

AUTHOR'S NOTE

If you're interested where this short story about Alex came from, then keep reading and I'll try to fill in some of the blanks.

If not, then just skip ahead to the main story – you won't be missing out on much...

I Hate Dragons predates *Grimble*, even though *Grimble* uses Alex as one of the main characters. Alex was originally a character in my first children's novel *Toasted*, and it is in this novel that Alex is kidnapped by sheep from the future. *Toasted* has never been published, even though it is complete in a hand-written text. At one point it was ready for publication, but a hard drive failure lost the original file and so it currently only exists in a half-printed, half-handwritten manuscript form. Because of this, *I Hate Dragons* was originally written as the start of the further adventures of Alex. Then, when *Grimble* needed to be expanded past a short story (what is essentially now Chapter 1) and other characters were needed, Alex snuck into the Chess Club. The insinuated story of his kidnapping is mentioned in *Grimble*, but for now remains a secret.

Who knows... maybe one day, I'll get round to completing *Toasted* as full-finished version and Alex's adventure into a future ruled by mutant sheep will finally see the light of day... I know that the last class I read *Grimble* with, prior to its publication, were desperate to learn what had happened to Alex... so you never know!

Until then, here's *I Hate Dragons*...

Enjoy, Simon

I Hate Dragons

By

SIMON MEREDITH

Dragons. I hate dragons, thought Alex. Especially large red one's with gigantic wings, and rows and rows of razor-sharp teeth.

Under normal circumstances a thought along these lines might have appeared odd. These, however, were not normal circ...

Alex ducked quickly to avoid the grasping talons.

"Get up off the floor, little boy!" the dragon snarled as it passed overhead, its talons inches from Alex's flattened body.

Alex raised his nose from the thick grass, and glanced ahead. There were trees; trees to hide under. The dragon was circling back around, and this time, Alex knew, it was going to swoop lower, and clutch at his jacket, and carry him; and he was going to get eaten...

"Don'twanttogeteaten,don'twanttogeteaten," the words came in time with each running step, silent words which whistled up from the bottom of his chest. Ahead were the trees, he was going to make it. He was going to...

Alex glanced back quickly, suddenly aware that it was taking the dragon a long time to mount another attack; and as he looked, he saw it. It was sitting on the spot where Alex had thrown himself to the ground only moments ago, and it appeared to be smiling. Its huge leathery lips were drawn back over its plaque encrusted teeth, and Alex was certain, for only a brief second, that the dragon was adjusting its bottom teeth. *But dragons don't have false teeth, he assured himself, they brush them every day to keep them in perfect condition for eating stray animals, or small boys.*

Once they had been adjusted, the dragon reared up on its hind legs, launching itself into flight, and Alex's attention turned once more to the approaching trees.

Not far now, his mind raced, not far.

If everything had gone to plan, Alex would have reached the trees, the dragon would have hovered overhead for a few minutes, before spotting a small flock of sheep grazing over the next hill. The dragon would have then thought: a light snack while I'm waiting for the little brat to stop cheating, and come

out from under there, would be rather nice; giving Alex the opportunity to run away before the dragon returned.

Things did not go as planned.

Alex was only three hundred feet from the safety of the trees, when the dragon soared over his head. If Alex had been able to see the dragon's face, then he would have noticed a smirk creep across its lips. It was only a brief smirk, before its huge jaws opened, and a torrent of flame leapt towards the trees, who promptly exploded into flame. The sudden gust of brilliant heat stopped Alex in his tracks.

"That's not fair!" yelled Alex, exasperated.

The dragon turned quickly in the air, and came to land a few feet in front of Alex.

"There's no need to shout," the dragon ordered. "Sit down."

Alex sat, red-faced; running his hands through the damp grass. He had never realised that dragons had such a powerful way with words. When the dragon spoke, the tone said 'obey without question'. He glanced around absentmindedly, his eyes

flitting between the deep ruby eyes of the dragon, and the lush green of their surroundings. There was a chance, albeit a very small one, that not all of the trees were burning, and that he might be able to find a path through to freedom.

“Is that one of your friend’s flying up there?” asked Alex, pointing upwards. The dragon followed the path of Alex’s finger, and scanned the skyline for a fellow dragon.

“Where?”

The dragon looked towards Alex when he gave no reply, only to discover that he was no longer there. The dragon looked around quickly, and spotted him in the distance, sprinting towards the trees.

“Stay where you are,” the dragon called after him, but Alex continued to run, entering the forest of blazing trees.

When he emerged on the other side, he was breathless, and smiling. Sweat ran from his forehead into his eyes, which he quickly wiped away. That had been much tougher, and hotter, than he could have imagined. There had been several instances where branches had collapsed from the trees above

him and, for one moment, he half-imagined himself in an old war move, moving quickly from side to side dodging explosions; all wrapped up at the end with a forward roll to leave the blazing warzone completely. Panting, he looked up and his smile faded quickly.

The dragon was sitting on the grass in front of him, its lips peeled back, and carefully adjusted teeth grinning at him inanely. It was running one set of nine-inch talons through the grass as it waited, leaving large furrows in the ground as if they had been worked by a miniature plough.

“Sit,” it ordered, pointing to the grass in front of it, where it pressed the point of a talon into the soft earth. Alex approached slowly, standing on the spot where the dragon had created the talon mark. He sat in front of the dragon, and began to pick at the grass, tossing it into the wind. His eyes downcast to avoid the hypnotising gaze of the creature.

“And pay attention,” it growled.

Alex dropped the grass to the ground, and sighed.

“Now,” began the dragon, moving its snout forward until it was only a few inches from Alex’s head. All it would take was a brief flash of teeth, and Alex could attend the next Halloween party as the infamous headless child. Luckily this wasn’t the case. “What seems to be the problem?”

Alex swallowed hard, and the answer to the question formed itself in his head: *I was more than happy to sit there, and then you decided to pick on me, and then you chased me, and you burned down the trees, and I was only doing my lunch duty by trying to run away, and now you’re going to... to...*

“I don’t understand,” replied Alex, embarrassed.

“What don’t you understand?” questioned the dragon, narrowing its eyes. The stench of its breath was quickly becoming overpowering, and Alex blinked several times, wondering how he was going to word his reply. “Alex?”

Alex blinked, “I don’t understand how you know which is the right angle.”

The dragon gave a snort which instantly told Alex that things were not good. The dragon nodded, turned, and walked once more to the blackboard.

“Alright,” the dragon began, “this is the right angle, because it is at an angle of ninety degrees...”

Maths. I hate maths, thought Alex.