



## **My Dad the Dragon**

Written by Jackie French

Illustrated by Stephen Michael King

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### **Synopsis**

Horace's dad has silver wings and a green and orange tail. His mum hasn't been able to cast a spell right yet, and his sister Grub – the Fayre Elayne – invents weird things like a box that can take instant pictures.

At King Arthur's School for Knights the nasty Sir Sneazle has given Horace the worst assignment of all. Why couldn't Horace be asked to rescue a damsel in distress instead of Pimply Pol, Bran and Snidge, or write an essay on the broadsword instead of Bernard. Anything but kill a dragon!

How will Horace and his friends manage? Will the Fayre Elayne come to the rescue with one of her inventions? Can Mum cast a spell that really works? And will Horace finally discover the truth about his family that will save Dad and Camelot?

Ages: 7–10 years

### **About the Author**

Jackie French is a full-time writer who lives in rural NSW. She writes fiction and non-fiction for children and adults, and has columns in the print media. Jackie is regarded as one of Australia's most popular children's authors. In 2000, Jackie won the Children's Book Council's Younger Readers' Award for *Hitler's Daughter*. In 2002, she won the ACT Book of the Year Award for *In the Blood*. Her bestselling picture book *Diary of a Wombat* was named an Honour Book in the 2003 CBC Awards and won the ABA Book of the Year, as well as numerous other awards in Australia and overseas. Most recently, *To the Moon and Back*, co-written with her husband Bryan Sullivan, won the 2005 Eve Pownall Award for Information Books.

### **About the Illustrator**

Stephen's first picture book, *The Man Who Loved Boxes*, was nominated for the Crichton Award for illustration, was the winner of the inaugural Family Award and was selected for Pick of the List (US). He has since illustrated over 20 books, and has been shortlisted five times for the Children's Book Council Awards. In 2002, he won both the YABBA and Koala children's choice awards for *Pocket Dogs*.

### **All About Wacky Families**

Jackie thinks that all families are wacky ... in their own way.

- What do you think is special or different about your family?
- Is everyone in your family human? Can an animal really be a member of a family?
- Is there anyone in your family who just MIGHT be a dragon in disguise? How about your teachers?

### **All About Camelot**

- Was Camelot a real place? Use your library or the Internet to find out more about it. Write down some of your findings.
- The story of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table is a famous *legend*. What is a *legend*? Carry out some research on King Arthur, his Knights and the Kingdom of Camelot. Present your information in a colourful poster.
- Was there ever a real King Arthur?
- If you lived in the world of Camelot what or who would you like to be?

### **All About Dragons**

- Are dragons real or made up? Find out some of the myths associated with them by going to the library or using the Internet. Write a story about a dragon and/or draw a picture of the dragon to go with the story.
- Slaying dragons was a popular subject of legends and fairy tales. Find some stories about famous dragon-slayers and retell one of them in your own words.
- There is a type of lizard called a dragon. Find out all about real Australian dragons. Do you think Jackie might have known any real dragons when she wrote *My Dad the Dragon*?
- Would you like to know a dragon?(either a real one or a made up one. ) Why or why not?

### **Activities and Discussion**

1. What punishment did Sir Sneazle threaten for any boy who didn't do his homework? (p. 5) Was this a fair punishment? Horace protested that dragons couldn't be killed because they were 'a protected species'. (p. 4) What does this mean? Make a list of animals that are protected nowadays. Choose one animal and write a report about where it lives, its habits and why it is protected.
2. Choose one of Grub's inventions and explain how it helped Horace and his friends. (pp. 36–44, 54) Why is it funny to read the other characters' reactions to these inventions? Horace said that 'Girls don't have the right sort of brains for

- school'. (p. 18) How does Grub prove that this is not true? How is Horace's schooling different from yours? And how is it similar?
3. What happened when Horace's mum tried to cast the handsome knight spell? (pp. 29–32) Write a humorous story about a spell that goes wrong. Make up a spell, in rhyming verse, for a situation of your choice, for example, turning a bully into a toad.
  4. How did Grub transform herself into a damsel? (p. 45—46) Discuss some well-known stories about 'damsels in distress'. Why were girls portrayed as weak and helpless creatures? Choose one story and re-write it with a more modern slant.
  5. Why did Horace go alone to hunt the dragon? (pp. 51, 55, 58) Is it easier to tackle problems by yourself or with the help of your friends? Horace thought he must fight the dragon so his parents wouldn't be ashamed of him. Do you think his parents would have wanted him to fight the dragon?
  6. How does Jackie French turn a scary situation (fighting a dragon) into a humorous one? (pp. 62–69) Is it likely that Horace would have been able to kill the dragon?
  7. Who told Horace the truth about his parents? How did he react to the news that he was half-dragon? (pp. 74–77) How would you react if you found out that you were only half-human? What might be a suitable name for someone who was half-dragon and half-human? A hugon? Consider some unusual animal pairings and invent names for their offspring. For example, a cross between a zebra and a donkey is a *zedonk* – and they actually exist!
  8. Why had Dad kept the truth a secret from Horace and Grub? (pp. 84–85) In your opinion, did he do the right thing? Is it important for family members to be honest with each other? When might it be necessary to keep a secret?
  9. Explain Sir Sneazle's plan to take over the Kingdom of Camelot. (pp. 98–104)
  10. Apart from discovering that he was half-dragon, what were some other important things that Horace learnt about himself in the course of the book? Do people need to face challenges to understand themselves better?