

Andy Shepherd

THE BOY  
WHO GREW  
DRAGONS

**A Piratey Adventure!**

*Illustrated by Sara Ogilvie*



Piccadilly  
PRESS



For all you dragon desperados,  
keep your eyes open for the magic in the world !



Dragons are great, aren't they? There are just so many of them. They can be friendly or fierce, mighty and gigantic or really quite titchy.

And they're different all over the world.

But one thing they all seem to have in common is that they come from eggs.

Or that's what I thought. Until one day I discovered this secret. You see, not all dragons grow inside eggs. Some dragons grow on trees!

Yup – trees!

I mean, I like a good tree as much as the next person. I'm always climbing them and there's this really cool one down by the field, which even looks like it has a face. It has a knobbly nose and two big oval knots in the trunk that look like surprised eyes, as if it's just been caught doing something it shouldn't. I can't help wondering if when we're all asleep it stretches its roots and goes on a wander and is a tiny bit mischievous. I reckon that tree has some serious stories to tell.

And then I used to have this totally brilliant dream about a tree that could grow chocolate, bars of delicious yumminess just hanging there waiting to be picked. Such a good dream!

But I never really expected to come across a tree as cool as either of them. And definitely not one that could grow a dragon!

But one day that's exactly what I found in among the brambles and nettles in my grandad's garden. Because I found a dragon-fruit tree.

And right then I learned something really important – that you just never know when magic could be right on your doorstep. So keep your eyes wide open!



For anyone who hasn't met him, my dragon is called Flicker. He hatched from the first fruit that I found. And he is the most utterly incredible dragon ever.



Most of the time he's ruby red. But he's not always, because he has scales that flicker through every colour, so sometimes it's like looking at him through a kaleidoscope. Especially when he's excited and can't decide what colour to be.



Right now he's sitting on my lap and feeling all contented. I know because he's this lovely turquoise colour. And he's rumbling and warming my legs, waiting for me to give him a scratch behind his horns.

He looks up at me with his diamond eyes and I know exactly what he's thinking and he knows what I'm thinking. It's time to grow some more dragons!

Now I just hope you're ready – because they can be a bit of a handful!

In fact before we go maybe I should just give you a quick heads up about what you're letting yourself in for. Yeah, I think that's probably wise.

So let me give you one example.

It happened a few weeks ago and it involved pirates!






1  
Stinky Pirates!

We were staying with Nana and Grandad for the weekend, while Mum and Dad set about building a house for the hens Mum had adopted. Dad said they deserved a palace and had drawn up an impressive design with split-level living and everything.

As we waved goodbye to them Nana gave us both a squeeze and said, ‘Now then, what do you say to some nice sugary shortbread and some chocolate caramel squares?’



I looked at Lolli and we both grinned. ‘I think we both say yes, please!’

‘Right, I’d better get baking. Can you tell Grandad I need some radishes for tea and a lettuce too?’


I nodded and then headed out the back door with Lolli skipping beside me.

We threaded our way down the path to the far end of the garden where the vegetables – and the dragon-fruit tree – grew.

‘Yo hoe hoe,’ Grandad called when he saw us, waving a long metal hoe in our direction, his eyes twinkling brightly. ‘Are you two landlubbers ready to look for some buried treasure?’

Lolli immediately gave a little squeal and started jiggling up and down, then pointed excitedly at the parrot wobbling precariously on Grandad’s shoulder.

‘Polly’s been waiting for you,’ he said with a wink. The cuddly parrot flopped forward, obviously too heavy for the safety pin holding her onto Grandad’s jacket. He settled her back and reached over to the bench, lifting a pirate hat up and plonking it on Lolli’s head. It was so big it





covered most of her face so she could hardly see.

He handed me a stick and a square of cardboard and then pulled a black square attached to some elastic over my head.

‘That’s better.’ he said. ‘A sword, a shield and an eye patch. Now you’re looking more piratey.’

‘So, Captain Lollibob Liffy of the good ship *Blossom*,’ he said, turning to Lolli, ‘what are our orders?’

‘The plank, the plank!’ she cried in delight.

‘You’re a harsh ’un, that’s for sure.’ He eyed me warily and asked, ‘What’s his crime, Captain?’

She looked me up and down and then declared, ‘He’s stinky!’

‘Good enough for me,’ Grandad said with a laugh. And poked me with the hoe.

I found myself being frogmarched towards a plank of wood laid out on the ground, at the end of which was a bowl of water.

‘Time to meet thy fate, you lily-livered luggins. We’ll teach you to be stinky at your post.’

Lolli giggled even more and joined in with a chorus of: ‘Stinky, stinky wash him in the pot.’



