

Dragon and Thief by Timothy Zahn

Subjects: Dragons—Juvenile fiction; Life on other planets—Juvenile fiction; Fugitives from justice—Juvenile fiction; False testimony—Juvenile fiction

Awards: Best Books for Young Adults

Book Lists: Gifted, Grade 6, Middle School, Reluctant Readers

Props: Dragon



14-year-old Jack looked up and watched as four small air ships attacked four larger air ships. He saw that despite their size, the smaller air ships were winning. Three of the large air ships were under their control. But the fourth one suddenly dropped from the sky and headed for a crash landing on the planet—Jack’s nice, quiet, out-of-the-way hiding place. “Great,” sighed Jack. Jack was a thief. Well, not a thief by choice, but by necessity. He was on the run for a crime he didn’t commit. He had landed on the planet because it was uninhabited. He just wanted time to figure out a plan to prove his innocence. But now that there was a wrecked airship on it, he might as well check it out.

One hour later Draycos, a K’da warrior, began to regain consciousness and to remember: His space ship had been attacked; it had lost control and crashed on an uninhabited planet. Pushing away the collected debris hemming him in, he worked his way out from under the control board. He looked around at the rubble to assess the situation. All he found were the dead bodies of Shontine warriors and more rubble. There was no one alive but him. And he would soon die as well. Draycos couldn’t survive long without a host. Another two hours, (*Bring out dragon*) perhaps, and his three dimensional dragon form would fade into a two-dimensional shadow and disappear forever into nothingness.

But then, from somewhere aft of the command complex, he heard a sound—the sound of footsteps coming toward him—his attackers. Despite his weak condition, he knew it was better to die fighting than to do nothing at all. Silently he drew his legs beneath him and waited. The footsteps came to the aft doorway. Draycos closed his eyes to slits: and then, the intruder was there—but he was a young human. And it was clear that this boy was no warrior. The boy spoke, “It’s just like back there, more of the same, only worse.” Draycos struggled to understand the foreign words. “Wait a second,” the boy said suddenly, “There is something new here. It looks like

a little dragon. No kidding—it’s about the size of a small tiger, all covered with gold scales.” A cracked voice from an unseen communicator replied, “Is it alive?” “Doesn’t look like it,” the boy said, “but I’ll check.”

As the boy approached, a strange thought occurred to Draycos. He could attack the intruder, kill the boy—or—he could use his last bit of strength to connect with him. It was a gamble, Draycos knew. Throughout their history, the K’da had met only two species who could act as hosts to them. Draycos came to a decision. The boy approached and leaned close. . . Draycos leapt. (*Put dragon away*)

It was the last thing Jack had expected. With a startled gasp he jumped backwards. There was a flash of gold right in his face—he blinked. And then, without a sound, it was gone. The dragon had vanished. But as the immediate shock of the incident began to fade, Jack suddenly became aware that there was something odd about the way his skin felt. He pulled open his shirt and caught his breath. There, angling across his chest and stomach as if painted on, was a wide tail. It had a golden fish-scale pattern—the same pattern as he had seen on the dragon. A horrible thought struck him. Frantically pulling the shirt free, he slid it all the way off his right arm. Twisting his head around, he looked down at his right shoulder—and gazed directly into the dragon’s face. Then, to his utter astonishment, the face rose slowly out of his skin, like the top of an alligator’s head rising up though the surface of the water. The long upper jaw opened slightly, giving him a glimpse of sharp teeth.

Jack is a thief who is trying to prove his innocence. Draycos is a warrior who must revenge his people—two species thrown together by chance. But is this more than Jack can handle? If you were Jack, would you host a dragon and let it live on your skin? Find out what Jack does. (*Hold up book*) *Dragon and Thief* by Timothy Zahn, the first book in the Dragonback Adventures.