PREVIEW EDITION

WHERE THE DRAGON WAITS

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

This story started as an image in my mind. It was a scene containing two people, unconscious, viewed as though looking down from a height, through a lens or a mirror or something. It arrived as a random thought, but immediately hooked me. And I felt that thrill that says 'This is the end of an unknown story, and I am going to tell it'.

I had no idea yet what the story was, only that it involved an accident. The pangolin, wolves, Dragon, butterflies, Orc, Realm and Rift, turned up and bound themselves into the tale as it wove itself together. And now it is done. And, excitingly, it is time to share that strange scene and its story with you. I so hope you find it as much fun as I did.

(Oh, and please don't mind Halfear. He's always like that.)

Tom Moorhouse

FICTION 240 pp ISBN 978-1-78845-383-7 Publication Date: 15th January 2026 Price: £7.99 Format: Paperback	Territorial Rights: World all languages David Fickling Books 31 Beaumont Street Oxford OX1 2NP www.davidficklingbooks.com

For PR requests, please contact Fraser Hutchinson pr@davidficklingbooks.com @DFB_storyhouse
For rights requests, please contact Bronwen Bennie bron@davidficklingbooks.com

Where the Dragon Waits
is a
DAVID FICKLING BOOK

First published in Great Britain by
David Fickling Books,
31 Beaumont Street,
Oxford, OX1 2NP
www.davidficklingbooks.com

EU Rep: Authorised Rep Compliance Ltd.,
Ground Floor, 71 Lower Baggot Street,
Dublin D02 P593, Ireland.
www.arccompliance.com

Text © Tom Moorhouse, 2025

978-1-78845-383-7

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

The right of Tom Moorhouse to be identified as the
author of this work has been asserted in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by
any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or
otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Papers used by David Fickling Books are from
well-managed forests and other responsible sources.



DAVID FICKLING BOOKS Reg. No. 8340307

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 11.5/18 pt Sabon by Falcon Oast Graphic Art Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

For Shona

And so we must fight by the side of the Knight,
As we strike for the mountaintop high,
Where the Dragon awaits by a far distant lake,
In the hope that we might make her cry.
– A rhyme from a long-ago childhood

[Voices, a long way off, like they are speaking in a different room and the sound is being carried down pipes or echoey corridors, so they come out thin, and tinny.]

Our boy, lying there.

He's tough, he'll be all right.

You don't know that. Critical condition, that's what that doctor said. And he doesn't answer anything. He doesn't move.

He's critical but stable. Stable. I'm holding on to that.

But all those machines . . .

Are helping him.

[A pause.] But what if he doesn't . . . you know?

What?
Wake up. Ever.
He will. You'll see.
Will I? Why hasn't he yet?
He'll come back when he's ready.
I hope so. He has to.

Chapter 1

'Ed, you ever get that sinking feeling?' said his dad. 'Because you're about to.'

'What?'

'We're going to crash.'

Ed blinked. He fumbled at the tiller and pulled the boat around. The marker buoy – a chunk of floating metal, with its flashing red light – eased away until it was safely off to their right. Then Ed settled the boat back on course, up the channel towards the harbour.

'Sorry,' said Ed. 'Sorted.'

'Excellent, so we're going to live,' his dad grinned. 'Do me a favour and stay alert. It'd be bad if we hit one of those.'

'Yeah, I know.' Ed gazed over the rail of their tiny

yacht. The moon was up. Its reflection scattered across the sea as waves slapped and hissed against the hull. And apart from the hum of a rope in the wind, those were the only sounds. It was very late to be sailing home. 'Sorry,' he said, again.

'S'alright,' said his dad. 'I'm here to help. Especially if it means we don't have to swim.'

Ed smiled. Dad wouldn't let anything go wrong. Not out here, anyway. They had been out since yesterday morning, starting engines, hoisting sails, cranking lines, scrubbing decks and polishing up their yacht's name, *Desert Moon*, which was painted on the side. Everything here was neat and orderly. Ed's smile faded. He glanced unhappily towards the harbour lights. Back home, that's where the problems would start.

His dad caught his expression. 'You're worried about Mum?'

'Maybe,' said Ed.

'Let me do the talking. I'll square it. My fault.'

It wouldn't work. There'd be words. Or worse, there wouldn't. And the house would fill with *things that were not being said* because of Dad being late. It was a different sort of quiet that you got out here; tense, like a rope straining too tight in the wind. Even now, Ed could feel it thrumming.

He raised his head. No. There *was* a thrumming sound. Not in his mind but out on the water. He glanced at his dad, who had sat up.

'Sounds big. Like a motorboat.' Dad squinted at the light across the water. 'It's headed this way, coming fast.' A moment more. 'Idiot's not looking where they're going. I'll call them.'

Dad disappeared into the cabin below. A gust whipped across the deck, bringing noise from the oncoming boat. Even at this distance its headlamp made Ed squint.

'Motor vessel off harbour entrance, motor vessel off harbour entrance, this is yacht *Desert Moon*, *Desert Moon*.' Dad's voice, professional over the radio. 'We are on a collision course. Please acknowledge. Over.'

Ed listened for an answer. None came. 'Dad?'

'Hang on.' His dad clambered up the steps from the cabin below, holding the portable radio. 'Motor vessel, motor vessel, this is yacht *Desert Moon*, *Desert Moon*. We are ahead of your course. Please acknowledge. Over.'

Silence. Dad shook his head. 'They're not budging. Haven't seen us.' He licked his top lip. 'Right. Let's get the engine going and sails down. OK?'

Ed nodded. With the motor running they could

take the boat in any direction. They'd be out of trouble in no time.

