

Book Proposal

for

The Dragontail Rabbits

by

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Contents of Proposal

Title Page	3
Overview	4
From the Author	5
Plot Summary	7
Author's Background	8
Book Comparisons	9
Target Audience: Who will buy this book?	11
Chapter-by-Chapter Plot Summary	12
Sample Chapters	22
Sequels, Spin-Offs and Tie-Ins	35

The Dragontail Rabbits

Amy Lucas

Overview
of
The Dragontail Rabbits

For generations, the Dragontail Rabbits have been trapped in a valley shrouded in mist and fog. The Dragontail Rabbits are dying—and some deaths are more mysterious than others.

In the middle of Dragontail Valley sits a monolith, shaped eerily like a dragon.

As the mist grows thicker and the wind grows stronger a mounting terror runs through the warren—rumors that the Dragon Rock is coming to life and unleashing its vengeance on the rabbits.

Is the Dragon real, or is it the illusion of an escalating fear, made of mist and magic?

In the midst of this turmoil appears a floppy-eared rabbit named Theo and his hedgehog friend Philip...two unlikely heroes who may just turn out to be the bravest champions of them all....

From the Author

The Dragontail Rabbits started as a simple bedtime story about an orphaned young rabbit who, without other rabbits around, struggles to identify and understand his own nature. It turned into something else entirely.

In writing about self-identification I wanted to acknowledge how easily we are defined by our communities and how damaging collective fear can be.

I grew up in a generation that lived in a culture of fear. Passing through the end of the Cold War and into the fear of terrorism, mutant microbes, crime, drugs, immigration...the media feeds us fear, fear and more fear. I have successfully maneuvered out of the thick “fog” of this fear and take a more proactive approach to the world and my place in it, an approach I’d like to share with coming generations.

There are many children’s novels that address fear as it relates to the individual: fear of failure, fear of what others think of you, fear of monsters or some similar “evil.” But I have yet to read a children’s story that deals with the insidious nature of collective fear and how it can manifest as prejudice, isolation and the very “something” we fear the most. I wanted to write a story that would help children recognize this communal fear so that they will be better able to disassociate themselves from it. Rather than becoming part of the fear, they can “shine their lights” to dispel it.

I also hope *The Dragontail Rabbits* helps people gain a better appreciation for their own uniqueness and that of others—that the firm lines that are sometimes drawn between those of other religions or races begin to soften until they are eventually erased. *The Dragontail Rabbits* teaches that other people’s fears do not have to become our own, and that we can break through even the most entrenched fears by honoring our own powerful

nature, truths and love. People will also learn to look at rabbits, and hopefully all other animals, a little more differently and a lot more compassionately.

Plot Summary

Floppy-eared with a patchwork-perfect coat, Theo the Rabbit isn't quite the bunny you'd expect to find hopping through the idyllic fields of Birchwood Meadows, but he's the only rabbit the Meadows has got, and he's starting to wonder...why?

When he rescues a drowning rabbit from the river rapids, he must decide whether to stay within the safety of the Meadows or honor the promise he makes to the dying rabbit to travel to his warren in "India" and deliver a cryptic message about a dragon and a crystal cave. With his trusty pal Phillip the Hedgehog and the stranger's brightly hued crystal to guide him, Theo travels to Dragontail Valley, a glen shrouded in thick mist and fog.

The valley is home to the warren of the Dragontail rabbits, but within the warren a firm line has been drawn between up-eared and floppy-eared rabbits, who are treated like prisoners and forced to toil under strict watch.

In the middle of the valley sits a monolith, shaped eerily like a dragon. There is a terrible fear running through the warren—rumors that the Dragon Rock is waking, unleashing its terrible vengeance on the rabbits. Is the Dragon real, or is it the illusion of a mounting fear, made of mist and magic?

As the wind grows fierce and the mist takes on a dragon-like personality, more and more rabbits die and food grows more scarce. Theo and Phillip befriend a group of floppy-eared rabbits, and together they search for the Dragontail crystal that will break the spell, free the Dragontail rabbits from the tyranny of the Dragon, and dissolve the mist forever.

Author's Background

A virtuoso writer, editor and actress, I have manipulated words for such companies as Mineral Essence, Gaiam, Livestrong, Local Spotter, Glad Lash, Think Out of the Book Publishing, and the Underground Health Reporter. I am currently the Senior Editor/Writer for Primal Blueprint Publishing, a health and wellness company based in Malibu, California.

I am the author of the highly praised series of SAT test prep books and DVDs, *Private Tutor SAT: Your Complete SAT Test Prep Course* (a *School Library Journal* Top 10 Pick with rave reviews), and the health and fitness book, *Beverly Hills Mega-Weightloss System*, as well as a contributing editor to the Random House book, *1,296 ACT Practice Questions*. I have edited and ghostwritten several dozen books within the fiction and nonfiction genres, and my op-ed essays and shorts stories have been published in Southern California newspapers and literary journals and have garnered awards from prestigious organizations such as *Writer's Digest*.

