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Magic Islands

The Land Of Now And Then



IRENE EDWARDS

Praise for Magic Islands

Awarded (U.S.A.) *Literary Titan Gold 5 star Medal Award 2021*,
Global Award by Global Network.com, Global Library and
Grandma's Book Club

"A delightful adventure... ignites the imagination."

Cheryl Rees-Price (author of *D.I. Winter* series)

"This adventure... wove a magic spell on sceptical me! I found myself, yes, ON a 'magical' island, following assorted 'eccentrics'.

I expect to see it in action or in animated form in due course."

Nigel Hanson (writer/songwriter, *Brit-Writers' Award Winner 2010*)

"...readers will enjoy visiting these Magic Islands, full of pirate-wizards, witches, castles, elves and dragons! The story also raises awareness of the modern problem of plastic pollution in our seas."

William Vaughan (writer/author of fantasy novels)

"Truly magical."

Jake Arnott (acclaimed writer, novelist and dramatist. Well known for his crime trilogy and B.B.C. series)

For Stefan

Map of the Magic Islands



What the Author Says

Wherever we live, whether near rivers, oceans, forests, deserts, frozen lands, towns, cities or rural countryside, all life on Earth tends to represent that of community and sharing. Nature is the system by which stability and survival are supported.

When stability is lost, extinction is sped up. Currently, 41,000 species are threatened with extinction and survival rates are becoming dangerously low. This loss of balance in nature tends to strike out at our most fragile species. Often, mankind is guilty of causing the disruption and, as seen with climate change, catastrophe can result. The world requires human protection. The Dinosaur Era shows exemplifying factors in the extinction of these beasts as climate change and the invasion of other species.

Helping our children to understand the importance of caring and preserving biodiversity in our modern world is important to avoid further loss of species, and the awareness of how to help is a forward-thinking concept, which can bring about a positive behavioural change, toward supporting future generations of species in communication, food-securing, climatic changes, economy and health.

This *Magic Islands* book, *The Land of Now and Then*, lightly sets the scene through intrigue and narrative comedy, merely as an introduction to more seriously questioning the aspects of, and pathways of further study toward, biodiversity, conservation, extinction of species, and moreover toward the children's protection of their own futures.

Once Upon a Time

Somewhere along the coast of Wales, there once existed a small group of islands. They were mysterious islands. Some were mountainous and craggy, others merely undulated from high to low levels.

The islands were often shrouded by mystic, silver clouds of magical dust, and it had never been easy to view them from a distance. For centuries, mariners had been unable to approach the islands because of the dangerous seas. As time went by, the islands faded and vanished, and the tales of strange, magical folklore were soon forgotten, seemingly forever.

Until, one day...

*

It was a very different day. A magical day, when anything might happen, but there was no way of knowing, for the magic may have been caused by a sprinkle of magical dust in the air, or by the piping of a tune, or a tinkling of bells created by some far-off magical forces.

When I felt the magic happen, I held my breath, kept quite still and watched, as the breeze blew a sparkle of magical dust in my direction, before it quickly passed by...



CHAPTER 1

The Meeting

“Tonight is the night when the red moon will make Father Time stand still for thirty seconds, and we must decide before the midnight hour of this night whether we keep our enemies, the criminal Purple Wizards, amongst us, for it would seem that none of us want to do that,” the Chief Red Wizard nodded, wisely.

“No, we will never, ever want to keep the criminal Purple Wizards here at our Red Vortex!” cried all the Red Wizards, in chorus.

“Oh, dear!” the Chief Red Wizard sniffed, as he plumped himself down on the ground, crossed his legs and leant forward, placing his head between his hands.

“Let me tell you all a riddle, and perhaps you will recognize this certain secretive, magical place from my words:

“It is not in jail, but it is in trap.

“It is not in discovery, but it is in map.

“It is not in planet, but it is in world.

“It is a place where everywhere meets anywhere,

“And where any species meets every species.”

“Oh, bother! Do get on with it, Chief Wizard, for I am in no mood for riddles, and neither is anyone else. We just need a solution, that

is all,” cried out an impatient Red Wizard, and all the other Red Wizards agreed.

“So, can no one solve my riddle tonight?” asked the Chief Red Wizard.

“We know of no such place,” the Red Wizards frowned, then asked, “so tell us more; this curious place, where is it?”

“It is a very curious place, for there is *no* such place. It is invisible and magical. It is close to and part of the Magic Islands, and is called ‘The Land of Now and Then’. It is a rather strange place, for it holds many secrets,” whispered the Chief Red Wizard. “And it is certainly not a place anyone would wish to voluntarily enter, for it is surrounded by a ghastly, ghostly, thick, green cloud.”

The Red Wizards shuddered.

“How do you know of this place, Chief Red Wizard?” asked the apprentice wizard.

“I have been told by the few who have witnessed this vision. The records of their words are written in a red-velvet-covered book, stored in a box opened only by a precious golden key, which holds secrets that have been hidden away for centuries. The Land of Now and Then is a mystical place. It holds a magical power so great, so secretive and so fearful that only beasts who carry the magical purity of wonder, or witches who are able to reach into darker shadows, or children with gentle souls, or certain chosen magical visitors, are allowed to enter.”

“The Land of Now and Then,” whispered the Red Wizards, in awe.

“Who has told you of these things, Chief? How do you know this place truly exists, and what are you proposing to do?”

“Ah, so many questions! It is simple: when the red moon is at its fullest eclipse with the sun tonight, and The Land of Now and Then

slumbers, when the moon flashes and sparkles, sending out its red beams, and when pain leaps to the eyes of those who watch the spectacle of light, it will be a time when the light beams will dance and provoke. Tonight, by arrangement with Ambrosious, the Wizard of the Magical Forest, on the Magic Islands, we shall expect, at the midnight hour, the magical light beams to reach up even as high as our Red Vortex, and thereafter bounce through the moonlit skies. Then shall begin the commencement of a mystical pause by Father Time, before all clocks stop. Tonight, wizards, we will meet again and my plan for the Purple Wizards will reveal itself. So, come, Red Wizards, and prepare yourselves for a joyous evening.”



CHAPTER 2

The Plan

It was just before midnight when the rather aggressive and rude wizard, Izzy Odorous, and his gang of Purple Wizards, awoke from a most uncomfortable sleep in their securely locked prison cell, in the Red Wizards' Vortex, where they had remained for at least forty-eight hours.

The cell was chillingly cold, and their mattresses extremely hard and narrow – so narrow that the larger wizards kept tumbling off the edge of their beds, onto the floors.

A distant clanking and laughter could be heard, ringing out across the skies surrounding the magical Red Vortex. The noise the Red Wizards made with their whooping and giggling became so loud that the Purple Wizards wondered why their enemies were behaving in such a wild manner.

The worst thing was that the Purple Wizards had become so stiff, without enough space in the tiny cell to sprawl or stretch their legs, that, when they finally stood and stretched their arms, their old joints and bones cricked, cracked and moaned. The Purple Wizards also felt edgy and angry, for they were in need of food and drink, having not eaten for ages.

“What is happening outside tonight?” Izzy Odorous, the leader of the Purple Wizard gang asked. He listened again, then sighed: “I do

believe the Red Wizards are flying around the heavens on their broomsticks. How curious! Are they having a celebration party because they have captured and imprisoned us?”

Izzy shrugged his shoulders, sneezed loudly and continued: “They are delighting in disturbing our sleep. How dare they throw us in their cell, imprison us and keep us from our sleep, all because we did some mischievous things a while ago. I always believed that the Red Wizards were a vengeful bunch.

“But, fear not, gang, for I shall make a complaint to the Chief Red Wizard at the first light of day tomorrow, and I shall insist that we are freed again, away from this place. Just look at this tiny cell, with its black walls. Hardly a chink of light enters, by day or night, and it’s freezing cold in here.” Izzy sneezed again.

He and his men became more and more annoyed as they tried again to snuggle down on their hard benches, but still failed to sleep. There was little point in even thinking of sleep, because the clanking noises outside were growing louder and louder.

Suddenly, a grating noise screamed out and the heavy metal prison doors flew open, with a haunting screech. As the doors slammed from open to shut again, a cold flow of night air blew across the Purple Wizards’ faces.

They opened their eyes fully, to feel a sharp shaft of red, magical starlight enter the cell from the doorway, and brighten up the room. Clouded by a cascade of magical dust was the Chief Red Wizard, dressed in his red gown and tall, red wizard hat.

He pointed his fingers toward the Purple Wizards and flashed them through the air, allowing flickers of red light to fly from his garlanded, ruby-red rings. To Izzy’s surprise, the Chief Red Wizard was grinning.

Izzy stared at him, feeling slightly confused, then opened his

mouth to complain about the noise.

“Tell your men to stop their awful noise at once...” he began, but he spoke no further, for the Chief Red Wizard was casting his sly, roving eye around the room, speaking slowly and quietly in a low, monotone voice.

“You are free to leave this cell,” the Chief Red Wizard was saying; “we are releasing you all tonight. And, what’s more, I bring you the good news that the Red Wizards have invited you to join them in an evening of fun, games and entertainment.”

“Fun and games? Entertainment!” whispered the Purple Wizards, as they gasped in disbelief.

“Yes, feel free to step outside these cells and, if you would like to follow me to the food and drink tables, we shall begin the fun.”

The Purple Wizards climbed to their feet in surprise.

“Why?” Izzy asked suspiciously, sneering at the Red Wizard. “Why?” he snapped again, in a confused tone of voice. “Surely this can’t be so? What is this lie you tell? Are we being tricked?”

The Chief Red Wizard said no more. Instead, he opened the prison door once more and pointed out to the fresh, cold night air, which continued to rush toward them.

“Step outside to the courtyard. The night air is wonderful. It tingles the nostrils, freshens the lungs, clears the brains, stirs the senses and cheers the soul. Step outside and see for yourselves.”

Izzy led the way, mumbling in disbelief: “You *must* be tricking us. Why should you Red Wizards be concerned about *our* nostrils, lungs, brains, senses and souls?”

“Come, all we ask is that you all step outside, into the night air, breathe in deeply and enjoy the evening with us,” sniggered the Chief Red Wizard.

So, Izzy and the other Purple Wizards followed the Chief Red

Wizard, shuffling one behind the other, until they had gathered outside in the night air.

The Red Wizards were a jolly crowd. Some Red Wizards were dancing, others were singing and many were just sitting in a circle on the ground and laughing, or playing magical card tricks with each other. Other Red Wizards whooped and yelled, as they looped and circled the heavens on their broomsticks.

“We all invite you to join in with our dancing and games tonight. As you can see, the party fun has already begun. There’s plenty of food to eat and lots to drink. We will all celebrate your freedom and welcome you to our Red Wizards’ Vortex.”

The Purple Wizards grinned and stepped forward, to the tables piled high with buffet food, for they would eat first and play later. They collected their plates and stacked them high with sausages, pies, cheese and pickles, and poured their drinks. In fact, they were so hungry that their tummies rumbled, so they ate and ate, as they had been told to do, until their tummies grew swollen and they felt contented.

It was almost midnight when, suddenly, the Red Vortex began to jolt and shake from side to side.

Moonbeams shuffled in through the open Red Vortex door, and the red shadows of magical moonlight crept into the courtyard, landing as blobs at the feet of each of the Purple Wizards.

“I believe the moonbeams have joined us at this midnight hour, and are ready to play our red spot game with us. Come, Purple Wizards, do join in.” The Chief Red Wizard pointed: “Do you all see the red spots on the ground?”

“We do,” chorused the Purple Wizards, who now felt friendly and warm from their food and drink.

“Hermes will play a tune on his lyre, and you will all jump

forward, onto a large, red spot on the ground, when the music stops. Those who fail to land on a spot will be out of the game. It is similar to a game called ‘Musical Chairs’. The winners will be those wizards who have secured a spot to stand on when the music of the lyre stops.”

Izzy ran his fingers through his beard, then he bent down to take a closer look at the red spots.

“These spots are made of some type of flashing, red beams of light,” he told his gang; “they are nothing to fear. Besides, this is an easy game to play – and we Purple Wizards will all win, of course.” Izzy laughed. “And what will be our prize if we land on a red spot?”

“Well, Izzy,” giggled the Chief Red Wizard, “the prize *must* be a magical surprise.”

“Then, we will agree to play if the magical surprise can be broomsticks.”

“Broomsticks? Very well, we will play for magical broomsticks,” giggled the Chief Red Wizard, for he knew he had a crafty plan, and it was working perfectly.

The magic seemed to happen when the clock on the tall tower shuddered and rang out twelve chimes. It was a special time in the magical calendar, for it was the only time of the year when time stopped and stood still. And it was the case that, when time stood still and paused, all peculiar magical happenings usually occurred.

The Red Wizards hummed a haunting tune, before the music silenced and Hermes put down his lyre. As the music stopped, the Purple Wizards very foolishly jumped, with both feet, onto a spot of red light on the ground before them. Delighted that they had each reached a red spotlight, they clapped their hands in glee and promptly sat down, cross-legged, each sprawled on their red spot. Feeling very pleased and triumphant with themselves, they laughed.

“We have all won this game. Just see how the Red Wizards have themselves failed to gain even one red spot to sit on.”

Little did they realize that they had been tricked, and they gasped as the red spots they sat on suddenly changed into floating discs of light.

The light discs danced frivolously through the air, increasing in speed as they carried the Purple Wizards with them. Eventually, the red discs shot them all out through the open Red Vortex door. One after another the Purple Wizards were thrust forward, as they tumbled into the magical heavens, where they seemed to float on their little, magical, red discs of light.

“We have been tricked!” Izzy gasped in a bewildered tone of voice, as he tried to understand what had actually happened.

With uncontrollable force, the discs of light descended downward. Below them, the Purple Wizards once more recognized the familiar shape of Planet Earth, like a blue jewel in the skies. And there, glimmering in a halo of magical sparkle, stood the Magic Islands.

“What’s happening to us?” chorused the fearful Purple Wizards.

The path of red light-beams swerved and veered, as the Purple Wizards were guided toward a shivering, green mass of land covered by a mysterious haze, hovering close to the Magic Islands. They yelled as the green, hazy cloud wrapped itself around them and they tumbled helplessly from their discs of light, with a flying toss.



CHAPTER 3

Arrival

Thump!

The Purple Wizards had landed on a narrow, precarious and wobbly flight of stone steps, cut steeply into the rocks, which led upward to a massive pair of jade-green doors, amazingly carved into a higher level of even steeper rocks. They had made little sound upon landing. The red beams of light had hit the ground first and fragmented into tiny, glowing, red stones beneath their feet. When the wizards steadied their balance, they saw they had all landed on the third step from the bottom. They glanced downward for a moment, watching the rippling waves of the sea lapping and gurgling over the first, lowest step.

They waited on the third step for a length of time, for they were baffled and puzzled by what might happen to them next. Then Izzy moved first, as he stepped closer to a pair of gigantic wooden doors, carved at the corners with monsters and gargoyles.

“These are the Magic Islands!” Izzy Odorous gasped. “They have to be, because I can feel this place has a magical power. But it’s not how I remember the Magic Islands; there seems to be a kind of massive temple before us at the top step. And look at those huge, green doors, and those ugly gargoyle statues along the top of the turret walling. Such a mysterious place. I’m sure we have never set

eyes on this place before.”

The gargoyles perched on the high walling frowned and took an instant dislike to the visiting wizards. How dare they be called ugly!

The Purple Wizards scratched their beards. Where were they?

The ground beneath their feet shuddered, as the surrounding seas licked and lapped at their purple shoes. Then, there was a final vibrating shudder, as the whole island lifted, lowered and rocked. With each ripple of seawater splashing at their feet, the Purple Wizards began to feel seasick. The movement of the sea against the jagged rocks of this island reminded them of being on board a rolling ship, in the middle of the ocean.

When the vibrating stopped, the Purple Wizards realized that the magical Father Time had paused and stood still, for one of the jade-green doors before them had darkened, almost to a blackened jade, and the other had lightened to like a glowing emerald. As the wizards looked upward, the giant-sized, darkened-jade-green door opened wide.

But the Purple Wizards feared it, for within the temple only a pitch blackness could be seen, and its large, gaping mouth door seemed too dark and uninviting. When the Purple Wizards did not move to enter by the dark door, it shut with a slam.

It then became the turn of the lightened-emerald-green door to open. And this door seemed more inviting, for the light inside the temple was bright and colourful. From inside the door, they could hear bells chiming, their echoes spinning across the land and sea.

“We can’t stay out here on these lower steps,” Izzy said to his gang of men; “they may wobble again soon and we may fall into the sea. Unless we gain the courage to enter through these doors before us, we shall be stuck outside all day.”

The Purple Wizards faced each other with staring, puzzled eyes

and felt unsure of themselves. Eventually, they climbed up the steps, slowly, until they reached the very top entrance.

Then, as they stepped inside, they knew they had arrived at a new, mysterious land.

The wind howled and whined. The lightened-emerald-green door slammed behind them with a drum of thunder. At the top of the doors a magnificent, magic, silver bolt slithered and screamed, as it shifted itself across, from one side to the other, jamming the door shut with a final, loud clank, fixing the silver bolting apparatus into locking position.

The motion of the huge doors told the Purple Wizards they had become locked inside a very new and unusual place. They also knew instantly that they had become trapped once more.

“Where are we?” whispered one of the wizards.

A voice boomed out from somewhere:

“Welcome to the Magic Islands,

“To The Land of Now and Then.

“Enjoy your stay.

“Have a good day.”



CHAPTER 4

From The Skies

It was always going to be a different day... a magical day... a day when anything might happen, but Stefan didn't know that when he awoke. He only knew that he hadn't slept at all well during the night.

He had read his favourite book before his bedtime, then turned off his bedroom light and snuggled down in bed. But he'd failed to sleep, tossed and turned, and finally got out of bed in a restless mood, at around the midnight hour. He pulled open his curtains and stared at the sky, through the creases and shadows of the inner window netting.

A rare sight met him, for a huge red moon looked down on him as it threw its red glow across the crimsoned, flickering skies above. Stefan drew back the window netting. He had never seen a red moon before. He recalled how his teacher, Mrs. Parry, had once explained to her class that a red moon appears during a lunar eclipse, or when the moon is low in the sky, or if there are micro particles in the air caused by volcanic eruption, forest fires or air pollution.

"That's an interesting sight," Stefan observed, thoughtfully.

As Stefan watched the sky, red lights suddenly flashed and spat out violently, their glittering images shooting across the sky. Stefan was startled, for he had never before witnessed so many flashes and patterns of light moving in so many directions. He became

spellbound as he studied the flashes of red lights creeping and roaming around, their patterns crossing over each other in the night sky.

“Wow!” Stefan exclaimed, almost hypnotized by the mystery of the sky.

As Stefan stared out of his bedroom window, he studied the pattern of the lights, as they jumped from the horizon in the far distance, then upward and backward, flying over and over in a crazy circle of motion, darting from sky to Earth and Earth to sky.

“Ah,” Stefan whispered to himself, his mouth gaping open in awe, “those lights are shifting from sky to Earth and back up again. How very strange!”

He reached over to the window catch, turned it and flung his window wide open. He listened to the curious, loud drumming noise booming across the sky, like thunder clapping, rumbling and crashing in the distance.

“Boom! Boom! Boom!” Stefan impersonated with excitement. “Wow! Are we having an electrical storm?” He puzzled again. There were no jet planes droning overhead, nor any machinery making the din at such a late hour. For sure, he thought, the sounds were incessant and the lights in the sky were certainly not fireworks, and neither were they flashes of lightning. Nor were they exactly like the sounds of thunder, but they certainly made a thunderous roar.

He then wondered whether the lights could possibly be the result of recent forest fires or air pollution. Mrs. Parry had once taught a lesson on the effects of planetary warming.

“They really look like tiny, magical flying carpets shooting across the sky,” Stefan whispered. “How mysterious.”

Stefan sighed, for these flashes and sounds were so unique, reverberating at times like crashing cymbals, echoing, vibrating and

roaring in a peculiar haunting voice, unlike any sound Stefan had ever heard before.

Stefan's house stood alone. It was a detached house, isolated and rural, situated on a hillside on the edge of White Stone Town, in Wales. Looking downward from his window, he could see the rooftops of the little houses in White Stone Town, beyond which lapped the seashore of White Stone Beach. No one lived near to Stefan's house, so he wondered whether the people who lived in White Stone Town had been awakened because of the noise. His parents were still fast asleep, so the noises from the moonlit sky hadn't disturbed them.

"How curious," Stefan sighed again.

As the red lights lit up the sky, Stefan screwed up his eyes to see what looked like a huge figure emerging from the sea, moving toward the shore. He watched as two more figures flew across the shoreline, toward White Stone Town, and for a moment Stefan froze in wonder. Had he been dreaming, or had he really witnessed such a peculiar sight? He was puzzled by all that he had seen: the red lights; the dark, mysterious shadows on the seashore.

A cold, shivering tingle passed by his bedroom window, and he closed it with a slam. He was not chilled because of the cold night air, and neither was he shivering because he was excited. Perhaps he *was* feeling nervous, or even scared. Or maybe, secretly, he had felt the flutter of magic dust settle on his windowsill, and knew in his heart that something magical was really happening out there.

Stefan stood at his bedroom window, staring up into the night sky, until the red lights finally faded and disappeared. It was only then that he pulled his curtains together and returned to bed.

"Did something magical really happen in the skies tonight?" he whispered to himself. "Surely the huge form emerging from the sea

couldn't have been a giant, and neither, surely, could the black shadows in flight have been witches or wizards. No, a magical being would never dare to visit White Stone Town, from as far away as the invisible Magic Islands. Perhaps the lights in the sky were a show of the Northern Lights, or maybe a meteor shower from space." He reasoned as best he could, from the facts that his Space Education schoolbooks had taught.

He remembered when Mrs. Parry had taught his class about all the celestial displays of the skies. He had been told about the "Geminids": meteor showers which only returned during the month of December, just before Christmas.

"But it isn't Christmas... It's only September," he told himself.

Still unable to sleep – for now his thoughts had become engrossed in the images and sounds he had seen – he thought about the red moon. He knew that normally a red moon would appear in October, so it was too soon for an eclipse to occur. And, Stefan reasoned, the Geminids were fast showers of multi-coloured shooting stars, from a comet called Phaethon, so such a shower as had happened on this night – of bouncing red lights – would most definitely *not* have been a Geminids shower.

As Stefan tried hard to fathom out all the possibilities of the curious happenings in the night sky, he thought that perhaps his teacher may be the person to ask, next time he saw her.

Slowly, his eyelids grew heavier and heavier, and Stefan closed his eyes. But he didn't dream of lunar eclipses or erupting volcanoes; he dreamt a magical dream. Yet, as Stefan lulled himself off to sleep, he had the feeling that he would soon discover the truth of the skies. Perhaps there would soon be another magical day ahead.



CHAPTER 5

The Next Morning

Megan had been sleeping peacefully all through the night, on her parents' rural farm close to White Stone Town. Unlike Stefan, she hadn't been disturbed by any unusual noises, nor had she heard any rumpus from the skies. She was unaware that a red moon had appeared in the sky on the previous night, and she certainly hadn't witnessed red, flashing lights in the skies. Neither did she know that any forms had emerged from the sea, on the coastline.

The morning on the farm was usually a busy time, when the mooing of cows being milked, and the braying of sheep in the meadow, or the snorting of satisfied pigs, were heard over their meal breakfasts. Usually, ducks scuttled around, quacking loudly, or the dogs were barking loudly. Everything sounded busy, and in the distance, she could hear her father starting the engine of his little green tractor.

So, when Megan awoke early in the morning to the sound of cackling laughter and the tapping of a firm fist on her bedroom window, she opened her eyes wide and listened. At first, she just rolled over in her bed, closed her eyes again and tried to doze off back to sleep, believing she must surely have imagined the tapping noise on her wooden window; no one could possibly be tapping at her window, as her house was tall and her bedroom was three floors

up from ground level.

“Bother those woodpeckers,” she decided; “stupid birds! Why are they tapping on the wooden window frame? Go away.”

