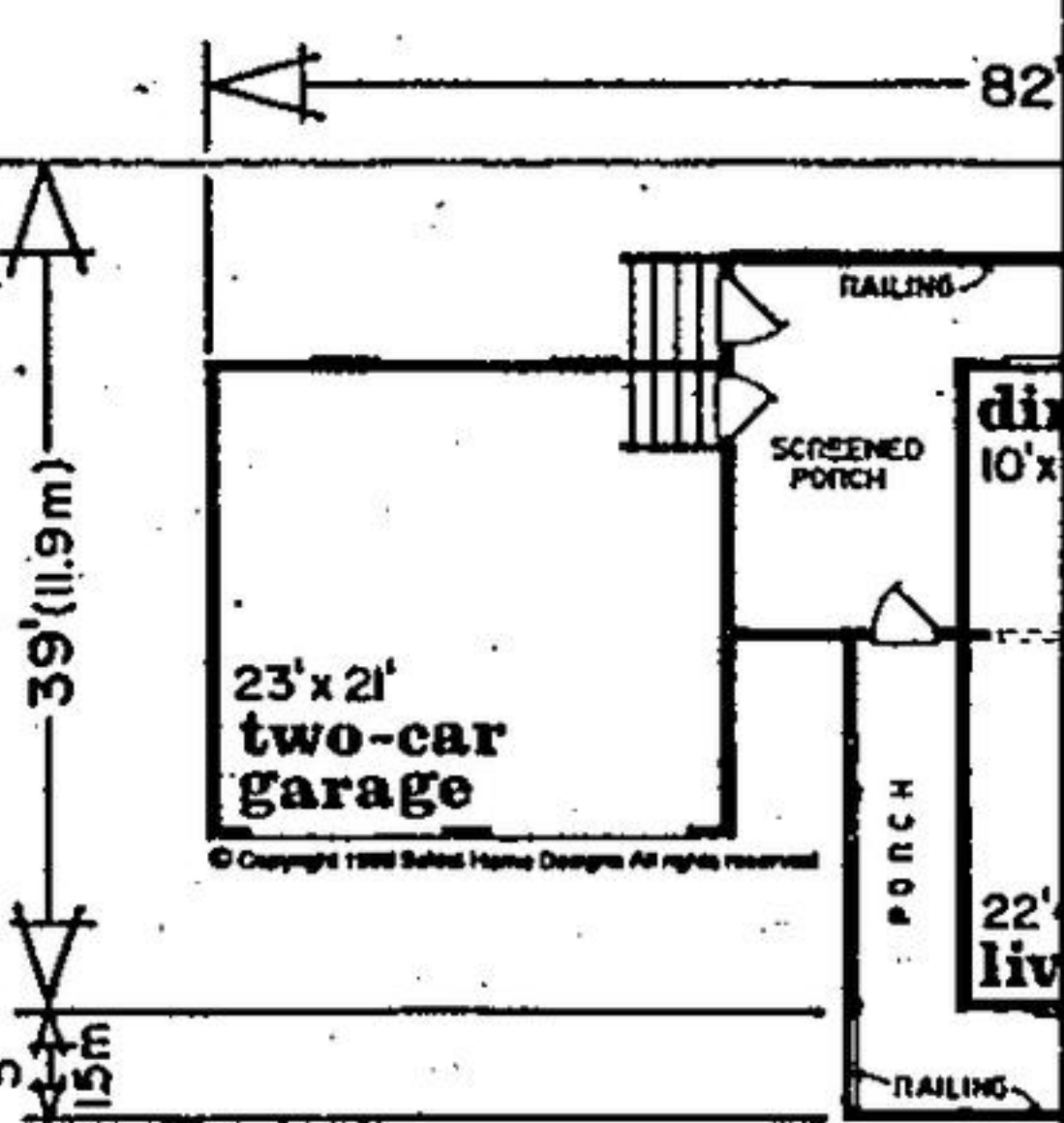
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The master bedroom features a roomy wall closet, double door access to the verandah and three-piece en-

CTV scores with double

Entertainment

Bob Spence
Thomson News Service

Coming to a living room near you soon... Major League Baseball. CTV, which will be airing both Toronto Blue Jay and Montreal Expo games this year, starts its coverage with the Blue Jay season-opener in Kansas City on April 3 (3:30 p.m. ET). The Expos make their CTV debut with their season-and home-opener April 4 (1:30 p.m. ET). The Pittsburgh Pirates are the opposition.

Allan Carr wants to double your pleasure. The producer of the 61st annual Academy Awards is using "famous pairs" as presenters at this year's awards show, March 29. Rain Main, the story of a brash young man's (Tom Cruise) cross-country journey with his autistic savant brother (Dustin Hoffman), has garnered eight nominations and may end up with the most Oscars.

The awards show will be aired in Canada by CTV.

What would dinosaurs look like today if they hadn't become extinct 65 million years ago? Dougal Dixon has an answer. Using a potent blend of science and imagination, Dixon has created 20th-century dinosaurs.

The scientist/author, who studied geology and paleontology at the University of St. Andrews, creates an alternate zoology in his latest book, *The New Dinosaurs*. He devotes a few pages to the various theories of why dinosaurs disappeared - (most are tied to changes in weather patterns, with one theory being that a giant meteorite struck the Earth, sparking the climatic changes). But *The New Dinosaurs* (Deneau Publishers) is not about what happened, but how dinosaurs would have evolved.

Dixon populates the planet with some rather strange creatures, complete with habitats and food-chain. The richly detailed artwork is spectacular.

Creatures such as the tromble, a 10-foot-tall, flightless bird with legs as massive as tree trunks, stalk through Dixon's world - a world that seems to get along just fine without homo sapiens.

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