Originally from Northern California, I graduated from UCLA's acclaimed School of Theater, Film and Television summa cum laude with highest honors. I have starred in numerous independent films and a handful of TV roles, most recently as misunderstood villainess "Snakeskin" and her sweet alter ego "Miss Scott" in Nickelodeon's "Supah Ninjas." I am also an accomplished voiceover artist who has voiced toys and video game characters of all ages, most notably "Cloe, the Talking Bratz Doll." My screenplay *Solea* is currently in pre-production.

Book Comparisons

Watership Down (1972) by Richard Adams is a novel about rabbits whose warren is threatened. They go on a search for a warren of their own. It is similar to *The Dragontail Rabbits* in that it is a tale of courage, leadership and survival and, of course, the protagonists are rabbits. Both books portray the rabbits as real rabbits, who, although they are anthropomorphized, behave not as humans would but as rabbits in the wild might.

Watership Down, while enjoyed by adults and children alike, is without a doubt adult fiction. Its pace is slower than *The Dragontail Rabbits*, the descriptions of nature more long-winded and detailed, the mythological stories that run throughout arguably a bit confusing for a child to keep track of. *The Dragontail Rabbits* is written for a much younger audience and moves at a faster pace. And while Adams touches on the metaphysical in his endearing portrayal of the psychic rabbit Fiver, *The Dragontail Rabbits* expands on these metaphysical themes.

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh (1971) by Robert C. O'Brien is a story of a widowed mouse and her plight to save her son. It is similar to *The Dragontail Rabbits* in that it delivers a realistic glimpse of what life must be like as a mouse. They do not dress in jackets and capes (as the illustrations would have us believe) but live quite believably on fluffs of down made of scraps of clothes and cotton. By the time we meet the uber-intelligent Rats of Nimh we easily buy the human-like life they lead because the book is so realistically grounded. *The Dragontail Rabbits* delivers the same realistic

depiction while walking the line of reality and fantasy quite believably.

While *The Dragontail Rabbits* is also a story of survival, it deals with different, and more pertinent themes.

In *Guardians of Ga'Hole* (2006) by Kathryn Lasky, we follow the young owl Soren from his loving home to a sinister and threatening prison, much in the same way that we follow Theo in *The Dragontail Rabbits* from his idyllic home in Birchwood Meadows to the cold, dark prison of Dragontail Valley. Both Theo and Soren are treated like prisoners and must find a way out, not only for their own sake, but also for the sake of all the other animals. Their courage and strength are tested, but ultimately they come out victorious. Both books address the question: What happens when power lands in the wrong hands?

We are immersed in their animal worlds and really get a feel for what it would be like to be born an owl or a rabbit. *Guardians of Ga'Hole* is a series, and *The Dragontail Rabbits* is a stand-alone novel.

Poppy (1995) by Avi is a very simple, realistic portrayal of a mouse's life and the different animals she encounters and learns from. We are taught that what we "learn" isn't necessarily accurate and, as in *The Dragontail Rabbits*, the book celebrates friendship among unlikely sorts. *The Dragontail Rabbits*, however, is far more interesting and more action-packed. It also entails elements of fantasy that aren't found in *Poppy*.

Target Audience: Who will buy this book?

The target audience for *The Dragontail Rabbits* includes:

- ❖ Kids and parents who are looking for more sophisticated (but G-rated) readers than those currently found in the 7-12 category.
- ❖ Parents who want to expose their children to more New Age principles without going so far as to buy a book devoted to spirituality.
- ❖ Kids and parents looking for animal stories, particularly ones about rabbits.
- ❖ Kids who love fantastical stories about dragons.

While current trends in children's literature fluctuate, animal protagonists are universal and much needed between stories of vampires, werewolves and the supernatural. *The Dragontail Rabbits* deals with the timeless themes of bullying, discrimination, diversity and survival.

Chapter-by-Chapter Plot Summary of *The Dragontail Rabbits*

Chapter One

Meet Theo, a young bunny with long, floppy ears, a patchwork coat, and a lively imagination. Theo lives in Birchwood Meadows, an oasis for all different kinds of animals...except, it would seem, rabbits, of which Theo is the only one...and he's starting to wonder, *Why?*

Theo also doesn't understand why his friends have suddenly become more interested in finding mates than in playing their favorite games. Not even Rasta the Raven has time to play hide-and-go-seek in the clouds. The old abandoned rabbit run no longer carries the scent of rabbits, and after an

embarrassing tumble in the pond, Theo is afraid that perhaps he's not behaving at all like a rabbit should. *Perhaps...perhaps he doesn't fit into Birchwood Meadows after all...*

Chapter Two

Philip the Hedgehog, Theo's most trusted friend, drags the despondent rabbit to the river, determined to snap Theo out of his funk. While searching the rapid waters for treasures, Theo pulls a drowning animal from the current...an animal who turns out to be a rabbit with long, floppy ears, just like Theo!

Xavier the Rabbit entrusts Theo with a tiny crystal gemstone. With his last breath, Xavier begs Theo to... "Go to India...find the Dragontail crystal and cave...you must tell...the Dragon...stones crumbling...you must go to India!"

