

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
TUI T. SUTHERLAND



WINGS
OF
FIRE

LEGENDS

DRAGONSLAYER

A decorative border with intricate, repeating scrollwork patterns surrounds the central text. The border is composed of two parallel lines with a complex, repeating floral and scroll design between them. The corners of the border are reinforced with larger, more elaborate scrollwork designs.

WINGS
OF
FIRE

BOOK ONE
THE DRAGONET PROPHECY

BOOK TWO
THE LOST HEIR

BOOK THREE
THE HIDDEN KINGDOM

BOOK FOUR
THE DARK SECRET

BOOK FIVE
THE BRIGHTEST NIGHT

BOOK SIX
MOON RISING

BOOK SEVEN
WINTER TURNING

BOOK EIGHT
ESCAPING PERIL

BOOK NINE
TALONS OF POWER

BOOK TEN
DARKNESS OF DRAGONS

BOOK ELEVEN
THE LOST CONTINENT

BOOK TWELVE
THE HIVE QUEEN

BOOK THIRTEEN
THE POISON JUNGLE

LEGENDS
DARKSTALKER
DRAGONSLAYER



WINGS OF FIRE

LEGENDS: DRAGONSLAYER

by
TUI T. SUTHERLAND

SCHOLASTIC PRESS
NEW YORK

Text copyright © 2020 by Tui T. Sutherland
Map and border design © 2020 by Mike Schley
Dragon illustrations © 2020 by Joy Ang

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc.,
Publishers since 1920. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are
trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any
responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

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 written permission of the
publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc.,
Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents
are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously,
and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business
establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

