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JAMIE SMART



FLEMBER
THE GOLDEN HEART

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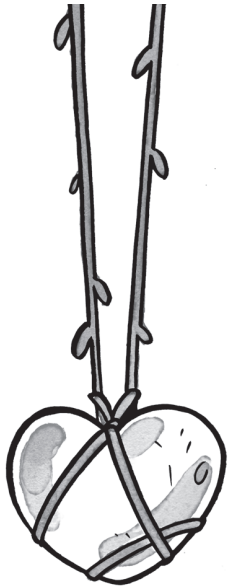
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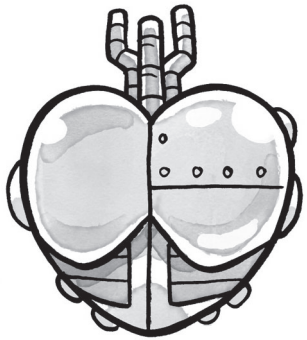
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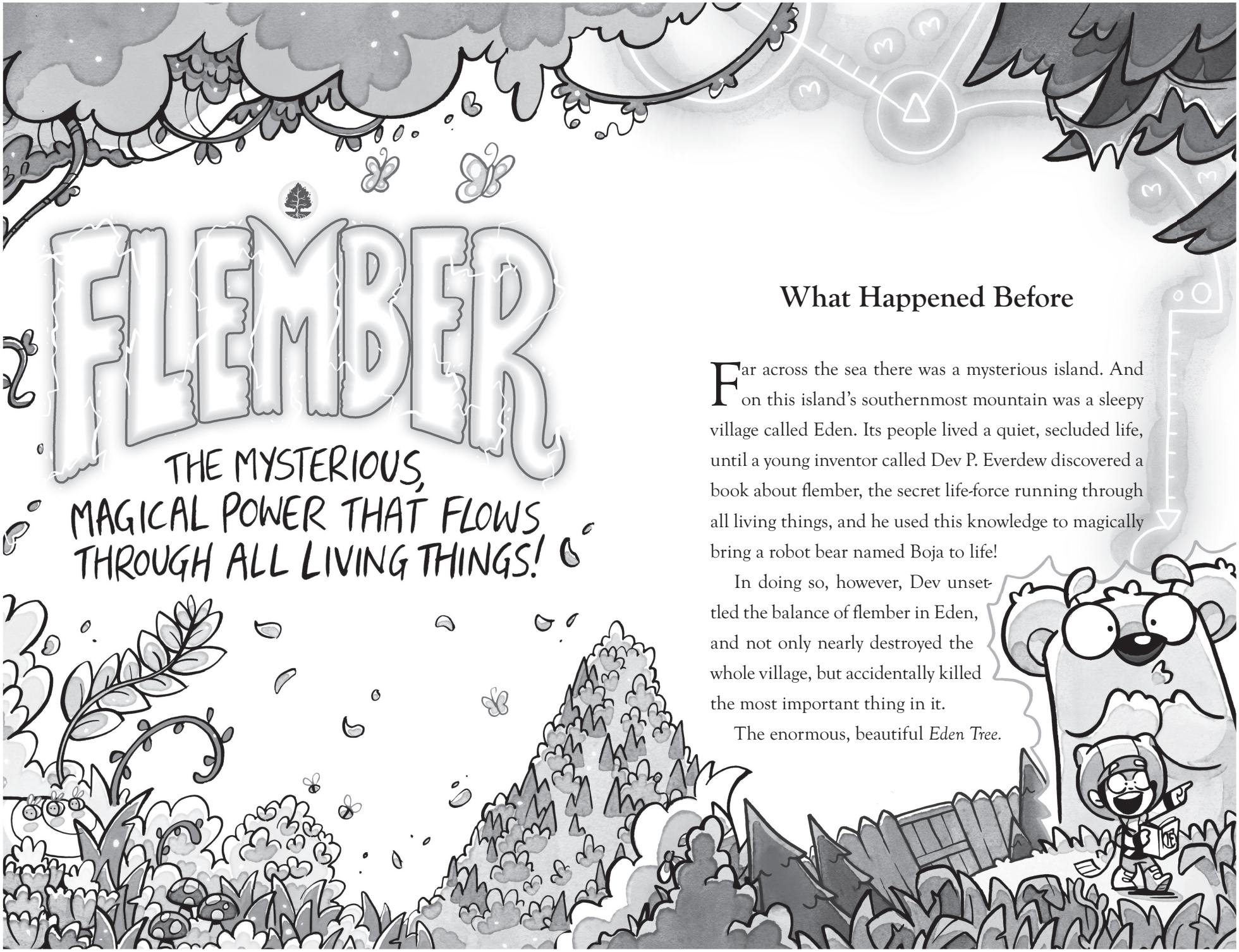
Dad, this all started with you.