Will Theo leave his home and friends behind and honor his promise to the strange rabbit? *If there are other rabbits in India...and answers to questions long pondered, then just maybe he might...*

Chapter Three

Spurred on by his promise, and the crystal's pulse of purple and blue, Theo embarks on a journey to India. But first, he must prove he can defeat his foes by winning a contest of speed against Rasta the Raven...who always beats the rabbit. To the shock and delight of the entire Meadows, Theo outraces the blackbird!

Theo tries to convince his most courageous friends to join him on his adventure, but none is willing to journey so far from the Meadows...except for the slow, timorous Philip, who can't let his best friend travel through the unknown alone. Rasta tells them to follow the sun to India...*and to trust the light within...*

Chapter Four

Theo and Philip have their first encounter with humans—lumberjacks cutting down trees in the forest. After barely escaping the thunderous crash of a tree, Theo and Philip find themselves at the edge of Dragontail Valley—a lowland colored grey, covered by fog and mist. It is here that they meet Blackjack, a black rabbit with floppy ears who attacks Philip, thinking him a feared predator of the warren...*The One*, as the Dragontail Rabbits refer to it. After a quick tussle with Theo and shaky introductions, Blackjack agrees to take Theo and Philip to India.

It is in this chapter that we are introduced to the concept of “downer”—a derogatory term for floppy-eared rabbits, who we discover are treated as prisoners and servants of the warren. They are stopped at the entrance to the warren by an aggressive guard named Ajax whose ears shoot straight up—the first up-eared rabbit Theo has ever seen! Ajax refuses to let them pass and accuses them of mutiny, but they use the wind as an escape route and make a break for it, headed into the dark dankness of Dragontail warren...

Chapter Five

As they race through the warren, Theo and Philip bombard Blackjack with questions. *What’s this downer nonsense and why are the rabbits so afraid of what the mist and fog hide?* With questions left half-answered, they arrive at an untouched corner of the burrow that carries the scent of sorrow. Here, Theo discovers that India is not a place after all, but a dainty female rabbit who makes his heart beat in triple time.

But when Theo drops Xavier’s crystal at her feet, India scorns him, shaken by the news that her beloved Xavier drowned in the rapids...a “silly pebble in exchange for his life.” She refuses to answer Theo’s questions about a Dragontail crystal and cave, a dragon and stones crumbling.

Disappointed, Theo leaves the crystal with India, but before he and Philip can make it out of the burrow and head back to Birchwood Meadows, they are stopped by the up-eared guards, who refuse to let them through and order them back to “downer’s quarters.” The other floppy-eared rabbits hint at the danger outside the burrow and in the mist, and tell Theo and Philip that they are much safer inside, *for now...*

Chapter Six

Expecting the fog to have lifted, Theo is dismayed to find that the valley is still thick with mist and seeped in cold. Blackjack takes Theo and Philip to Dragontail Rock, a jagged piece of stone shaped like a Dragon, but when Theo reaches out to touch a crumbling scale, the earth begins to violently shake and the wind whips into a tornado-like frenzy. Theo, Philip and Blackjack run for cover, haunted by screams of rabbits carried on the wind.

Having had enough of orders and threats, Theo and Philip wait for the earth to stop shaking and the wind to quiet and then make a dash for it back to Birchwood Meadows. Their escape is thwarted, however, as they discover they are trapped... not by the up-eared guards but by the cloak of mist surrounding the valley. Whether they try to break through the mist with their noses or jump through in one go, it moves with them... *the mist follows them wherever they go...*

Chapter Seven

Theo and Philip are forced to work “the pits,” where they dig for gems under the watchful eyes of up-eared guards. When a guard begins bullying Philip, Theo rushes to defend his friend, but his paws are too badly bruised and his muscles too achy for him to put up much of a fight. A floppy-eared rabbit named Bruiser comes to Theo’s aid and deflects an almost certain beating. Theo and Philip barely escape another violent episode of whipping wind and rumbling earth, and they have to be helped back to the warren by Bruiser and his brother Echo, a floppy-eared bunny who speaks in rhyme.

In this chapter, Theo’s pressing questions are finally answered. Echo’s floppy-eared young daughter named Cherry leads Theo to the Archives, an abandoned part of the warren that tells the legend of the Dragontail rabbits in pictures etched into the burrow’s walls.

The legend goes like this: Long, long ago, a Dragon ruled the valley and forced the rabbits to collect gems that increased his power. He stowed these gems inside a crystal cave. The key to his power was the Dragontail crystal, a large crystal that fed on his imaginings—to create a valley of Dragons that would rule the forests and meadows beyond.

A brave rabbit named Tavone saved the Dragontail Rabbits by discovering the crystal and transferring its power to his imaginings, those of a safe valley for rabbits to thrive. His intent was so powerful, the Dragon came tumbling to earth and remained frozen in rock.

Years later, a floppy-eared rabbit named Bluebell was dumped by her human family in Dragontail Valley. She had a litter of kits, and though the other rabbits took her and her babies in, they taunted her, making fun of her ears and slow gait.