Just as Megan was about to doze off again, the tapping sounded once more, but this time it was far louder, firmer and sharper; an urgent type of knocking.

Rat-a-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat!

“Oh, bother!” Megan moaned. She eventually climbed out of bed.

Perhaps the knocking had been at her bedroom door and not at her window at all; that made logical sense to Megan. She opened her bedroom door, but there was no one knocking outside her bedroom door. Megan shrugged her shoulders, dived back into her bed and pulled the duvet up to her chin, as she snuggled down again.

But soon the tapping persisted again, until it became a sharp, heavy thud, directly on the glass pane of the window. As Megan listened, it sounded as though the glass of the window was being thumped by a very heavy, solid stick, which rattled the glass windowpane, threatening to break the glass with its pounding. Determined to stay in her warm, comfy bed, Megan ignored the noise once again.

“Stupid woodpeckers!” she mumbled. “The birds must be swooping blindly in flight, straight into the glass windowpane.”

She pressed her fingers to her ears, as the tapping changed to a deeper and deeper thudding. Megan knew she would never manage to sleep, and she would need to scare the birds away somehow.

“Is there no peace to be had from the wild birds at my window this morning?” she grumbled. She picked up the alarm clock on her bedside cabinet; “Six o’clock!”

She yawned deeply as she stepped sleepily over to the window and edged back her curtains, just as Stefan had done during the

midnight hour. Peeping out through her window, she stared in disbelief, for outside were two witches, hovering on their broomsticks and swaying in the wind. Megan screwed up her eyes and rubbed them, for she recognized the witches as Mogul and Drot, whom she had once met at a mysterious place called the Magic Islands.

She could now hear them calling her name. Then the elderly witch, Mogul, called out for Stefan. And, surely, there was a further shout from the younger witch, Drot; in her low, tuba-sounding voice she called for Trevor.

“What?! Oh, no!” Megan pinched herself, for now she really thought she was imagining things. Or, perhaps she should pinch herself to make sure she *wasn't* dreaming. “Witches? Oh, no! Not those witches again!”

A nasty, scary feeling suddenly washed over Megan. It made her feel uncomfortable, for she didn't really like witches at all, and she hadn't truly enjoyed all her adventures of the past, on the Magic Islands. As she stared at the two women through the misted glass window, she feared the visiting witches might mean there would be another of those scary magical days ahead, days she really preferred to escape from.

“Why are Mogul and Drot here bothering *me*?” Megan enjoyed reading magical stories, but when real magic happened it was quite another matter, and at times extremely worrying.

She pulled her curtains together again, temporarily hiding the image outside her window. She would ignore Mogul and Drot, though she would contact Stefan on her mobile phone and warn him about the arrival of the witches in White Stone Town. Megan grabbed her mobile phone, tapped in the numbers and waited, until she heard Stefan's familiar voice on the other end of the phone.

“Stefan, hello. Mogul and Drot are outside, tapping on my bedroom window and flying around on their broomsticks,” she cried, with a hint of panic in her tone.

“Yeah,” Stefan replied casually, but hardly surprised, “I suppose those were the black shapes I saw last night, flying along the coastline. I thought they were too big to be birds.”

Megan frowned impatiently. “I’m getting ready for school soon, and I just hope those witches won’t mess up my day! They’ve already woken me up this morning, battering on my bedroom window. How did they find me?”

“Did they say what they wanted?” Stefan asked, curiously.

“No, Stefan. They called out my name, then your name, then they called out for Trevor. I don’t even want to talk to them. I wish they would fly away to somewhere else,” Megan pouted.

“Be careful what you wish for, Megan,” Stefan replied. “Remember, those witches are magical. They can make the strangest of things happen.”

“Stefan, listen!” Megan was saying, her words tumbling out in an impatient, hurried confusion. Stefan went silent. “I *insist*,” Megan continued, “that I am *not* going to put up with *any* magical problems today! I totally refuse to get involved with any more magical spells from crazy witches. I shall completely ignore them this morning, and I really do wish they would go away!” Megan sighed. “Father will take me to school in his car, because I don’t want them to follow me and spook me. I’ll see you soon at White Stone School! ‘Bye.”

There came a click from Stefan’s phone, then more silence.

At eight-forty-five, Stefan switched his mobile phone off, picked up his school bag and ran down the hill, all the way to White Stone School.

He stopped at the school gates and looked around. Megan was

ahead of him, at the open school doorway, but there was no sign of his best mate Trevor, who always arrived at school first, and usually waited for Stefan at the school gates. It was unusual that Trevor was late on that day, for it was Trevor's special day: the day when Trevor would receive a birthday card before lessons began, from all the children in the class, Mrs. Parry their teacher, and Mr. Beedles their headmaster.

“How odd,” Stefan puzzled. “I wonder where Trevor is this morning.”



CHAPTER 6

Osmo The Troublemaker

It was early morning when Trevor drew back his bedroom curtains and looked out toward the little row of whitewashed cottages on the opposite side of the street. The rain had started spitting down, and the drops were streaming on the outside of the glass windowpanes. Perhaps, he hoped, it would only be a short shower and the weather would soon improve.

Just like his friends, Stefan and Megan, it didn't occur to him, as he rubbed his bleary eyes that morning, that this new day would resemble anything like a magical day, for Trevor had always been somewhat dubious and uncertain about real magic. Though, just recently, he'd felt that maybe magic was real. Still, so far – apart from it being his birthday and a rather special day, when he would receive birthday cards, gifts and well wishes – it was, at this early hour of the morning, like any other ordinary school day.

Trevor sighed. Was it to be another rainy day or not? Trevor frowned as he inspected the clouds in the sky. Perhaps the clouds would clear soon, for there weren't too many of them floating around, and they were only light-grey in colour, with no threatening black clouds in view. Perhaps the sun would shine again soon, just in time for his walk to White Stone School.

But, unfortunately, the day didn't start at all well for Trevor, even

though it was to be his special day; his birthday. Osmo, his puppy dog, had caused so many problems from early dawn. The dog had bounded from bedroom to bedroom, skidding dangerously on the wooden flooring on his arrival at each room, and yapping excitedly at his funny game. Trevor had woken up with a jump, as Grandma Greg let out an almighty cry.

“Waah! Get out of my bedroom you silly, stupid dog, Osmo! Trevor, control this dog! Get up and calm the little beast!”

Trevor moaned loudly, rolled over, buried his head in his pillow and sighed, as Grandma Greg screamed again and again: “Trevor, control your dog! Get up, you lazy boy, and calm this dog down!”

So, poor Trevor eventually dragged Osmo out of Grandma Greg’s room and into his bedroom. As Trevor’s head hit the pillow again, the only thing he became aware of was Osmo crawling on top of him and slumping down on his bed. Osmo was not abiding by Grandma Greg’s doggy-bedroom-rules at all.

At breakfast time, in the kitchen, instead of remembering it was Trevor’s birthday, Grandma Greg began to complain and moan. “Do you know, Trevor...?” she began.

“Do I know what, Grandma Greg?” Trevor replied, as he rolled his eyes and guessed what Grandma Greg was about to say.

Grandma Greg began again:

“Do you know, Trevor... I need you to keep your puppy dog out of my kitchen this morning? We’ve only had your little puppy here for eight weeks, and he’s already ruined my house and a lot of my furniture. He’s a naughty little puppy dog!”

“All puppies are naughty little dogs, Grandma Greg. I thought you liked Osmo,” Trevor frowned.

“Oh, I do like him! But today he’s chewed your Grandpa Greg’s slippers to bits. He’s run straight upstairs, after his morning garden

play session, and dabbed his muddy pawprints all over my white bedsheets. Just look!” Grandma Greg held up a grubby, paw-printed bedsheet for Trevor to view. “Just look!” she said again, in a rather sharp, irritable tone of voice. “That dog needs a good, long walk and a run on the beach, to tire him of some of his energy. This morning, after breakfast, I want you to walk him to the beach and give him a good run. I want him out of the cottage and far away from me, for at least an hour!”

“I can’t walk him for that long, Grandma Greg; I need to get to school by nine o’clock or I’ll be late for lessons. Have you forgotten?” Trevor shuffled his fork around his breakfast plate, stabbing at the fat sausage Grandma Greg had cooked him.

Grandma Greg tutted between her teeth, as she rolled the dirty bedsheet into a rounded ball and pushed it through the open door of the washing machine. With a hefty slam, she threw the small, round door of the machine shut; the shelving on the kitchen wall shuddered and shook, and the cups and saucers tinkled, as they vibrated and wobbled dangerously on their hooks.

Grandpa Greg jumped at the sudden bang from the kitchen. He peeped over the top of the newspaper he was reading and mumbled something to himself. Then he coughed a few times, held his handkerchief up to his nose and snorted loudly, as he blew his nose.

“Oh, deary, deary me!” Grandpa Greg moaned to himself, over and over, from his deep, green armchair, as he rustled his morning newspaper. “Oh, deary, deary me, Grandma Greg! Do stop slamming the doors today. Every time you slam that door, I jump. Now my spectacles have fallen from my nose to the floor, and I’ve lost them somewhere. Will you find them for me, Trevor?”

The spectacles sat underneath Grandpa Greg’s chair. Trevor bent down to pick them up. “Here are your spectacles, Grandpa

Greg,” he said, as he placed the glasses back onto Grandpa Greg’s nose.

“As for your dirty linen, you wouldn’t expect a puppy to wipe his feet, would you, Grandma Greg?” Grandpa Greg continued grumpily and sarcastically, staring wide-eyed at his wife.

“I would!” Grandma Greg snorted. “Osmo may be tiny, and as scrawny as any plucked chicken, but his paws are broader than your cheesy, smelly trainer shoes, Grandpa Greg. He seems to have dabbed his dirty paws all over the place; his muddy paw marks are everywhere!”

“Everywhere?! Huh!” Grandpa Greg snorted into his handkerchief in disbelief.

“Yes, everywhere! As for my kitchen floor...” scolded Grandma Greg, once again turning to the puppy, and pointing her index finger at the white patch of hair above Osmo’s nose, “...why, just take a look at my kitchen floor, Grandpa Greg! That crazy little doggy over there has tipped his water bowl over and drenched my rug. Oh, I do despair!” Trevor noticed the puddles of water across the kitchen floor.

“As for my lounge settee,” Grandma Greg continued, “it was once flawless, but now it’s been scratched by Osmo’s sharp claws, until the material on the cushions has fallen into strands of loose fibre, full of holes.”

“Grandma Greg, dear,” Grandpa Greg said, “I do believe the lounge settee got its tags and strings from the cats.” Grandpa Greg looked around the kitchen at the six cats, perched on the lounge settee and mantelpiece, and on the rug in front of the fireplace.

“Come on, little friend,” Trevor said, as he stood up and called out to Osmo, “we’d better get out of Grandma Greg’s way for a while, so she can get on and clean up your mess. Let’s go walkies.”

Trevor stepped outside, into the garden, with the dog's lead in his hand, and closed the kitchen door softly. He knew it would be easier to stay outside, and keep Osmo out of Grandma Greg's way for as long as he could.

"Walkies?" he repeated, lifting up the dog's lead and shaking it above his head.

Trevor had said the word "walkies"! Osmo knew what the word "walkies" meant, and he liked walkies! The puppy tilted his head to the left side, in an inquisitive fashion, and then to the right side, before throwing back his head and yapping loudly with excitement.

Whilst loitering on the lawn, Trevor could still hear Grandma Greg complaining, for her kitchen window was wide open and her voice rang out loudly from inside the room. And he could still hear old Grandpa Greg moaning loudly, snapping his jaws in irritation at his complaining wife.

The puppy dog looked up at Trevor with a sneaky eye, as Trevor slowly placed the lead around his neck.

"Shall we go to the beach for a nice long run, then, Osmo?"

"Wuff!"



CHAPTER 7

A Magical Encounter

Leaving the cottage garden, Trevor looked up at the now twinkling sunshine in the sky, and at the wet, shiny grass beneath his feet. At least the rain had stopped, just in time for an early-morning walk to White Stone Beach with Osmo, who had hurriedly bounded out onto the rough stone pathway toward the beach.

Osmo wagged his tail excitedly, yelped and darted into some type of dog tribal dance. Round and round spun the dog, wriggling his head violently. Poor Trevor was left spinning on the spot like a top, as he hung onto Osmo's lead. Osmo tugged, snarled and chewed at the leather lead, for the puppy didn't want to linger a moment longer than was necessary.

"Stop it, Osmo!" Trevor scowled as, with a sudden jerk of his lead, the dog pulled his head free from the collar. Realizing his freedom, Osmo stared at Trevor for a moment, yelped mischievously and, with an impulsive nod of his head, bounded between Trevor's legs and around the corner toward White Stone Beach. Trevor followed at a run, yelling at Osmo to stop, but Osmo was in a very naughty mood on this particular morning and he didn't stop, for he was having the best time ever.

He raced forward as fast as he could, toward a woman who stood close to a large, lumpy form at the beach's entrance. At first, Trevor

hadn't really noticed the woman, and neither did he take much notice of the nearby crouched, lumpy form. But, as he looked on, he saw something rather strange about the woman, for a weird, dark glow surrounded her. It was as if she was powered by a twilight battery. She glared at Osmo first, with an expression of great distaste, then turned her glare toward Trevor.

Trevor stared back at her, for the woman had a horrid, long, warty nose, white, pallid cheeks, a droopy jaw, hollow eyes and an ugly mouth. Who was she? She wasn't a local villager, dressed in her very odd black cloak and tall, pointed hat. She was a visitor to White Stone Town; she had to be, thought Trevor, for this woman was a stranger, who not only looked physically different but also dressed differently.

When Trevor spied a pair of horns sticking out of the old woman's head, he wondered whether she had dressed up in a witch's costume, or whether he and Osmo had encountered a real witch.

When he screwed up his eyes, he could see how Mogul's neck was twisted into layers, and how she had garlanded a necklace of black, rotten teeth around her neck. And, on closer inspection, he could see her fearful, hollow eyes glimmering with a scarlet hue; they were unlike any other human eyes that Trevor had ever previously seen. Her long, bony fingers ended at their tips in pointed claws of razor sharpness. In her left hand she carried a broomstick, with a rough, twiggy piece at one end, which she now lifted up and pointed toward the dog. Then, from a deep pocket in her black cloak, she flung a glittery dust at the puppy.

Trevor felt the magic happen, as the old woman's eyes riveted into him and held him in some kind of magnetic power; Trevor's legs began to wobble. What was happening to him? He slouched downward and sat himself on the pavement, for his legs would no

longer hold him.

The old woman coughed and sneezed, and the spittle-splattered out of her mouth in a huge whoosh: a green spray of damp air. Had her sneeze taken her breath away, for her face had now changed to a jaded green hue? Poor Trevor could only catch his breath by panting loudly, for the smell from her mouth was a rancid stink of rotten fish.

He wanted to leave, to walk away from the woman with his dog, Osmo, but when he tried, he couldn't lift himself up at first. Then, when he was finally on his feet, he could only drag his feet slowly along, with the greatest of difficulty. Meanwhile, Osmo pitter-pattered on his four paws over to the old woman; Trevor felt dazed as he watched Osmo approach her.

"Stop that awful yapping noise," she cried in her high, tinny, scolding, shrieking voice, "or I'll shrink you, dog, pot you, pickle you and eat you!" She glared at Osmo, as the little dog slumped onto his back in silence. Her expression was fixated and furious, her face creased into a deep frown, her movements sharp and agitated.

"That's better," she cried again, in her high, tinny voice, when the dog lay still. Then, clutching her long broomstick tightly, and angrily poking the twiggy end bits of the broom at the puppy dog's tail, she swept Osmo off his feet, high into the air, with a fast swish of her broomstick, and caught him in her long, black skirt.

Trevor felt the sweat streaming from his forehead and brow, and across his shoulders. He wanted to tell the old woman to leave his little puppy alone but, when he tried to speak, he found he was speechless and unable to say a word, for in that instant his voice had disappeared.

A second later, another strange-looking woman emerged from around the corner. Trevor noted immediately that she too had an

ugly, hard expression on her face. She also had hollow, penetrating, hypnotic eyes, and was dressed in a similar black costume which dragged on the ground. The second woman had an elongated neck, from which sprouted wild, black hair which cascaded to her waist. Her eyebrows looked unnaturally furry, and spindly fingers poked out stiffly beneath her cloak.

As Trevor stood face to face with the women, he shuddered. He was beginning to feel very dizzy. The misty lights which lit up the witches' eyes began to hurt his own, when he looked at them face to face, and a twisted pain tore through his stomach. His heart thumped loudly. A cold stream of air swirled around him as he realized that, for the first time in his life, he had met whimsical, magical witches – and he didn't like them at all.

“Oh! You've caught yourself a puppy dog, Mogul! Well done! You can keep it; I don't like puppy dogs,” boomed the second woman in a deep, tuba-like voice, as she approached the scene.

“Puppy dogs are magical creatures – did you know that, Drot?” Mogul replied, nodding her head triumphantly at her catch.

“Never!” snarled Drot.

“Their magical tricks are sometimes more powerful than ours! They are tricky beings, and we can't allow ourselves to be threatened in any way by a puppy dog, for that little beast could surely destroy our own precious magic. The last puppy I met chewed up my magical broomstick and it failed to fly afterwards.”

“Aw,” Drot exclaimed at the snarling Mogul, “I didn't know puppies were the bad guys.”

She gasped as Osmo leapt out of Mogul's skirt and, within seconds, it seemed as though Osmo had developed invisible wings, for he flew upward toward Mogul's face. He was growling angrily at the woman, a noise the young puppy dog had never, ever made until

now. Trevor blinked and tried his hardest to concentrate.

“Be careful, Mogul,” Drot warned; “silly witch: don’t you remember how the last magical puppy dog I met brushed all my magic dust down a drain hole with its tail? Dogs are dangerous little monsters! All witches detest magical puppy dogs for, the smaller they are, the more magical they are.”

“*Witches?!?*” Trevor whispered, as he suddenly regained his voice. He blinked unbelievably, as he listened to Mogul and Drot talking. Were these two ugly women really *witches*? But where had the women come from? They had called themselves *witches*. They looked and sounded like witches, but were they *really* witches?

And was Osmo really a magical puppy who terrified witches? Trevor felt apprehensive, for he knew in his heart that Osmo was only a normal pet puppy, and not a magical threat to anyone, let alone two strange women who called themselves witches. He and Osmo would need to make their escape from these witches’ super-magical powers, and super- fast, but how?



CHAPTER 8

A Nasty Shock

With blurred eyes, Trevor looked across the beach. It was deserted at that time, for it was early morning; there was no one else in sight. Would he be the only person to have witnessed these magical characters?

The two witches then behaved as if they had only just noticed Trevor, when they turned and asked: “Who are you?”

“I’m Trevor,” Trevor replied nervously, though his voice tremored when he tried to talk. He wanted to charge up to the witches, grab his puppy dog and run away, but the witches’ magical powers seemed to hold him back.

Looking suspiciously again at Osmo, Drot wrapped her arms tightly around her middle and continued: “Now that we are faced by this new danger – a threatening and dangerous, magical puppy dog – what curse shall we place on him?”

Trevor looked around nervously. He tried to call out to Osmo, but couldn’t, for it seemed that Osmo was once more under the witches’ power, as he now lay in silence, close to the women’s black, pointed shoes; he neither moved nor barked. Had the old witches cast a spell on the little puppy?

Trevor stood up on his wobbly legs and took a step closer. He tried to call out, but his voice merely croaked: “I’m Trevor and that’s

my puppy dog; he's called Osmo. He's not magical, as you believe – you are both mistaken; he's just a naughty puppy dog.”

“Are you the Trevor we are searching for: the friend of Stefan and Megan? Are you the boy Ambrosious, the Wizard of the Magical Forest, wants us to send to the Magic Islands?”

Trevor frowned. He thought about his best friends Stefan and Megan, and remembered how they had vanished into smoke on more than one occasion. Then, when they had reappeared, they always seemed to be chattering in whispers about witches or wizards or magic, and occasionally they claimed to have visited “Magic Islands”.

Bother Osmo! Why had the puppy disobediently run to the women in the first place, and why was he now so motionless, yet too close to the women for Trevor to reach out and grab him?

“Mogul, what shall we do with this nasty little puppy dog?” Drot asked again.

“Oh, we can't have this puppy dog threatening us, can we?” Mogul blurted out, as she turned to the younger witch and gripped her broomstick securely. “I reckon Osmo is a good name for a mouse – the type of mouse one could easily flatten with one's foot and stamp on! A mouse, Drot. What do you think?” Mogul flicked her broom high in the air, excitedly.

“Mmmm!” Drot mumbled, agreeably.

The witches laughed, and their eyes flickered with mischief as they blew out puffs of smelly, green breath toward Osmo. And, in a magical flash, before them now stood a mouse.

A cute little mouse, no bigger than the tiniest mouse in the whole world.

A mouse with tiny, twisted ears, popping out at each side of its head like tiny lemon buds.

A mouse with an odd, flat, twitching nose, which stuck out of the front of its small, brown head.

A mouse with a long, smooth tail, which flicked from side to side in confusion.

Poor Osmo was now no larger than the tiniest chocolate drop. His little legs were stumpy and covered in short, hairy spikes.

“What’s happened?! My poor Osmo, you’re a stumpy, hairy, spiky mouse, with a smooth, flicking tail!” Trevor glared at the witches and blurted out the words in anger and frustration, as he stared in horror at the tiny, four-legged mouse. “Oh, Osmo, what have these nasty women done to you? I can’t bear it!”

Osmo ran toward Trevor, as the boy bent over to pick up his pet, and hurriedly popped the little mouse into his coat pocket.

“You silly witch!” Drot was ranting. “You silly witch, Mogul! You got your magic spell all muddled up and your mouse has run away. Where did it go? It’s disappeared. Well, no matter, that hairy hound won’t mess with witches any longer. Come, we have work to do.”

A toxic, green dust flared from the witches’ nostrils, as they lifted their broomsticks and pointed them up to the sky. The street corner where the witches had stood became filled with a thick, green fog which, as the witches flew upward, fell in green twirls, dancing and darting like flying arrows across the beach, at speed, as the witches flew through the sky toward the beach. The green smoke was pungent; it stung Trevor’s eyes. He quickly brought his scarf up over his mouth, to prevent himself from swallowing the green dust particles.

Then the witches were gone; they had disappeared out of sight.

And Trevor was somehow being lifted high into the air by the lumpy figure, which had until now stayed crouched in a motionless ball. It lifted itself up and stretched, higher and higher, into an

enormous giant. It strode forward in wide strides, toward the beach, and from the beach toward the sea, while Osmo sat motionless, safely inside Trevor's pocket.

"Help!" Trevor yelled loudly. "Help!"

The giant shape strode forward, into the sea and, even though Trevor called out and objected angrily, continued to walk through the sea. Trevor panicked. "Put me down!"

"The Wizard of the Magical Forest, Ambrosious, says he wants to meet you as soon as possible, and that you have learnt that magic really exists. So, I'm taking you to the Magic Islands," said the giant.

"Well, Ambrosious is wrong: I don't believe in magic. Well, perhaps *sometimes*, but *not always*. Besides, I need to go back to White Stone Beach and hurry to school. I've already met two horrid witches and I don't want to meet Ambrosious, the Wizard of the Magical Forest. This is ridiculous! Take me home at once!"

This magical day's journey, to somewhere called the Magic Islands, where Trevor had never been before, with a little mouse now wriggling crazily inside his coat pocket, was becoming more and more absurd. And the giant was clasping him so tightly in its grip that Trevor could hardly breathe.

"Who are you, anyway?" Trevor blurted out. "Let me go! You're hurting me!"

"Oh, sorry," boomed the giant, lifting Trevor high onto its shoulder, "I didn't mean to hurt you."

How long would this journey take, and how would Trevor ever manage to hold onto the giant's shoulder? He had to grip the giant's bushy hair firmly, and did his best to keep balance. Surely the giant must be mistaken, for why on Earth would any wizard want to meet him?

Plus, Trevor knew that Osmo would be relatively safe in his deep

coat pocket, but what on Earth was he going to do with a little mouse with twisted, lemon-bud ears and an odd, twitching nose?