'Good lad. I'll steer, you get cracking.' Dad took over and started the engine.

Ed winched in the front sail, watching it coil neatly around its mast. 'Done,' he said.

'Great, now do the mainsail.'

But as Dad spoke their boat's engine choked, and stopped.

Ed glanced at his dad. 'Wha—'

'It'll be fine. Get that main down and back here quick.'

Ed's heart thumped as he scampered up on deck. He heard *Desert Moon*'s engine fire, turn over, stop. Then fire and die again. He glanced at the headlight of the oncoming boat. It was dazzling, now. Its engines vibrated the air. It sounded big. And fast. Fast enough to smash them. Ed clutched at the mast and hauled the sail down in stiff folds. He secured it, and crawled back to the safety of the cockpit. All the while his gaze was on the other vessel: too bright, too loud, too close.

'Let's move,' Ed urged. 'Where's the engine?'

Dad swallowed. He thumbed the ignition, kept it held. The motor whirred, then died. 'Won't start.'

The motorboat was all noise and light. Beyond the glare of its lamp Ed could sense the black-on-black of darkness being blotted by something immense. 'Dad . . .'

'I know!' Dad snapped. 'I'll go down and sort it. Get on the radio. Keep calling.'

Dad disappeared into the cabin. Ed, alone, took the receiver. 'Motor vessel, motor vessel, this is *Desert Moon*.' His voice quavered. He swallowed. 'Change course. Please. Over.'

But he heard no reply. All sounds, now, were drowned by the roar of engines headed straight at them.

'Try it,' yelled Dad.

Ed hit the start button. The engine chugged, spluttered, then surged. Ed shoved the boat into gear. He swung on the tiller, desperately trying to wrench *Desert Moon* out of the other boat's path. But between one moment and the next that boat had become an entire world. Rails, hull, windows, fenders, decking: it was colossal, unavoidable. *Desert Moon* rocked as seawater slammed against her hull.

Every detail of the instant before the impact slid sharp into Ed's mind. The prow that knifed towards them belonged to a huge powerboat. Spray hung in

the air around it, forming an aurora that shone purple and green. A white-haired old lady stared out through the window of her cockpit. Her expression was fixed in ghastly, dawning horror. One hand was raised as though she could push the boats apart. Her other grasped feverishly at the wheel. And down below, staring up from the cabin, his father's frightened face – right where the powerboat would hit.

'No!' Ed shoved the throttle to full. *Desert Moon* tipped. Ed was flung against the side, hands flying free. He heard a smash and a crack and their yacht jolted and lurched. Salt sprayed. Water sloshed across Ed's shoes and poured down the stairs to where Dad was.

'Dad!' A wave washed past Ed's knees, threatening to knock him from his feet. He grabbed for the tiller once more.

'Leave it!' Dad's voice rose above the chaos. 'Life raft! Life raft!'

Alive, then. But no time for relief. Ed dragged himself to the life raft's container. He popped the clasps then hurled it overboard. The raft inflated, bobbing higher and higher. No. It wasn't getting higher. *Desert Moon* was sinking.

They were sinking.

Dark water flooded down the hatch. Ed could see

Dad fighting to get up the steps, wrestling and slogging against the torrent. Then Dad hauled himself through and fell spluttering into the sea-filled cockpit. They stared at one another, waist deep, limbs shaking, as more and more waves sluiced around them. *Desert Moon* wallowed and pitched. Ed heard snaps and groans as the hull splintered.

Dad grabbed him and held him tight. 'We're getting out. I promise. OK?'

Ed managed a nod. But beyond them the motorboat rampaged. Everything about it was vast: the howl of its engines, the clouds of billowing, black smoke as it careered in a circle around them.

'It's out of control!' Dad released Ed, pulled him to his feet, pushed him to move. 'Life raft,' he shouted. 'Life raft, now!'

They half-scrambled, half-swam for it. The yacht rolled, pitching Ed into the sea. Brutal cold closed over him. He surfaced with a gasp as his life-vest inflated. He hung in the swelling dark, panting and gulping with shock. Then he forced his cold-weakened limbs to move. He doggy-paddled for the raft. He got a hand on its rubber skin. He tried to pull himself up, but his muscles wouldn't obey. *Come on. Please.* He tried again, fell back. Then felt Dad's hand, strong at his back.

'No . . . no good,' Ed managed. 'Can't. You.'

'All right, mate, don't worry. I'll g-get us up.'

The motorboat's roar grew. Ed turned away as its light veered across him. The boat powered by, far too close. Waves rocked the raft and washed greasy water across them. Ed spat oil in the dark. He kept paddling. Dad grasped the raft, got a knee on the rubber lip and heaved. He slipped off, landing with a splash that barged Ed back. He tried again, and this time pitched inside. He staggered about. He reached down. Ed saw his Dad's face, white and staring in the motorboat's headlight.

'It's . . . coming back,' said his dad. The light illuminated him as he held out his hand. 'Grab it,' he shouted. '*Grab it*.'

The noise of engines grew terrible. Ed swam in desperation. He paddled, quaking, for Dad, for safety. *Just a little more, just a little more*. He lashed with one arm for Dad's outstretched hand – which was wrenched away. The raft was hurled aside. The world went white and clamorous. Ed felt himself spun and twisted. His ears filled with ringing and smashing and cracking. And his mouth filled with water. And he choked and gagged. And his mind raced and panicked and was overcome by rushing blackness.

And thoughts and cold and fear and sorrow were rinsed away and made tiny and made insignificant and made quiet, quiet, quiet, until they had dwindled and gone silent.