Mum, it finished with you.

Dedicated to you both.



Flember goes where it belongs

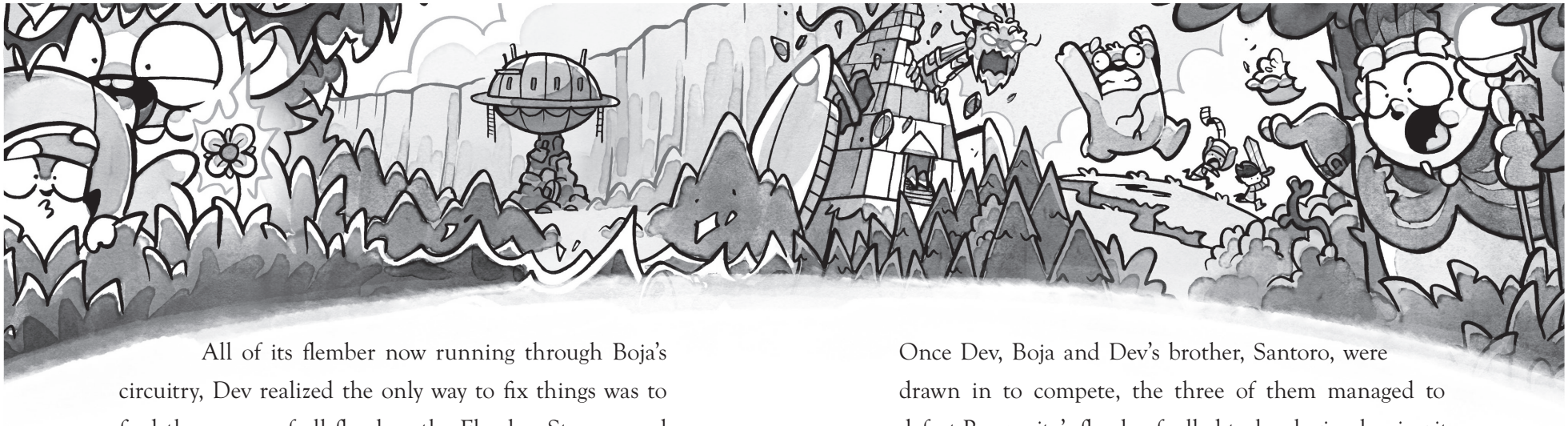


What Happened Before

Far across the sea there was a mysterious island. And on this island's southernmost mountain was a sleepy village called Eden. Its people lived a quiet, secluded life, until a young inventor called Dev P. Everdew discovered a book about flember, the secret life-force running through all living things, and he used this knowledge to magically bring a robot bear named Boja to life!

In doing so, however, Dev unsettled the balance of flember in Eden, and not only nearly destroyed the whole village, but accidentally killed the most important thing in it.

The enormous, beautiful *Eden Tree.*



All of its flember now running through Boja's circuitry, Dev realized the only way to fix things was to find the source of all flember, the Flember Stream, and use it to save the Eden Tree. So, guided by the glowing map in his flember book, he and Boja snuck out into the scary, unknown world of *Flember Island.*

Having survived the dangerous Wildening forests, Dev and Boja first arrived at the small mining town of Darkwater. It was a harsh, desolate place, with barely any flember, but thanks to a little ingenuity, and Boja's explosive farting, Dev managed to bring the town together.

Still looking for flember, they headed on to a bright, modern city called Prosperity. Here they found a society *divided* by flember, forced to fight each other in epic games, hoping for a chance at equality.

Once Dev, Boja and Dev's brother, Santoro, were drawn in to compete, the three of them managed to defeat Prosperity's flember-fuelled technologies, leaving it a fairer place to live.