Why, oh, why, on his birthday, was everything going so wrong for him?



CHAPTER 9

The Land Of Now And Then

Macsen had been prowling around for days, checking that all would be safe for the arrival of his new visitors to The Land of Now and Then. He knew that, at the twelfth hour, with the clanging of the tower bell, the outpouring of magical dust from the red moonbeams would cause an irritation to the entire species of the Magic Islands.

“An irritation,” Macsen nodded, “and from now I must take on the responsibility of making sure that my visitors will learn good lessons from their visit. Mmmm, now, where do I begin?”

Macsen waited, for he knew that, according to an ancient secret legend, at the count of midnight, Father Time would need to pause and stand still inside the boundaries of The Land of Now and Then; all clocks on the Magic Islands would miss their count by thirty seconds. All magical powers would be reborn in those thirty hesitant seconds, and the full eclipse of the red moon would simply mean that all paths would soon change direction in The Land of Now and Then.

The red moon had sparkled brightly in the sky since it had arisen, and moved toward the eclipse with the sun. Some nearby planets fizzled and shook, for perhaps the planets were amused as they looked down; their sparks of red energy were flying and bounding across the moonlit sky. Some curious lights were changing from a

strangely reddish tinge to orange, or even a shade of yellow, as the lunar lights rose and fell. He remembered the arrangement he had made with Ambrosious, the old Wizard of the Magical Forest, that the light beams would strike at the Red Wizards' Vortex first, then his visitors would be flown through the atmospheres, each sitting on a light beam; soon after they would arrive in his land. Macsen also believed, mistakenly, that it was too early yet for Father Time to stand still, so he sighed impatiently, believing his visitors would not be along for a while.

Macsen had also been told that the hesitation and halting of Father Time would bring changes to The Land of Now and Then. Half the land would be denied the light rays and would be left in darkness, and remain cold for a very long time ahead. How would the species living in the darkness and cold survive such a magical happening? How would the plants survive? How would anything survive in the darkness?

Perhaps even more worrying was that the other half of the land, receiving light but not darkness, would be denied rain, yet receive so much heat from the sun that the heat might even scorch the land. It would certainly cause a muddle for all the species in the land, and Macsen would soon need the Wizard of the Magical Forest, Ambrosious, to sort out such a magical muddle and put a stop to such extremes of magical changes.

Macsen didn't like puzzles, and he wasn't too sure he really wanted to welcome any visitors, either. He wasn't feeling sociable. He had much on his mind, and so many problems made him feel confused and exhausted. The big clock needed a good dusting, to make sure it would chime loudly when it restarted ticking, as would every other clock in the land.

The secret, red-velvet-covered book would need to be hidden

away safely in the vault behind the Red Stone, and the golden key and its precious Box of Secrets would need to be urgently found, for both key and box had vanished, and Macsen had spent hours searching for them, to no avail. He had searched the temple and the gardens, and all the places he could think of across The Land of Now and Then, but there had been no sighting of them. Their disappearance had become a mystery to Macsen, but at least he had safely found the secret, red-velvet-covered book on the kitchen table.

“Ah, well, there is nothing more I can do but wait for the trickery of this night to happen in the heavens. And, in fact,” Macsen reckoned, as he shuffled around, “I may even have time for a game of chess before my visitors intrude.” Macsen grinned, for his favourite pastime was a game of chess. “Yes, that will be a good way to ease my boredom, whilst I await my visitors. Then, later, I can sneak away and begin my search again for the golden key and precious box.”



CHAPTER 10

The Temple

The chiming of a bell from within the building sounded loudly, throwing out massive gongs. It made the Purple Wizards jump. For a short time only there was silence, before the clanging of the bell rang out again. They listened, intrigued by the bell's echoing clangs.

There was still an annoying, overhanging, green mist at that time of day, which Macsen hated, for it made him sneeze. But, slowly – so slowly – the green mist was fading away, revealing the temple's high window slits, the darkened sky visible above, with its display of planets and stars. His irritation, from the skies to the islands, had somehow suddenly calmed.

“Ah, good, good,” sniffed Macsen, as he gave his final sneeze.

The Purple Wizards listened in silence. They rubbed their eyes and looked around again at their curious surroundings.

Once inside the temple, the Purple Wizards realized that they were all feeling rather tired, perhaps because of the journey down on the red beams of light, or perhaps they had been in shock, and now realized they had become tired of standing inside the temple building. They rested their legs as they flopped down onto the hard, cold floor of the temple, where they sat cross-legged, staring up at the beautiful domed ceiling, painted in beastly gold and crimson images. They shivered. They seemed confused and tired all at once.

When they looked at the floor of the building, they couldn't understand why they were on a giant chessboard, each of them squatting on a square, surrounded by ugly gargoyle chess pieces.

"Where are we? What is this place?" Izzy Odorous whispered.

"Hush!" gasped a voice from somewhere above him, for the whispering had stirred Macsen, who now became aware of the visiting Purple Wizards.

"Oh, so you've arrived, have you?" Macsen snapped. "Can't you visitors see I'm concentrating? And you're spoiling my game of chess."

The Purple Wizards were silenced once more. They weren't too sure what had really happened to them, or why they should have been lifted and carried by light beams to a mysterious temple, somewhere on the Magic Islands. Neither did they understand the game of chess. In fact, they weren't too sure of anything.

The Purple Wizards weren't even aware that it would be here, in The Land of Now and Then, that their new magical adventure would be about to begin.



CHAPTER 11

The Chessboard

The Purple Wizards were aware of the sounds around them: the loud, clanging gongs ringing out from a hollow bell, somewhere nearby in the building, and how it then silenced for only a short while before clanging again. And they knew they were not alone, for the other chess pieces were now chattering to each other, and making a din with their giggles and screams.

The wizards listened and watched, until the gargoyles quietened once more.

“Now it’s your turn to move, Gargoyle 3790. Hurry up, and stop looking so cross about it; you only need to shift yourself forward or backward on the board,” Macsen was yelling.

Gargoyle 3790 moved.

The other chess pieces laughed.

The pawns watching from the outside of the chessboard grunted. “Now you’ve had it, Gargoyle 3790; you’ve moved into a danger zone.”

“I’m not bothered,” said Gargoyle 3790, in an uppity tone; “I don’t like playing chess, anyway. If I’m out of the game, I shall leave and put the kettle on for a nice cup of puddle soup.”

An enormous crashing of hooves bounced across the board, as a figure on a horseback smashed into Gargoyle 3790, causing him to

skid off the chessboard.

“Not fair!” shouted Gargoyle 3790, as he landed on his head.

“Not fair! Not fair! Knight, you knocked me flat!”

“Your turn next,” Macsen’s voice rang out again, as he now revealed himself.

The gargoyles were fighting between themselves, tittering loudly once more, and frowning angrily at each other.

“Hush!” Macsen called out.

The Purple Wizards could see Macsen now, as he swung across the domed ceiling on the bell rope, in a loop of movements. He wore a grey cloak with an oversized hood, as if he was dressed in a monk’s habit. It was difficult to see his face, for the hood draped down over his nose. As they looked up, they realized it had been the monk who had been shouting, but now his bell rope was lowering downward, toward the Purple Wizard, Batty-Butty Barbignagion.

“Which square do you want to move to? Hurry up, will you?” Macsen’s voice snapped again.

“Me?” Batty-Butty Barbignagion gasped in surprise. “But... but... are you talking to me?”

“Yes, you; of course I’m talking to you,” Macsen yelled as he sprang upward, climbing higher, clinging onto the bell rope. Macsen disappeared behind a thick pillar, but then, from somewhere in the ceilinged dome above their heads, the Purple Wizards heard the grey monk’s voice yell once more: “Hurry up! Move carefully to another square or you’ll get smashed, too.”

“Sma-smashed,” Batty-Butty Barbignagion sniffed. “But... why me?”

“Look, you’re sitting on my chessboard and it’s your turn next. You’re one of my visitors, aren’t you?”

“I’m Batty-Butty Barbignagion, but... but I don’t know how to

play chess.”

“What?” boomed Macsen. “That’s ridiculous! Everyone knows how to play the game of chess in this place.”

“None of us know how to play the game of chess,” chorused the gang of wizards.

“Senseless visitors! Huh! I’ve been expecting you for some time and you all arrived at the *wrong* time! I’m Macsen; whatever I say goes in this place! I’m in charge of Father Time, and every second counts to me. Father Time can come, Father Time can go, Father Time can pass, but Father Time will never wait, not even for Mother Nature, and certainly not if he’s in a hurry. But, I’m sorry to say that you wizards have caused such an atmospheric confusion in the skies tonight, because Father Time has paused and stopped still, and that is seriously bad news, and it’s all your fault, you nuisance Purple Wizards! So, you see, I can’t wait for you to decide what move you want to take on my chessboard, for we haven’t much of Father Time left to dilly-dally. There is no Father Time for that sort of dilly-dallying in The Land of Now and Then. Hurry along; move yourself to another square on the chessboard. If you don’t, you’re wasting everyone’s Father Time.”

“Wasting time! Tut-tut!” tittered the gargoyles.

“But... but...” Batty-Butty Barbignagion protested, “I don’t understand what you are talking about.”

“Do as Macsen asked,” Izzy snarled at Batty-Butty Barbignagion, for he had taken a dislike to the monk who seemed to believe he was boss. Everyone knew there was only one boss, and of course that would be he, the infamous Izzy Odorous. “My men will only take orders from me, for I am their leader.”

“Huh,” the monk exclaimed again, as he complained and mumbled, “then you have no manners, for if you had learned

manners, you would know how to listen, how to do things properly and, therefore, how to play the game of chess.”

And, with another enormous crashing of hooves, Batty-Butty Barbignagion felt the sudden gust of wind fly toward him, and a sharp kick from the knight’s horse struck him from behind and threw him through the air, right off the chessboard, into a deep pit encircling the board. Dazed, Batty-Butty Barbignagion picked himself up and peeped over the edge of the pit with startled, dazed eyes.

“But, but...” he moaned.

“Who are you? What are your names? Why are you here?” Macsen yelled in a booming voice again, as he flew backward and forward overhead. He waited for someone to reply but, when no one answered, Macsen showed little patience. The bell rope he clung onto lifted and lowered, and the heavy bell in the tower gonged demandingly, its impact chipping the belltower walls. Macsen pulled angrily on the rope, ringing out one harsh gong, then another, and another, and another...

“Do you need to make such a noise with that bell?” Izzy growled.

“Yes. I am the keeper of Father Time, and Father Time waits for no one. So, hurry up! Now, answer my questions immediately: what are your names? I’m Macsen.” Macsen rescued his treasured book from the red stone and, with a feather quill, got ready to scribble the wizards’ names onto a blank page.

“We are the Purple Wizards. There’s Cranky-Creep Lickspittle, Snoopy-Loo Boondoggle, Noodle-Doodle Hornswaggle, Batty-Butty Barbignagion, Willie-Nilly Kerfuffle, Grizzly-Grime Squatpump, Grimble-Pants Cheesequake, and me. I’m the boss. I’m Izzy-Odorous.”

“Well, tell me more,” Macsen demanded. “Where did you lose

your manners? And have you searched for them? You must have dropped them somewhere on your journey here, which was most careless of you all.”

“Perhaps if you stopped clanging your bell, we would be able to remember when we used our manners last,” Grizzly-Grime Squatpump grizzled.

Macsen was mumbling to himself again, but he continued to clang, swing and chip the walls with his heavy bell.

“It is different for me,” he was saying, “for I have to move the clock hands forward... er... by thirty seconds, for the thirty seconds which were lost at midnight when Father Time paused, and the disaster is that the lost Father Time has not been found. And nothing can be corrected until I remedy my problems. And I have somehow mislaid the golden key, and also the precious box which the red-velvet book of secrets is usually hidden in.”

With that, Macsen began to climb up the bell rope until he reached a clockface. The clockface looked down at him with droopy eyes.

“Don’t gawk at me like a pigeon, Clockface.” Macsen leant backward and pushed the clock’s hands forward; it took all his strength. He huffed and puffed until he had regained his breath, then slid rapidly down the long rope and sat on the massive knot at the bottom of it. Flickering his close-set eyes toward the Purple Wizards, he quickly explained that The Land of Now and Then had encountered a difficulty: their friends, Light and Sun, had lost track of direction, and at a guess would now only shine on one half of The Land of Now and Then, leaving the other half of the land plunged into darkness.

“And where there is continuous darkness, nothing will grow, nothing will live, and all my creatures, beasts and monsters will fail

to survive. I see that all as your fault, for confusing us with your visit.”

The Purple Wizards gawped, open-mouthed, with disbelieving expressions on their faces, as the gargoyles shuffled off the chessboard and floated across to Macsen, who seemed to be continuously complaining angrily about his new visitors, the Purple Wizards, and about the lost key and box.

“Send the senseless wizards to the dark side, Macsen. After all, they’ve ruined our game of chess,” the gargoyles twittered.

“But it isn’t yet dark,” Gargoyle 3790 tutted, as it explained; “these Purple Wizards will have to go to the light side. It won’t matter where they go, as long as they get off our chessboard, for they are spoiling and interrupting our game of chess.”

Macsen’s voice boomed, as he spun around the domed ceiling: “Leave, Purple Wizards. You have upset the gargoyles. Go on your way, through this great building. Step off the chessboard, into the pits, and you will find that the floor will move you to another place. I will see you in a short while.”



CHAPTER 12

In The Kitchen

The Purple Wizards tumbled awkwardly into the moving pit surrounding the chessboard, and soon they were bundled into a kitchen.

“Have we all arrived?” Izzy Odorous asked, as the wizard boss checked that all his gang were together. Then, they all sat and waited in silence.

And they waited and waited, twitching their long, purple fingers and impatiently turning the rings on their hands, which were beautifully adorned with purple amethyst stones. They looked at the clocks hanging on the walls of the room, but each clock read a different time, so no one really knew how long they had been waiting.

“How much longer will we be left here in this room?” Izzy mumbled impatiently. “I am beginning to tire of our long wait.”

Then, with a huge fluttering of thunderous rumble, a duck-billed dinosaur leapt toward them from a large, open chimney-place. It was a species the Purple Wizards had never seen before; perhaps no one had. It was half duck and half dinosaur, its wide mouth, which opened to greet them, flattened and toothless in the front, like a duck’s beak; but toward the back of its mouth, its teeth stood like batteries in large numbers. The duck-bill jumped up again on its

two powerful back legs.

“Phillys, the duck-bill has decided to collect all of your jewels and rings from your fingers, toes and necks,” Macsen’s voice was heard to say.

“Phillys? Is that your real name?” Snoopy-Loo Boondoggle asked, inquisitively.

“Phillys is a *Parasaurolophus* dinosaur. She was rescued from America, centuries ago, by Ambrosious, the good Wizard of the Magical Forest,” Macsen called out.

“Why?” Cranky-Creep Lickspittle asked.

“Collecting extinct dinosaurs became a hobby of his,” Macsen’s voice rang out.

“Why does Phillys want our jewels and rings?” Snoopy-Loo asked again.

“Good question,” Macsen said. “Phillys, why do you want the Purple Wizards’ jewels and rings?”

“Secrets must always be kept safely. Every ring is a treasure and is *my* deserving reward,” Phillys the *Parasaurolophus* whispered quietly. “But, to gain the reward, your rings must be placed in my safekeeping.”

“What is this reward?” Izzy Odorous asked, not really understanding what the duck-bill was saying.

“That would be a secret,” Phillys continued in a low, quiet voice.

“Ah! Is this a trick? Or is it some sort of a game? We like games, but a secret game sounds really intriguing, doesn’t it? That is, providing there is no trickery happening. Hum! Very well. Place your rings and jewels in the dish, Purple Wizards. Let us all play Phillys’s game,” Izzy nodded approvingly.

“Yes, Boss,” echoed the voices of the Purple Wizards, as they dropped their rings inside the dish.

When the dish was full of rings of precious gold and amethyst stones, the huge creature known as Philly's left the temple, carrying the beautiful trinkets.

"I shall now call on my Terror Birds," Macsen's voice echoed loudly. "These birds have grown to an incredible size; they are the tallest birds that have ever lived. They were rescued from New Zealand, where they lived until five hundred years ago, and Ambrosious, who normally only saved one extinct species, brought the Terror Birds in multiples."

The birds raced into the kitchen, screeching to a stop and, before Macsen could say a further word, the birds had scooped up the wizards and flown away with them, across the land, into the distance.

When all the wizards had been dispersed, Macsen pulled at his bell rope and counted backwards: "Thirty... twenty-nine... twenty-eight... twenty-seven..."

When he reached "...three... two... one..." there was a thunderous roar of wings, as the birds returned at a screeching halt and dropped the wizards from their sharp beaks.

"Did you all enjoy your tour of The Land of Now and Then?" Macsen asked, as he climbed down from his bell rope and ran to a table nearby, where he opened the large, secret, red-velvet-covered book. His busy fingers flicked through the pages until he landed on the "*Visitors Page*", where he hesitated as he explained:

"There are many columns on this *Visitors Page*. One is a column for '*Welcome Visitors*', another column for '*Unwelcome Visitors*', and here are the columns for '*Magical Visitors*', '*Visitors With Manners*', '*Visitors With No Manners*', '*Wicked Wizards*' and '*Good Wizards*'. What type of visitors are you?" Macsen chewed the end of his plume. For the time being, he would tick the column and list

the Purple Wizards under the heading: *'Visitors With No Manners'*.

Turning over the pages, he arrived at another page, entitled, *'Lessons'*, but there were no instructions given in these pages, even though Macsen searched, turning over leaf after leaf. He sighed and sniffed loudly, as he read the final words on the last page of the book:

"In the beginning there was Father Time, and Father Time was magical, and the most magical moment was when Father Time allowed all the clocks to mark time."

Macsen flicked the pages over again, and whispered angrily: "You don't understand!" He scoffed at the secret, red-velvet-covered book: "What I need to know is what exactly are the secrets, and when will Father Time tell me, because I must know now?"

The secret, red-velvet-covered book snapped shut. "Patience, Macsen!" replied the book. "They are Ambrosious's secrets, which he locks away in his Box of Secrets. None of your business, really, is it? Only Father Time will tell you when the clocks will restart, and that will only be when Father Time is ready. In the meantime, find the golden key and the precious box I always hide in."



CHAPTER 13

Colossus

Trevor was not enjoying his journey on Colossus's shoulder, and kept shouting at him to stop and return him home to White Stone Beach. Eventually, he leaned toward the giant's ear and yelled his loudest: "Sssstttooopp!!! STOP!"

Colossus stopped. "Are you having a problem, young sir?"

"Of course, I'm having a problem. Turn around and take me back to school. The witches have made a mistake. I don't want to meet Ambrosious, the Wizard of the Magical Forest, nor do I want to go to the Magic Islands. Besides, Grandma Greg and Grandpa Greg will miss me and worry about me. And, if you don't turn back soon, I'll miss my school trip to the Natural History Museum."

"But you believe in magic, don't you?" the giant frowned with a confused expression on his face. "The witches told me that—"

"I certainly don't believe in magic!" choked Trevor, who was by now feeling emotional. "Those witches are stupid and wrong. I have to return to White Stone. *You must take me back to Wales!*"

Poor Colossus was unsure. He twisted and turned himself one way then the other. "I can't turn," he explained: "the witches have magically programmed me to move my feet forward."

"Try reversing," Trevor suggested.

"Reversing?"

“Walk backwards, sliding your legs in reverse,” Trevor explained. Colossus slid backwards easily.

“Well done!” Trevor encouraged. “Just keep reversing until we reach White Stone Beach.”

The giant grunted. He still felt uncertain, but on the other hand it was fun walking backwards across the sea; it was almost like a new game. He grinned wider and wider with each step, as he slid along confidently.

There was no one at White Stone Beach when Trevor and Colossus arrived. Relieved, Trevor slid hurriedly off the giant’s shoulder and landed awkwardly on the sand.

“Er, thank you, Mr. Giant. Perhaps we’ll meet each other another day,” Trevor mumbled, as he ran across the beach toward White Stone School.

When Trevor arrived, Mrs. Parry was already handing out books to the class children about the endangered species in the world, and those species which had become extinct.

“There’s the African Forest Elephant, the Amur Leopard, the Black Rhino, The Bornean Orangutan, the Cross River Gorilla and”

“Mrs. Parry! Mrs. Parry!” Trevor interrupted from the classroom doorway.

Mrs. Parry was too busy to turn her head, passing around pictures of the endangered species and reciting long lists of their names. She appeared to be so engrossed and enthusiastic in the topic that she then moved quickly onto the next pile of pictures on her desk, rummaging, sorting and handing them out to her students.

“These unusual beasts were once endangered species and later they became extinct. How do we know this?”

“The archaeologists have found their bones,” Stefan answered, putting up his hand to draw attention.

“Yes!” agreed Mrs. Parry, in a delighted tone of voice. “These monster beasts lived thousands of years ago. There were the dinosaurs, the Horned Turtle, the Mammoth, the Entelodont, the Sabre-Toothed Dinofelis, the Dodo, the Toxoden and many more, some of which we will see in their skeletal form at the museum today.”

“Mrs. Parry! Mrs. Parry!” Trevor called again, impatiently.

But Mrs. Parry was not to be interrupted by a nuisance of a lad like Trevor Dalston. “Any questions?” she asked.

“Mrs. Parry! Mrs. Parry!” Trevor puffed.

“Yes?” Mrs. Parry conceded, eventually. “What is it, Trevor?”

Trevor hesitated as he felt Osmo, the mouse, climb from his pocket and leap to the floor. He watched with horror as it ran across the room and climbed up onto his desk. He gasped and his heart thudded, as he stood rigid at the doorway and called out: “Osmo! Osmo!”

The mouse didn’t twitch, squeak, bark or even show an interest in Trevor’s yelling. It turned and, within seconds, had scuttled out of sight.

Mrs. Parry put her hand to her mouth and crinkled her brow, with a puzzled expression on her face. “Er...” she frowned, as her false teeth rattled, “excuse me, Trevor, but why are you so late arriving to class this morning? Would you like to explain?”

Poor Trevor twiddled his thumbs together, and stared again at the desk where the mouse had been. “I... I...” Trevor began, but stopped again when he spotted the mouse climbing up onto a windowsill.

“Trevor!” snapped Mrs. Parry. “I’m waiting for an explanation.”

“Mrs. Parry, I... I...” Trevor began again.

From the corner of his eye, Trevor glared at Osmo, for the mouse

had jumped back down to the wooden floor again. It had now squeezed its way between Mrs. Parry's legs, as she sat astride her chair.

"Don't move, Mrs. Parry!" Trevor yelled at her. Then, she gasped as Trevor dived under her desk and lurched at her feet, in an effort to catch his pet. But he didn't catch the mouse; it just ran away again.

The children giggled, because they thought Trevor was being funny.

"Don't move, Mrs. Parry," Trevor yelled again, from beneath his teacher's desk.

"What is going on, Trevor?" Mrs. Parry demanded, as she glared at Trevor.

"Mrs. Parry, I have some very scary news. There are witches in town today, and they've turned my dog Osmo into a mouse. He's hiding very close to your feet, but it's okay because, he may look like a mouse, but he's really a dog."

"Ha ha! Rubbish!" scoffed a small girl in a blue dress. "Here we go again, Mrs. Parry: Trevor is about to make up a ridiculous story."

Mrs. Parry's jaw dropped. The problem with Trevor was, as Mrs. Parry knew, he always made-up tales or exaggerated his jokes – and most of his tales were improbable, if not impossible. Ever since Trevor had arrived at White Stone Town, in Wales, to be with Grandma Greg and Grandpa Greg, he had become the most popular boy in class, for he really had shown a wild sense of humour. Known as the comedian for his exaggerations and comical comments, he somehow always made his classmates laugh. However, Mrs. Parry was not humoured by Trevor's nonsense on this particular morning. She shook her head in doubt, sighed, rolled her eyes impatiently and plugged a finger into each ear. She really didn't want to hear

Trevor's excuses.