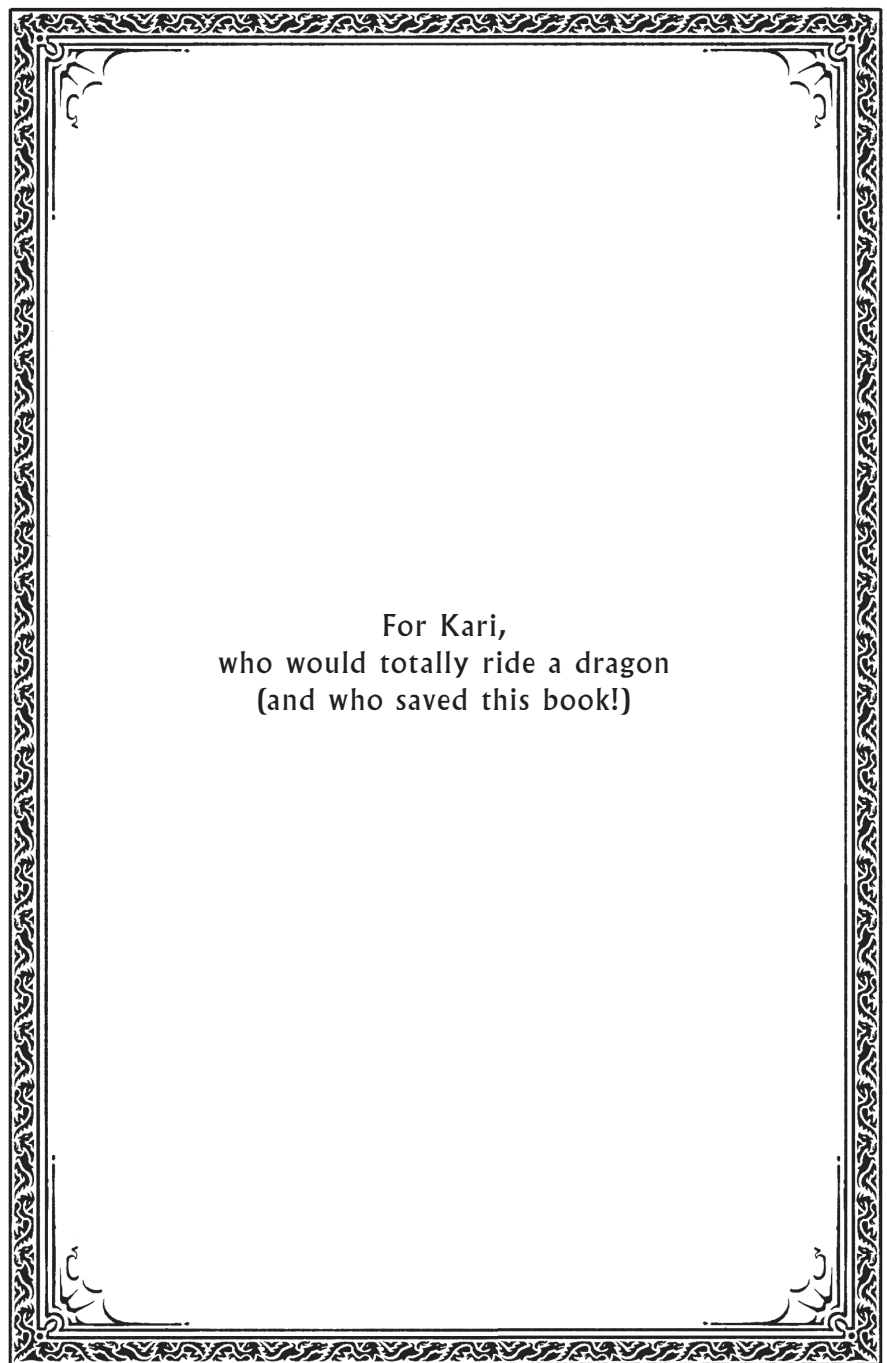
ISBN 978-1-338-21460-4

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

20 21 22 23 24

Printed in the U.S.A. 23
First printing, March 2020

Book design by Phil Falco



For Kari,
who would totally ride a dragon
(and who saved this book!)



The events of this book take place
during roughly the same time period as
Wings of Fire: Books One through Five.

PROLOGUE

TWENTY YEARS AGO . . .

It is nearly impossible to steal from a dragon.

Everyone knew that.

Nearly impossible and decidedly stupid, especially when that dragon lives in a giant fortress with a hundred other dragons and you are the size of their average midmorning snack.

But if they did it — if they succeeded — they would be legends. Wealthy legends, with more gold than anyone they knew had ever seen before.

That was Heath's grand vision anyway. Stone couldn't imagine himself as a rich person. But he couldn't stop his little brother and sister once they had an idea in their heads. The best way — the only way — to protect them was to come along, too.

And so now he was here, doing the nearly impossible and decidedly stupid thing.

The dragons' palace loomed out of the sand like a dark mountain.

Three crescent moons overhead curled like ice dragon claws against the night sky, casting barely a glimmer of light on the dunes below.

In the shadows of the castle walls, Stone and Heath crouched in the sand, side by side. Small, wingless, without talons or scales. Teeth scarcely worth mentioning.

We're a perfect dragon's dinner, Stone thought nervously, just sitting at their front door, like we're asking to be eaten. No other creatures in Pyrrhia walk right up to the dragons like humans do. They must think we're the dumbest prey on the planet.

Maybe we are, if we really think we can steal their treasure and get away with it.

"What's taking her so long?" he whispered. "We shouldn't have let her go back in." He hefted a bag of gold in his hands. "This is more than enough for the three of us for the rest of our lives."

His brother gave him a scornful look and reached into the other bag. Stone heard the soft metallic sound of gold nuggets running through Heath's fingers. "She wanted to go back for more," Heath murmured. "She said there was rooms and rooms of it. All this sand dragon treasure — *ours*, Stone. We'll be kings."

"Being as wealthy as dragons won't make us as powerful as dragons," Stone pointed out.

"We'll see," Heath said, turning his gaze back to the window above them. The narrow slit was made to be too small for an enemy dragon to slip through — but it was an easy squeeze for a sixteen-year-old human girl like their sister, Rose.

"I think I hear her," Stone whispered.

