

THE DUNDOODLE MYSTERIES

# THE DENTIST OF DARKNESS



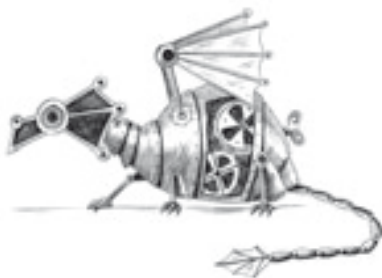
DAVID O'CONNELL

BLOOMSBURY

ILLUSTRATED  
BY  
CLAIRE  
POWER

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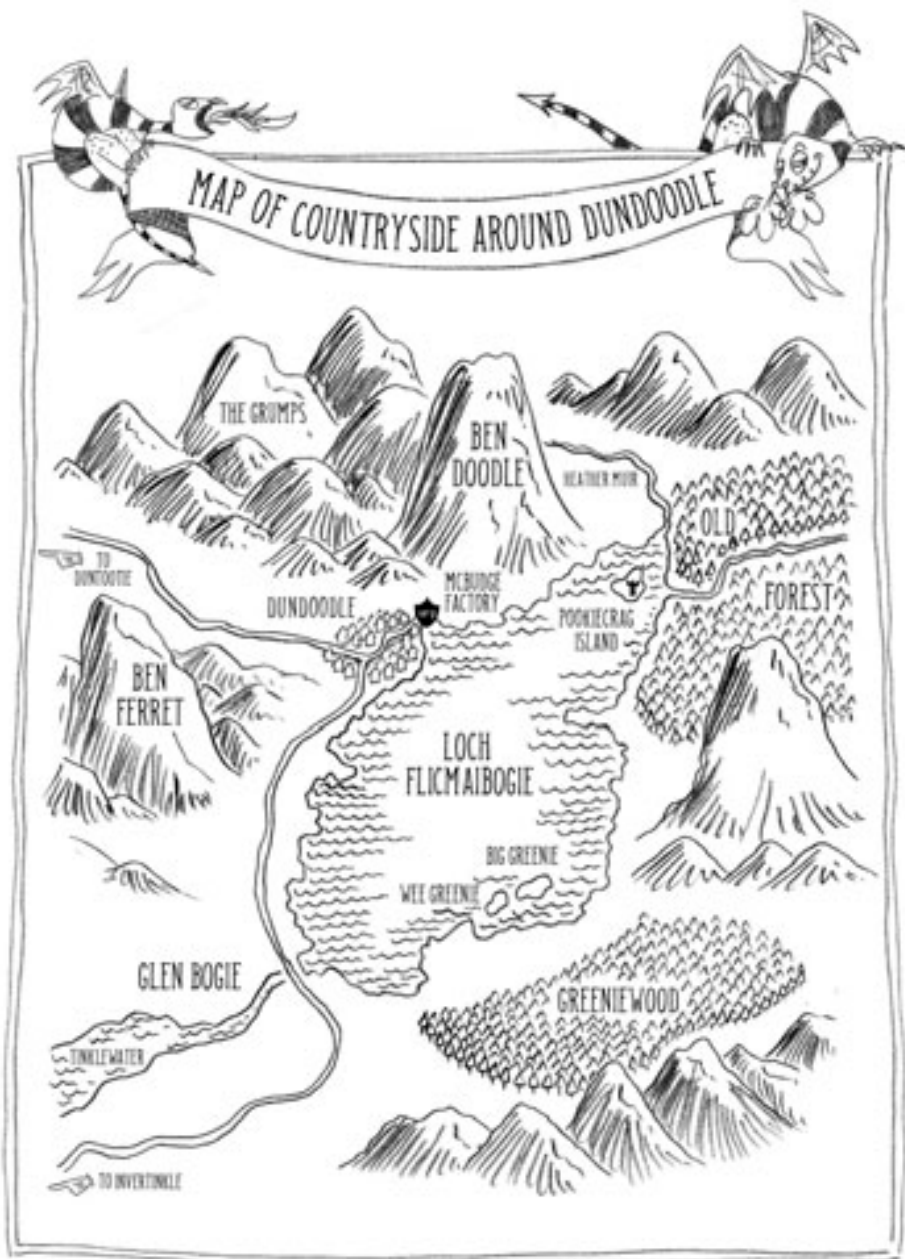


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BLOOMSBURY  
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

NEW YORK LONDON OXFORD NEW DELHI SYDNEY







The hills were alive with the sound of ... *dragons*.

Archie McBudge lay back on the sun-warmed grass and watched as a flock of honey dragons circled overhead, their little wings a blur of skin and scales. Occasionally, jets of fire would erupt from their mouths, leaving clouds of sunset-coloured smoke trailing across the blue of the summer sky.