I stepped onto the plank and shuffled forward, Grandad’s hoe at my back. I teetered on the end, but before I met my watery doom my gaze turned upwards.

‘You won’t get me that easily,’ I cried, wielding my sword.

Suddenly a shimmering shape shot down from one of the branches of the apple tree. Flicker!

He dived at Grandad’s head, making him duck and dance, while Lolli, still holding on to her pirate hat, chased round after him. Flicker let out an arc of sparks and then did a little judder.

We all knew what that meant!

‘Not the exploding poo!’ Grandad cried. ‘It’ll blast the good ship *Blossom* to smithereens. Quick, to the decks, to the decks!’

Thankfully Flicker had clearly just been toying with them and didn’t in fact unleash one of his poos. But he did drop some mushy strawberries that had been clasped in his claws. They

splatted on to Grandad's arm and he staggered around a bit clutching his chest and groaning.

‘Call a truce, Captain. For all our sakes.’

Lolli grabbed his hanky and started waving it madly.

Then we all fell about in fits of giggles.



## A Delight of Dragons

While Lolli dragged Grandad off to make her a shield like mine, I made my way to the dragon-fruit tree. Flicker had flown down and settled on my shoulder, his tail curled round my neck.

‘Time to see if any of the fruits are red and ripe and ready to hatch, hey, Flicker,’ I said.

He raked his claws on my hoodie and sent out another little burst of sparks.

Slowly circling the tree, I started counting the fruits hanging from the long cactus leaves. One. Two. Three. Four. Five.



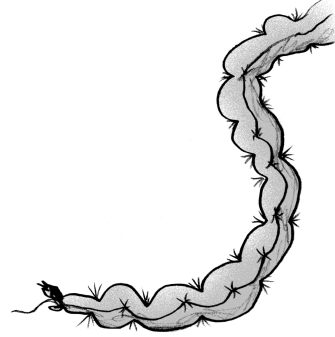
My foot squelched on the mud and I looked down to see the soil mixing with some pulp and seeds and the floppy skin of one burst dragon fruit.

I looked around but couldn't see any scales glinting anywhere. I guessed the little dragon must have already flown off.

I pulled up a flowerpot and sat on it, ready to keep watch over the remaining fruits. The hairy trunk of the tree was almost hidden by the draping cactus leaves and as I peered through I saw some smaller green fruits tucked within. It looked like this was going to be a big crop. But at least they would be hatching in waves. Looking around at Grandad's garden, I wasn't sure it could survive if they all burst out of their fruits at once. We'd have a ... a what? What did you call a whole lot of dragons? Not a flock. Maybe a fury of dragons? Or a blast of dragons? Or a majesty of dragons?

I imagined the sky full of shining dragons, soaring above the clouds, their fiery breath filling the air.

Suddenly there was a THLUMP as one of the fruits dropped from its spiky branch. And then another THLUMP as a second fell to the ground.



They started bulging as the little dragons inside wriggled and pushed and then the fruits burst open, sending a spray of seeds and pulp splattering across the mud. And there they were, two brand-new dragons.

The first was rose-pink with black spines down its tail, black wings and two short stubby horns on its head. It shook off the piece of dragon fruit that was stuck to its back and launched up into the air. I watched it circling the tree and then it rocketed towards Grandad's shed and shot inside. A second later it reappeared carrying what looked like a messy clump of garden string. It flew up onto the roof then zipped back down minus the string. The next time it emerged from the shed it had a gardening glove in its claws. It dropped this into its stash and then headed back inside for more.

I didn't think Grandad would want any more of his gardening bits nabbed, but before I could run over and close the shed door, I noticed the other dragon that had hatched. It had a

pale green head and tail and its wings were orange, while the scales on its back were grey. It also seemed to be struggling a bit with a piece of dragon-fruit skin that was stuck to it. It shook itself and wriggled, but the dragon fruit stayed firmly attached. In fact all it seemed to be doing was getting more and more muddy and covered in leaves.

I bent down and tried to peel the dragon-fruit skin and leaves away but they were stuck fast. And what's more, my fingers came away all sticky too. This dragon was oozing stickiness!

It obviously didn't want me near it and started hopping away, letting out little sparks as it retreated. And by the glistening on its scales, more slime too. I just hoped it wasn't too weighed down by muck and leaves to fly off.





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## A Sticky Situation

Lolli came running towards me, a shield held up in front of her.

‘Tomas, look,’ she cried.

And then she flew at me as she tripped spectacularly over a clod of earth. She splatted head first in the mud and I dashed forward.

But she was already leaping up again, scanning the now mud-splattered shield. She was obviously more worried about hurting that than herself. Her face crumpled and her bottom lip started to wobble when she saw a piece of it had broken off.