"Enough, Trevor! I really don't want to hear your crazy stories today; I want the truth. Why are you late arriving in class this morning?"

"The witches delayed me, Mrs. Parry," Trevor began. "I met them on the road to White Stone Beach."

The class of children started to giggle again.

Mrs. Parry unplugged her fingers from her ears, then put her chin in the cupped palm of her hand, as she propped her elbow on the desk. With a glint of steel in her eyes, she frowned at Trevor.

"Your imagination is too vivid. Really! Whatever will you blurt out next, Trevor?"

Mrs. Parry's question needed answers, Trevor thought, so he explained again: "I was walking Osmo, my puppy, toward White Stone Beach this morning, because Grandma Greg was cross with Osmo for a mess he'd made in the cottage. Anyway, Osmo ran away from me."

"So, you are late this morning because you have been running after Osmo? Is that right?" Mrs. Parry prompted Trevor.

"Er, yes. Er, no..."

The class of children's giggles grew louder.

"Was that a 'yes' or a 'no', Trevor?"

"Both, Mrs. Parry."

Mrs. Parry scowled. This boy could be so difficult at times.

"Well, there were these horrid witches, you see, Mrs. Parry? One witch, called Mogul, had horns and warts and a twisted neck. The second witch was called Drot. She was evil, too. Her neck was as long as a giraffe's neck. The witches' eyes were as black as lumps of coal or volcanic rock; they were like black diamonds from Mount Etna. Red rays jumped out of their eyes."

“Mount Etna!” echoed the small girl in the blue dress, as she giggled in sheer glee. Then she laughed uncontrollably, in a heehaw, guttural croak, which was followed by an explosion of laughter from the other children.

“A giraffe’s neck!” repeated a boy from the back of the class. “How ridiculous!”

“Huh! Witches!” another child called out. “Did they fly around on broomsticks?”

The children’s giggles grew louder and louder.

“The red rays must have been magnetic, and the light around their bodies must have been lit up by batteries,” Trevor extravagantly added, with a radiant grin of satisfaction on his face.

“Hee-**h**ee! Battery-operated witches! Good one, Trevor.”

Each comment brought a new boom of laughter, as the children rocked in their seats, obviously delighted by Trevor’s new story.

“Mmmm! Oh, really?” Mrs. Parry shook her head. Whatever should she do with Trevor, she puzzled, as she moved on her chair, trying to rub her itchy bottom on its bumpy, lumpy, hard, carved wooden seat. She moved with the greatest of unease.

“Anyway, it was horrid, Mrs. Parry. These two witches changed Osmo into a mouse. Then, Mrs. Parry,” Trevor blurted out, “this giant was put under the witches’ magic spell, and I was lifted up onto his shoulder as he marched me across the sea. Osmo was in my pocket the whole time. But it was okay, because I persuaded Colossus the giant to bring me home, so that I could come to school, because I don’t want to miss our trip to the Natural History Museum.”

Mrs. Parry shook her head in despair and frowned at her pupil. Then she laughed. “Trevor, you say such stupid things. Will you now go and sit down in your seat, and join the class?”

Suddenly, Trevor edged his way up to Mrs. Parry's desk and, when he was so close to his teacher that their noses touched, he looked past Mrs. Parry's left eye, glaring toward a hole in the skirting board, where Osmo the little mouse had reappeared, and was now twitching his tiny nose and lemon-bud ears.

"Don't move, Mrs. Parry!" Trevor shrieked. "Don't be afraid. Osmo is right behind you."

Mrs. Parry was no longer interested in Trevor's jokes and, while everyone giggled, poor Mrs. Parry frowned. It was a funny scene and the children were all laughing, apart from Mrs. Parry, who had stood up and now actually spotted the little mouse herself. Tearful Trevor had by now run to the hole in the skirting board, ducked down beneath Mrs. Parry's long skirt and picked up the mouse by its tail.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Parry; I've caught Osmo," Trevor grinned triumphantly, whilst waving the mouse in front of Mrs. Parry's nose.

Mrs. Parry rolled her eyes and pointed at the classroom doorway. "OUT!" she screamed. "Get that mouse OUT of my classroom, and don't you dare bring it on our school trip."

As Trevor stepped out of the class, Stefan and Megan looked at each other.

"Gracious!" they gasped, as they knew that Trevor must have *really* met Mogul and Drot, and the witches surely *had* changed Osmo into a mouse, and Colossus the giant *must* have somehow carried Trevor through the sea. Then they gasped again, for they knew that they would need to meet the witches and order them to change Osmo back into a little dog. They excused themselves and slowly followed Trevor out of class.

As Stefan closed the classroom door behind him, he whispered quietly to Megan: "Let's catch up with Trevor, and then we'll search

for the witches and have a long talk with them, shall we?"



CHAPTER 14

Problems

Trevor had already made his way to the kitchen area behind the school building, where the busy cooks prepared school lunches. It was a place where children seldom lurked, and was out of view of the classroom windows. It was a private area, as Trevor felt he needed to isolate himself in peace, and think seriously about solutions to his problems. He silently edged his way to a walled corner, where the school bins stood in a neat and tidy row.

“Oh, Osmo, what shall we do next?” Trevor sighed, picking up the little mouse and holding it in the palm of his hand. He watched as the mouse twitched its nose and shook its two little lemon-bud ears.

Trevor studied the little character closely and sighed again. “Osmo, you look so different,” he said, then giggled as Osmo rubbed his head deep into Trevor’s hand. Trevor popped Osmo into his coat pocket once again.

Even though Trevor now had the mouse safely in his jacket pocket, his problems were not over. And neither were Osmo’s problems over, for Trevor wouldn’t be able to take him home; a mouse would obviously scare Grandma Greg. There was also the problem that, if Trevor took Osmo back to his bedroom, where would he hide him? Perhaps he could hide Osmo in his wardrobe, and hope that Grandma Greg would not hear the little mouse

scratching? Or perhaps somewhere like Grandpa Greg's shed would be a better place? He could search around for a wooden box, for Grandpa Greg had quite a few toolboxes made of wood, which would make a safe hiding place for Osmo, who would need a box to sleep in. The pet shop on the corner of the street would probably stock mouse food for Osmo to eat.

Trevor plunged his hand into his trouser pocket and dug out a few pence. He wondered whether Mr. Arthur, the pet-shopkeeper, would sell him a cupful of mouse food for the few pence he had. And, of course, he would need to find a small water bowl from Grandma Greg's kitchen for Osmo to drink from.

But, if he hid Osmo in Grandpa Greg's shed, would Grandpa Greg then find him and throw him out? There just didn't seem to be an immediate solution for Osmo. Trevor realized that he would just have to hold the little mouse all day, until he could think of a *really* safe place to hide him – somewhere *ultra*-safe; a perfect hideout.

Still looking around and searching, Trevor cast his eye toward the school bins, lined up against the school's rear wall. He ran forward, lifted a bin's lid and looked inside. The bin was full of old papers, plastic bottles, plastic straws, paper plates and one fat, stuffed teddy bear toy, pressed inside with its face upward; its tummy was torn open, with fluffy stuffing bulging from it. Could he drop Osmo inside the teddy and hide Osmo in the dustbin for the day? Perhaps not.

A man's voice suddenly rang out, as a massive, green rubbish-disposal lorry clanked over toward him. That was when Trevor realized that the bin really was a silly place to think of using as a hiding place for Osmo; if he hid Osmo in the bin, he'd be putting his pet in danger, for the binmen would scoop poor Osmo into their lorry and take him away amongst the rubbish.

Trevor idled toward the field and leant against a post.

Then, from nearby, he could hear the familiar sound of a witch's cackle, and a tinny-sounding voice piped up.

"Look, Drot," said Mogul, the old witch, "it's that boy again, the one who owned the magical dog. Shouldn't Colossus have carried him to the Magic Islands by now? We'll not waste our time with him; we'll search for Stefan and Megan. They can't be far away. Let's go inside the school and see if we can find them."

"Oh, no," Trevor whispered, alarmed, as he watched the witches enter the school building, leaving behind them a curious stream of green smoke.



CHAPTER 15

At School With The Curious Visitors

The two witches barged into Mr. Beedles's study room without delay.

Looking up from his desk to the doorway, Mr. Beedles the headmaster saw the two ugly women staring down at him. He gave them a puzzled, one-sided smile.

"We're searching for Stefan and Megan," the witches chorused abruptly. "We must find them."

"How did you get into my school?" Mr. Beedles frowned. He felt somewhat confused by his intruders. "I'm afraid the children will be busy in class at this time of day, and I must ask you both to leave, and return when we have agreed an appointment time to talk."

"Certainly not," said Drot. "We need to get back to the Magic Islands by lunchtime; we haven't time to dilly-dally here with you. Where are those children? Let's search for them, Mogul."

"Well, I'm afraid I—" began Mr. Beedles, as he edged back in his seat and slumped down onto his chair. But there was a flash of green smoke before the two women completely disappeared before his eyes.

Mr. Beedles pinched himself, to make sure he hadn't been dreaming. "Ouch!" he mumbled. He picked up his phone, his fingers trembling as they slid across the dial-pad.

“Are you going to phone the police, Mr. Beedles?” came Trevor’s small voice, through the green clouds of smoke. “Those two women are the witches.”

Mr. Beedles grunted: “Huh! Witches, indeed! What rubbish! Go away, boy, and stop dawdling in corridors.”

Mr. Beedles had no idea that the two witches had moved further down the corridor, to Mrs. Parry’s class. They quickly entered and pressed their heavy bottoms down in the seating, until their chairs creaked loudly. Looking around, they realized immediately that Stefan and Megan were not in class.

“Hmmm!” Mrs. Parry hummed as she kept her head down, for she hadn’t noticed her intruders, and was concentrating on the wobbly heel of her shoe.

“Begin, teacher,” Drot called out in her deep, tuba-sounding voice. “Teach us something interesting.”

Mogul’s tinny voice snapped as she butted in: “We don’t want to learn about writing. Teach us something we’ve always wanted to know, like how to change snails into pickled onions, or how to plait rats’ tails into baskets, or how to train pigeons to clean up their own stinky-poops...”

A ripple of giggles broke out from the children.

Drot lifted up her furry eyebrows. “I’ve always wanted to know how to cook giant pancakes, climb on top of them and fly across the world on them – a bit like magic carpet flying. I suppose it could be terrific fun if we learned that.”

Mogul snorted: “But you’ll need to be quick about it, for we are to be home on the Magic Islands by lunchtime, and we need to find Stefan and Megan.”

Mrs. Parry was speechless for a minute; she opened her mouth to speak, then closed it again and gasped loudly. She was stunned.

“See for yourself,” Mogul tittered; “I bet the children would much prefer those lessons to writing lessons.”

At exactly that time, Mr. Beedles pressed the school fire-alarm bell. It rang out loudly, vibrating through the entire school. The furniture rattled, the ceilings crumbled here and there in the empty corridors, and the doors slammed as Mr. Beedles ran around, yelling out loudly in a sharp voice: “Fire! Fire!”

The green smoke had thickened, trailed along the corridor, through doorways and windows, and was now as thick as smog, as it approached Mrs. Parry’s classroom. The very confused Mr. Beedles therefore assumed that his school was probably on fire, even though the green smoke was indeed mysterious. However, he believed that smoke in corridors called for immediate action and a school fire drill.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Parry had taken a good look at the two women. She noted the horns sticking out of Mogul’s head, and the odd twisted neck and warts. She also noted Drot’s peculiar furry eyebrows and her broomstick, and the look of alarm in the women’s black eyes, as the sound of the fire-bell rang out loudly.

“Ah! Eyes as black as coal,” Mrs. Parry whispered quietly to herself, as she remembered Trevor’s story about the two witches.

Then, with another flash of smoke, the women had gone again; they had disappeared.

Mrs. Parry was completely baffled as she began to bustle the children into the green-smoky corridor, and out to the school yard.

Poor Mr. Beedles had become rather confused, and now realized that there had never been a fire. “Just an error of mine,” he explained. “Hurry along on your school trip, Mrs. Parry. The bus is parked up and awaits you all.”

“Oh...” Mrs. Parry mumbled again, in a puzzled tone of voice, for

she had the oddest feeling about the two women who had barged into her class. Were they really the witches Trevor had told everyone about? There was now no sign of them anywhere, and neither was Trevor in view. And where had Stefan and Megan gone? Where had they all disappeared to? Mrs. Parry sighed deeply. “Oh, dear, I do hope this won’t become another magical day.”

As time moved on, Mrs. Parry became most concerned. Megan, Stefan and that boy Trevor were certainly class nuisances. The bus had remained stationary for some time, and the missing children were not aboard. Should the bus leave without them? The impatient bus driver wished to make a start on his journey, for he was running behind schedule. Mr. Beedles was waving his arms and shouting at her.

“Leave now, Mrs. Parry; go at once. I’ll look around for those three children. They can’t have gone very far.”

Mr. Beedles frowned as he thought of the words the two visiting women had said to him. “Hmmm,” he humped, “there are no Magic Islands and those two ugly women haven’t fooled me. I’m not convinced they were witches.” He mumbled as he tried to remind himself that everything magical was, after all, quite ridiculous.

Mr. Beedles screwed up his eyes as he stepped forward, to begin his determined search to find the children, and his voice boomed loudly as he called out their names. Then he saw Stefan and Megan running across the school yard, toward the bus.

“Hurry along!” he boomed. “Where’s Trevor?”

“We think he’s taken his mouse home. We can’t find him anywhere.”

“Ah,” replied the headmaster. Mr. Beedles then made his way over to the bus, where he rang Grandma Greg’s number on his mobile phone, speaking in a calming voice to Trevor’s grandparents.

“Trevor has left school for home, Mrs. Greg, so the school trip must go on without him today.”

Grandma Greg uttered a few words in reply, before the conversation was ended by a blank screen appearing on Mr. Beedles’s phone, when the battery died and the phone silenced.

“Bother this phone!” said Mr. Beedles. “But at least the missing children have turned up.” Feeling satisfied, Mr. Beedles called off his search for Stefan and Megan, as he turned and boarded the fuming, belching bus.

*

Mogul spotted Stefan and Megan as the two children were climbing the steps of the bus. She zoomed above them on her broomstick, into the sky, wondering whether she should follow the bus, as it started its engine.

Drot, meanwhile, had driven her broomstick to the back of the school and spotted Trevor walking aimlessly, circling a tree in the playing fields. At first, she just slowed her broomstick down, and was about to turn away when she heard Trevor call out to her.

“Hey, stop! Stop, witch! Change my mouse back into my puppy dog, Osmo. Please! Please! Please!”

“Can’t,” snapped Drot, in her deep voice, “but I know a wizard who can, and that’s Ambrosious, the Wizard of the Magical Forest, on the Magic Islands. I’ll give you a lift there on my broomstick. Here, jump on and take a ride with me.”

“I don’t want to visit the Magic Islands!” Trevor protested. “I don’t want to meet the wizard! I just want my dog back.”

Drot landed next to Trevor and pulled him toward the narrow-pointed broomstick.

“Come along, then, if you want your dog back,” Drot snapped again, “but you keep that mouse safely in your pocket, away from me, because he’s a baddy, and if Mogul captures him, she’ll probably pickle him, or something like that.”

Trevor pulled an uncertain face. After all, Drot was a horrid witch, and Grandma Greg and Grandpa Greg would not like it that he had not gone on the school trip, but had instead taken the risk of jetting off on a broomstick with a real witch, toward an invisible place called the Magic Islands.

Was it too late to change his mind, though, for Drot was now ascending upward, clutching tightly onto Trevor’s jacket? She was speeding up in flight and, whether he liked it or not, Trevor was about to embark on a mystery tour; all he could do was hold onto the broomstick with one hand whilst nervously placing the other in his deep jacket pocket. His mind was filled with doubts and fears, as he wrapped his fingers around the little mouse and whispered: “Don’t be scared, Osmo; it will be alright. Ambrosious will help us soon.”



CHAPTER 16

A Bus Journey

Diesel fumes puffed out of the bus as it prepared for the journey to London's Natural History Museum.

"Oh! Diesel fumes! How disgusting and polluting!" Stefan complained, as he coughed in agony.

"Stefan is quite correct," rasped Mr. Beedles, spluttering into his paper-tissue handkerchief: "this bus is discharging disgusting fumes."

Stefan recognized the voice and turned to glance over his shoulder at Mr. Beedles, who had mounted the steps of the bus and was making his way toward him.

"Oh, Headmaster, are you coming along with us on our trip?" asked the surprised Mrs. Parry.

"Yes, indeed I am, Mrs. Parry. I've sent all the children back to their classes, because there wasn't a fire at all. But the green smoke along the corridor was odd, so I've decided that I'm going to make sure there'll be no hocus-pocus or magical mishaps today. No more disappearances or rumours of witches from certain members of your class. I shall be keeping my beady eye on them."

"Oh, no! Mr. Beedles has joined us!" Stefan scoffed in dismay, as he looked across at Megan.

Mr. Beedles continued to stroll down the bus's central aisle, all

the way to the long seat at the back, where Stefan and Megan were seated. Then, with a heavy slump of his very wide bottom, he promptly sat down, pressing himself uncomfortably between them. The children felt like squashed sardines as they fidgeted and smiled vaguely at Mr. Beedles. Stefan and Megan squinted across at each other in weakened discomfort. It certainly was unusual for Mr. Beedles to join them on a school trip; he usually stayed in school to oversee the other classes.

The journey to London began in the usual way: the bumpy, dirty, fuming bus driven by the grumpy-as-usual Mr. Pips, the school bus driver. Over the Severn Bridge the diesel-fuming bus chugged, eastward toward the metropolis.

After about ten minutes, Mr. Beedles flopped forward and began to snore loudly. He was breathing heavily, and the occasional loud snort made Stefan and Megan jump, for they were never quite ready for the exuberant, dramatic twitching and snorting at the end of the occasional snore.

But, when the bus bounced in and out of a road pothole, and finally screeched to a stop, Mr. Beedles was on his feet very quickly.

“A temporary setback, sir; nothing more,” shouted Mr. Pips from his driving seat; “nothing I can’t fix in a jiffy. A regular tyre blowout, sir, which will need a repair.”

The halting jerk of the bus had emptied the luggage shelf along the ceiling of the bus, and the children’s schoolbags had tumbled down around Mr. Beedles’s long legs and big feet, which were sticking out into the aisle of the bus.

“This is most irregular, Mr. Pips. I was dreaming. I woke up believing that some sort of earthquake had occurred,” Mr. Beedles complained.

Mr. Pips left the bus to take a good look at the tyre blowout. He

returned hissing angrily, with sweat on his brow. He was obviously spitting out his frustration, as he announced to all the passengers that they should leave the coach, because he needed to ring the bus company for a new one; this coach would need to be towed to the depot's garage.

"Most irregular! Most irregular!" growled Mr. Beedles, as he kicked the weight of the schoolbags off his feet. He, too, seemed angry. Perhaps it was because he didn't like being woken up, or perhaps he didn't wish to tolerate any delays, or maybe he was seething with the terribly out-of-condition coach that had been provided by the bus company.

"Pick up your bags, children, and get off the bus," Mr. Pips said promptly, as he gingerly waved his arms about, indicating with flapping arms that teachers and pupils should all stand against the hedge, away from the busy road. When all passengers were outside, Mr. Pips promptly got back inside his bus and sat down.

At the back of the bus, Mr. Beedles shuffled, muttering and tutting as he kicked the bags along the bus's aisle. "Most irregular, wouldn't you agree, Mrs. Parry?" began Mr. Beedles again, as Mrs. Parry was last to dismount the bus.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Beedles, most irregular!"

Mogul chuckled from the other side of the road hedgerow. She had been following the bus, flying on her broomstick, and was now hidden out of sight, behind the hedge. She saw the situation as an ideal opportunity to fulfil her task and please Ambrosious. She suddenly flew toward Stefan and Megan, and grabbed the children by their hands, pulling them sternly upward onto her broomstick, where the children were balanced haphazardly. Her rickety broomstick bent and creaked a little under the children's weight, and Stefan and Megan gasped loudly as Mogul spun higher and

higher. With a splutter and a spray of sparks, the broomstick became engulfed in green smoke, as it seemed to disappear into the distance.

Mr. Beedles, Mrs. Parry and Mr. Pips stood aghast, as they witnessed the sudden movement of the witch and children in flight through the sky, and all the remaining children were silent and speechless as they watched; and apart from the occasional whirring of passing traffic, no one made a sound for at least two whole minutes.

Then, Mr. Beedles said: "Does anyone have a mobile phone with them today?"

"Trevor Dalston usually has his Grandma Greg's mobile phone, but he's not here today," explained a tall boy in short, grey trousers.

Mr. Pips, of course, lifted up his arm to offer his mobile phone to Mr. Beedles. "I have a phone, sir. Who do you wish to ring?"

Mr. Beedles snatched the phone from Mr. Pips, hit the keypad impatiently several times, with his pointed index finger, listened and then yelled down the phone: "I'm Mr. Beedles, headmaster of White Stone School. We're on a school trip today and I'm ringing the police station because..." he lowered his voice and began to mutter, as he held the receiver to his ear, "...because a witch has abducted two of my pupils, and flown them across the sky on her broomstick, leaving only a stream of green smoke behind her. And, what's more, I think I know where they've gone: the witch has taken them to the invisible Magic Islands."

There was a cough and a giggle from a man's voice on the other end of the receiver. "Er... and I'm not a police sergeant at all, sir; my name is Father Christmas," laughed the policeman. The loud howling of laughter from the police station rang out through the phone, echoing over to the children standing near the hedgerow.

Mrs. Parry tutted.

“And I’m Peter Pan,” laughed a second policeman.

“I’m Mickey Mouse,” came another policeman’s voice.

“But I’m serious!” implored Mr. Beedles. “Our bus has broken down and we’re all standing alongside a hedge on a busy road, on our way to London.”

“Yes, sir,” the policeman gurgled, in an amused voice, stifling more giggles. “Then I’d better visit you all on my sleigh, with my friend Rudolph Reindeer.”

There was then a sudden click, as the phone line went dead.

Explanations regarding magical happenings were never simple, as Mr. Beedles was now learning. How was he ever going to convince the police sergeant and the other policemen at the station that he had spoken the truth? “Oh...” he muttered, as he prepared himself to dial once more.

This time he would need to be more determined, more forthright, more commanding and demand proper attention.

“Er...” he hesitated, clutching at Mr. Pips’s phone in confusion. “Drat this hocus-pocus and magical behaviour!”

Then, with a long, doubtful sigh, Mr. Beedles rang the police station again, and again, and again, but no one at the police station believed a word of his magical story.



CHAPTER 17

Trevor Is Lost

When Drot finally arrived at the Magic Islands, she slowed in her flight at first, then lowered the broomstick and tipped it sideways, until Trevor lost his balance and fell off. She cackled in amusement as she whisked back up to the skies and darted away on her broomstick, until she was no longer in sight. Trevor watched as the final trail of green smoke smudged the sky, leaving a small, green, trembling cloud.

Then Trevor stood up and brushed himself down, as he worried whether Osmo was still safely tucked away in his pocket. Trevor hurriedly searched his pocket. when he found it empty, he knew little Osmo the mouse must have fallen out as he hit the ground. But where was he? If Osmo had got himself lost in the surrounding lush forest undergrowth, it would be impossible to find him again.

Trevor scampered around in panic. He looked between the long grasses and giant sunflowers. He searched between the trees, under the wooden tree stumps, and even inside one or two burnt-out trunks for his little pet. He called out Osmo's name repeatedly, but the little mouse had disappeared and was nowhere to be found.

Trevor just couldn't understand how his little friend – his little Osmo – had disappeared so quickly into the forest. He was saddened; it was his birthday and should have been his special day,

but poor Trevor felt he was having the worst day of his life, a dreadful day, for everything had already gone so wrong.

Not knowing what to do or where to go, Trevor sat down on the grass, leant against a flattened log and thought hard but, the more he thought, the more difficult it became to accept his present predicament. Why, he repeatedly asked himself, had he taken a lift from Drot to this island? Drot, the horrid old witch who had put an evil curse on Osmo. Now, not only was he lost and missing on a strangely magical island, but his tiny little house pet, Osmo the mouse, had scampered and possibly got tangled amongst the surrounding sharp brambles.

