Andy Shepherd



The Boy Who Lived With Dragons

Illustrated by Sara Ogilvie



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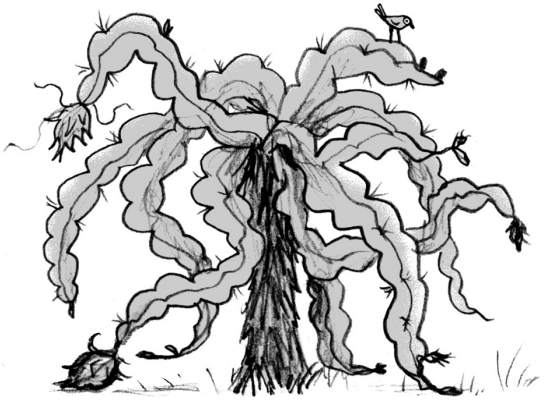
Welcome all you dragon-seeking desperadoes!

I'm guessing you've picked this book up for one of two reasons.

Either:

You've been hearing about how we grow dragons and you want to get in on all that juicy fire-breathing action.

In which case you need to go find yourself one of these:



Or:

You've found yourself a dragon-fruit tree already, hatched yourself a dragon and now have no clue what to do next.

How do I know this? Because neither did we.

After I found the dragon-fruit tree in Grandad's garden, and Flicker – that's my dragon – hatched out in my bedroom, things changed pretty quick. Not just because it sort of affects how you look at the world – I mean, if you can find a dragon in your bedroom on an otherwise normal Sunday, what else is possible? But also because he wasn't the only one. Not after my best mates Ted, Kat and Kai decided they wanted one too.

But just like you would be, we were too busy getting ourselves dragons to really wonder what having a dragon would actually be like.

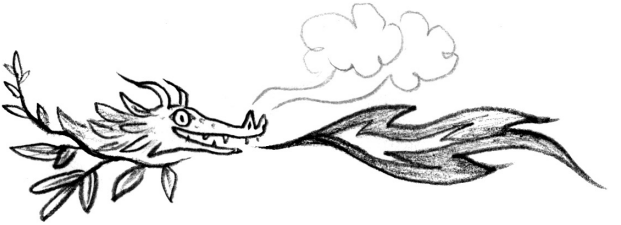
I bet it all sounds magical, doesn't it? Growing a dragon. And it totally is, don't get me wrong. But let me tell you, when the fire-breathing really kicks in and you're getting singed every five seconds, it's like having



a very unpredictable volcano in your pocket. Then it all starts to feel a bit less magical. Just something to bear in mind, my dragon devotees.

So get some oven gloves, be prepared to hide your holey pants and, above all, listen up. Because I'm about to show you what living with dragons is really like.





1
Solaris the Destroyer

'My pants!' Ted cried as I opened the door. 'Grab them!'

OK, I know it's not what you usually expect your best mate to say when you walk into their room, but listen, once you have a dragon you need to be prepared for anything.

'I can't lose another pair out the window! That'll be the fourth in the last two days,' he wailed.

I ducked as Sunny, Ted's golden dragon, swooped over my head. He'd crawled into Ted's pants and was wearing them like battle armour. A fiery blast shot out and scorched the lampshade as the dragon circled

above us. Flicker had been happily curled up in my pocket, but now he wriggled his way out. He hovered beside me while I tried to grab the pants, before they disappeared out of the open window.

'They better be clean,' I wheezed, dropping them and coughing on the trails of smoke the dragon's breath had left behind.

'They were until he got in them,' Ted moaned. 'Now they're probably singed – or worse.'

We both knew what he meant by worse. You see, dragon poo has this pretty unpleasant habit of exploding when it dries out. And sure enough, seconds later, Ted's pants detonated spectacularly. Sunny zipped up to the top of the wardrobe while we stood there with foul-smelling shreds raining down on us.

'So, things going OK then?' I grinned. 'You know, in among the exploding poo and being on twenty-four-hour Scorch Alert?'

Ted burst out laughing. 'Well, that's Sunny for you.'

Ted had actually named his dragon Solaris the Destroyer. I think he was imagining him as his superhero sidekick and wanted to give him a name that could conjure fear in all Ted's enemies. Or at least in Liam Sawston who is our arch-nemesis. Not that we were about to share the secret of the dragons with him – we were spending most of our time trying to make sure that nosy parker didn't find out about the dragons!

But let's face it, having a dragon called Solaris the Destroyer in your pocket kind of gave you the edge a bit. Anyway Solaris the Destroyer only lasted a day because by his second morning Ted had decided to call him Sunny. Officially this is because Sunny is his dragon's alter ego, like Spider-Man is actually Peter Parker. But really – and this is just between us – it's because Ted is scared of the dark. And Sunny is the best nightlight ever. The little dragon curls up next to him and glows, casting comforting orange light around the room. So Ted ended up feeling he was far too friendly for a name like Solaris the Destroyer. But like I say, that's just between us.



I was going to call my dragon Scorch, after the first night I got him when he singed everything in sight. But the thing is, he changes colour. He flickers. So Flicker just suited him. Most of the time he's red, although even then he can't always decide what shade to be so he ends up shimmering through bright crimson all the way to deep ruby. When he's settling down to sleep on my sister Lolli's lap his scales ripple turquoise, a colourful quiver of contentment. But if Tomtom, our

cat, starts stalking him, he flares electric orange. The best thing is when I lie in bed with him curled up next to me and he starts glowing like a hot ember. And I fall asleep with him warming my dreams.

'Where've Kat and Kai got to?' Ted asked.

The twins, the other two members of our superhero squad, were always late and so it was no surprise that they still hadn't appeared. In fact, now they had two dragons to contend with they had the perfect excuse.

Ted's stomach gurgled like an angry drain and he grinned apologetically.

'What you mean is, "Where have the snacks got to?"' I said.

'Well, yeah. Those too. I can't keep anything edible in my room these days. Not when I leave Sunny in here on his own. Did you know a blue whale eats the equivalent of six thousand chocolate bars a day? Well, I reckon Sunny would have a good go at smashing that record if I left him to it.'

Flicker, who'd settled next to me, sneezed, sending a glittering spray of sparks into the air. As usual – thanks to my lightning reflexes – they were all snuffed out before they'd even landed.

'Impressive,' nodded Ted. 'Sunny's less into the non-stop sparking. He's more of a one-blast kind of dragon. And he usually only does it when he's eaten. Honestly, he has the most fiery farts. And talk about an explosive belch!'

'But didn't you say he eats all the time?' I said, looking round his room and realising there was less evidence of burning than you might expect.

'Yeah,' Ted said with a shrug. 'But mostly I can tell it's coming and point the right end outside in time, before he causes too much damage. That's why I have to hide the snacks. If I know when he's eaten, I know roughly when he's likely to blow up!'

It wasn't foolproof though – as we were about to find out.