A city rat who had long coveted the power of the Dragontail crystal befriended Bluebell and convinced her to help the rats steal the crystal. He told the impressionable floppy-eared doe that the crystal would bring her strength and speed like that of no other rabbit. When Bluebell realized she had been tricked, she left the warren, abandoning her bunnies. The warren declared the floppy-eared bunnies prisoners not to be trusted.

When the Dragontail crystal disappeared, the mist suddenly appeared, trapping the rabbits in an unbreakable veil of miserable fog.

Now, food is dwindling, as there is no sun for a harvest, and it seems that without the Dragontail crystal to protect them, the Dragon Rock is crumbling and the Dragon is waking. Every time the earth trembles and the wind swirls

ferociously, more and more rabbits are lost. And Theo has to admit...the Dragon Rock seems to change shape every day...

Chapter Eight

Theo and Philip get their first opportunity for escape, and it comes in just the nick of time, as more and more rabbits are succumbing to seemingly supernatural forces...*is it starvation, the Dragon, the wind, or fear that's killing them, Theo wonders?*

India guides Theo and Philip to the river rapids, the only way out, but also, perhaps, a way to sure death. *After all, Xavier couldn't brave the rapids...*

They are joined by Blackjack, Bruiser, Echo, and Cherry, until Ajax breaks up the crew and starts a fight with his rival Blackjack. Blackjack's father—an up-eared Captain—breaks up the fight, but not before Ajax discovers that Theo has been hiding Xavier's crystal this whole time!

The Captain orders Ajax back to the warren, but instead Ajax gathers together the up-eared guards, along with the Chief rabbit, who return to the river to squelch a mutiny and gain possession of Xavier's crystal.

Blackjack and Theo put up a good fight trying to protect the crystal from the greedy hands of the up-eareds, but it's up to the Captain to tilt the battle in favor of the floppies. While the Captain holds off the up-eareds, Theo uses the crystal to part the mist and his friends hop through. Theo seals the mist closed behind him, trapping the up-eareds, as well as the defeated Captain, once again in the shroud.

Chapter Nine

Blackjack insists on going back through the mist and saving his dad, but the other rabbits know that would lead to certain death. Blackjack and Theo brawl over the crystal, which appears to jump from their hands and shoot back into the mist.

With the crystal gone, the rabbits have only one option—move forward before the up-eareds discover the crystal on the other side and set out through the mist in pursuit. The way back home to Birchwood Meadows is blocked by the mist, and the other rabbits, including Blackjack's father, are in mortal danger.

Theo devises a plan. They will head to the city to find the rats and reclaim the Dragontail crystal. Once they have possession of the Dragontail crystal, they can return to the warren, save the rabbits from the Dragon, and dissolve the mist for good.

They push forward, but India carries a secret tucked securely between her toes. None of the rabbits saw her snatch Xavier's crystal from the tussle. *Safe out of sight, safe out of mind, keeps us safe from harm...or does it?*

Chapter Ten

The rabbits and Philip are confronted by two blazing crimson eyes staring at them through a chink in the concrete wall of an alley. The amber eyes belong to a black rat named Galion, who warns them to talk no further of the Dragontail crystal, for it brings only evil. When Galion is trapped by a butcher with a baseball bat and a vendetta, the alley lights up with flickering orange eyes that watch eagerly for the beating.

Theo risks his life to save the rat's, an act that earns them all the disapproval of the hundreds of city rats that emerge from the brick walls. The rats are hungry...for rabbits, and the rabbits are pulled into the most intense and dangerous fight of their lives. During the battle, the crystal jumps from India's paw, and all the rats and rabbits scramble for possession. With the help of Galion, India is able to secure the crystal again and the rabbits narrowly escape...but a rift has been created in the group due to India's lies.

Chapter Eleven

Blackjack is furious at what he considers India's betrayal, believing that withholding the crystal may have cost his father's life. The rabbits follow Galion to the safety of a deli, where they feast on vegetables and learn that the rats gave the Dragontail crystal to a colorful Toucan who carried it beyond the highlands and canyons that flank Dragontail Valley.

The rabbits concoct a plan B. They can't return to Dragontail Valley empty handed, but what if they return with a load of vegetables for the starving rabbits as a sign of peace? They could drop the food and then dash out of the mist using Xavier's crystal. Then, they could continue their search for the Dragontail crystal and save the warren! *Surely that's a foolproof plan...*

Chapter Twelve

Using teamwork, the rabbits fill a mini shopping cart with vegetables. They manage to push it to the field, where it gets stuck on a rock and topples over. The rabbits can't tilt the cart upright again, but Rasta the Raven saves the day when he encounters the field of furies while on his migration.

His flock returns with a sheet to carry the rabbits and the vegetables all the way back to Dragontail Valley, but before they can load the sheet full of food, some adolescent boys with BB guns decide to use the animals as target

practice. Theo recklessly tries keep his friends safe and distract the boys with a chase, but ends up getting shot!

The birds scoop up the sheet full of rabbits before another animal is hit, leaving Theo lying motionless in the field.