'Completely bonkers!' sighed Fliss. She stood on a rock nearby, one that overlooked the blanket of heather and gave a view across the hidden valley all the way down to the loch. 'If anyone had told me last year that I'd be friends with dragons, I'd have said they were completely *bonkers*!'

Archie grinned and grabbed a piece of McBudge Fudge from his bag and popped it into his mouth. His friend



Fliss loved watching the honey dragons. He had to admit he couldn't think of a better way to spend a Saturday morning.

The two children looked on as the small, amiable creatures descended and then buzzed about the heather, making a noise like the hum of a thousand bees. Archie's little dog Sherbet barked and wagged his tail every time a dragon swooped close by them. He wanted to play chase but the dragons' wings gave them an unfair advantage.

'Careful, Sherbet,' Archie warned. 'You'll be a dog kebab if you get too close.' Dragons from old stories and legends used their fiery breath to barbecue courageous, armoured knights like they were human-shaped baked potatoes wrapped in tin foil. Not the honey dragons. They were more like flying blowtorches, but they could still do some damage.

One dragon paused briefly nearby. Its long, thin tongue whipped out of its golden mouth and deftly licked the nectar from each tiny flower in a row.

'Do they eat all the nectar?' Archie said, sitting up on his elbows. 'Don't they need it to make honeystone?' Fliss had become something of an expert on honey dragons, ever since one – named Blossom – had hitched a ride home in her pocket. Archie would never forget that

snowy winter's night when they had first discovered the honey dragons, in the Cavern of Honeystone.

'They have cheek pouches,' she explained. 'They're like flying-lizard-bee-hamsters! They store some nectar in their pouches and use their magical Dragon-fire to spit it out as crystals of honeystone when they get back to the cavern.' She screwed up her nose. 'Honeystone is magical dragon drool. It's a bit gross, if you think about it too hard.'

Archie wrinkled his nose, remembering the massive cave filled with honeystone, hidden under the mountain of Ben Doodle. He, Fliss and their friend Billy had discovered it whilst on a quest to prove Archie was worthy of inheriting the world-famous McBudge Chocolate Factory and all the magic that came with it. They had never imagined the sparkling honeystone was made of dragon spit.

'We'd better get back home,' Archie said, getting to his feet. 'Or Billy will think we've abandoned him in the library.'

'Don't worry – you know he's in his element. Billy loves your great-uncle Archibald's collection of books. It's all material for his *Book of Wyrdivness*.' Billy Macabre (whose real name was Billy MacCrabbie) was obsessed with collecting stories about local legends and magical

mysteries – or *wyrdiness* as the people of Dundoodle called it.

‘I’m more worried about him stumbling across another secret passage or a hidden trapdoor into a dungeon. There are still so many rooms in that house I’ve not explored. We might never find him again!’ Archie grinned at the idea. ‘And anyway,’ he added, ‘I’m supposed to be going to the dentist before lunch.’

Fliss jumped down from the rock and whistled. One of the honey dragons sped over and landed lightly on her shoulder.

‘You’ve got Blossom well trained,’ laughed Archie. ‘I wish Sherbet was that obedient.’

‘The honey dragons are really intelligent,’ said Fliss. ‘I’m teaching Blossom to speak human. Isn’t that right, Blossom?’

‘Completely bonkers!’ croaked Blossom in reply, burping a smoke ring into Fliss’s face.

They left the other dragons to their nectar-gathering in the heather and tramped across the moor, following a sheep track down to the shore of the loch. As they trudged along the path that would lead them back to the little town of Dundoodle, Archie suddenly had the feeling they were being watched. A movement in the bracken caught



his eye and he froze as a small figure appeared in front of them.

Sherbet growled at the stranger, a bearded man with a mud-splashed face. He wore a green hood and a cloak made of leaves. Clumps of grass sprouted from his moss-coloured trousers. The odd character bowed low, disturbing a little robin that was nestled in his beard.

‘Guardian,’ the man said solemnly. He had a strange accent. ‘You are summoned. The Tree sends its first signal. A time of great danger is upon us!’ He produced a large, yellow leaf from under his cloak and handed it to Archie. The man eyed Archie’s face expectantly.

‘Um ... thanks?’ said Archie. The stranger gave him a confused frown before plunging back into the undergrowth.

‘Wait!’ called Archie, but the small man had disappeared.

‘Who was that walking compost-heap?’ said Fliss. ‘What was he talking about?’

‘The Tree,’ said Archie, staring at the golden leaf that lay on the palm of his hand. ‘This is from the Wyrddie Tree ... the source of all magic in Dundoodle!’