

Felicity Pulman - Wally and Merlin

We've had two pet dragons over the years. Wally came first; a head-banger who used to hurl himself at our glass sliding doors – not, as young students often suggested, because he wanted to come inside, but because he wanted to kill that ferocious dragon looking back at him!

He was a source of endless delight to us, but terror for delivery men. They had to either share a stepping stone with a basking dragon to get access to our front door over the fishpond, or adopt our tactic of a pretend kick to scare Wally off his perch and into the pond.

We stopped feeding Wally grapes after one occasion when I ventured outside without my usual supply. When he realised no food was forthcoming, he tried to nibble my toes instead! Nevertheless he was eternally optimistic, often coming close and becoming quite tame over the years, perhaps still living in hope that we might relent and produce juicy green grapes for him once more.

For many years we enjoyed the company of female dragons and babies while Wally fought off other dragons and reigned supreme – until finally he was challenged by Merlin in a vicious fight, which saw Wally defeated while Merlin inherited his harem and his domain.

Merlin seems to be a more peaceable dragon, although he does indulge in a spot of head-banging from time to time. Sometimes, like Wally, he does press-ups to show off his fearsome red breast. A come-on to the females, or a warning to other pretenders to his throne that they should get lost, or pay the price?

After studying the life cycle and habits of water dragons, I immortalised Wally in my novel, *Wally the Water Dragon*. Meanwhile Merlin, like Wally before him, is now king of the fishpond and all the garden around the house – but only until another big dragon takes him on, and this time wins.