A pair of small hands appeared at the bottom of the window, and a moment later Rose pulled herself up to straddle the ledge. In the shadows, she could have been anyone, except that no one else had a halo of dark curls quite like hers . . . and no one else would climb into a dragon's lair — twice — as she just had.

Rose dropped a rope down to her brothers, and they both grabbed it, helping her heave the sacks of treasure up from the floor inside. After a few moments, she signaled for them to move out of the way. *Clink! Thud!* went the bags as they hit the sand. With a hiss, the rope slithered down beside them.

Stone squinted up at Rose's silhouette as she inched down the stone wall, finding cracks and dents where she could fit her feet to climb. This whole plan had been Heath's idea, of course; Heath was obsessed with the dragons of the desert beyond their forest. Rose, the youngest, had run the greatest risk, slipping into the dragon palace and finding the treasure room in the middle of the night.

Stone's job was transport. As the oldest and biggest of the three siblings, he could carry all four of the sacks himself, at least until they reached the horses that were waiting a few dunes away — the horses he had stolen from their father's stable two nights ago.

Well, if he gets mad, I'll be able to pay him three times what they're worth, Stone thought with bitter pride. Rose had almost reached the ground. Maybe they really were going to get away with this.

“Stone,” Heath whispered. “Stop breathing so loudly.”

“I’m not breathing loudly,” Stone objected. “I’m barely breathing at all.”

Heath turned to him with an impatient scowl, and then suddenly his whole face went blank.

Stone knew that look. He’d seen that look when Heath’s carelessness lit the smithy on fire and nearly set the whole village ablaze. He’d seen it when their father had caught Heath stealing food meant for the Wingwatchers. It was pure terror, and Stone knew instantly, with a plunging cold fear in his chest, what that meant.

He whirled around and saw the dragon looming behind him.

She was taller than the trees around their village, with wings that blotted out all three moons. Obsidian-black eyes glinted in a narrow, snakelike face. Sand hissed between her claws as she flexed them, and Stone could see the dark, dangerous barb of her tail raised behind her like a scorpion’s, poised to strike. He’d seen — from afar — what that venom could do to a full-sized dragon. He didn’t want to imagine what it could do to a human, or how painful that kind of death would be.

The dragon growled, low and long, with a lot of hissing and guttural sounds. She glared at the stolen treasure and, even more menacingly, at Rose, who’d reached the ground and now stood with her back pressed to the castle wall.

“She’s going to kill us,” Stone breathed. He had a spear strapped to his back, but the five seconds it took him to

reach for it would be all the time the dragon needed to stab him through the heart with her tail.

"Heath," Rose whispered. "There's a sword in the bag nearest to you."

"Don't!" Stone wanted to turn and grab his brother, but he didn't dare move. "Don't antagonize her."

"Right, good idea," Heath murmured. "Except it's a bit late for that, idiot. Not sure if you've noticed, but we're in the middle of stealing her treasure."

Her treasure? Stone finally noticed the black band of onyx, embedded with diamonds, that circled the dragon's head. This was the queen herself.

So. There was no escape. Death, then, already. He was only twenty; he'd expected to do a bit more with his life before a dragon inevitably killed him. *Why did I let Heath talk us into this?*

Abruptly, Heath lunged for the sack beside him. The dragon let out a shriek of rage and stabbed her tail forward, but Stone just managed to dive and roll out of the way. He saw moonlight ricochet off steel as Heath swung the sword up and clumsily jabbed the dragon's underbelly with it. The weapon clanged against her scales. Heath nearly lost his grip, staggering sideways.

Stone leaped to his feet and drew his spear. He ran full tilt at the queen, trying to remember what the Wingwatchers at school had taught them about dragon weaknesses. The only thing he could remember was someone saying, *They don't have any.*

The dragon's tail whipped toward him, lightning fast. He ducked and her tail struck the spear, sending shock waves rippling down his arms. The sand slipped away from his feet and he fell.

"Stone!" Rose cried, darting forward. She grabbed one of the sacks of treasure and swung it in a full arc around her body, hurling it at the dragon's head.