Chapter Thirteen

Rasta and his flock carry the rabbits and Philip back to Dragontail Valley, but the rabbits aren't quick enough. The up-eareds see the mist part and are quick to ambush. The up-eareds take everyone but Philip prisoner. The hedgehog fights back, choosing to mourn Theo's loss alone at the river.

Meanwhile, Theo is barely alive, but manages to drag his body toward the forest. The boys follow in hot pursuit. One boy cocks his gun, aiming for the fleshy part of the rabbit's skull, when another boy, wanting to make the game more exciting, shoots his friend in the leg with a BB. And off the boys go for revenge, as Theo drops into unconsciousness.

Chapter Fourteen

Theo regains consciousness and begins the long journey back to Dragontail Valley by himself. The direction is unclear, but he follows the scent and sound of a rushing river, until he finds himself at the top of none other than Xavier's waterfall.

Back at the warren the vegetables are almost gone, and the up-eareds can't seem to get Xavier's crystal to part the mist. In desperation, the Chief orders Blackjack and India to try, but no rabbit, up-eared or floppy-eared, has the power to activate the gem. It seems the mist has settled in their hearts and clouded their imaginations.

Meanwhile, Philip realizes that there is nothing for him here; that Theo is gone and he must return to Birchwood Meadows. But the only path home is down the rapids, so Philip gathers all his courage in his tubby heart, faces his fear of the water, and jumps in!

Back at the top of the waterfall, Theo is awoken by the sound of a rattlesnake's rattle. He tries to pull his body upright, but with his wounds and all the rough travel, his limbs forsake him. He closes his eyes and awaits his fate, but the scent of blood under his nose tells him the rattler has veered off course. Opening his eyes he sees Philip, the dead rattler at the hedgehog's feet.

Chapter Fifteen

While Philip tries to convince Theo to come home with him to Birchwood Meadows, he falls through a patch of mossy earth and straight into the crystal cave beneath the waterfall. Theo jumps in after him to discover that Philip is being held down by a fierce creature inside the cave.

Back at the warren, the Chief forbids Blackjack and India entry into the burrow, leaving them to suffer the Dragon's wrath in the mist. Reluctant to leave the two floppy-eareds to such a cruel fate, Ajax confesses to Blackjack and India that he was scooped up by the Dragon and dropped when the wind began to settle. The fall damaged him, causing him to lose his strength and suffer from twitches and shakes. And just then, the wind begins to howl and the earth to rumble, *leaving Blackjack and India with nowhere to hide and only Ajax to help them find safety...*

Back in the cave, Theo discovers that Philip's attacker is the Captain, who was sent down the river when the moon was high and has been hiding out in the cave ever since. The Captain tells Theo and Philip that the Dragon will be returning and that they must leave now, but before they can escape the cave, *a clawed foot blocks the only entrance out...*

Chapter Sixteen

The Dragon appears as a mixture of mist and wind, his red eyes peering greedily into the cave. Theo, the Captain, and Philip evade the Dragon's hunt, pressing their bodies against the wet rock wall. *Before it was only wind and air, as if the mist had a mouth and the air claws, but now the Dragon is growing more powerful!*

When the coast is clear, Theo and Philip make their way out of the crystal cave. Neither can convince the other to join him, and the best friends part, Philip trekking back to Birchwood Meadows, and Theo traveling toward the highlands to find the Toucan and the Dragontail crystal.

Meanwhile, the Dragon continues his hunt at the warren, unleashing blazes of fire and heat through Dragontail Valley...*the flames head straight towards Ajax, India, and Blackjack...*

Chapter Seventeen

Theo makes it to a sandstone canyon, where he spies the Toucan and follows her aerial acrobats to her nest at the tiptop of a lush, tropical tree. She has been waiting for a rabbit with a pure heart and lively imagination to come claim the crystal, which she has hidden deep within the cavity of the tree.

At first, the crystal remains unresponsive to Theo's touch, but when he releases his fear and charges his imagination, the crystal begins to glow with vibrant hues...and off the Toucan and Theo go to try to save the warren...*but will they get there in time?*

Chapter Eighteen

Theo and the Toucan race to the waterfall, but before they can settle the Dragontail crystal onto its platform in the cave, they are attacked by the Dragon, who scoops Theo up with his tail. In between punches and kicks, Theo discovers that the Dragon is actually just made of mist and wind. Theo cleverly uses the wind to carry him back down to the ground, unharmed.

The Toucan tosses the crystal from her bill, and Theo kicks it toward the platform, but before he can steady it, the crystal shatters into pieces at his feet...its pulse of light now a million fragments of lavender.

As rocks begin to crumble around him, Theo gathers the light closer for protection, and as he does so, he realizes that the light is not coming from the crystal, but is originating from inside of him! He shuts his mind to the fear, and imagines Dragontail Valley as Tavone had once seen it, a valley

wrapped in sunshine, lush fields, and rabbits running freely, no Dragons or other predators to fear. *Even as he is buried under the rocks, he imagines...*

Chapter Nineteen

When the wind calms and the rocks stop crumbling, Theo calls out to the Captain and the Toucan, whose wing was badly injured in the fight. The Captain frees Theo from his rock prison, and the trio heads back to the valley *hoping they aren't too late...*

But the sky remains clear and blue, and the air, though crisp, is dry. They survey the scorched valley from the Dragon's snout, its reptilian figure now hardened permanently into stone.