‘Awesome shield, Lolli,’ I said quickly. ‘That’s seen a lot of action I can tell. Did that leviathan give you trouble back there?’

She turned round and looked back at Grandad.

‘Levvy what?’ she said, frowning.

‘That great sea serpent I saw you battling back there. You were brilliant. Good job you had that shield.’

Her muddy face broke into a grin and she nodded firmly.

‘It was hugegantic, Tomas. It nearly sunked us.’

‘Are you all right, Captain Lollibob?’ Grandad asked as he joined us. He wiped Lolli’s face with his hanky and then winced at her broken shield. ‘Oh dear, that didn’t last long.’

‘This is the goodest shield ever,’ she said. ‘It just saved us from this hugegantic levvythumb.’

Grandad gave me a wink. ‘That *is* a good shield.’

‘What’s the treasure?’ she asked. ‘Is it chocolit? Is it?’

He laughed. ‘You’ll have to wait and see – you’d better find it first.’ He lowered his voice and added conspiratorially, ‘I stored the treasure map in the shed to keep it safe.’

Lolli grabbed my hand and started pulling me along.



Inside the shed I could see the rose-pink dragon had made quite a mess. Grandad's pot with the dragon coiled around the inside had been knocked over and pens and plant labels were scattered across the counter. And it had tipped a tray of seed packets onto the floor.

I tidied things up as Lolli searched for the treasure map.

'It's not here,' she said, turning to Grandad.

'That's odd, I left it right there,' he said, stepping inside and peering over my shoulder.

Lolli gasped and then said, 'It's been stoled by another pirate.'

I glanced out of the door and up at the tree. The little dragon was perched on a branch, a packet of seeds clutched in its claws.

'I think it has,' I said. 'But not by pirates. Come on, we need to climb the rigging!'

Lolli, who now had my sword as well as her shield, bashed and thrashed at the air as I climbed up into the apple tree.



'Any luck?' Grandad asked.

‘It’s got a proper stash up here,’ I called back. ‘Bit of a magpie this one. I can’t see the map though. I’ll have to climb a bit further. Maybe it’s hidden it higher up.’

I reached up to the next branch and my hand came away covered in moss and bark. Suddenly, from the branch beyond, the sticky green-headed dragon zoomed out and shot past me. Now as well as leaves I saw something else stuck to its back.

‘The map!’ I hollered. ‘It’s stuck to that dragon.’ And I pointed as the little creature flew over Grandad’s head. Lolli stopped fighting the invisible pirates and turned her attention to the sticky culprit. She giggled and chased after it.

‘I don’t think that’s the way to catch it,’ I said, clambering down. ‘It’s a bit nervous.’ And then, wiping my sticky green hands on my trousers, I added, ‘And watch out because when it gets scared it gets super-sticky.’





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## To the Treasure!

It turned out the dragon didn't just ooze slime, it sent shots of it rocketing out of the spines along its tail. And some of it had clearly landed on Lolli, as she seemed to be collecting things as she chased around the garden. She'd raced past some runner beans and now several of them were clinging to her arms. And after leaning into a bush to try and reach the little dragon, she'd come out with so many leaves on her jumper that she looked all feathery like a bird.

Not that I was having much luck either. I'd wiped enough slime onto my clothes that my sleeves kept getting glued to my


sides so I couldn't move my arms. Eventually the dragon settled on the top of Grandad's shed and stared down at us.

'Don't suppose you have any bright ideas?' I asked Flicker, who had flown down and landed on my shoulder. He swept his tail back and forth across my arm until it snagged on a blob of gluey slime. Then he twisted his head and breathed a warm breath over my sleeve. His tail flicked upwards and I saw that the slime had dried and clearly lost its stickiness.

'Any chance you could use that warming breath to get our map back?' I asked. He launched up into the air and I quickly added, 'Without scorching the map!'




We watched Flicker dart between the branches of the apple tree and then circle round towards the back of the shed. I just hoped the green-headed dragon would keep its gaze on us, rather than notice him and fly off.



Flicker was changing colour as he flew, his scales rippling from ruby red to orange to yellow to green. As he flew over the dragon he shook his head from side to side, unleashing what I hoped was a gentle warming breath and not a blast of flames. Startled, the green-headed dragon launched off the shed, but Flicker's breath had clearly done the trick, because the map fluttered down towards us. Lolli jumped to try and catch it but a sudden gust of wind swept it away from her. Flicker zipped after it, caught it in his mouth and brought it safely back to her. She took it from him happily and waved it above her head.