The heavy bag collided with the queen's skull with a loud *crack*. The desert dragon stumbled back, shook her head, and lunged forward with a roar.

"No!" Stone yelled, trying to stand, trying to bring the spear around, trying to fight the sand that dragged him down — too slow, too slow.

A burst of flames shot from the dragon's mouth. Her wings flared, flinging sand into Stone's face. He floundered forward blindly. *Not Rose. Not Rose.*

Heath let out a shout of rage somewhere to his left. There was another clash of sword against scales. Following the sound, Stone aimed for the blurry winged shadow and stabbed his spear upward.

It connected, lodged in place, and was ripped out of his hands.

The dragon roared, but now the roar had pain in it as well as fury.

In the dark, through sand-stung eyes, Stone saw the dragon collapse heavily to the sand with a thud that shook the ground. He heard Heath's footsteps sprint past.

Stone covered his head and cowered as the dragon thrashed and howled.

Heath appeared suddenly at his elbow, tugging him up to his feet. "We did it! We killed a dragon!" His arms and chest were spattered with dragon blood, and he was carrying something grotesque and dripping in one hand. He'd abandoned the sword, which Stone could see still sticking out of the end of the severed tail. "Let's get out of here before that noise wakes any more of them." He shoved a sack of treasure into Stone's hands.

"Rose," Stone said.

Heath flinched away from him. Stone realized that his brother's clothing was charred, and dark burns rippled along his arm on one side. "She's gone, Stone." Heath picked up another one of the bags of treasure, shoved the object in his hand into it, and fled into the darkness.

Stone took a step after him, then stopped. *I can't go home like this. If I return to Father carrying bags of treasure instead of my sister's body . . .* He turned and looked up at the dark walls.

Wings were boiling over the top of the palace like a million bats pouring from a cave. The sand dragons were coming, called by the dying roars of their queen.

And when they catch us . . .

Stone's courage failed him. Still clutching the dragon's treasure, he turned and ran.

Mountain
Dragon Palace

PART ONE

The
Indestructible
City

Here Be Dragons, Probably?

Safe Harbor

Here Be
Water
ons



CHAPTER 1

WREN

One morning shortly after Wren turned seven years old, her parents wrestled her into her best blue wool dress, pinned her down to oil her curly hair, and took her up the mountain to be eaten by a dragon.

They didn't tell her that was the plan, of course. They didn't say "guess what's going to happen to YOU today" or "bad news about that tree-climbing expedition you had planned for tomorrow." They didn't say much beyond "stop wiggling!" and "don't you DARE bite me!"

If they had *told* her she was off to be a dragon's breakfast, she might have pointed out that the dragon *certainly* wouldn't care what her hair looked like, so there was no need to spend the last minutes of her life *torturing her*.

But instead she thought she was trapped on another boring walk with the dragonmancers for an Edifying Lecture About Dragon Behavior, and so all she wondered, as they marched through the woods, was why her parents were holding her hands so tightly, and why none of the other village children had been dragged along.

She was too young to remember the apprentice who'd been sacrificed five years earlier, especially since it was forbidden to talk about the gifts the village gave the dragons. And despite what the dragonmancers thought, Wren hadn't fully understood what she'd read in the books she stole from them.

Wren did notice the strange sideways looks from the other villagers, but it did not occur to her that those were "good thing it's HER getting fed to a dragon and not ME" kinds of looks. She thought they were the usual "there goes Wren, the girl with a dragon's temper" faces she always got. She liked making a horrible face back so she could see them blanch and turn away quickly.

But really, she should have been more suspicious. She should have realized her parents were being too quiet. It's just, one never really *expects* to be fed to dragons.

And then suddenly one dragonmancer stopped and raised his hands, and then all the villagers stopped and stared at Wren. The other two dragonmancers produced ropes from their robes and grabbed her.

