

## Dreams and Schemes

### My Decade of Fun in the Sun

Steve Lopez

#### Playing Footsie with a Dragon's Basic Instinct

All I have to say is this: If my wife were to tell me that as a special Father's Day gift, she was going to put me into a cage with a seven-foot lizard, I would start sleeping with one eye open. I might check in with the life insurance agent, too, and see if there were any recent changes in the policy.

You know the story.

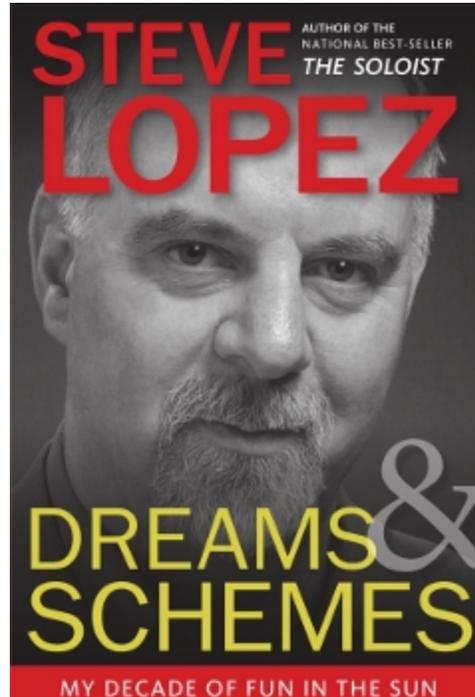
San Francisco newspaper editor Phil Bronstein came to Los Angeles with his wife, actress Sharon Stone, and special arrangements were made for him to have some private time with the Komodo dragon at the L.A. Zoo. Bronstein, as I understand it, was instructed by the zookeeper to remove his white sneakers before entering the dragon's domain, so the beast would not mistake his feet for rats.

Now look. I have worked for seven newspapers and a lot of editors, and none of them came within eight yards of normal. But if you had scraped them off a barroom floor at two a.m. and asked if they'd enter a cage with an animal that might mistake their feet for rats, they would have had the sense to stand clear. They don't even like contact with readers, let alone exotic animals.

Have you seen pictures of this Komodo dragon, by the way? Its head looks like a boulder with eyeballs. The dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* looked friendlier, and they were eating SUVs. Bronstein apparently likes these things, though. Or at least Stone managed to convince him that he would.

"No, really honey. Just scratch him behind the ears and he'll roll over on his back."

So he goes in with the lizard while Stone watches from outside the cage. The same Sharon Stone who got rich and famous playing a woman suspected of whacking her lovers with an ice pick. Not to read into this. But Stone and Bronstein hadn't been married 10 minutes when, out of the blue, he develops a heart problem. And then, with a rebuilt ticker and no note from his cardiologist, she sends him into the cage with a dragon.



*Basic Instinct II: Return of the Dragon Lady.*

"Of course I loved my husband, detective. Why do you ask?"

And what does this dragon do upon realizing that a member of the media has dropped by unannounced? It goes for the newspaper editor like a shark after chum. It chomps down on his big toe with the jaws of life and won't let go.

Maybe the dragon has read *The Chronicle*. Maybe it knew that Bronstein and Stone hadn't paid admission to the zoo or made a donation either, as others in the privileged and pampered set have done before getting the royal treatment.

Bronstein, having married into show business, makes like Crocodile Dundee. He manages to free himself from the Komodo dragon and escape through a trapdoor, and they run him to the hospital for foot surgery.

Happy Father's Day.

All things considered, it could have been worse than a big toe. Joe Brown, a *Chronicle* spokesman, said Bronstein was in stable condition and was doing some work Tuesday from his hospital bed. My guess is that across the country, newsroom reporters are taking up collections to send their own editors to the L.A. Zoo. It's a shame that when he visited L.A. to tell us we could take our energy problem and drop dead, no one arranged for President Bush to get a special tour.

The dragon, by the way, is doing fine, not that anyone asked. Lora LaMarca, zoo spokeswoman, described a dragon that seemed to be quite pleased with itself. Maybe this is a north-south thing with the lizard. LaMarca confirmed the dragon never bit anyone from L.A. Next time the San Francisco Giants come down to play the Dodgers, someone ought to arrange for Barry Bonds to stop by the zoo.

LaMarca says the dragon that ate Phil Bronstein is now unavailable for private viewings, but that's a big mistake, if you ask me. This thing is world-famous now, and it could be worth a fortune. I'd bet the mortgage that people would pay for a chance to tempt fate. If you have faith and your heart is pure, He'll protect you in that cage, won't He?

Bronstein must not be a believer. Or maybe there's a cosmic force for universal justice, and it says that if you're going to win Sharon Stone as your wife, at some point you're going to be attacked by a seven-foot reptile. From one hack to another, Phil, if she starts hinting at something special for Christmas, run for the hills.