Blackjack and India are the first to greet the heroes. India explains that the mist started falling like rain, extinguishing the flames that burned through the warren. From a patch of scorched weeds, a single daisy peers shyly through the ground.

Chapter Twenty

The valley is plush with green, and up-eareds and floppy-eareds play as one, but still...something is amiss. Theo feels a pull back toward Birchwood Meadows, especially as he watches the Toucan, finally healed, fly back to her home.

India can feel Theo is not completely happy and asks if he wants to leave the Dragontail rabbits, go home to Birchwood Meadows. But he can't...because he can't leave India behind. Longing for more adventure, and unwilling to break her developing bond with Theo, India decides to travel with Theo home to Birchwood Meadows, where they can start their very own warren of rabbits.

And so begins new life in the Meadows, *free of fear and full of imagination...*

Sample Chapters

CHAPTER TWO

The locals of Birchwood Meadows have always known that the faster the river's current, the more treasures lie beneath. So, certain the river would cure Theo's ailing mood, Philip the Hedgehog flexed the thorny points of his spines and shuffled the crotchety young rabbit to the shallows.

As the early morning light turned from gray to blue, the two friends surveyed the rapids from atop a small boulder in the river.

"What do you see, Theo? Anything?"

"Just bubbles and fish," he grumbled. "The current is so strong I can barely get a good look at anything! Hold me tighter."

Philip pressed his front paws more firmly on top of Theo's hind legs, and Theo plunged his head further into the rapids. The river water lapped over the boulder and tickled Philip's toes with a teasing spray. Philip hopped from paw to paw, trying to avoid the jets of water spritzing all around.

"Philip, hold steady!" Theo demanded, after coming up for a quick breath. He threw the hedgehog a steely stare before dipping back under the water.

Theo reappeared. "Ah ha! Look at this!" he said with a red aluminum cylinder in his mouth. He tossed his treasure triumphantly onto the rock.

Philip stuck his snout into the opening of the container and scrunched up his nose. "It smells sweet and syrupy."

“Look at the scratches on it,” said Theo, excited.

Phillip’s eyes widened. “Human writing, my grandpa calls it. Animals should never hold on to anything made by humans. It brings bad luck! Throw it back, Theo.”

Ignoring Philip’s warning, Theo tucked his nose inside the treasure and flipped it upside down, shaking it like a maraca. “Something’s inside. Rocks or pebbles...it sounds like a woodpecker drumming!”

But Philip had stopped paying attention—his eyes were now fixed firmly on the river. “Theo, look!”

Theo quickly tensed, popped up onto his haunches and scanned the rushing rapids for danger, but instead he saw a small animal bobbing in and out of the quickening torrents, its body hanging limp and beaten.

He glanced at the manmade gadget by his side. Fearing the truth of Philip’s superstition, Theo kicked his newfound treasure back into the water and perched on the edge of the rock.

“I’m going to grab his neck with my teeth. You lift him with your head, Philip!”

Philip’s spines pricked up straighter. “I don’t know how to swim, Theo!”

“I can’t do it alone, Philip!”

“I’m afraid of the water!”

There was no time to argue. The animal had nearly disappeared under the current, but Theo caught a glimpse of a torn ear waving its surrender. He

thrust his head into the water and sunk his teeth firmly into the scruff of the animal's neck. Pulling with all his strength, he lifted the animal out of the rapids and lay it safely down on the rock, collapsing beside it, fur to fur.

Theo was worried the animal's limbs held no life, but as the ba-dum of his own heartbeat began to quiet, he felt the faint pulse of the injured creature thanking him.

Theo sniffed at the stranger's fur, running his nose along the animal's fatigued limbs. He wondered at its long droopy ears and velvety nose...and then let out a gulp of recognition!

"Philip, I think I'm hallucinating! I see me, but in white."

"You're not hallucinating. I see you in white, too." said Philip.

"Another rabbit, here in Birchwood Meadows!" they both thought.

The stranger suddenly opened his eyes!

Theo jumped back, apprehensive.

"Innnn...di...," the stranger breathed heavily.

Theo cocked his ear.

"Innnn...di...a," the stranger sighed again in a hoarse voice.

"India?" Theo said, puzzled.

The stranger whipped his gaze into focus and locked eyes with Theo, causing Theo's heart to circle round his stomach and back.

But Theo stared right back, looking deeply into the stranger's eyes.

The stranger struggled to turn and stand but finally fell back with a thud.

Theo instinctively touched his nose to the stranger's and said in a calm voice, "Careful, my friend. You're safe here. Try not to move."

"India!" came the stranger's quavering voice. "Crystal cave. Must tell. Have to tell!"

"What crystal cave?" Theo asked, trying to make sense of the stranger's babble.

"Crystal cave. Falling water. That is the way...out of the..." The stranger gasped for breath. "I can't...I can't..." he coughed, twisting his body brutally, trying desperately to reach down with his head to his paw.