When Trevor realized he was completely on his own in an unknown new land, he began to feel lonely and scared. The deep, dark forest was uninviting; the trees held lurking shadows and seemed to move, as the winds whispered to them in strange melodies. Trevor brought his knees up to his chin and hid his head down, closing his eyes tightly. He didn't want to go deeper into the forest, not even to search for Osmo. He didn't want to see, through the leafy branches of tangled boughs, the darkness of the forest, nor listen to the eerie sounds of the melodic winds. He put his fingers to his ears to blank out the noises, and tried very hard not to even think about his problems. He would just sit quite still and hope that Osmo would find him. After all, some dogs were good hunters, so perhaps mice could also hunt for humans.

As Trevor pressed his fingers into his ears, he knew the melodies he could hear in the forest were getting louder and louder. The whispering winds rushed past him, alarming him, and somewhere in the distance he was sure he could hear the sound of voices. Trevor lifted his head reluctantly and listened. The voices were getting louder and clearer.

People were approaching, coming closer and closer. But, as Trevor lifted his head up, despite the sounds of the conversation, there was still no one in sight.

“It looks remarkably like Trevor’s mouse, Osmo,” said the first voice.

“Yes, but it can’t be! It can’t be!” echoed the second. “It surely can’t be Trevor’s mouse! How could Osmo have got to these islands? Unless...”

“Unless, perhaps... if you remember, Trevor popped Osmo into his pocket just before he left class, and...”

Trevor sat bolt upright, for he recognized the voices as those of his friends Stefan and Megan. Yet there was still no sight of anyone, so Trevor stood up and yelled out, in his loudest voice: “Help! Help! It’s me, Trevor! I’m over here!”

At first there was no reply. Trevor listened anxiously, but could only hear the wild melodies of the wind gusting between the tremoring trees. Then, a few things seemed to happen at once...

In the far distance, between the trees, Trevor saw a magical flash of light, and emerging from the light was a tall figure. Trevor screwed up his eyes; the light seemed blinding. And, within the glow of light. Moving toward him, was the figure of a wizard. Could this be Ambrosious, Trevor wondered?

Were Stefan and Megan really nearby? Could they really have found Osmo? Trevor shrugged his shoulders and wondered how he would be found, if they couldn’t hear him yelling at them.

Trevor called out again, in his loudest voice: “Stefan! Megan! Help! Save me! I’m lost in the forest and I’m scared, because there’s a wizard and he’s coming closer to me.”

“Well, well, well! Please don’t be scared. I’m Ambrosious, the Wizard of the Magical Forest. You must be Trevor. And I

understand you believe in magic.”

“Magic is awful!” snapped Trevor. “Magic has spoiled my birthday, taken my puppy dog Osmo away from me and cruelly changed him into a mouse, and today I was so looking forward to my school trip, to see prehistoric monsters. Now I’ll never be able to see them, and... oh...” Trevor then gasped, for the wizard had held out his hand, and little Osmo was seated quite comfortably there, twitching his lemon-bud ears contentedly on the wizard’s palm.

“That’s him!” Trevor pointed, excitedly. “That’s my Osmo! Oh, you found him!”

Ambrosious smiled.

From behind him, Trevor could hear children giggling, and those giggles sounded remarkably like the laughter of Stefan and Megan.

“Thank you for coming to the Magical Forest,” Ambrosious was then saying. “Let’s all sit together on this log, for I have something to tell you all.” Stefan and Megan had now become visible, as they neared and joined Trevor and Ambrosious. “I have called you today because the islands have experienced a serious switch in time. Let me begin at the beginning...”

“The criminal Purple Wizards were caught by the Red Wizards, and sent once more from the Red Wizards’ Vortex to a part of these Magic Islands called The Land of Now and Then. The Red Wizards only wanted their enemies, the Purple Wizards, to learn respect and manners – not only toward others, but also toward the natural world. Children, you may find these islands are very interesting when you see all, for The Land of Now and Then is a curious place. It is invisible, magically secretive and full of my friends, all of which are ancient, extinct beasts.”

“Wow! Do you mean there will be some extinct monsters living there? Are you sending us there?” asked Stefan, slowly.

“Yes,” came the reply. “Now, allow me to continue. Since the arrival of the Purple Wizards, an urgent problem has revealed itself, which I need to discuss with you: I am certain that those Purple Wizards can’t really be trusted there, and I have a nasty feeling that they have somehow corrupted our dear clockfaces by their hurried arrival, and stopped Father Time – which, of course, could become disastrous for The Land of Now and Then, and all of us on these Magic Islands, especially if darkness arrives over parts of the land.

“I will share my secrets with you, and you shall visit The Land of Now and Then shortly – that is, if you might like to trust and help us one more time. As for you, Trevor, you will have the opportunity to personally meet, greet and get to know some of the extinct monsters, and perhaps learn something later in school about all the other species on Earth today. My collection of beasts are no longer in the world, but existed years and years ago. I have been saving them for generations, and have taught many of them how to talk.”

“Talk? Wow!” chorused the children. “You taught them to magically talk? That sounds really amazing.”

“Yes, some will talk, but not all; some will roar; some may hiss; others may only grunt. I will explain. Centuries ago, since time began, when these monstrous beasts moved across Planet Earth, some important species were becoming fewer in number; some species drowned, some starved, and later others were savaged by mankind. I am, as you know, a very ancient but kind, magical wizard – perhaps the most ancient in the whole universe – and I knew some of these wonderful species were dying out and becoming seriously extinct. It was time for my magic dust to rescue quite a few of them. So, that’s what I did, and I brought them to live nearby, on the Magic Islands, at The Land of Now and Then, which I had prepared for them all.”

“That’s my Osmo,” Trevor cried, distracted from the wizard’s story, as Ambrosious turned the little mouse around in the palm of his hand. “The horrid witch told me that you would magic him back into a puppy dog for me. Will you do that, please, Ambrosious?”

Megan thought she had better explain this a little more: “The witches, Mogul and Drot, visited White Stone Town today, and they have caused huge problems for our friend Trevor and his puppy dog, Osmo. They have cast a magical spell on Osmo and turned him into a mouse – that little mouse in your hand. We need Trevor to have his puppy dog back.”

“Oh, my, how unfortunate. I do sometimes dislike those witches,” came the wizard’s reply. “They are moody and really can’t be trusted.” The trees shook in anger as the wizard sighed: “This will mean I shall need to break the witches’ curse. Yes, I enjoy saving all species, and of course you shall have your little puppy dog returned to you.

“Let’s all say my magic words together, shall we?” Ambrosious whispered quietly, as his magic words were spoken:

"Fuzzy-pickles!

Wiggly-jiggly!

Itty-bitty-magic-bits!"

Then, the tiny mouse leapt energetically from the wizard’s hand, barked loudly and, before their very eyes, transformed back into the puppy dog, Osmo, who landed instantly with a hard thump on Trevor’s lap.

“Oh!” Trevor gasped once more, as Osmo licked his face – first his nose, then his cheeks and forehead, and finally his chin.

Laughter rang out in the deep, dark Magical Forest, and Ambrosious beamed with delight.

“Are you all ready to visit The Land of Now and Then?” Ambrosious asked.

“Wuff! Wuff!” barked the puppy dog, enthusiastically.

“It’s only a short distance from our shores, but it’s only visible to a few chosen, magical beings. However, if I give you some magical powers today, you can go there and actually meet the magical monsters, and all the extinct species of the ancient world. I have very little time to oversee the tasks that will be given to the Purple Wizards there, and I’m really far too busy to be bothered by them, so you can all keep an eye on them for me, can’t you?”

Megan listened and she pondered. She really didn’t want to stay on the Magic Islands for very long, but she knew that if she helped Ambrosious, she would soon return home in time for tea, as that is what had occurred on previous visits to the Magic Islands. So, she gulped apprehensively before eventually agreeing to stay.

Ambrosious called out his magic words once more. The trees tremored and shook their leaves with a rustle, and the breeze whispered and hummed tunefully, as magic dust flew from the large, deep pocket in Ambrosious’s gown, to lightly touch the children and dog. In an instant, the magic happened.

“Oh, wow! More magic!” gasped the delighted and amazed Trevor.

Within seconds, Stefan, Megan, Trevor and his puppy dog, Osmo, were whisked into a cloud of magical dust, and they shot through the skies.

Seconds later, the children approached a green, ghostly form, which hovered over the mystic shadows of a secretive, magical kingdom. As they descended down to the huge entrance doors of

The Land of Now and Then, they saw a curious place where shadows lurked, and shapes which looked formidable.

Megan stared. She wanted to yell and protest, and say she had changed her mind about staying, but her voice only croaked as she mumbled in fear. She suddenly wasn't sure she wanted to go to this secretive island, for it was shrouded in an emerald-green mist, which seemed to overpower it, and poor Megan felt rather overwhelmed by it all. She thought that the scene before her, of the jade-green temple, dressed along its turret walling with ugly gargoyles, looked too foreboding and unbearable. But, at that precise time, she didn't tell the others how she felt. For a reason she couldn't understand, she was scared of this unknown land, where monsters and manner-less Purple Wizards resided. This would be, it seemed, a difficult magical mission for her.



CHAPTER 18

The Game Of Chess

The children's arrival was sudden, as they catapulted downward, toward the edge of the island, just as the Purple Wizards had done before them. And they coincidentally landed on the third step of the same flight of steps, leading up to the jade-green entrance doors before them.

Stefan looked around. "Now what are we supposed to do?"

The sea lapped and gurgled at their feet, as they climbed up the steps and knocked loudly on the door. They could hear a bell clanging from within The Land of Now and Then, and looked up to see the row of ugly gargoyles laughing down at them.

"We have more visitors," they tittered loudly. "Macsen, we have more visitors."

"Then open the doors," snapped an impatient voice, "and let the visitors enter The Land of Now and Then."

The children waited as the doors creaked, opened only slightly, then slammed shut again.

"Stupid doors," Stefan frowned, as he leant against the doors and pushed with all of his strength.

With a loud howl and a clang, the two huge doors creaked open, and the three children and puppy dog stepped forward, nervously, into their new, strange surroundings.

The jade-green doors suddenly slammed shut again with a thud. The echoing sound of a slithering bolt twanged as it flew across to fix itself into a locking position, with a final, loud, sharp clicking sound.

The children had arrived at the magical place known as The Land of Now and Then, and they had become locked inside. They wondered whether the place was going to be a prison of sorts for the Purple Wizards, or would it be a bit like a magical wonder-world? And would they have to meet those Purple Wizards again, and oversee their chores? Would they be safe in a land where ancient beasts roamed around freely, and where Father Time had either paused or stopped? Were they really wise to enter this land of extinct species, and discover for themselves what beasts lurked beyond the jade-green doors?

“We shouldn’t have come, Stefan,” Megan complained, as she breathed in deeply. “This place smells putrid.”

The children looked around. They had arrived inside what seemed to be some kind of ornate marble building; it resembled a temple. The walls and floors glistened with beautiful, speckled colours of gleaming marble stone.

“Look, it is a temple building; there’s a sign over there saying *Temple*,” Megan said, as she looked upward. She pointed before her, at another object floating just above her head: a magical green clock. It had to be magical, for it hovered in mid-air, and looked like a spherical shape suspended in a cloud of magical dust.

Inside the temple building, way up at ceiling level (which was very high indeed), sat the figure of Macsen, dressed in his monk’s robe. He was sitting cross-legged on the flattened part of a massive, knotted rope, which had somehow suspended itself in mid-air; the rope was floating precariously, being guided back and forth by a

seemingly crazy monk. At first, Macsen ignored the children below him. So, the children watched him in silence, until he eventually lowered himself slowly and leapt to the ground.

He still ignored the visiting children and their puppy dog, as he ran across to a wall cavity in the building, and reached out his arm beyond a red rock structure, where he delved through an opening. He brought out a red-velvet-covered book. Grunting to himself, he opened out the lavishly ornate, red-velvet-covered book, spreading it before him. Then, with a loud slam and a thud, he angrily shut the book again. He was now mumbling to himself but, even though the children listened, it was impossible to know what Macsen was saying, for he was mainly whispering to himself.

Turning suddenly toward the visiting group, he agitatedly held onto the red-velvet-covered book and, in a sharp, shrill and scolding tone of voice, challenged the children directly. "I saw you children sneak in here. What do you want?" he snapped, sharply.

"We are visitors. Ambrosious sent us here to oversee the tasks of the Purple Wizards, and he thought we'd be interested in his extinct beasts. That's all. We don't really want anything, and we won't be staying here for long," Stefan explained, nervously. "You're not very welcoming, are you?"

Squatting now on what seemed to be a giant chessboard, the monk sat himself down amongst the chess pieces.

"Visitors. More visitors! You can't fool us, you know; no one comes here unless they want something. So, what do you want?"

"Want something?"

"What do you want?"

"Do you want something?" echoed the very peculiar-looking gargoyle chess pieces, questioningly.

Stefan noticed some of the chess pieces frowning at the children.

Others were smiling, though mostly the corners of their mouths dipped to form grim, upside-down letter C shapes. Two chess pieces had wobbly eyes and four chess pieces wore horses' heads. Some chess pieces wore hats which were castle-shaped, bird-shaped or arrow-shaped, whilst the smaller pieces on the chessboard wore red berets upon their nodding, wooden heads.

"Who are you?" Stefan asked, eventually.

"I'm Macsen, the monk," came the sharp reply.

"He's not a real monk," chorused the chess pieces.

"Don't believe him."

"He's not a monk at all," jeered the floating clockface.

"Don't believe him."

"Cough! Ha! I'm not really a monk at all," laughed Macsen.

"Then we shan't believe you," Stefan smirked, rather amused by the way the magical pieces showed the monk very little respect.

"What book were you reading?" Megan smiled. "I like reading books."

"None of your business." Macsen glared at the girl, speechless at first. "It's a secret."

"A secret?" Megan replied, with a puzzled expression on her face. "How can a book be a secret?"

Macsen leered at the children through his close-set eyes and wrinkled brow. He said no more about the secret, red-velvet-covered book he clasped tightly, other than that it was a secret not to be told, and certainly not to visitors who were children and strangers to The Land of Now and Then.

"What are your names? Names!" Macsen yelled loudly and commandingly, as he dipped a feather quill into a nearby pot of ink.

"I'm Stefan, and this is my cousin Megan and my friend, Trevor. We'd rather be in school today, but those stupid witches, Mogul and

Drot, cast a magic spell and changed my friend's puppy dog into a mouse. But now he's fine, because Ambrosious changed him back into a puppy dog. His name is Osmo."

"Wuff!" barked Osmo, wagging his tail energetically.

Macsen took a long time to write the names into the secret, red-velvet-covered book. Then he grinned and asked: "Do you play chess?"

"I know the names of the pieces," Stefan said. "There are eight pawns per team."

The miserable little gargoyle pawns nodded.

"There are two bishops per team."

The two gargoyle bishops slid along the board. "That's us," they called.

"There are two knights per team."

The gargoyle knights galloped across the board, waving their shields.

"There should be two rooks, one queen and one king around here somewhere, but where are they? I can't find them," Stefan said, studying all the pieces and noticing that they were absent.

"Excellent replies. Quite perfect!" Macsen piped up, in his shrill voice.

"Perfect!" chanted the gargoyle chess pieces.

"The Purple Wizards had no idea how to play chess. They never follow rules. Persons who don't follow rules usually lack manners. However, it seems that you children follow rules, and therefore I shall assume you must be well-mannered. I do believe that those Purple Wizards even make up their own rules – or so I've been told. Now, leave me. Enter our land through the walled gardens, where you will meet Cart." Macsen indicated toward an old cart, cramped between some open doors. "Hurry away with you and climb aboard

Cart.”

“Climb aboard,” Cart shuddered, as his legs rattled loudly and impatiently.

The children looked around at the circle of doors on the rounded walls of the marble temple. Some were painted in the same jade-green paint. There were several blue and yellow doors, too. Some doors were open, some were shut and some were swinging rhythmically. There were also doors which opened and banged shut with a continual thud. And some doors seemed to be making grinding sounds.

“I don’t need to assist you; off you go!” Macsen told the children, as he climbed up his rope again and swung back and forth overhead, watching the children with his head bowed low. The golden bell Macsen swung on began to clang loudly.

“Do you have to make such a noise, Macsen?” Stefan shouted, at the top of his voice. “Come on, Megan, Trevor and Osmo, let’s get out of here. My ears are tingling and the clanging noise is giving me a headache.”

Stefan had already reached Cart and climbed inside. Megan followed Stefan into the cart, her hands cupped over her ears. Trevor dragged his feet as he picked up a yelping, noisy Osmo, who had begun howling at each new, loud bell clang.

“Hurry up,” Cart called out to Trevor and Osmo, as they eventually reached it and climbed on board.

“Get a move on, Cart,” Macsen mumbled, as he swung on his rope, high overhead, in the domed roof of the temple. “That howling dog is giving me a headache.”

“Yes, Master,” came a voice from Cart, as it raised itself up onto its four legs and galloped forward in a wobbly manner.

A yellow glass door stood in their pathway. The door tittered as

it opened, to reveal a cobblestone path entrance to what seemed to be a tranquil garden. The grasses and trees stretched out before them, as they trundled deep into the heart of The Land of Now and Then.



CHAPTER 19

The Shacks And Claw

Ahead was a steep, sunny valley where trees grew in abundance on hillsides. As the cart rattled by them, the children noticed how each tree trunk had the tattoo of a carved-out clockface. The hands on each clock read a different time, and Stefan wondered why all the clocks on the island had lost count of time.

The galloping cart rattled as it made its way down the valley, and slowed down to a stop as it reached a row of roughly-built huts or cabins, signposted: “*The Shacks.*” The moaning cart fell to its knees, puffed, panted and rattled as it waited.

“Get out, then!” Cart rudely barked. “And hurry up, I’m in a rush. If you knock on the door of Shack Number One, it’ll be Claw you will need to speak to.”

“What are we to say to Claw? Do *you* know, Cart?” Megan asked.

“Tell Claw you are the visitors,” said Cart.

Megan whispered: “This must be the end of our journey, Stefan.”

The three children climbed out carefully. Trevor held Osmo in a big cuddle, close to his chest, as Stefan stood up and thanked Cart for the ride. Cart waited for a while, still huffing and puffing, before lifting itself up, sprouting out its legs again and galloping off.

“Gracious!” Megan spluttered in awe.

“This is a weird place,” Stefan said. He scratched his head as he

stared ahead, and counted seven shoddily-built timber shacks, standing side by side in a row. They were much larger than Stefan's shed at home, much wider than the cowsheds on Megan's farm, and much higher than Grandma Greg and Grandpa Greg's terrace cottage. In fact, the shacks were all gigantic in size, and they all had extremely high rooves and wide doors.

Shack Number One was a tall building, built of wooden planks. Stefan looked at it and wondered why it had been built to such a great height and width. Its door reached up to the roof, which in turn seemed to disappear into the thick, green-clouded mist swirling above.

Stefan edged his way toward the first shack. Megan, Trevor and Osmo followed. A noticeboard on the door of Shack Number One read:

*"This Shack Belongs To...
Claw."*

"I don't understand it, Stefan," Megan whispered, as she stood outside Shack Number One: "what is this place Ambrosious has sent us to? It's so weird, and the overhanging green clouds reek of boiled cabbage. The whole place looks eerie and, apart from the temple and The Shacks, the gardens look uninhabited."

"We didn't even spy one extinct beast on our way through the gardens," Trevor commented. "Where are they all hiding?"

Stefan knocked lightly on the door of Claw's Shack Number One, and when no one answered he slowly opened the door, quietly. The door was heavy and difficult to move, for it was unbelievably wide. It creaked and moaned loudly, as it finally swung to an open position.

Stefan peered inside. There were shovels, rakes, spades, large blades and tools of all descriptions, hanging on the walls or stacked on shelves. And, in the corner of Shack Number One, sat a giant ape beast.

When the beast saw the children, he jumped up excitedly from his squatting position on the floor, and stood up to his full height of nine feet.

Megan shrieked: "It's a giant ape! Just look at him!" Then, bravely, she breathed in deeply, as she reminded herself: "I believe this giant ape must be one of those extinct animals you'd never see in the world today."

The ape listened quietly and grunted to himself.

"I reckon this ape is a Gigantopithecus?" Trevor said in a low whisper. He was bewildered by the size and appearance of the giant ape.

Stefan nodded positively. "I agree: I also think that Claw is a real Gigantopithecus. Mrs. Parry showed us a picture of the Gigantopithecus in school, earlier this morning, and I studied the ape picture closely, so I'm pretty sure that Claw is one of those extinct apes. But, just look at how he's almost half-human. He has long arms, yet his face is that of an ape. If this is a Gigantopithecus, it's the tallest primate that's ever existed. It lived one-hundred thousand years ago."

"He's an ugly beast," Trevor said in a loud voice, as he observed the ape. He tilted his head to one side and peered cautiously through his glasses.

The ape glared at the children, and at Osmo the dog, frowning at first. He had never seen children before, and the puppy dog in Trevor's arms fascinated him. Claw nodded his huge, furry head, then the ancient Gigantopithecus opened his massive mouth and

showed his thousand teeth. His brown, furry coat tremored, as he stretched up even further on his long legs and curled his sharp-clawed toenails into the bare, muddy flooring of Shack Number One.

“Stop talking about me. It’s very unkind of you to call me an ugly beast,” the ape roared angrily, as he stepped forward, growling in an unfriendly and rather terrifying manner.

Little Osmo barked frantically and, in a panic, leapt out of Trevor’s arms, landing at the ape’s feet, while the children backed away from the Gigantopithecus, as the huge beast approached them. The ape was unpredictable; would the species hurt them? Trevor ducked forward to hurriedly grab the little puppy dog in his arms again, trying to calm him down by stroking his head, for Osmo was shuddering with fear as he glared, as though petrified by the ape’s growling.

“Are you really a Gigantopithecus?” Stefan asked, in a nervous voice.

“Are you calling me names?” The ape leant forward and hovered over the children. “I’m Claw. No one here calls me by any other name.”

“Awesome! The ape talks,” Trevor whispered, as his eyes grew larger in amazement.

“Where did Ambrosious find you?” Megan finally asked. She had stared at the ape for some time, for she had never been so close to any ancient or rare species before. Surely Ambrosious had taught the ape how to communicate with humans. It was weird but pretty amazing, she thought.

The ape pondered for a moment, then explained: “Ambrosious found me when I lived in the Bamboo Forest, many, many centuries ago. I was just a baby then, but at that time China suffered a terrible flood, and the Bamboo Forest was lost beneath the sea. I was

starving and crying, and lucky to be alive, for I alone had survived the dreadful floods. After I was found, Ambrosious brought me to live here, in his magical land of extinct animals.”

“How did Ambrosious manage that, Claw? You would have been far too heavy for Ambrosious to carry you,” Stefan puzzled.

“Ah, but it was easy.” Claw explained: “Ambrosious said his magic words and, a second later, I landed safely on this magical land. But I suppose you are correct when you say I am the only Gigantopithecus in the world now.”

Then Claw sneezed.

Can you imagine what a giant ape’s sneeze was like? Stefan, Megan, Trevor and Osmo were blasted right out of Shack Number One by just one enormous sneeze. Claw squinted and his eyes rolled around, as he flopped over in his mist of sneeze spray. Then he paused again, picked himself up from the ground and followed the children outside.

“Pardon me!” Claw snorted. “I seem to be allergic to humans – if I’m right in assuming that you must be humans. You’re not my usual visitors; we’ve never had humans here before. Human species are different to us. Tell me, are you also extinct?”

Stefan laughed: “Of course not, Claw.”

“How very unusual,” Claw growled. “Then I suppose you are my visitors. I wasn’t expecting any humans to visit us today, though I was expecting a group of Purple Wizards. I take it that you humans are not wizards, are you?”

“We are children, Claw. I’m Stefan, this is Megan, my cousin, and this is Trevor, my friend, with Osmo his puppy dog.”