As a prize, Boja was allowed to carry some extra flember home to revive the Eden Tree. But their journey back would not be simple. The dark wolves that had pursued them all this far chased them deeper into the Wildening, forcing Dev to confront some of his deepest fears, and risking Boja's life. Only by learning the secrets of flember from the island itself could Dev become more powerful, rescue his brother from the monstrous robot called Senba, and save Boja — his best friend.

Stronger for all they'd endured, Dev, Boja and Santoro continued their quest to carry Boja's flember back to Eden.

That is, until one of the dark wolves lured Dev away.



PART ONE

THE CASTLE IN THE MOUNTAINS





1

A Hold

Follow the wolf.
Bring the bear.

The words echoed through Dev's mind.
Over. And over. And over.

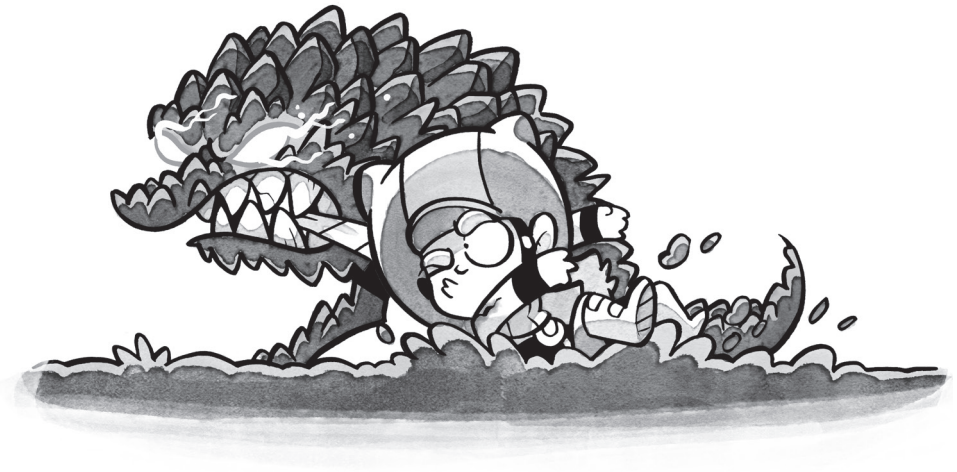
Follow the wolf.
Bring the bear.
Bring the bear.
Bring the bear.

And then, other sounds drowned it out.

SQUELCH! SLPPP! FRRRPPPP! Dev woke to the noises of wet mud squelching around him. Something was tugging his body along the ground. Something huge. Something snorting warm, stinky breaths down his neck.

He opened his eyes to see huge, heavy paws slamming into the mud. Powerful black legs, spiked from ankle to haunch. Two glowing red eyes, and below them, a row of snarling, jagged black teeth clamped around his scarf.

The *dark wolf*.



'Where are you TAKING ME?' With a sharp YANK, Dev tore himself away. His limbs felt weak. His head was swimming. He grabbed onto the nearest tree and smeared the mud from his eyes. 'SANTORO!' he yelled. 'BOJA! WHERE ARE YOU?'

He paused. Blinked through the drizzle.

'Wait. Where am *I*?'

From his boots onwards, all Dev could see was marshland. Thick, and squelchy. Sloping and uneven. Clumps of wet grass poked up between the bent, broken lines of the trees. The drizzle thickened into mist around its edges, surrounding Dev, hemming him in, forcing him closer to the wolf.

Locking them together.

His heart hammering in his ears, Dev turned, about to run, when suddenly the wolf's sharp teeth chomped angrily onto his backpack. The straps STRE-E-E-E-ETCH-ed across his shoulders. The bottom of it R-I-I-I-I-I-I-IPPP-ed open. The flember book dropped like a weight from inside, scattering its pages across the mud.

And with a loud *SQUELCH*, Dev tumbled onto his bum amongst them.

He watched the last few pages drift calmly, gently, down. The weakness in his limbs was starting to subside. A quiet filled his mind. And then, a fire lit inside Dev Everdew's belly. 'That was my FATHER'S BOOK,' he growled, steadying himself in the mud. He held his hand over the flemberthyst on his chest, and let the warm, tingling glow of his own flember surge through his body.

'And I'm taking it home.'