The tall, thin one said something like, "Hear us, oh mighty wings of flame," in her snooty voice, and the short one with bumps all over his face said, "We offer you this gift, that you may spare the rest of your lowly worshippers." Then the leader, the smug one who always ate all the goat cheese at village celebrations, started to say, "Thank you for the lives of those —"

But Wren didn't let him finish. She recognized the words

they were chanting. She'd read them in one of the books she'd "borrowed" from the head dragonmancer's study. This was the Gift for the Dragons ceremony, it was real after all, AND THIS TIME SHE WAS THE GIFT.

After a lot of wrestling and screaming and fighting, they finally managed to tie her up, but they didn't get to say all their stupid blessing words. One dragonmancer staggered away with his nose bleeding; another clutched her scratched-up arm; the third was hobbling as they hurried off. Wren shouted every bad word she knew at them as the villagers scurried away, avoiding her eyes. Her parents didn't even look back once.

They left her on a giant stone slab overlooking the river, where the sky was wide open and the dragons would be able to see her easily.

The idea, of course, was that the seven-year-old would sit there politely and wait to be eaten, like a good little human sacrifice.

But that was obviously not going to happen. Although she was quite little, Wren was never polite and rarely good. And Wren was very much *not* on board with the plan where she got eaten and all the smug-faced meanies in her village did not. That was the ULTIMATE definition of unfair. Wren was a younger sister, so she knew all about fair and unfair, and getting eaten by dragons while jerks like Camellia stayed inside, probably playing with *Wren's* dolls, WAS ABSOLUTELY ONE HUNDRED PERCENT NOT FAIR.

Wren had one brother who'd agree with her, she was

pretty sure, but her uncle had taken Leaf hunting this morning. *To get him out of the way*, she realized now. Not that an eight-year-old could have stopped the village's plan either, but at least he could have been SUPER MAD. He would have yelled at Mom and Dad. He would have been full of RAGE AND VENGEANCE FOREVER and made their lives miserable for all time and they would have TOTALLY DESERVED IT.

But instead, she knew they'd tell him there was a sad accident while he was gone and little Wren got chomped by a dragon, too bad. And he'd be sad, but then he'd get over it, and everyone would LA-DI-DA off into their peaceful Wren-less futures.

Moons above, Wren thought furiously as she wriggled her hands free from the ropes. *They'll probably tell him it was MY fault! That I was DISOBEDIENT AGAIN and THAT'S why I got gobbled! They're going to make me into a story they tell other kids to make them behave!*

Now she was REALLY MAD.

She yanked off the rope around her ankles and jumped to her feet. What she wanted to do most was run after the villagers and dragonmancers and yell at them some more. She wanted them to know they were unfair stupid stupidheads and that she absolutely refused to get eaten by a dragon and she didn't even care if a dragon came and ate everybody else because they were all MEAN.

Wren took two steps into the forest and stopped herself.

If I run after them, they'll just tie me up again, but tighter.

They wouldn't listen to her. They never did. The more she

yelled and screamed, the less they listened. This was a fact she had noticed, but it only made her want to scream louder.

Screaming right now would probably summon a dragon, though. Or the dragonmancers, with their cold fingers and scowling faces. Of those two options, Wren might prefer the dragon.

She slid down the muddy bank and crouched beside the river, trailing her hands in the ice-cold water. Droplets flew up around her wrists, catching in the sunlight like diamonds tossed into the air.

It isn't fair, she thought, yanking a weed up from between the river pebbles. Why did they pick ME? Out of everyone in the village? Why did the dragons send a vision saying they wanted to eat ME?

"I bet they didn't!" Wren cried. "I bet the dragons don't even care!" She plucked a rock from the riverbed and threw it at a bush on the opposite bank. "They'd eat anyone they found all tied up! If they *could* choose, they'd pick someone bigger and yummiier than me. Like Camellia! She would make a much better sacrifice to the dragons! Why didn't they pick *her*?"

Everyone was always saying how SWEET Wren's next-oldest sister was. *She'd be so oily and sugary the dragons could choke on her.*

But the dragonmancers loved Camellia and the way she listened to them with her eyes wide and her fake "this is so fascinating" face on.