“My last visitor was a type of giant muskrat called Martin,” the Gigantopithecus continued, “but he dug a tunnel, disappeared into it and I have not seen him for centuries. He was a bother. Everyone

believes that he took the missing Box of Secrets and the golden key that Macsen has mislaid, and hidden the items somewhere. Perhaps we are all assuming incorrectly, and that crime has little to do with Muskrat. Whatever, no one in this land can find the items, and no one knows where Muskrat is, either. Macsen is truly in a dither about it all, and he keeps organizing search parties to hunt for the precious items, for the box and key belong to Ambrosious. Macsen just doesn't know how he mislaid them."

Claw then opened his mouth wide and changed the subject, rapidly: "I have a toothache." He pointed to a tooth in his great big mouth.

"Poor you," Megan said, reluctant to peer into Claw's huge mouth. "How many teeth do you have, Claw?"

"About two thousand," Claw replied, "but I've never counted them."

"Why do you need so many teeth?" Trevor asked. "It's crazy to have so many teeth. We only have molars, pre-molars, incisors and canines."

Claw grunted; he had little idea of the names of his teeth. "I grind up the bamboo with my teeth and turn the wood into sawdust before I swallow it," he explained. "I also enjoy eating the occasional citrus fruit. It's sometimes a disadvantage – a nuisance – having so many teeth: I have many tooth cavities and I often have toothache. Once, four hundred of my teeth broke, all at once, on a nasty piece of wood. I'm lucky, because Ambrosious always fixes my tooth pain with his magical spells, whenever he calls by."

Claw suddenly pushed some shovels into Stefan's hand, pointing to a square piece of wasteland nearby. "Use these tools to turn over the soil, for you may need them. And, if you find any secrets, don't forget to tell me about them. Nice to have made your acquaintance.

Good day.”

Stefan stared at the spade in his hand, then at the wasteland before him. He was about to explain that he didn't know much about digging or gardening, when suddenly Claw vanished. The children searched about for him, but Claw was not to be seen anywhere, and Shack Number One was now empty. Where had the giant beast gone?



CHAPTER 20

Martin The Muskrat

Stefan dug his spade down into the soil. Most of the land was rocky, but there were two tiny, curious, soft heaps of soil nearby. Perhaps someone had already dug out the soil in those patches, Stefan thought. He plunged his spade into a soil heap and it struck something hard.

As he dug further, he was able to bring out from the soil a flat, yet solid, square object. “It’s a book,” Stefan said, as he curiously opened it and stared at all the pictures it stored, of generations of extinct animals. “Let’s sit here on this grass and look at this book of extinct animals, so we can learn how to recognize as many as we can.” Stefan opened the book, shook the soil from it and the children studied the pictures of the extinct species in it.

As they did, something amongst the long grass surrounding Shack Number One distracted Osmo. The puppy dog had obviously taken an instant dislike to Claw, and had disliked him even more when Claw sneezed, for little Osmo had been thrown off his feet by Claw’s enormous sneeze. Instinctively, Osmo had flown from Trevor’s arms and squatted, tail down, knees sprawled, his head buried in a deep hole. Yet, something in that hole had excited him, for he wriggled and writhed his way, head-first, deeper and deeper into the opening in the ground.

Trevor looked on, amused. He tried to pull the puppy back, for somehow Osmo was delving deeply into more and more soil. Was he in search of something?

“Here, boy!” Trevor warned, as Osmo emerged, covered in a clay-like soil, which had smudged and blotched out his nose and mouth, his wide paws and front legs. As soon as Trevor had taken a firm grip of the puppy dog, up popped the head of a muskrat.

“Look!” screamed Megan. “It’s a muskrat! It must be Martin, the muskrat who has stolen Ambrosious’s golden key and Box of Secrets.”

The muskrat twitched its nose. It could smell dog, and likewise the dog could smell Martin the muskrat. Osmo knew what he wanted to do: he wanted to run and catch Martin, who in turn wanted to run and hide from the loud, yapping puppy dog. He could no longer hide safely in his shallow hole in the ground, for this dog might dig further and trap him, or even catch him in there. So, he would run, and hope that the nasty little dog wouldn’t follow him, for the muskrat had no wish to be caught by a puppy dog.

But, the fear at first of the gigantic, roaring, sneezing ape, and then the excitement and delight of seeing a wriggly muskrat, was far too much for Osmo. Besides, the most fun in the game of *Catch* was always going to be in the *chase* side of it. Osmo was well rehearsed in the game of Run, Chase and Catch; it was a game he played with Trevor on White Stone Beach. He was accustomed to running and chasing balls, sticks or stones. So, with a final thrust and a jump from Trevor’s hands, the game of Run, Chase and Catch began for Osmo. Suddenly, he darted toward Martin the muskrat, who promptly ran, helter-skelter, into the long grass which spread over the land, toward the forest area.

Osmo had sprinted as fast as his little legs could carry him, and

was disappearing far out of sight. “Oh, no, I’ll never catch him now! He’s so fast!” wailed Trevor, as he too shot quickly toward the long grass, in chase of Osmo. Carrying his new book under his arm, Stefan got up hurriedly and ran after Trevor, leaving Megan, who made up her mind to take chase as well.

With a twitch of his moustache, Martin the muskrat squealed with laughter as he looked back and ran faster through the long grass, toward the Bamboo Forest. When he turned his head to look back the second time, Osmo and Trevor were still following him closely, but Stefan and Megan had slowed slightly, though were still running lightly through the tall grass.

Martin the muskrat ran on, in and out of the grass, dodging bushes, scampering along paths and rough roadways, across sand dunes and beaches, through forests, over icy mountains to frozen lakes, where he turned and scampered back inland, toward a swampy forest. Then he stopped running. He had churned up the ground with his four feet and broken his pathway, which now carved itself across The Land of Now and Then.

When Osmo and the children finally reached the muskrat, Martin had seemingly forgotten all about them. Trevor and his puppy had become so tired that they were no longer running, for they both lacked the energy to do so. Trevor had caught up with his puppy and leant against the trunk of a huge tree, which cascaded its branches around them, keeping them well hidden from any forest dangers. “Naughty boy, Osmo,” Trevor scolded, crossly. Nearby, Stefan and Megan had sprawled onto the ground, breathlessly.

“This is wild country ahead,” Martin the muskrat was mumbling to himself. “This is where the forest spreads its branches. Here, on the lowest branch of the twentieth tree, in the twentieth row of trees from where I now stand, hangs the magic key which may or may not

open the Box of Secrets. Nothing to do with me; I didn't put it there, but I know who did."

"How do you know about the key and where it is hidden, unless of course you hid it yourself?" Stefan asked, rather bewildered.

Martin stood just a short distance from Osmo and Trevor. Osmo had rolled onto his back and folded his paws over his tummy, in a perfectly relaxed pose. He was tired, but had enjoyed chasing Martin the muskrat. Trevor, on the other hand, was still alert and listening carefully to the muskrat's mumbling.

"I know you've all been following me. I'd better warn you that this is Dinosaur Country, where one of each extinct creature will live. You seem to have found the book I buried. You can keep it; use your book to identify the species. But be careful when you enter the forest, because some of the monsters are flesh-eating beasts; they are the carnivorous dinosaurs. Others are herbivorous dinosaurs; they're harmless because they only eat plants."

A huge screech from nearby made the children jump. They instinctively ducked down to protect themselves, and dodge the massive, birdlike form approaching them. It scuttled over to them, screeched loudly and suddenly dived toward them. The creature then flapped its three-metre wingspan and turned toward the thick forest ahead of them.

"What was that?" Megan asked, in alarm.

"That huge creature was an extinct Pterodactyl. Many millions of years ago, the Pterodactyl creatures lived on Earth, until one day an asteroid hit Planet Earth and killed them all. Only one of the species was saved. It was deep in the heart of a silent volcano, and was soon hatching from its egg. It had escaped the impact of the asteroid and then managed to flee from the volcano. Then it called out in its loud, haunting screech for help. Ambrosious heard its cries

and saved the last of the species. He taught the tiny Pterodactyl how to fly and guided it back here, to The Land of Now and Then. Macsen has promised to always take care of it.

“Well, I must run now and leave you. Good luck. I hope you reach the key before you get gobbled up.”

“Wait!” Stefan called loudly. “Muskrat, please wait! Don’t go! Where have you hidden the Box of Secrets? What good is the key to anyone, if the Box of Secrets is also lost?”

“I didn’t take Ambrosious’s secret box, but the correct key will open the correct box. Now, take care. ‘Bye.’”

With that, Martin the muskrat turned and raced out of sight, leaving Stefan, Megan and Trevor standing beneath the cascading tree at the edge of the deep, dark forest known as Dinosaur Country. Osmo indifferently snuggled down, contented after his little game, and snored loudly.



CHAPTER 21

Giant Beasts

“Oh, Osmo, this is awful. Why did you chase that stupid muskrat? We are lost in Dinosaur Country. This really is pretty scary stuff!” Stefan said, in an impatient voice.

For a short while, the children stayed very still and listened. They could hear the occasional rustle from the surrounding undergrowth of the forest. Was something moving closer toward them?

Trevor picked Osmo up in his arms carefully, and whispered to the others: “There’s something moving through the undergrowth, and it’s heading our way. I’m going to make a run for it, and follow the overhanging trees along the way. I’m going to count until I get to the twentieth tree in the twentieth row of trees, and perhaps I can find the magical key for that Box of Secrets.”

“Oh, Trevor, that’s crazy!” sniffed Megan. She’d had enough of Osmo and Trevor’s games. Martin the muskrat had already told them they had reached dangerous country, and now Trevor wanted to go right into the forest to search for Ambrosious’s key and box!

“Don’t you dare bark,” Trevor was lecturing his puppy. “You see, perhaps some of the beasts who live here in this forest are the carnivores, who will eat humans and even silly little puppy dogs.”

“Trevor, stop! I don’t think it’s very safe here,” Megan was warning. “Besides, perhaps we’re not supposed to be here.”

Ambrosious sent us to The Land of Now and Then to oversee the Purple Wizards at their tasks, not to find a golden key or a Box of Secrets. Don't you think we should return to Shack Number One?"

"I'm not too sure of the way back." Stefan was frowning." But there's a map of The Land of Now and Then in this book, so it's going to be easy to find our way back. Besides, Martin has left the tracks quite churned up, so there's no hurry to return. Trevor will have time to enter the forest, Megan. It may be safe for him to do so."

So, Trevor clasped his little puppy tightly and laughed at Megan. He would soon have so many terrific stories lined up to tell Mrs. Parry and his friends at school, and now he was so close to perhaps meeting some real dinosaurs that it would be a pity not to go to the forest, and risk missing an adventure. He ran along the tree line until he dived, once more, into hiding below the branches.

Stefan shook his head. It wasn't as if the twentieth tree was going to be that distant, and he supposed it would be easy to get there and catch up with Trevor. "I would love to see the extinct monsters. And perhaps they won't gobble us up, because I remember Ambrosious telling us that nothing on the Magic Islands would ever eat children, as magical beings don't eat humans any longer," Stefan said. "Come on, Megan, I'm going further into the forest, too. You can't stay here on your own, so you'd better come along with me."

"How can we be so sure that the monsters won't eat us? We can't be sure..." Megan said, folding her arms decisively. "Perhaps these dinosaur beasts are different. Perhaps some are the carnivores who *do* eat humans, and may decide to hunt us for food. I don't think it's very safe to enter deeper into Dinosaur Country. Besides, Ambrosious sent us to The Land of Now and Then to oversee the Purple Wizards at their tasks. Don't you think we should return to Shack Number One?"

“That’s the second time you’ve told us you think we should return to Shack Number One. I’m sure all will be safe to enter Dinosaur Country,” Stefan assured Megan. “Surely there’s no need to rush back to Claw. He was horrid.”

“You boys must be crazy!” Megan complained, as she reluctantly held onto Stefan’s jacket and followed him closely.

The forest was at its thickest point at its edge, where the trees were clumped closely together. But, as the children crept forward, past the first row of trees, then past the second row of trees, they discovered that the trees thinned out; the third row of trees was easily more visible, and daylight peered downward between the high branches. The twentieth row of trees was fairly central to the forest and it was not eerie, for now there were no shadows and sunshine lit up the wide, grassy stretches between each tree. Some of the patches were completely barren of plant growth, and Stefan saw that the dinosaurs had left their gigantic footprints across the great openings of brown, heavily-worn ground, beyond which were hills and high, carved-out rocks with cave openings.

Finally, Stefan and Megan saw Trevor and Osmo again, crouching beneath the twentieth tree. They silently made their way over to him for, just beyond the tree where Trevor hid, the children could clearly spy the most enormous dinosaur.

“These dinosaurs are giant beasts and shouldn’t be trusted. It’s the Tyrannosaurus Rex,” Megan warned. “Open the book, Stefan. What does it tell us about the Tyrannosaurus Rex?”

Stefan slipped the muddy book from under his arm, and lumped himself down onto the grass once more. He opened the book and grinned. It was still stained with soil particles and caked mud patches, so he shook the book until most of the particles dropped away.

“I’ll have to speak quietly, in case the dinosaur hears me, so listen carefully and I’ll read aloud...”

“The Tyrannosaurus Rex lived sixty-six million years ago, in northwest America, but it only lived for about twenty-eight years. Tyrannosaurus Rex was the ruler of his kingdom. He was huge and vicious.”

Megan shuddered, as she looked through the thinning bushes at the beast. “That dinosaur is an enormous beast and shouldn’t be trusted, as I keep telling you boys, for the book says that Tyrannosaurus Rex are meat eaters. If that huge dinosaur found us here, beneath this tree, it would surely eat us. I really wouldn’t like to meet him, and hope that he won’t notice us in the forest today. What a stupid place to hide the magical key to the Box of Secrets: right in the middle of Dinosaur Country.”

Trevor was busy. He was not distracted by the monster. He was looking around at the lower branches, searching for Ambrosious’s missing key. And he very quickly discovered it for, as the muskrat had described, it was dangling from one of the narrower, lower branches.

“What a stupid place to hide an important, magical key to a secret box, Osmo,” Trevor told his puppy, as he examined the key closely. It was a small, ornate key, gold in colour. Carved at the very top, in a looped scrawl, was the letter “A”. “Who would ever think of searching for a key like this in a place like this: the middle of Dinosaur Country?”

It wasn’t long before the great Tyrannosaurus Rex presented a dilemma for the children. They waited, believing that the beast would soon roam away but, step by step, the Tyrannosaurus Rex

edged its way closer to the twentieth tree in the twentieth row of trees.

“Perhaps Megan is right about some of these beasts: perhaps we *are* in danger. Perhaps we *will* get eaten, as the muskrat believed. Let’s hurry and get out of here. We’ll need to be very careful when we make our escape from Dinosaur Country. It may make it easier to remember that there is only one of each species, but I don’t think we can make any mistakes, for there may be lots of other beasts in this deep forest.”

Stefan was breathing rapidly, for he knew that he and his friends would need to run out of the forest before the Tyrannosaurus Rex came any closer. “Follow me,” he called, with caution. “Trevor, hold Osmo firmly; don’t let him run away again. Here we go!”

Stefan trod lightly and with caution through the undergrowth, fully aware of all the dangers surrounding him. He tried to move quietly, avoiding any rustling or sounds from underfoot twigs. Megan and Trevor followed.

Trevor whispered loudly: “Don’t be scared, Osmo; be brave. We’ll soon be back at the wooden huts.”

Something heavy and strong pushed Megan on the shoulder, and she screamed in panic. A Brontosaurus had stretched out its long neck, from great height, and its head had come down to rest on Megan’s shoulder.

Stefan gasped as he looked on, with a terrified expression on his face. “Er! It’s fine, Megan; don’t panic. It’s a Brontosaurus. It won’t eat you; it only eats plants.”

The beast, though, was huge in size. It grunted like a caged bear, as it called out to the other beasts to join him. Its head had now left Megan’s shoulder, and swung from side to side on its elongated neck.

“He’s gigantic, isn’t he? Wow!” Stefan said.

The Brontosaurus turned and clawed at a nearby tree, heaving itself up and making the strangest noises. It had soon lifted itself up to the juicy leaves, tearing violently at the highest branches and chewing them with relish. It was now ignoring the children below.

Stefan watched carefully and thought quickly. Turning toward his wide-eyed, terrified cousin, Megan, he took her arm and pulled her away from the massive creature. He started to make his escape, along with Megan, Trevor and Osmo. As they fled through the forest, they could hear the cries of the Tyrannosaurus and Brontosaurus.

Megan’s chin was trembling. “Are they following us?” she asked, through chattering teeth.

Trevor nervously blurted out: “Will we be able to make our escape from Dinosaur Country? I suddenly feel rather scared.”

“I don’t know. I can’t say.” Stefan shook his head. He was also afraid of the monsters and had no idea what to do next, or in which direction they should run.

They reached an open plain, where a deep river flowed.

And, to the children’s horror, a third beast appeared, as it leapt from the vast river.

“Here comes the Iguanodon,” Megan sobbed. “Run! Run!”

“Please don’t cry, Megan. Ambrosious told us nothing will eat children on the Magic Islands.” Stefan wanted to remind Megan of the old wizard’s words, once told to them, trying to calm her a little. “But, hurry,” Stefan added. “If we run over there, toward the long grass, we will be able to find the pathway Martin the muskrat churned up for us. Come on, let’s run faster. Let’s get out of Dinosaur Country, and back to Claw in Shack Number One – if we can find it.”

“But Claw is horrid!” the children all agreed, as they bounded onto Martin the muskrat’s carved-out pathway, which would lead them back to Shack Number One.



CHAPTER 22

Rewards

Cart galloped across The Land of Now and Then, and the Purple Wizards bounced around inside it. When Cart abruptly stopped at Shack Number One, beside the long row of other shacks, it flopped once more onto its knees with a loud moan.

Macsen had arrived and now stood outside Shack Number One. “Ah!” Macsen called out. “Claw, our visitors have arrived.”

“Get out of my cart, Purple Wizards,” barked Cart at the visiting wizards.

As usual, Izzy Odorous was not going to be helpful to anyone, not even himself. “No one tells us what we should do,” he sniffed, as he stood up from his seat in the cart. “We are the Purple Wizards, and everyone will get out when *I* give the orders, and not before that time. I’m the boss. My gang won’t listen to you, Cart.”

“Huh?” snapped Cart, impatiently. “I said *get out!*” Cart began to shake with fury, and he shook so hard that eventually all the Purple Wizards tumbled into the air and out of the cart. They landed on the ground at Macsen’s feet.

Cart stopped shaking as soon as he knew his cart had emptied. Then he picked himself up, stretched his floppy legs, moaned loudly again and ran off with a speedy gallop, as the Purple Wizards climbed back onto their feet.

Macsen grinned. “This way, Purple Wizards,” he pointed, as he led the way to the patch of land behind The Shacks, “for this is where you will begin your work for us today.”

“Work?!” exclaimed the Purple Wizards.

“Work?!” Izzy barked. “What work? My Purple Wizards only work for me. They only follow my orders. I’m the boss.”

“Isn’t it the way you Purple Wizards always behave? I see you are all familiar with the ideas of blackmailing, so it will be easy for you to understand that this is the way we will play our little game today, in The Land of Now and Then. Today, Claw will teach you better manners, for during this task of work in our gardens, you will learn how to respect and look after the young plants. You will learn how to become our gardeners. You will plant and water the young shoots and, through your respect for them, will help them to grow. You will also be taught all about the endangered species of plants that we like to save in this land. Ambrosious will often bring the root of a rare, failing or extinct species of plant for us to grow, and it will live here in our beautiful gardens, in abundance.”

“We refuse to play your silly games!” Izzy Odorous stamped his feet at Macsen and shook his head.

“In the corner of this field lie two thousand tiny sapling trees, and each will need to be planted in the ground by yourselves. Follow me,” Macsen continued, ignoring Izzy’s outburst of temper.

Macsen turned on his heel and walked back to the door of Shack Number One, knocking loudly on the door. As Macsen opened the door, Claw stepped into view. He towered above Izzy Odorous and blew out his smelly breath.

“Pooh,” gasped the Purple Wizards, “Claw’s breath stinks. That’s horrid!”

“Poor Claw has toothache today. Many of his teeth are rotting,”

Macsen explained, clearly.

Claw sneezed, and his powerful blast of smelly breath blew the Purple Wizards off their feet, into a patch of long grass, as his sneeze had previously done to the visiting children and puppy. Then, Claw bent down from his great height and towered over them all, as he glared at the Purple Wizards, huddled into a pile at his feet. He laughed in amusement.

“Are these my volunteers?” Claw asked, rubbing his claws together in delight.

“They are,” Macsen agreed. “These Purple Wizards are going to plant your sapling trees, and soon you will have a lovely new fruit orchard of rosy apples to eat.”

Claw was clutching spades and buckets in his arms, as he looked down from his great height and roared fiercely at the Purple Wizards. Then, with a swing of his strong arms, he dropped the spades and buckets at their feet, and roared an extra loud, ferocious growl once more. The Purple Wizards had never before seen such a frightening sight, and they slinked back in fear at the sight of Claw. What sort of monster was he?

Izzy stood up defiantly, his head just reaching over the tip of the long grass. “I’m not afraid of you!” he yelled at Claw. “You don’t scare me! I’m not afraid of anything.”

Macsen grinned. “Allow me to introduce you to Claw. He is your new boss for the day, and you Purple Wizards are to become his volunteer gardeners; you must busy yourselves tidying up his garden and planting all his trees. After all, we had a problem a short while ago, when the sun blazed down and it became too hot: many of our lovely trees burnt to the ground, including the trees in Ambrosious’s Magical Forest. In order to ensure that you always respect trees in the future, you will need to replant all these trees

today. They will be watered and fed, and will grow into a much-needed orchard.”

Claw moved his big foot closer to Izzy and stepped toward him, roaring even louder than before. When Claw eventually lifted his foot, Izzy and his gang of Purple Wizards hurriedly picked up their spades and buckets, and ran with haste to Claw’s garden, to begin digging and planting hundreds and hundreds of young sapling trees.

Macsen and Claw watched them. “You see, Claw?” Macsen whispered. “I have been given information that these Purple Wizards have committed terrible crimes, and have paid no respect to living things. So, while they are here with us, we must teach them good manners and respect, as I have listed them as: *‘Wizards Who Have No Manners’*. When they are ready to leave us here, they will have become better wizards. That, indeed, is the task Ambrosious has set us. Yet I am puzzled, for Ambrosious told me the children would be here to help. But they must have wandered off, and are nowhere to be found.”

It didn’t take the wizards long to plant all the trees, before Cart returned, galloping along the road. And this time he had brought a wonderful reward for the Purple Wizards: his cart was full of toffee apples.

“This reward will show you how giving is also an act of kindness. Today, we say a kind ‘thank you’ for planting our trees.” Macsen stretched his mouth to grin at the Purple Wizards, but his narrow eyes remained stone cold, for he was staring at the wizards with a look of complete mistrust.

“Toffee apples?” snorted Izzy Odorous. “Is that our only reward? Where are our rings?”

“I’ve learnt that you have no future ambitions, other than to do as much damage and harm with wicked magic as you are able. So, I

am here today to offer you an opportunity, which will give you all a new beginning,” Macsen continued, ignoring Izzy Odorous once more.

“A new beginning?” Noodle-Doodle Hornswaggle blinked. “What do you mean?”

Macsen shifted about on the ground, folding his arms and secretly chuckling, for he enjoyed having the authority of being a powerful top boss. “There is a need to prevent your evil little tricks, which have been causing untold harm to the entire universe. Whilst you are here with us, in The Land of Now and Then, we will train you to become good Purple Wizards. You will be treated well, providing you learn well, but you will have to learn everything carefully, from the beginning. Do we understand one another, Purple Wizards? Follow me!” Macsen bellowed, as he led the way over to Cart.

“Jump aboard!” Macsen yelled at the Purple Wizards. “Cart will now take you through the gardens, toward the heart of The Mountains of Learning and to The Cave of Curiosity, where you will meet your future teachers and find a library of books to guide you.”