He charged at the wolf, bellowing noises he'd never known he could make. As the wolf clawed at the mud,



snarling, Dev dropped, sliding between its legs before tumbling out behind it. The wolf swung around but Dev had already leapt one foot, next foot, up a mound of rocks, and he threw himself down upon the wolf from above.

'This whole journey,' he snarled, gripping its rocky black skin as the wolf turned, and thrashed, and gnashed its teeth at him. 'This WHOLE JOURNEY you've been following us. Chasing us. ATTACKING US!' This close to the wolf, he could feel his own flember ebbing again. The twisted black veins across his arm started to ache. His head was swimming. But he held firm. His fingers clenched around the wolf's spines, wisps of sparkling blue flember trailing across his muddy arms. 'What do you want with us? WHAT DO YOU WANT?'

A spark.

Somewhere deep inside of them both.

At exactly the same moment.

Suddenly Dev could feel not just his own flember, but that of the dark wolf too. He could feel the creature's strength, its power. Its *anger.* For the splittest of split seconds, his flember had touched against it.

They had connected.

And he could see *inside* the wolf.

With one sharp, sudden lunge, the wolf threw up its rear end and sent Dev spinning back into the mud. Before Dev knew what was happening it was standing over him, glaring down at him through its blazing red eyes. A low, rattling growl echoed up from deep inside its chest. Strings of glistening spit hung between its sharp black teeth.

'Your flember . . . it flows *red*,' Dev gasped. 'You're being controlled. All this time, someone . . . some . . . *thing* . . . has been controlling you!'

He stared into the wolf's blazing red eyes as if hypnotized.

'Who's in there?' he whispered. 'Who's telling you to bring them Boja?'

'*HWOOOOOARGHHHHHH!*' It echoed through the mist. A ground-shaking, tree-rattling, mud-wobbling battle cry. It carried upon an almighty pounding – *STOMP STOMP STOMP* – which sent a rumbling deep through Dev's bones. He knew that noise. As a smile cracked between his muddy cheeks, he watched the huge, clumsy red shape of Boja – flember boots blazing across his feet, bright crackling gauntlets swirling around his fists – throw himself face-first into the mud with the loudest *SPLUTCH* of all.

Thick lumps splattered across Dev, across the wolf, raining back down upon Boja as he lifted up his face and grinned his goofiest of grins.

'BOJA!' Dev beamed. 'YOU FOUND ME!'

'MUST . . . PROTECT . . . DEV!' Boja growled, catching sight of the wolf. Angry sparks flickered behind his eyes. He pulled himself up, flember gauntlets balled into fists, his body wrapped in some kind of mud-soaked tunic.



Bright, glowing flember billowed out from deep inside him. His teeth were clenched so tightly, a few muddy bubbles spilled out from somewhere around his bottom.

The wolf didn't respond. It barely even looked at Boja. Instead, it cast Dev one last silent look, then it turned tail, disappearing into the gloom.

Like a shadow chased away by the light.

The marks across Dev's arm settled back down into scratches. He let out a huge sigh of relief.

'Thank you, Boja!' he wept, throwing his arm around the big muddy bear's leg. 'Thank you for coming to get me!'

'Called my *name*!' Boja beamed, his flember calming; gauntlets, boots subsiding, as he turned and wrapped his arms around Dev. 'I heard you! BOHHHH-JAHHHH!'

'THERE you are!' Santoro stumbled out from between the trees. His hair was ruffled, his flember armour muddy, as he used his huge, broad sword like a giant walking stick. 'I said to Boja, we're looking for Dev together, so don't run off without me. DIDN'T I SAY THAT?'

Boja giggled, then let out a few more muddy bubbles. Santoro grimaced. Then he saw Dev. He ran to him, clenching him into a hug so tight Dev thought his ribs might crack.

'I saw inside the wolf, Santoro,' Dev whispered. 'I connected with its flember. I didn't mean to, I just . . . It's red. The dark wolves, their flember is RED. They're following instructions. Follow the wolf, bring the bear. Someone wants BOJA!'

Santoro pulled away. Then he glanced to Boja, who waved cheerfully back. '*Who* wants Boja?' he asked.

Dev knelt down, pulling the covers of the flember book out from the mud as he started gathering up the pages. 'I'm not sure. But we're going home,' he said, hoping his brother wouldn't see how much his hands were shaking.

'We're going home as fast as we can.'

