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Adaptation of "Snuggles the Dragon," a character by Sadie DragonFire <xian_pu@excite.com>, used by permission.

"Snuggles the Dragon"

"Get back," Hiei growled, his red eyes glowing. Dark fire swirled around him and the feel of his power signature changed.

The rest of the team hurriedly obeyed, staring with wide eyes and stunned expressions at their team mate.

When the transformation was complete, Hiei's diminutive near-human form with the spiky black hair was gone. Instead, standing there calmly was a monster who looked down upon the group as Kuwabara had looked down upon Hiei. The deep red eyes were the only familiar sight, yet even those were as large as a whole cat each, set back within the scaly head peering both off to the sides and in front of the monster. The long body stretched down the road and an even longer tail was idly twining around a pine tree. The claws were foot-long talons. Along its body were overlapping scales that were darker than night, blacker than onyx, yet each was outlined with a white starburst that defined the scales yet blended with the whole. On the long neck, soft blue fur spiked out in a ridge-line as stiff as a crest, yet also gave the impression of a horse's mane if it would only settle down. Huge, leathery bat-like wings arched up from its back and slowly opened, stretching out to a great width. As dust and leaves swirled away and the body of the huge monster lifted slightly from the ground, it was obvious the wings were not merely decoration. Then the wings folded back and the monster settled back to the ground. Opening its long mouth revealed six inch ivory fangs within, gleaming as blue-tinted smoke poured out. "Hn. Stop looking so surprised."

Yusuke tried to put his mouth back as he stuttered, "But, but, but... Hiei -- you're a dragon!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

The dragon shrugged, a motion that involved its whole body from snout to tail. "What did you think I meant when I said I needed to change? And in this form, I'm not called Hiei."

"You want us to call you 'sir' instead?" Kuwabara retorted, only half-joking as he started at the dragon.

The dragon reared up and spread his wings out, stretching them so the edges gleamed in the sun. More smoke poured on the ground as the long jaw dropped down again, revealing the sharp teeth all

over again. "In this form...", the deep voice deepened even more dramatically and the ground shook and the trees vibrated with the bass sound that crept up the humans' feet and into their bones, "I am the Great Terrible Dragon from the Land of Fire and Rage!!!" As he pronounced his name, black and red flames poured like water off his body, sparks flew from his wings, and the white starbursts on his scales all flashed for an instant, nearly blinding those who watched.

As the ground around the dragon smoked, the small group stood stunned, hearing the truth within the Name and instinctively fearing it.

After a moment went by, the dragon folded his wings and coughed lightly, "But my friends just call me Snuggles."

Kurama and Yusuke fell over laughing as Kuwabara stared.

Still laughing, Kurama got up and approached the dragon for the first time, his green eyes gleaming with mischief and fun, "Oh, now aren't you just the cutest little thing, my little Snug-wum, adorable little dragon-mine, Snuggles." He reached up and scratched the bony ridge of the eye closest to him as the red orb looked down.

"Don't push it, Kurama..." the dragon warned. But nobody was too impressed with the words as the dragon's eyelid half-lidded and swirls of rainbow color within the white of the eye showed his contentment. As Kurama continued his ministrations, a low rumbling sound from within the dragon's chest shook the ground.

Yusuke shook his head, "A purring dragon? Hiei, you're certainly an original." Studying the form of the dragon, Yusuke walked closer, but not quite as close as Kurama.

The other eye was still open and watching him. "I was serious about the name – Just call me Snuggles."

Yusuke blinked, "You're kidding."

The dragon's mouth opened again, but instead of saying anything, a long forked tongue extended out and thoroughly swept over Yusuke's face and hair, licking and tickling before retreating back again. "Any more comments?"

Yusuke was sputtering and laughing at the same time, wiping his face and trying to brush his hair

back into the proper shape. "Alright! Snuggles it is!"

With a sardonic snort and a grin that promised teasing for years to come, Kuwabara finally came forward, "So, if we've got that sorted out... Are we ready to go now, 'Snuggles'?" He snickered as he said the name.

The dragon growled, shaking his head and gently pushing Kurama and Yusuke to the side. "You have to call me Great Terrible Dragon from the Land of Fire and Rage!"

Kuwabara stopped where he stood, a stricken look on his face.

The dragon studied him for a moment, "Unless you make the appropriate sacrifice."

"Sacrifice???" Kurama and Yusuke spoke in surprised unison, glancing at each other to make sure the other didn't know either.

Red orbs fondly looked down at them, "Of course. Virgins are always sacrificed to Dragons, didn't you know that?"

Yusuke turned a scarlet color while Kurama looked up skeptically. With dry tones, Kurama remarked, "Snuggles – there are a lot of things I've been called in the last 600 years, but 'virgin' hasn't been one of them since I was a kit. And it wasn't you I 'sacrificed' the title to."

The dragon chuckled, a very odd sound coming from such a mean-looking creature, "But you'd never taken a mate before, so I have taken your virgin soul." The tongue flicked out again and licked over Kurama's face, without as much moisture as he'd used with Yusuke.

Kurama laughed and fondly regarded the dragon, "Okay, I'll give you that one."

"Virgin???" Kuwabara was staring at Yusuke, "Uramishi... you didn't!!!"

Yusuke turned even redder than red and glanced up at the dragon, "Umm..."

The dragon laughed, shaking the ground with his mirth, "I also accept peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches."

"Peanut-butter..." Kuwabara's attention was diverted again, "You sneak! You want my lunch!!!"

The forked tongue swept over the sharp teeth and licked his chops hungrily, "Changing shapes takes a lot of energy."

Kuwabara rolled his eyes and dug through his backpack, finally coming up with a small package. He glanced up at the large mouth, "Want me to unwrap it first?"

"Don't bother, just toss it over."

Kuwabara complied, and the lunch package was snapped out of the air by the dragon's mouth. One gulp and it was gone. With another lick of his chops, the dragon remarked, "That's better. Okay, you can call me Snuggles, too." The fur over his neck ruffled in a wave as the dragon grinned.

The tabloid held for a moment more before the dragon extended a foreleg, kneeling down, "Climb up on my back and let's get going. Sit between my mid-back up to the neck. You can grab onto my scales, but watch out for my wings!"

With shared grins and then a reversion back to the seriousness that the mission required, the other three followed the directions. The long wings swept up and down and then they were up in the air and flying away on the back of the Great Terrible Dragon from the Land of Fire and Rage, on their way to defeat evil and restore balance to the Worlds.

"And they all lived Happily Ever After."
The End.