Wren stared into the rippling water.

“The dragonmancers would never choose Camellia,” she said out loud. “They chose me, because they don’t like me. And Mother and Father let them.”

Of course the dragonmancers chose the loud seven-year-old who kicked Master Trout in the shins when he scolded her. The girl who stole their books and read all their secrets, even if she only half understood them. They’d be happy to get rid of her.

And maybe Mother and Father were, too.

Nobody tried to stop them at all. Not one stupid person in the whole village.

She knew her parents were terrified of dragons and did everything the dragonmancers said all the time. But she still would have thought they might say, “Could you double-check that vision one more time? Are you sure it’s *our* daughter the dragons want?”

Wren rubbed her eyes angrily.

Stop crying. So people are terrible and can’t be trusted. That shouldn’t be such a big surprise, Wren. They’ve never stood up for you before. Nobody cares about you and so you shouldn’t care about them either.

Well, I think I shall NOT get eaten, she thought. That will SHOW THEM. I don’t need a village! Or parents! Or any of them! I’m smarter than all of them and smarter than the dragons, too! I don’t have to be someone’s breakfast if I decide not to be. So there!

But that meant she couldn’t go home. She could never go back to Talisman now that the dragonmancers had told

everyone her destiny was to be dragon food and her parents had said, "Sure, that sounds right, fine by us."

She stood up, shaking the freezing droplets off her hand, and a flicker of motion caught her eye on the opposite riverbank.

Instantly she crouched, her heart bursting into a gallop and screaming "DRAGON!" even as her mind registered that the animal, whatever it was, couldn't be much bigger than a rabbit.

She took a deep breath.

It's something little. Maybe my breakfast.

She kept her eye on the spot where she'd seen it, but the movement had stopped. Cautiously, she slipped into the cold river and splashed across. The other side was rockier, covered in glassy black stones and small tangles of little leafless shrubs.

The thing she'd seen was caught in one of those nets of branches that leaned out over the river. She crept toward it slowly.

A rabbit would be great. Breathe, Wren. Don't panic. It's certainly not a dragon.

It was a dragon.

Or at least, it was a very small, pathetic, skinny miniature of a dragon. Its scales were the palest orange she'd ever seen, like a sunset painted on wool and then left under a waterfall or out in the sunlight for too long. She'd never seen a dragon so pale before — all the ones in the mountains were bright reds or oranges, and the ones that came up from the swamps were shades of mud brown.

Its eyes were closed and it hung limply in the tangled bare branches, its wings drooping toward the river.

Probably dead, Wren thought, and was surprised to feel a twinge of pity. For a DRAGON. What was THAT about. Feeling sorry for something that would probably eat her if it were still alive!

Then again, it wouldn't be able to fit much of her in that tiny mouth. It would take it days to nibble off her pinkie finger.

She snorted, and the baby dragon distinctly flinched.

It was alive!

"Hey," she said fiercely. "Dragon baby! Are you faking being dead? So that I'll come up close and poke you and then you can eat my finger?"

The little creature's eyes fluttered slowly open. It glanced around, spotted Wren, and let out a squeak of alarm.

She realized that it was shivering. She wasn't sure if that was from the cold water or because it was scared of her.

A dragon scared of me! I bet that's never happened to any of those stuffy mean old dragonmancers.

Wait. This dragon can't possibly be cold. It's a sky dragon; they all have fire inside them. It could burn up that bush in a second and fly away if it wanted to.

"This IS a trick, isn't it?" she said. "You want me to go, 'aw, poor baby,' and try to set you free, and then you'll set me on fire and eat me! I see what you're up to, little weird dragon!"

The dragon tried to twist itself one way, and then another,

but it was too snarled in the branches to wiggle free. It let out another pitiful squeak, its minuscule claws opening and closing on the air. It sounded like the kitten Wren's brother had once found in the woods, which their parents wouldn't let them keep because they wouldn't be able to keep it quiet if there were dragons hunting overhead. "That kitten will be the death of us all!" was how they'd put it, in typical overdramatic grown-up fashion.