CHAPTER 23

The Great Chimera Beast

The Wizards had followed Macsen. They had little choice, really; where else could they go? What more could they do? They climbed aboard Cart, one by one, and when all were seated, Cart reared up onto its hind legs and bounced forward. Cart recklessly hopped and galloped across The Land of Now and Then. When it stopped again, quite hastily, they had all reached a place called The Mountain of Learning. The Purple Wizards were whirled around dizzily when Cart came to a dead stop; it was shuddering. Most of the wizards were now awkwardly bunched together, in one corner of the cart.

The surrounding dry dust from the road track had been blown up, by a sudden high wind from the north of the country. The dust had stacked itself onto the floor of the cart, and the Purple Wizards' clothes were covered in a mess of grime and dust, as the gusting northerly wind calmed and diminished. The thump and moan from a rather miserable-looking Cart seemed almost deafening, as it leapt and twisted itself to face the track of the wind.

“Stop upsetting everything, Wind!” Cart yelled out at Wind, as it leapt into the air and then collapsed in a heap. Cart's two front legs left the cart container and they galloped together, through an archway, into The Mountain of Learning, where, much to Cart's horror, the front legs galloped into a tunnel of darkness and

completely disappeared out of sight. Cart frowned and stared anxiously through its piggy eyes.

“Get out!” snarled Cart, as the Purple Wizards uncurled themselves and looked around. They had landed with a bump once again, but were unhurt.

“Now look what you’ve done: you’ve broken my cart, Wind!” Cart scolded sharply, for now poor Cart was stuck in the dust, unable to move.

“Now look what you’ve done!” roared the loud voice of Lion. “You’ve broken the cart.”

“Look what you’ve done: you’ve broken the cart,” bleated the second voice, of Goat.

“Oh, bother, Wind! Look what you’ve done: you’ve broken the cart,” hissed the third voice, of Snake.

Izzy Odorous straightened his wizard hat and, at first, stared at the odd, tall beast standing before him.

“You could have asked us if *we* were hurt, couldn’t you?” Izzy Odorous mumbled, confused by so many voices chorusing in turn. “Who are you, anyway?”

“That’s a secret. Who are *you*? Why are you here?” chorused the three voices, together.

“I believe we are called the visitors,” Noodle-Doodle Hornswaggle explained, slowly and carefully, as he wriggled his toes free of dust, in his purple-painted shoes.

“They must be the Purple Wizards,” echoed the three voices at the same time. “We’ve been expecting you.”

The peeping Purple Wizards were agog with surprise, as they wriggled behind the topsy-turvy, smashed Cart, whilst spying between their fingers, now perched before their noses. They stared with wonder at the very peculiar beast standing before them, for this

beast was a fearful sight. Claw had been horrid, but the tall beast who now hovered above the Purple Wizards was even more fearful than Claw; this beast was a very different character. To begin with, the beast was immense in size. Its peculiar body was part lion – for it had a large, powerful lion’s head – but, just behind the lion’s head, on top of the lion’s mane, sat a second head: that of a goat. The tail of the beast slithered along the ground, bearing at its tip a snake’s head, which spat and hissed.

Izzy Odorous looked at the beast. First, he looked at the lion’s head, as it roared in anger, then he glanced over at the bleating goat and hissing snake. It had by now lifted itself up, as though about to pounce on the Purple Wizards. As the Purple Wizards stared at the beast, they waited in silence.

A high, gruff voice roared, as the lion head opened its gigantic mouth and spoke:

“I am the fictional Great Chimera Beast, best known from the world of books on ancient Greek legends, and it is within my stories that I am at my most powerful. Most people have forgotten my stories, for no one reads about me any longer, so I live here, in The Land of Now and Then, and share my world at The Mountain of Learning, along with other fictional beasts, who have jumped from the pages of ancient folk tales to be here, at Ambrosious’s command.”

“Do you mean that there are other beasts in this mountain, and they are all like you?” Cranky-Creep Lickspittle asked, in a bewildered tone of voice.

“Yes, lots of learned beasts with different names, who will all tell you their stories and amuse you,” said the Great Chimera Beast. “Many of their stories will teach you to become better wizards.”

“Really?” tittered the Purple Wizards, in surprise.

“Really?” spat Izzy Odorous, but he was not amused at all. He didn’t want to meet other beasts or learn their names. Neither did he want to listen to their stories or become an apprentice.

The Great Chimera Beast nodded. “I heard Cart approach and thought I’d come to meet you. I’m your teacher for today. Call me Tri-Top. We will soon enter the mountain, through the tunnels.”

Tri-Top, who had begun to lead the way toward The Mountain of Learning, suddenly stopped in his path. He lifted himself up onto a high rock and looked down at the Purple Wizards.

“Here are the rules,” Tri-Top blurted out: “you will all have a daily job of work to do here. Don’t expect me to fuss with you; you do your jobs and that’s the end of it. I never expect my apprentices to be lazy.”

“Are we still to be apprentices, Izzy, Boss?” Snoopy-Loo Boondoggle asked, as he followed the other Purple Wizards.

“Student apprentices,” explained Tri-Top, answering Snoopy-Loo Boondoggle before Izzy Odorous had a chance to reply. “Yes, you are my apprentices, so you *are* what you *are*!”

Izzy Odorous lifted up his eyebrows and laughed.

“Let me begin. Listen carefully and remember all these things, for I have a story to tell you about secrets – and in this land we have lots of secrets.” The fictional Great Chimera Beast pulled out a long scroll of paper from his gown and read:

“Names have secrets.

‘Ages have secrets.

‘Dates have secrets.

‘The past has secrets.

‘The future has secrets.

‘Boxes have secrets.

*'Keys have secrets.
'Maps have secrets.'*

“Is that it? Is that your story? How boring and untrue,” Izzy Odorous laughed again.

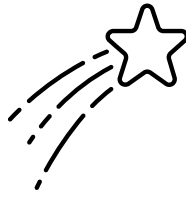
“The Mountain of Learning will show you something new every day,” continued Tri-Top, “and you will soon gain the knowledge of the secrets within The Land of Now and Then. Now enter The Cave of Curiosity. I shall see you all again soon.”

“One question,” asked Izzy: “what exactly will you be teaching us?”

“Ah,” said Tri-Top, “that would be letting you into a secret. But I can tell you a little, for The Mountain of Learning has a huge library of storybooks. Some books will tell you how to be happy, or how to magically make happiness happen. There will be books on how to cherish the planet and care for the safety of its species, so that the living species do not become extinct, as we are – for we beasts in this land are lost forever. There will be books about Planet Earth and the heavens, and how we must show our respect for our natural world, and love for others who live amongst us. And, best of all, there will be books on the most secretive of magical spells, which will teach you how you can become cleverer and wiser wizards. Would you find our library interesting?”

Izzy Odorous rubbed his beard and thought. “It sounds too good to miss. No one has ever taught us how to become really clever and wise, so your Mountain of Learning may be of interest to us all.”

Tri-Top nodded all his three heads, as he slithered forward to lead the Purple Wizards into The Cave of Curiosity, before suddenly disappearing from their sight.



CHAPTER 24

The Cave Of Curiosity

The wizards rubbed their eyes and looked around. They were standing in a cavern – a large, grey, rocky chamber which was dimly lit. They could hear the tumble of water splashing downward in torrents from a high, rocky shelf; it was hitting a gushing cavern pool. Crouched around the pool were other peculiar beasts. They seemed a muddled lot of odds and bods to the Purple Wizards; some had the head of an eagle, or a goose, or a rook, but still had the body of a lion, a horse or other animal, yet they had wings. On the water’s edge was a marine beast which had the head of a lion and the tail of a fish.

“Oh, look, Boss, we can’t rest here in The Cave of Curiosity; it’s packed with lots of beasts. Are they all fictional characters?” Grizzly-Grime Cheesequake asked. It was the first time he had spoken for a long time, but he needed to talk, for he was feeling nervous and was actually quaking in his pretty, purple-painted shoes. He really wanted to run away, as fast as he could, from the vile-looking beasts nearby.

“We are indeed fictional characters,” spoke one of the beasts, who had overheard the Purple Wizard’s question, “but we haven’t all been characters in storybooks; not all of us were dreamt up for story-writing. There are some real beasts amongst us, who once existed

on Planet Earth but now only exist in storybooks – or here, in our magical land.”

“Huge beasts – a bit like Claw but even more horrid,” shivered Grizzly-Grime Cheesequake.

“Yes, a bit like Claw, but Claw is a friendly beast when one gets to know him well. And remember, there are many dinosaurs here, living amongst us, who once actually roamed the world.”

Soon, a second beast approached the Purple Wizards, for it too wanted to chatter. “Most of the poor beasts were destroyed by the passing of a silly clock, which became known as Father Time,” the second beast explained. “Let me explain; I know of the story. I’ll begin...”

“Once upon a time, Father Time moved forward and the years passed by, but the world became an unsuitable place for Earth’s beasts and monsters to live in. And, when the beasts and monsters found it impossible to live on Planet Earth, it was often because they were destroyed by something or someone, and so they became extinct and were no more. Then, one day, someone began to tell stories about fictional, imaginary beasts, and that’s when people gave us fictional beasts life, for we are the beasts found between the pages of books and stories. And now here we are, and we hope we can stay alive when people read about us in books.”

“Mmmm, you’ve been quiet ‘til now, Grizzly-Grime Cheesequake. What is troubling you?” Izzy Odorous asked, looking across at the worried face of Grizzly Grime.

“Well, I’m really lost for words. How does one talk to a giant beast?” Grizzly-Grime Cheesequake asked, nervously.

“Well, er... if it’s a giant, I suppose, perhaps you need to use big, giant words, of course,” suggested Cranky-Creep Lickspittle.

The Purple Wizards giggled loudly.

Izzy Odorous scratched his beard, and stared at the goat's head on the lion's shoulders. He noticed one of the goat's eyes was red and the other was yellow.

"That's most curious," Izzy mumbled to himself.

The goat blinked and chattered to itself. First its left eye winked, then it winked its right eye.

Cranky-Creep Lickspittle, the oldest Purple Wizard, stepped forward. "What do you think the goat's left eye is saying to the right eye?" he asked the gang of wizards.

"I know," giggled Willie-Nilly Kerfuffle: "between us, something smells."

The Purple Wizards giggled again, and pointed rudely to the goat's long nose.

"I'm a goat. All goats have long noses," smiled Goat.

Izzy was determined that he would not show his fear to the other Purple Wizards, even though he could feel his tummy rumbling nervously inside him, and his knees were wobbling beneath him. He approached one of the beasts cautiously. He scratched his beard and joked, as he asked his men: "What do you get if you cross a pie with a snake?"

"I know," laughed Snoopy-Loo Boondoggle: "a pie-thon."

The wizards giggled, and their laughter grew louder and louder. The beasts turned their heads to watch and listen to the Purple Wizards, who had more jokes to tell.

"Why do lions eat raw meat?" Snoopy-Loo Boondoggle asked, grinning.

"I know," laughed Batty-Butty Barbignagion: "it's because they don't know how to cook."

The Purple Wizards giggled louder and louder at their own jokes about the beasts, and their laughter made the fictional beasts smile.

“Why did the lion spit out the clown?” asked Noodle-Doodle Hornswaggle.

“I know,” replied Willy-Nilly Kerfuffle: “because he tasted funny!”

The Purple Wizards laughed until their wizard hats slid off their heads and, when they looked across at the staring beasts, they were laughing, too. How clever of the Purple Wizards to make the beasts laugh. Perhaps things were not that bad, after all.



CHAPTER 25

A Threat

When Tri-Top returned to The Cave of Curiosity, he was both alarmed and confused, for both the beasts and the Purple Wizards were sitting cross-legged in a large circle, on the stone flooring of the cave, and in the middle of the cave a fire had been lit; its smoke plumes reached upward and outward, through a cavity in the cave roof. A large cauldron pan sat on the spitting fire, and the aroma of a vegetable soup filled the air. Burgers were sizzling on the barbecue range, where potatoes were also roasting nicely. There was a busy chatter of conversation between beasts and Purple Wizards, and the beasts were chuckling merrily, for it seemed the Purple Wizards were amusing them with teasingly funny stories and rhyming limericks. Izzy Odorous was presently on his feet, versing out such a limerick, and the surrounding beasts were clapping their applause...

“There was an old beast from Assam,

“Who only ate boiled cod and ham,

“His tummy got fatter,

“But what did it matter?”

“It tasted much better than man.”

“Well done, Boss,” Snoopy-Loo Boondoggle laughed “Now it’s my turn...

*“There was an old beast from the winelands,
“Who grew vines in the waters of tidelands,
“But when the floods came,
“He began a new game
“And grew vines on the slopes of these islands.”*

“My turn,” Grimble-Pants Cheesequake giggled, as he began his limerick, saying...

*“There was an old beast from a forest,
“His feet were the neatest and smallest;
“Whenever he danced,
“He darted and pranced –
“The old beast was seen as the ‘coolest’.”*

“Stop! Stop! This assembly is ridiculous!” Tri-Top called out in anger. “You Purple Wizards have arrived on these Magic Islands so that the beasts will scare you all into obedience, but you have already changed all that, by driving the beasts to partying and feasting. You can’t stay here in this cave any longer. How would I explain this to Macsen, who has sent me here to give you wizards another job?”

“Go back and tell Macsen we are not interested in doing his jobs for him. We have found a lovely cave and lots of friends, and have already made up our minds to make this place our next magical home. We are enjoying good food and happy company, and this will be our perfect magical hideout,” Izzy Odorous explained.

Tri-Top sent out his snake head, which wrapped itself around

Izzy's waist, and within seconds Izzy was pulled away from his friendly beasts and the Purple Wizard gang; he was dragged out of The Cave of Curiosity until he reached a roadway. Tri-Top then spun Izzy Odorous around and around, until the Purple Wizard became so dizzy that he breathlessly lay on the ground.

“This is the road that will take you back to Shack Number One. Go and tell Claw that you will not do any more work for Macsen; see what Claw will tell you. And remember, this is a one-way road, so you should only ever move forward; if you dare to turn back toward the cave, your friends may all disappear forever.” Tri-Top's goat head nodded, his lion head roared and his snake head hissed.

When Izzy Odorous lifted up his dizzy head, Tri-Top had vanished.

Poor Izzy Odorous looked at the long, empty road ahead and knew that he would cause harm to his friends if he turned back toward the cave. Exasperated, he shook his fist in the air and flopped exhaustedly once more onto the ground. He breathed in deeply and told himself that he would follow the road at a jogging pace. It would probably be a long-distance jog, thought Izzy Odorous, for the road ahead seemed unending, but he supposed he would eventually reach Shack Number One. And surely, if he did so, he would soon meet up with his gang of Purple Wizards again, at a later time. He took a second, really deep breath inward, drew himself back up onto his feet and began his more relaxed jog along the long, long road ahead.



CHAPTER 26

Following The Tracks

Stefan, Megan and Trevor had become confused. Martin the muskrat's path back to Shack Number One had not been that simple to follow. In fact, the track in the iced-up land had frosted over completely and, for a long time, the children slid around in circles, inspecting the edge of the ice, exactly at the spot where the land met the ice, for they hoped that the muskrat would have churned up a path somewhere. The problem was that Martin had carved more than one track for himself – possibly a while ago – so there were several churned-up paths, and this puzzled the children.

“Which one of the muskrat's tracks should we take?” Megan asked the boys, rather anxiously.

“Perhaps all tracks will lead us back to Shack Number One,” Stefan reasoned, casually.

“Possibly,” Trevor agreed, “but surely all tracks will lead somewhere. Providing we don't follow a track back into Dinosaur Country, we should be safe enough.”

Eventually, the children decided on the churned-up track where the earth seemed much looser underfoot. They sat beside the track, resting in the churned-up grass, before continuing on their journey, hoping that they were no longer within easy reach of the dangers of the dinosaurs. When they had recovered from their flight from

Dinosaur Country, they began to follow the track.

They thought that it would lead them to Claw, but the track ended at the mouth of a cave, above which stood a high, mountainous crag of rock, which held a clockface tower.

“Where are we?” Stefan asked, inquisitively. Then, turning to look through another darkened opening, Stefan gasped.

“Shhhh!” he whispered. “Be careful, because I’ve just seen the oddest scene through that second cave opening: the Purple Wizards are on the floor in there, and seated with them are some really weird and ugly beasts. We can’t possibly be safe from harm in this place, for those beasts are unreal and so fearsome that they may have stepped out of ancient storybooks.”

“What do the beasts look like?” Megan asked.

“Large,” came Stefan’s reply.

“Large... and...?” pressed Megan, for she needed to know more.

“Some beasts have two heads, or the head of one beast and the tail of another. Perhaps they are fantasy beasts, taken from fiction. But they are not related to the dinosaur era at all.”

“Wow! I must see them!” Trevor said as he crept forward, toward the second darkened cave entrance, followed closely by Megan.

Upon seeing the Purple Wizards and the beasts dining together, Megan immediately believed that they should not stay and oversee the Purple Wizards whilst they were with these beasts, for it would be too risky. They should leave the caves, for surely these ugly beasts were too alarming and their behaviour perhaps unpredictable; it would be unsafe to risk staying.

The three children left the cave, to discover Batty–Butty Barbignagion sitting at the cave’s entrance.

“Look!” Stefan whispered quietly, as he crept closer and closer to the squatting figure. “It’s one of the Purple Wizards.”

Batty-Butty Barbignagion turned to face Stefan with an alarmed expression, and he seemed disturbed as he blurted out: “But... Tri-Top has taken Izzy Odorous over to Shack Number One.”

Stefan was not following what the wizard was saying. “Is something wrong, Purple Wizard?”

“Yes, I believe there is. I need to find Izzy Odorous, but which pathway leads to Shack Number One? Do you children know the way?”

“No, we don’t, but if you want to come with us, we’ll search together for The Shacks,” Stefan invited.

Batty-Butty Barbignagion seemed glad for the invitation. Perhaps he felt uncomfortable as a guest to the beasts, and needed an excuse to get away from them. He immediately picked himself up from the grass and trudged after Stefan.

“Let’s take a new track from the caves, shall we? A track which runs in a different direction will do,” Stefan suggested.

Trevor shrugged his shoulders and Megan nodded in agreement, as the group made their way onto a new pathway – but it wasn’t the long, straight road Izzy Odorous had found himself on.



CHAPTER 27

Georgy Megashell

Batty-Butty Barbignagion had also had a muddled day, and he was in no mood to think clearly about tracks, paths, routes or roadways. But he was happy to follow the children onto their new pathway.

The track they took was wider than before. Cart had probably used it as a roadway, Stefan believed. Everyone became even more confused when the roadway kept forking into two, and no one was sure of their way. Trevor put Osmo down onto the ground, and watched the puppy closely as it ran a short distance, leading the way.

After a while, the group noticed, just ahead of them, a rather large hump blocking the path. When they got closer to the hump, Batty-Butty Barbignagion exclaimed loudly that it was some kind of large beast, for its body stretched from one side of the road to the other as it waddled slowly, plodding along on shortened legs and padded paws. The creature's back was made of tough shell, and its head and neck were broad and thick. As it turned its head slightly to one side, it tried to glance at Batty-Butty Barbignagion, for he had stopped behind the creature and was now knocking on the shell with his hard fist.

At first, the shelled creature did nothing, so Batty-Butty Barbignagion knocked again. The creature stood still and listened. Then it opened its beaky mouth, closed its eyes and padded forward

slowly, stretching out its short legs and dragging its padded paws, completely ignoring the Purple Wizard trying to attract its attention with his hammering. But, tiring of all the battering, the creature finally stopped.

“Er, excuse me, but... but, you are blocking the road and we need to pass you, because we’re trying to reach Shack Number One. Are we on the correct road? Would this be the roadway Cart travels on?”

“Ah, Cart, yes. Cart jumps over me.” The creature turned slowly and spoke in a rumbling voice; “If you wish to pass me, you will need to climb up onto my back and slide over my front. But you’ll need to be careful, because I’m older than a million years of age.”

“But... but, I can’t climb over you; you are far too tall. I would need a ladder to help me climb onto your back,” Batty-Butty Barbignagion was protesting at the awkward creature.

Trevor picked up Osmo, for the puppy had started to sniff beneath the creature’s massive shell, whilst the giant tortoise waddled forward at a snail’s pace, occupying the entire width of the road.

“Then take an alternative road,” suggested the giant tortoise.

“But... if I may ask, who are you?” Batty-Butty Barbignagion asked.

“My name’s Georgy Megashell. I’m what’s known as a Pinta Giant Tortoise.”

“Can’t you move sideways,” Trevor asked, “so that we can all pass you by?”

“I certainly can’t walk sideways. I can move forward slowly, or take just four steps backward.”

“But... Oh, bother!” snapped the Purple Wizard.

The Pinta Giant Tortoise hadn’t spoken to anyone for centuries, and he needed to chat to someone. “I’m the only extinct giant

tortoise of my kind left in the world.”

“But that’s a good job,” sighed the frustrated and slightly inconvenienced Batty-Butty Barbignagion, “for if there were any other wide slow-coaches like yourself, blocking roads and pathways, no one in this land would ever get anywhere!”

“I once lived on the Galapagos Islands, but some sailors and pirates came to our island and took my family away. I was not found, because I hid away under a bush. I was the only Pinta Tortoise left in the world and I became quite lonely. I still feel lonely.”

“That’s understandable. I suppose if I was the only Purple Wizard in the world, I’d feel lonely, too.” Batty-Butty Barbignagion nodded his head, thoughtfully.

“I spent years just hoping someone would find me and keep me company,” the Pinta Tortoise explained. “Then, one day, when I was walking on the beach, a rather amazing wizard named Ambrosious found me, much to his delight and my joy. He was a magical character, and he used his powers to bring me here, to his Magic Islands.”

The Pinta Tortoise padded forward, so, so slowly that he hardly moved at all. “I’m so sorry, I can’t walk very fast, so you will have to try and climb over me. It will take me a whole week to move out of your way.”

Batty-Butty Barbignagion looked at the giant tortoise. “But, none of us will be able to climb on top of you; you are too tall and slippery. We would never be able to keep our balance.”

The children and Batty-Butty Barbignagion looked around. There were a few other paths they could choose but, of course, they would have no idea where any of the paths would lead them.

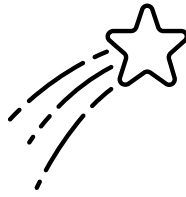
“Perhaps we should take a chance on it and divert onto another

path,” Megan suggested.

She turned, and just to her left sat a small sign which read “*Marshmallow Pathway*”. It had a soft, pink, squidgy surface, and when the children stood on it the sticky marshmallow surface clung to their shoes. So, they turned away from the soft, squidgy path and headed onto another path, which had been signposted: “*Candy Bar Avenue*”. The path was shaded on each side by a row of deciduous trees, and the path beneath their feet was covered in pink chippings, just like pieces of crunchy candy. Stefan picked up a small, pink chipping and tasted it. It tasted bitter, just like a sour pickle, and not at all like a piece of delicious candy. Candy Bar Avenue veered to their right, and took them in a straight line for miles and miles.

“Let’s sit down and rest again,” Trevor suggested, as he squatted down at the edge of the pathway and rubbed his sore feet. He was completely lost, and the Purple Wizard was missing his gang of magical wizard friends.

Batty-Butty Barbignagion decided to curl himself up into a ball and roll over, with a loud moan, and it wasn’t long afterward that the children did the same thing. Their groaning could be heard from a great distance.



CHAPTER 28

The Dodo Bird

The children and the Purple Wizard hadn't hesitated, rolled over or moaned for long when their noises attracted attention; a large bird was walking toward them. The group had never before seen a bird like it, for it was larger than a turkey but smaller than a black swan. It snapped its huge, hooked, dark bill with a sharp and loud click, fluttered its blue-grey plumage, with a tuft of curly feathers on its tail, and pranced about on its stout, yellow legs.

"Dodo! Dodo! Dodo! Dodo!" screamed the bird, as it came closer to the moaning group.

"But... who are you?" Batty-Butty Barbignagion asked.