Philip bent his snout to the stranger's foot to search for an injury.

"Crystal rock," the stranger said between coughs.

Then they saw what he was reaching for: a shimmering translucent pebble lodged firmly between his toes.

Philip jiggled the jewel free, holding it between the sharp points of his top and bottom teeth. He watched, delighted, as the sun's rays played upon the gem, shooting rainbow-colored prisms of light off the gleaming water and onto the tip-tops of the hemlock and pine trees.

"The Dragon. Stones crumbling."

The stranger looked at Theo eagerly.

"You must tell..."

"Tell what? Tell who? I don't understand!"

“They will not believe. You...must...make...believe...you must find... the Dragontail crystal,” the stranger panted. “I...am...Xavier. Please...promise...me.... Go to...India!”

Xavier sighed a last gentle breath and then went completely limp, his body still.

“I promise! I promise!” Theo cried, nudging the motionless rabbit with his nose. “I promise. I swear!” He hoped his pledge would force life back into the rabbit, but it did no good.

He still had so many questions. Are there other rabbits in India? Do they eat grass, flowers, or insects? His heart was beating double-time.

“Theo?” Philip’s voice was quiet. “He’s gone. We have to give him back to the river now, okay?”

Philip carefully set the crystal rock down and took a final look at the lifeless rabbit before leaping over the water to dry land.

Theo watched as a large drop of water fell from a tree above and washed atop the sparkling pebble. The gem shot to life, snatching a sunbeam off the water’s splash and using it to project rainbows of light around a dazzled Theo.

The colored lights danced in front of Theo, gathering into faint forms that, with each two-step, sharpened into the images of rabbits, their ears floppy and long. Their silhouettes circled round, gazing at Theo with eyes full of equal parts hope and despair.

Suddenly, a bright shaft of light shot upward from the stone. The stone grew skyward into the light, ripening into a towering crystal pyramid adorned with smooth, beveled sides.

Theo slinked back, startled, for in the center of the pyramid, where the pulsing blue and pink light shined the brightest, a winged claw-footed creature appeared. Scaly, like a lizard, with eyes that glared red, its fangs were sharp and its forked tongue stabbed outward, trying to taste the damp air that surrounded the pyramid.

Drawn in by the creature's flashing red eyes, Theo edged closer. It belched out a hiss, fangs sharp and reptilian tongue slithering, but still Theo jutted his nose forward, as though hypnotized.

Suddenly, the creature snapped violently at him!

Theo jumped back, almost falling into the river.

Rattled, Theo pulled his gaze away from the winged beast and focused instead on the glowing shadows of rabbits twirling around him in merry-go-round fashion. Standing on his hind legs, he reached up to nudge the faint figures with his nose and touch their outlines with his paws, but the lizard-like creature in the pyramid beat its wings downward, sending out vapors of mist and wind that whipped the helpless, wispy figures into a shapeless frenzy.

Then, with a final threatening roar, the fanged beast spewed out a torch of bloody red flames, and the pyramid-tipped crystal melted in the blazing rays of the sun.

And just as quickly, the sun disappeared behind a cloud and the blood red flames vanished, leaving the crystal resting lifeless on the rock, just as it had been before the fantastic display.

Theo, breathing heavily, hooked his gaze upon the crystal rock, wondering whether he had just witnessed magic or mirage. He tapped it with his paw, but, with no sunlight upon it, the tiny stone remained spiritless...a mere pebble to untrained eyes. A mix of imagination and sunbeams, Theo thought.

Theo scooped the gem into his mouth, then gently pushed the rabbit back into the rapids. He did not release his gaze from the rabbit's sail until the river had wrapped Xavier in its strong embrace.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Theo raced through the highlands, the Toucan flying above with the Dragontail crystal lodged safely in her bill. Although Theo's ears flapped against his cheeks and the dust swirling in the wind stung his eyes, he never slowed his sprint.

Trees began to fill in the sparse moss grass, and the sound of the waterfall crashing against rock signaled the finish line's approach.

Theo skidded to a stop at the top of the waterfall, kicking several loose stones over the cliff's edge.

"Fly through the waterfall into the cave, Toucan!" Theo shouted. Theo leapt through the cave's roof and dropped into the granite cave below.

The Toucan shook droplets of water from her feathers.

“Hurry, Theo,” the Captain’s voice thundered through the dark cave, where the up-eared rabbit had waited since his exile to defend the warren from the Dragon’s reign of terror. “The Dragon’s wings are beating close by!”

Theo hopped quickly to the base of the crystal’s empty pedestal, the Toucan following on her skinny blue bird legs, her wings outstretched for balance.

A low vibrating growl boomed off the cave’s walls.

“Behind you!” Theo screamed to the Toucan. But the Dragon was too quick. It thrust its neck forward into the cave, grabbing the Toucan with its fanged teeth and breaking a wing. The Toucan’s screech split the air.

With a guttural cry, the Captain, from a dark corner of the cave, lunged at the Dragon, jabbing the sharp point of a rock into the monster’s red eye.