"Squeak," the little dragon said pathetically. "Sqrble. Eeeek."

"Stop being cute and tragic," Wren said, crossing her arms. "I'm not falling for it."

The baby dragon sighed, closed its eyes, and stopped wiggling. Its wings drooped and its head flopped sideways. It looked like it had given up and was planning on lying there in the bush until it starved to death.

"Oh, fire butts," Wren said crossly. "All right, fine, but if you eat even *one* of my fingers I am *throwing you in the river* and I won't feel bad about it." She clambered out across the stones, feeling the cold water eddy around her bare feet. The branches kept stabbing her as she tried to reach through them, so she started breaking them off and tossing them aside until she'd cleared a path to the little dragon.

It opened its eyes again and blinked at her in either hope or alarm; she wasn't entirely sure. Its face was more expressive than a lizard's, but still not at all human.

"What am I *doing*," Wren muttered. But she reached through the sharp web of sticks and carefully untangled the

little dragon's wings, tail, and claws until it slipped free and tumbled into her hands.

She jumped back, holding it at arm's length. It was still trembling, sending little shudders through her whole body, and now she could feel that it actually was very cold. She'd obviously never touched a dragon before, but she would have guessed that they'd be warm or even burning hot, given the fire inside them.

This one was so different, though. Its eyes were pale, watery blue, like a frosted-over puddle. It nudged her thumb with its snout and tried to bury its head between her fingers.

Cautiously, she brought it closer to her. It immediately latched tiny claws in the weave of her dress and stuck its nose under her chin, shivering tragically.

"Why are you all alone?" Wren asked it. "And why are you so cold?" She ran one hand gently along its side, and it leaned into her palm with a whimper. She'd always thought dragons would feel kind of scaly and slimy like fish, but blisteringly hot. Instead the dragonet's skin was more like a lizard's, smooth and cool and a little pebbly, especially the softer scales under its chin and wings. Wren touched one of the wings softly with two fingers and the dragon unfolded it to rest in the palm of her hand.

She was pretty sure this dragon wouldn't eat her. It looked as if it wanted a mommy more than a meal, or at least something warm to curl up against.

Do dragons take care of their babies? Does it have a mommy

somewhere nearby? Wren realized she had no idea. She'd been told to avoid mother bears with their cubs, and not to take baby birds out of their nests, but the only thing she really knew about dragons was to hide if you heard one coming.

"Well, if you do have a mommy somewhere, she wasn't taking very good care of you," Wren said. She patted the little dragon's head. "Don't feel too bad. Mine is very, very terrible, too." She felt a stab of deep, lonely sadness trying to sneak into her heart, but she shoved it back down under her anger.

A roar suddenly split the sky overhead, and Wren ducked into a crouch. The dragonet clutched her in a panic, trying to burrow into her armpit.

"Calm down!" Wren barked, although her heart was pounding like an avalanche. Now she could hear wingbeats coming closer — and she was still out in the open, here beside the river.

She wrapped her arms around the baby dragon and bolted toward the trees. Dark green leaves enveloped them as she tumbled into the first large bush she saw and pressed herself against the trunk.

Through the cracks between the fan-shaped leaves, she saw a rust-colored dragon soar overhead. Its yellow eyes glittered as it swung its head back and forth, studying the ground. The air crackled with heat and tiny flames curled from its nose.

It's hunting, Wren thought, her heart going even faster.

This is the dragon who would be snapping me up right now if I hadn't gotten out of those ropes.

She squinted through the leaves and noticed a mark on the dragon's face — an odd burn on its cheek that was smoking as though it was brand-new.

"ROAR!" the dragon in the sky bellowed. "ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAR!"

It sounded almost human, although that was a bonkers thing to say about a dragon's roar. But there was something about it that reminded Wren of her mom calling her name whenever Wren had a tantrum and went to hide in the trees. This dragon's roar was like that; it sounded mad and frantic and worried at the same time.