‘Let's have a look then,’ I said. ‘I want to see where this treasure is too.’ I also couldn't wait to see Grandad's map. He was a brilliant cartographer and always put in loads of detail and made up the best place names. I still had the one he'd made on



our holiday to Cornwall, when he'd led us on a trail along the cliffs and down into a real sea cave, which he'd called the Dragon's Mouth. Who would have guessed a year later we'd have a map brought to us in an *actual* dragon's mouth!

I guess you just never know when magic is going to appear, that's why you have to keep your eyes open. I glanced over at Flicker, who'd settled on Grandad's spade.

Lolli was turning the map round and round, looking confused and a bit cross.

'Here, this is us,' I said, showing her the Pirates' Cavern (or shed). 'We need to get to the treasure. "X" marks the spot.'

'I can't see eggs,' she said, frowning.

'"X",' I repeated, crossing my forearms in the air.

I led her along the Serpent's Tail (the little paved path), past the Lake of Immortality (water butt) and the Edible Icicles (runner beans).

'Careful of the Mound of Mutinous Muck,' I warned, pointing at the compost heap.

Then we ventured further on to the Den of the Stinging Deity (bee hives) and crept carefully under the Bearer of Golden Orbs (apple tree).

‘Right, it’s ten paces north from here,’ I declared.

Taking ten Grandad-sized steps, we found ourselves by the hedge. A small mound rose up from the grass like a little molehill.

Lolli clapped her hands and waved at Grandad, who was sitting in Pirates’ Cavern with a flask of rum (tea) and some ship’s biscuits (Nana’s jammy dodgers). I grinned at him and raced across to the wheelbarrow to grab the spade. He really had buried the treasure, not just hidden it! And I was getting as excited as Lolli to see what it would be.





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## Puff the Magic Dragon

Lolli isn't very patient, so while I dug she skipped and sang and picked daisies and followed butterflies and did roly-polies in the soft grass.

'Have we found it yet?' she asked.

We hadn't. It was hard work digging. 'Not yet,' I puffed.

She buzzed around me like a bee, making a loud humming noise and flapping her arms really fast, which didn't exactly help.

'Can you get me some provisions?' I asked. 'A ship's biscuit will do,' I added pointing over at Grandad.

I watched her skip away, and then start dancing when she reached the apple tree. So much for my biscuit! I just hoped this treasure was the chocolate kind!

Suddenly my spade hit something and I scraped away at the dirt until I saw a metal lid. I felt the excitement rush through me and I knelt down to ease it out. It was one of Nana's biscuit tins. I was just about to call for Lolli when I heard her give a little squeal.

'I founded it!' she cried.

I spun round. 'But I've just struck gold,' I said. 'Come and see.'

She shook her head and then bent down. As she straightened up I saw she was cradling something golden in her hands. Had the Bearer of Golden Orbs actually dropped a golden orb?

I watched her lift it up to her grinning face, turning it round in her hands and studying it curiously.

I raced over, wondering what on earth she'd picked up. It looked a bit like one of those puffy dandelion seed heads that

you blow on, except this was golden, not white. And it was about the size of her head!

‘Lolli,’ I said, ‘That’s not the treasure.’

‘But it smells yummy and sweet,’ she replied, sniffing it again.

I peered closer and prodded it, and then it suddenly exploded, sending out puffs of golden fuzz into the air and covering Lolli and me in the process. A piece of it ended up in Lolli’s open mouth and her eyes went wide with delight.

‘Candyfloss,’ she cried. And started licking madly at the bits stuck to her arms. I sniffed the piece on my hand and then licked it gingerly. She was right! It tasted like sugary candyfloss and it was delicious.

Lolli had already found another golden puff a few feet away and grabbed it. She squealed again as it exploded into the air and then ran round trying to catch the falling pieces in her mouth.

And then I noticed that the two new dragons had joined Lolli in her twirly candyfloss-catching dance, their little tongues flicking out to snatch mouthfuls of the stuff.



But where was it coming from?

And then I saw it. A small, round-bellied, yellow dragon shining so brightly it was dazzling. It looked up at us and then rolled its head round and round, breathing out a golden mist that crystallised in the air.

It looked as if the dragon who'd hatched first hadn't left after all.

With Grandad joining in, we giggled and danced our way around the garden, catching the puffs of golden candyfloss as the dragon spun more and more of them.

'And I thought a bar of chocolate made for good buried treasure,' Grandad said with a wink.

'It is too,' I said, glancing back at the tin I'd dug up.

'Dragons always have a way of making everything that bit more magical,' he said.

I reached out for Flicker and felt the warmth of his scales as he settled on my arm. He stretched out, laying his head on my palm, his warm breath tickling my fingers. His bright eyes twinkled up at me.

'They certainly do,' I whispered.