With an angry roar, the Dragon spat out the Toucan, who stumbled a few steps forward before falling onto her yellow breast. The Dragon began wildly thrashing its scaly neck about the cavern, searching for more prey in the heavy mist.

When the tip of its devil horn made contact with the Captain’s bushy tail, the Dragon scooped the Captain up through the mist. The rabbit slid down the curved horn until he was eye to eye with the Dragon. The Captain winced and the Dragon’s huge eye filled with hungry anticipation as the beast began to slowly lick the Captain with its crusty forked tongue.

Just then, Theo jumped onto the Dragon's tail but, unable to get a firm hold on its slimy scales, fell back down to the cave's stone floor. The tail swooped down, grabbed Theo and lifted him off the ground. The Dragon swung its tail around to its mouth, suspending Theo in mid-air. Breathing puffs of hot air through its large nostrils, the Dragon looked at Theo and curled its upper lip into a delighted snarl.

The Dragon's teeth gleamed silver and sharp against swollen gums ridged with pulsating purple veins. Peering into the cavernous depths of the Dragon's open jaws, Theo did not know which would be worse—having his flesh ripped apart by those frightening fangs or being swallowed whole, lost in the flaming belly of the beast forever.

His instincts, normally so quick and agile, were blunted with fear, and he remained frozen as the Dragon flicked its scabrous tongue along his frame. The Dragon peered with its bloodied eye into Theo's clear one, which was paralyzed open in terror.

The Dragon's gut rumbled with a throaty purr, as though amused that this tiny creature dared to challenge him.

But Theo caught another sound carried on the wind...a reminder of a promise he once had made. Xavier's words fell on Theo's ears as an echo, charging him with a surge of power. "They will not believe. You...must...make...believe..."

Theo gathered together his strength and, nails drawn, swiped a paw at the Dragon's long nose, but, to his surprise, sliced only through thin air. The

beast's nose temporarily melted in the mist but quickly snapped back into place. Theo tried punching with his other paw, which once again disfigured the Dragon's face into a shapeless mist, but when a fresh flutter of wind blew through the cave, the Dragon's features moved back into shape.

Theo's eyes widened in amazement, then in comprehension.

"The Dragon! He's just wind!" Theo called to the Captain.

Theo swiped with his left paw and kicked with his hind legs, refusing to give the Dragon a chance to resurrect its form. Instead, he punched at the Dragon furiously, whipping the wind into a down current so that the claws melted into swirls of mist that carried Theo back down to the cold stone floor.

"Toucan! The crystal!" shouted Theo.

Craning her neck, the Toucan tossed the crystal from her beak and into the air. Theo jumped high and with his hind leg kicked the crystal toward its stand.

The crystal caught a flare of sunlight and spun through the air flashing purple and blue. Landing on the pedestal's edge, the crystal teetered and tottered.

Theo sprinted forward, but, just as he reached out with his paws to steady the crystal, it tilted forward off the ledge, crashing at his feet and spattering into a thousand jeweled pieces.

"NO!" Theo cried!

He wrapped his body around the crystal's fragmented shavings, trying to gather its magic together. He closed his eyes tightly, willing the crystal whole again, knowing that without its powers the Dragontail rabbits were doomed.

But then, bathed in a mysterious rainbow-colored wash of light, Theo blinked his eyes open. He shifted up onto his haunches, looking around to find the source of the light, but all he saw were the dark colors of the mist; the crystal was still just broken pieces of dull stone with a few hints of color here and there. He tried desperately to grab at a pop of color or a pulsing glow but as soon as his paw closed around it, it would flicker out like a firefly extinguishing its light.

Faster and faster the glimmers of light came, holding more steady and vibrant.

As the glow around him brightened, he looked down and, with wide eyes, realized the light was coming from within him! A beam of golden light shot from his front paw and a spiral of lavender looped from ear to ear.

He tried to gather the coils of lavender light closer for protection, all the while imagining green fields and sunshine, tall grass and flowers—and rabbits running freely under a blue sky.

Suddenly, he was shocked out of his reverie by an ear-piercing scream and a booming crash, followed by the low rumble of rocks falling around him. It's just fear, he thought, as the rocks tumbled from the cave's walls. He shut his eyes to his fear and instead imagined India with a litter of kits,

Blackjack racing with some up-eareds, and Cherry playing by the riverbed with the other young does.

He heard the Captain scream his name, the Toucan cry for help.

“The Dragon...the mist...it’s not real!” he called out, hoping the Toucan and Captain could hear him. “It’s just our fear! The more we are afraid, the stronger and more real it becomes! Don’t be afraid!”

His voice boomeranged off the walls of the cave as the rocks collapsed around him. But, even as he realized he was being buried beneath the rock, he still felt the warmth of the light within surrounding and protecting him...

Sequels, Spin-Offs and Tie-Ins

The Dragontail Rabbits is *made* to be developed into sequels, animated movies, spin-offs and tie-ins! It is a marketer’s “dream come true.”

*Are you ready to take
the magical journey*

*to the warren of
The Dragontail Rabbits?*