Yeah, right, Wren thought. As if dragons can have that many complicated feelings! A roar is just a roar. It probably means "WHERE'S MY DINNER HUNGRY NOW" and that's it.

She wondered if dragons cared about their babies, or if they ever threw them out to die. Maybe they were actually better parents than humans. Maybe they fought to protect their kids.

If my mom came back and called for me right now . . . would I go to her? Would I let her take me home, if she said they'd made a mistake?

No, Wren decided. Because they could change their minds again tomorrow. Now I know they could throw me away anytime for no reason. So they can never, never have me back.

The baby dragon in her arms squeaked the tiniest squeak

and wrapped its tail around her arm. Its face was completely hidden in the folds of her dress and it was shivering again.

“Shhh,” Wren whispered. “It won’t hurt you, but it’ll definitely eat me if it finds us.”

Another roar shook the leaves, and the baby dragon squeaked again, small and tragic.

“Unless . . .” Wren thought for a moment. “Do you know that dragon?” she whispered. “Is it the one that threw you in the river?”

She knew the baby dragon couldn’t possibly understand her, but something about the way it trembled made her think the answer was yes.

Was that its mother? Did she get rid of the baby — and then change her mind? Or is she making sure it’s really dead?

Whoever it was, the baby was clearly scared of it.

At least someone is looking for you, Wren thought, hugging the little dragon closer. But I won’t let them take you and hurt you again.

The red dragon swooped around in another circle, glaring at the river, and then kept flying, following the river south and east toward the sea.

Wren let out a breath and nudged the baby dragon’s head up to look at her.

“It’s gone,” she said. “I won’t let it find you. We’re safe.” She glanced out at the vast, dangerous sky and the unfriendly wilderness that stretched all around them. “Well . . . kind of sort of safe. As safe as a seven-year-old and a baby dragon can be all alone in the mountains anyway.”

The tiny creature blinked its large, trusting eyes. Its trembling abruptly stopped, and it put one small paw on her hand. As if it was saying, *Yes. I am safe now; safe with you.*

Wren smiled at it. This was still a pretty terrible plan, saving a baby dragon who would probably eat her just as soon as it was big enough. But she suddenly didn't care. She had a feeling someone had decided to toss aside this baby dragon, exactly the way her parents and her whole stupid village had thrown her away.

People are awful and untrustworthy and mean, so I'm going to make friends with a dragon instead. My dragon is way better than any person I know, so there.

"We don't need anybody else, right, little dragon?" Wren said, stroking one of its tiny ears. "If they don't want us, we don't care. We can look after each other, can't we?"

The dragon squeaked again. Even though it couldn't understand her, it was still a better listener than literally everyone in her village.

"I'm Wren," she said. "Do you have a name? It's probably something like Rawrgllorf, isn't it?"

"Squeak," said the dragon.

"Well, I can't call you Squeak," she said. "When you're big enough to eat me, I'm pretty sure you won't like that name very much." She ran her fingers lightly over his smooth scales, the color of the palest sunset over the mountains. "I think you're a mountain dragon, even though your color is a little wrong. How about Sky? I kind of like the name Sky."

The baby dragon poked its snout into the center of the

palm of her hand and made a little snortling sound. Wren giggled.

“I think that was a yes. Hello, Sky. When you grow up, will you burn down my village for me? Especially the dragon-mancers’ houses. That’ll show them. I’m going to grow up on my own just fine and then come back and be like, *ha! I did NOT get eaten by dragons and now my pet dragon is going to eat YOU, take THAT!*”

Wren lifted Sky to her shoulder, where he curled around her neck, closed his eyes, and fell into a peaceful sleep.

She had no more family, no village, no people to take care of her. She knew she could never trust a human again.

But she didn’t need any of those things. She had a dragon of her own, and she was going to be better than fine. Together, she and Sky were going to be amazing.

ORDER YOUR COPY!



iBooks

amazon.com

BARNES & NOBLE
BOOKSELLERS



Google Play

BOOKS-A-MILLION

kobo

INDIE
BOUND