"Dodo! Dodo! Dodo!" screamed the Dodo Bird, uncontrollably.

"I'm a Purple Wizard," announced Batty-Butty Barbignagion.

"I'm Stefan," said Stefan, "and this is my cousin Megan and my friend Trevor, with his puppy, Osmo."

"But... shall I call you Dodo?" asked the Purple Wizard. "I'm Batty-Butty Barbignagion by name. I am often told by the other wizards that I have a bird brain, like that of a Dodo Bird, but I have never met a Dodo Bird like you until now."

"I have a picture of you in my book," Stefan said, as he held up his book and showed everyone the colourful image of the Dodo Bird.

"But... what did the other Purple Wizards mean, when they called

me a bird-brain?" Batty-Butty Barbignagion puzzled.

"I think I may have a small brain. But, nevertheless, I do have a brain and I'm quite clever," explained Dodo. "Perhaps both wizards and Dodo Birds have small brains. People think birds have very little intelligence, but that's never been true," the Dodo Bird defended; "we can sing in tune and compose new melodies. Some birds can even compose symphonies."

"But... what are symphonies," the Purple Wizard asked, vaguely.

"Musical arrangements," Megan replied.

"You can fly, can't you?" Trevor asked. Osmo seemed to be resting quietly in Trevor's arms, listening.

"I'm hopeless at flying," Dodo admitted.

"But I'm good at flying... but I can only fly if I have my broomstick to fly on," Batty-Butty Barbignagion said. "Sadly, our broomsticks were never returned to us by our enemies, the Red Wizards, so now I can't fly, either."

"Ambrosious saved me," the Dodo Bird chattered. "I have lived here on these Magic Islands for centuries, but my Dodo family are not here with me, which is sad. I am all alone, the only magical Dodo in the universe. Dodo Birds became extinct because the sailors stole our eggs and ate them. We used to lay the eggs on the ground, but that was a big mistake, for we made it too easy for the sailors to find them. And, when the greedy sailors had eaten all our eggs, they decided they would eat us next; I remember how they chased us along the beaches. We ran as fast as we could, to try and escape them, but because our wings were so tiny, they weren't powerful enough to allow us to fly away to safety. It had never been important that we should fly, and most of us had never tried or even bothered. Besides, we were too heavy to fly, and too big and awkward to lift ourselves from the ground. That's when most of us were caught by

the sailors. Many of the sailors had eaten only the rats and mice on board their ships, so most of the Dodo Birds were caught and roasted, then the horrid sailors feasted upon us.”

“Wow! How did you manage to escape the sailors?” Megan asked, with interest.

“I hid behind a large bush, as I explained. Sometimes people hurt animals, or don’t show respect for them, but they should try and show more care and love toward different species. Wouldn’t you agree?” Dodo asked.

“Mmmm... but I’ve never thought about it like that before. But, yes, I do believe you must be right,” Batty-Butty Barbignagion mumbled, with a guilty look upon his face, for he remembered the times when he had been unkind to others.

“What an interesting history you have, Dodo. Did Ambrosious give all of the extinct species in this land magical powers?” Megan asked.

“Of course, we are all magical. The Land of Now and Then is only a small part of the Magic Islands. Ambrosious, the Wizard of the Magical Forest, is the kindest of wizards, and he takes a strong dislike to those who are wicked or cruel to others.”

“But... we have enjoyed being wicked wizards,” Batty-Butty Barbignagion reasoned. “I am one of the notorious and famous magical Purple Wizards, as I told you, and, as such, have done many naughty things; my gang have been called ‘criminals’. But... but, today, Dodo, you have taught me how bad mischief can hurt others. I will always remember you, and try not to do anything bad again. In fact, when I meet Izzy Odorous and the gang of Purple Wizards next, I will need to tell the other Purple Wizards your story of the extinct Dodo Birds, and explain to them how bad mischief can become a danger and have awful consequences.”

“Good! Good! Now, if you’ll excuse me,” said the friendly Dodo, “you are sitting too close to my bush, and I would like to have my supper of fruit berries from it. Would you mind moving over, or perhaps you can continue on your way?” The Dodo Bird had turned toward the bushes and was now munching at his supper of fresh, juicy berries.

So, the group turned their back on the Dodo Bird and continued their journey along the path of Candy Bar Avenue and, hopefully, toward Shack Number One.

“But... but, it can’t be much farther, can it?” sighed Batty-Butty, as they plodded forward.



CHAPTER 29

The Riddles

Macsen was rummaging through the dustbins. He was searching for clues, and had looked everywhere he could think of for the Box of Secrets. “The box has to be hidden somewhere in this land, but where?” Macsen sighed in desperation. If only he could find the box and key, he could use the key to open the box. Inside would be the magic dust from Ambrosious, which would save half of The Land of Now and Then from imminent darkness, and the destruction of nature and life. For some time, Macsen had noticed the box had been missing, but where had it gone? Had someone taken it? Surely there couldn’t be a thief here, on these islands?

What would Ambrosious say if he knew that Macsen had lost the Box of Secrets, containing the Wizard of the Magical Forest’s secrets? Were the secrets important to Ambrosious?

Macsen coughed as he moved over to the large kitchen chimney and reached his hand up, bringing down the dust and debris onto the hood of his cloak. His narrowed eyes glittered through his dusty eyelashes, as he strained to look and search the chimney place. He saw no sign of the box, but he did draw out a scroll of paper. He opened it and read the words carefully:

“I come as a circle. I’m easy to lose. I’m worn on the

fingers but not on the toes.

“I roam in the kitchen, have eyes that can see. I’m not a cook and don’t make tea.

“I’m covered in feathers, but not in skin. I keep my secrets all feathered therein.

“If you see my treasures, you’re likely to gasp, for beneath my feathers I’ll never unmask.

“Who am I?”

Macsen read the words again, but was baffled by them. He turned from the fireplace and pushed the scroll under his cloak. “Just a nonsense puzzle,” he frowned. “Ridiculous.” Dismissing the puzzle as rubbish, Macsen continued his search outside.

He needed to go and talk to Claw about his missing box. Perhaps Claw had seen it, picked it up and put it with all his garden tools, in Shack Number One. Perhaps he and Claw could search the other shacks, which stood nearby.

And where was Cart; he had not been seen all day? Macsen needed to talk to Cart; perhaps Cart had given a lift to the box thief? Would he have seen anyone heading off with a box from the temple?

Then there was the red-velvet-covered book. The book had been rude and most unhelpful to Macsen, and had not given him any advice or knowledge about the subject of secrets – but surely the red-velvet-covered book must have some knowledge of Ambrosious’s magical secrets? Then again, perhaps no one knew what secrets the box contained. There may have been some secretive magical spells inside the box, and certainly Ambrosious would have kept his magic dust carefully locked inside the box.

Macsen stood at the roadside, baffled, as he sat next to a clockface carved into a tree trunk. He decided to tell the clockface

his problems.

“Do you know where the Box of Secrets is hidden?” he asked Clockface.

“Not really,” replied Clockface, “but if you walk halfway down this road there is a hollow tree, which would make an excellent hiding place for a box.”

“Oh, thank you!” The excited Macsen jumped up and immediately hurried along the road.

At the halfway point, he spotted the hollow tree. He ran over and thrust his hand into the big, round hole. But, when he drew out his hand, it was holding another scroll of paper.

“Eh?” he blurted, as he unrolled the scroll of paper. “What is this? Huh! Another puzzle?” He cast his eyes over the paper, as he read aloud:

*“My first is in thief, but never in chief,
My second is in box, but never in locks,
My third is in shut, but never ajar,
My fourth is in purple, but never afar,
My fifth is in gold, but never in wealth,
My sixth is in flight, but never in stealth,
My seventh is in dish, but never in wish,
My eighth is to take, but never to show,
My ninth is in bird, but never in go,
My tenth is in gather, but never in greet,
My eleventh is in meet, but never in sweet,
My twelfth is in is hidden, but never in seen,
My last is in jewels, but never in dreams.
Who am I?”*

“Tut-tut! Who am I, indeed?” spat Macsen. “Another stupid riddle!”

He rubbed his feet and knees for, without riding in Cart, the road was too long a way to walk.

The Iguanodon slowly slinked forward from behind some bushes. It resembled a giant lizard as it lashed out its long tail, whipping it from side to side.

“I’m rather lost,” the Iguanodon was saying, though his head had reached so high into the air that he hadn’t noticed Macsen, stooping below him.

Macsen looked upward. “Oh, you made me jump, Iguanodon! You are *really* lost, because you’ve wandered outside the boundaries of Dinosaur Country.”

“I know,” replied the Iguanodon, “but Dinosaur Country is getting darker and darker, and the creatures are beginning to fear that they will not be able to find their fruit bushes, lakes and caves if the skies hide the light from the sun. They have sent me out to find you.”

“Ah,” Macsen said in a worried tone, “so, the darkness is descending over half the island, and so soon? This is such bad news.”

“Will you help us all? Please, Macsen?” the Iguanodon begged.

“I wish I could help you,” replied Macsen. “You see, my keys and Ambrosious’s Box of Secrets are missing; if I could find those things I could open the box with the key, and perhaps sprinkle the magic dust onto the land. Then, perhaps Father Time would no longer hesitate or stop time, but would instead tick forward, and we would all regain light for our days and darkness for our nights; dark days and dark nights would be no more. You see, Iguanodon, we all depend on the growth of plants for food, and they will only grow and

thrive if they have light, but not too much sun. Without light and sunshine, earth and water, we would not have plants to eat, for our fruits and vegetables would perish, and soon all living life would suffer.”

“I understand,” said the Iguanodon. “Have you looked everywhere for your lost items?”

“Yes, I have,” Macsen said.

“Have you looked beneath the branches of the trees?” Iguanodon pressed his neck to the underside of the branch of a small fir tree and shook the branches. A scroll of paper fell to the ground.

Macsen slid his eyes over to it and frowned. “It’s another stupid riddle,” he announced, in anger. He picked up the paper and read out the riddle once again:

*“I can take you to places you may never have been.
I’m loaded with treasures but not with treats.
If missing a key, smash open the box.
I carry the secrets, as sly as a fox.
Who am I?”*

“You see, Iguanodon? Someone in this land is having a game of hide-and-seek – a joke – with me, but I don’t know who it can be,” Macsen sighed.

“I’ve been trying to remember where I’ve seen a key. I believe there is one hanging on a branch near to where the Tyrannosaurus Rex lives, in Dinosaur Country. If you show me how to return to my home, I will take you to the tree from which dangles the golden key.”

“Oh, my poor feet!” Macsen moaned. “Come on then, Iguanodon, follow me. I would be most interested in this golden key you have seen.”



CHAPTER 30

A Panic

Stefan was tired of tramping over so many tracks. He sat on the ground to rest, yet again.

“Come on, we’re all so tired of wandering along pathways and tracks, let’s all sit here and look at my book for a short while. I’ll read bits out to you.”

Stefan opened his book and the others sat around him. Osmo wanted to see the pictures, so he bounced up onto Stefan’s lap and snuggled into him, sniffing at the picture before him.

“This is a picture of the Iguanodon,” he began, as he read aloud...

“It lived over ninety-nine million years ago, in Europe, America, Africa, Australia and Asia. Its remains have also been found in Sussex, England, where they found the teeth of this large lizard, which they think had a spike on its nose.”

Perhaps it was because they were all tired, or perhaps they were all listening and concentrating on the pictures in the book, that they just hadn’t heard the swishing sound of Madsen and the Iguanodon approaching.

Osmo had heard the noise, though, and he jumped up immediately. Perhaps he could smell the Iguanodon, for he must

have smelt a bit fishy. So, Osmo was the first to raise the alarm that something large was sneaking toward them, slowly.

It was Macsen who appeared first, and he seemed equally surprised to see the children, dog and Purple Wizard as they were shocked at seeing him. But, when the Iguanodon crept through the high grass, the children and Purple Wizard yelled loudly in fear, while Osmo, the puppy dog, whimpered and yapped pitifully, leaping up and down. The group jumped to their feet and edged backward, staring in fear at the Iguanodon.

“You are quite safe,” Macsen assured them. “This is Iguanodon, and he’s going to show me where my magic key is hidden, in Dinosaur Country.”

“A magic key?” Trevor mumbled, turning the key in his pocket. “Why would you need a magic key?”

“I have lost Ambrosious’s key and the Box of Secrets. They have been missing for a while and, so far, all I have found are riddles. But my friend the Iguanodon says that he knows of a key which is dangling from a tree, in Dinosaur Country. We are off to find it, and then hope that we can find the box, also.”

“Ah,” Trevor mumbled again, “would that be the twentieth tree in the twentieth row of trees?”

The Iguanodon grinned and asked: “How did you know that?”

Trevor pulled out the key from his pocket. “Do you mean this key?”

Macsen reached out his arm and snatched it hurriedly from Trevor. “Where did you find it?”

“We found it, as I just explained, on a lower branch on the twentieth tree, in the twentieth row of trees.”

Macsen was silent. He thought quietly, then he asked: “Who told you where to find the key? Surely you have not long arrived. And

who told you to go to Dinosaur Country without my permission?”

“Martin the muskrat showed us the way to Dinosaur Country. It’s over in the distance somewhere,” pointed Stefan.

Osmo, as usual, had become a huge distraction; the puppy, still yapping, was now jumping against the body of the huge Iguanodon. Trevor ran forward, toward the monster, and lifted Osmo into his arms, as he usually did.

“I think I know my way back to the lakes from here,” Iguanodon was saying, restlessly shifting from side to side, as if he wished to move away from the crowd and their snappy little animal. Iguanodon turned and spoke again: “You won’t be needing me to search out your key any longer, will you, Macsen, for you have already found it? Perhaps you should try to work out your riddles, and find Martin the muskrat and the Box of Secrets. It’s rather urgent that daylight returns to Dinosaur Country.”

“I will do my best,” Macsen agreed.

“Come,” he told the group, as the Iguanodon slinked away through the grass, in the direction of Dinosaur Country, “come, all, let’s return to Shack Number One, for I need to speak to Claw.”



CHAPTER 31

Ambrosious

Claw was sitting alone in Shack Number One when a loud knock on the door made him jump. He rose to his enormous height and reached forward to open the door.

The Great Chimera Beast's heads stared at him and, as Claw stared back, he could see the Purple Wizard Izzy Odorous clinging onto Snake, who had wrapped himself around the wizard's middle.

"Come in. Do come in and shut the door, please," Claw said.

"This Purple Wizard has been brought here to tell you that..." the Great Chimera Beast hesitated. "Look here, you tell Macsen yourself, Izzy Odorous."

Izzy Odorous uncurled himself from Snake. He folded his arms and, in a quiet voice, mumbled: "The Purple Wizards are not going to do any more jobs of work for you – that is, unless we can stay at The Cave of Curiosity."

"This Purple Wizard reckons he likes it here in The Land of Now and Then, and he wants to make it his magical kingdom, and stay here forever and ever," growled Lion.

"So, you see, this Purple Wizard wants to live with us," bleated Goat.

"Will he be allowed to live with us?" hissed Snake.

"Stand up, wizard," Claw barked; "allow me to clarify. Number

one, you are with us because no one else wants you. Number two, you are also here with us because everyone believes you are a criminal. Number three, you are with us because you are listed in the red-velvet-covered book as ‘*Wizards With No Manners*’. Number four, as far as I understand, you are here with us until you have learnt better manners. Number five, and to conclude, you are here with us until we need you to return to the Red Wizards.”

“Huh! Never!” snapped Izzy Odorous. “The Red Wizards are our enemies, who tell false stories and untruths. We will never return to the Red Wizards, and it’s not surprising that we never want to be with them again.”

Izzy pondered. “Anyway, I have already made friends here with the fictional beasts, and I am personally interested in and can’t wait to explore The Mountain of Learning. For The Cave of Curiosity is filled with so many books that we will read, and we have been told that we will grow wiser and greater. I really wish to stay here and read them all. It is the perfect magical place for me. I’m sure that my gang of Purple Wizards will agree with me, and also want to stay.”

“I am not too sure,” Claw snarled. “Besides, it isn’t my decision. I’m sorry, I will need to ask Macsen.”

The second knock on the door was loud; it sounded like urgent, hard hammering.

“Enter,” growled Claw. “Now what is it? Tut! All these interruptions, when I was just about to have a peaceful rest.”

Macsen pushed the door open wide. He seemed upset and flustered, as he briskly made his way into Shack Number One, closely followed by the children, Osmo the puppy dog, and yet another Purple Wizard, whom he remembered as Batty-Butty Barbignagion. There really wasn’t room in Shack Number One for

everyone, and poor Claw was pushed, pressed and completely squashed against the wall.

“Oh, deary me,” Macsen was calling out, “someone has hidden Ambrosious’s Box of Secrets. And I must find Martin the muskrat, for he has led the children and puppy to the golden key which opens the magical box. Guess where they found it, Claw.”

Claw breathed in. He was so squashed up he could hardly catch his breath. “Tell me,” he gasped.

Macsen leapt up and down with delight, but he kept landing on Claw’s huge feet. “The key was on the twentieth tree in the twentieth row of trees, in Dinosaur Country; the golden key was dangling from a branch. This boy, Trevor, carrying his puppy dog, has kindly given it back to me. It is urgent that I find Martin the muskrat at once. Do you know where he can be, Claw?”

Claw breathed in again and, with another breathless huff, he whispered: “N... n... no.”

“Bother!” snapped Macsen. “I shall return to the temple and gather together my army of gargoyles; they will help me search for the muskrat.”

Then, from his long coat, he withdrew the scrolls of riddles and handed them out to the children. “Here, take these riddles and solve them for me, please. Perhaps they will lead me to the thief who stole the golden key and hid it – and those riddles may lead me to the Box of Secrets, too. I have no time to dawdle at this place, for I must hurry to prepare a search party.”

“Don’t leave yet, Macsen,” Claw cried out. “The Purple Wizard, Izzy Odorous, has been brought to me by the Great Chimera Beast. The wizard requests to stay here, in The Land of Now and Then, forever and ever. He wants to live with the fictional beasts in The Cave of Curiosity, and make the place his magical kingdom. What

do I tell him?"

"Tell him to ask Ambrosious; I have no time for wizards with no manners today. By the way, where is Cart? I haven't seen him today."

Batty-Butty Barbignagion and Izzy Odorous looked at each other. "We know where Cart is," Izzy Odorous explained. "Cart has had a crash and broken into bits."

"His front legs have galloped away, into The Mountain of Learning," Batty-Butty Barbignagion added.

"Ambrosious must be called here, to help us sort out this terrible muddle," Macsen said, hurriedly.

"We know how to call for Ambrosious," Stefan said, helpfully. "We know the magic words."

"Then hurry and call out the words," Macsen urged.

Together the children shouted the magic words, as loudly as they could, and hoped that Ambrosious would hear them...

"Fuzzy-pickles!

Wiggly-jiggly!

Itty-bitty-magic-bits!"

Nothing happened.

There was silence in Shack Number One.

"Call again," Macsen asked, anxiously.

So, the children shouted a second time.

And, when nothing happened the second time, there was great disappointment.

"Where is he?" Megan asked with a sigh.

When they called again, the third time, everyone in Shack

Number One helped, all calling out the magic words in chorus.

There was a sudden flash, before Ambrosious appeared at the entrance.

Poor Claw was still pressed against the wall, huffing and puffing hard. "Please step outside, everyone," Ambrosious asked.

When everyone had gathered around Ambrosious, Macsen began to tell his story of the lost Box of Secrets, how Father Time had stopped, how all the clocks needed to be wound up to restart, and how the dinosaurs in Dinosaur Country were worried, for the land was darkening, and that was such a bad sign for the islands.

Claw complained to Ambrosious about his toothache.

Izzy Odorous then began to tell his story of how he wanted to stay forever, with the fictional beasts.

Batty-Butty Barbignagion began to tell the story of how Cart was broken, and how his front legs had galloped away, into the mountain.

Trevor told the story of how he had found the magical key in Dinosaur Country.

The Great Chimera Beast began his story of the wonderful Cave of Curiosity, and how it had a huge library of storybooks.

Megan told Ambrosious how scared she had really felt.

And little Osmo yapped loudly, because everyone was chatting at once, so I suppose he wanted to join in the chatter with his adventure story, too.

Ambrosious raised his arms to the air and boomed, in his loudest voice: "Silence! I will hear only one story at a time."

And so it was that Ambrosious agreed to allow Izzy Odorous to stay at The Cave of Curiosity, with his gang of Purple Wizards, forever.

Ambrosious then magically called Martin the muskrat to appear

before him and, within minutes, Martin the muskrat had scratched his front paws into the garden soil and revealed the Box of Secrets, buried deeply, quite close to where Stefan had dug up the beautiful book he held.

“So, you are our culprit, Martin Muskrat? You stole the key and the Box of Secrets, and hid them in the garden?”

“Not I,” claimed Martin the muskrat, “but I know who did it. I watched her trip along the roadway on Cart, and she often brought her treasures to the garden. She dug with the spade, uncovered the Box of Secrets, and stored her bits and pieces in it. Then she would bury the box again.”

“Who is she?” Ambrosious asked.

“I left lots of clues as riddles, and placed them here and there,” Martin the muskrat explained. “If you study my clues, you may be able to find who you are looking for.”

The children unfurled the scrolled papers and read out all the riddles...

...And everyone guessed the name of the thief.

Have *you* guessed, and are you right?

Ambrosious smiled, for he knew who had run away with his key and Box of Secrets. He winked, for he would soon magically correct all wrongs and make them right again. He was not going to tell anyone who the thief was, but he would talk to the guilty culprit and scold her for thieving.

Ambrosious opened his Box of Secrets. Inside the box sat the Purple Wizards’ many glittering amethyst rings. He smiled as he pulled the rings from the box. “Here,” he told Izzy Odorous, “return these rings to your Purple Wizards at once. I wish you all happiness and contentment. I doubt you will find any crimes to commit or naughty things to do at The Cave of Curiosity, for you will have much

to learn there. Reading books will teach you a great deal.”

*

From that day onward, Ambrosious made sure all wrongs were amended in The Land of Now and Then. It delighted him to know that his plan for the Purple Wizards had worked out so well, and he smiled as he watched them study the map of the tracks back to The Cave of Curiosity.

“It’s time to leave our Magic Islands, children and dear little puppy dog. Thank you all for helping me out once again. I’m so pleased you managed to come,” Ambrosious said.

And, as he looked across the land, the clocks began to tick loudly, and somehow the children vanished from the crowd.

Macsen ran all the way back to the temple and climbed the bell rope, to pull and clang at his huge bell.

“Come on, gargoyles!” he yelled, excitedly. “All is well again. Let’s have another game of chess!”

The clockfaces in the land watched as light dawned once more over The Land of Now and Then.

Claw contentedly took his rest at Shack Number One.

What a magical day it had been.

Martin the muskrat, Ambrosious and Phillys shared a cup of magical tea leaves in the temple kitchen, and Ambrosious had a quiet, secretive chat about stealing and hiding goodies with Phillys. I don’t believe anyone stole anything after that – not even the Purple Wizards. Ever.

Have you worked out the riddles Macsen found, and guessed who the thief was?



CHAPTER 32

At White Stone School

Mr. Beedles felt fuzzy-headed when he returned to White Stone School. He was with Mrs. Parry and was worried, for he had not seen the children Stefan, Megan and Trevor, nor his puppy Osmo, all day.

A sudden, loud popping noise behind startled him and, when he turned to look, the missing children and puppy had suddenly returned to class.

Mr. Beedles stared at them for, a second ago, there had been just empty chairs of missing children. And, then... *pop!* Just like that, Stefan, Megan and Trevor were sitting at their desks, heads down, studying the pictures of extinct animals from a rather beautiful but muddy book.

“What happened to you? Where have you been? Where did the old witch take you? Where is your puppy dog, Osmo?” Mr. Beedles blurted out, in a nervous, loud voice. “We’ve been so worried about you all day. I’ve finally managed to report you as missing persons to the local police, and I’ve just reported the other rude policemen who, earlier in the day, laughed when I tried to tell them about witches and broomsticks and clouds of green smoke.”

“Osmo has gone home to Grandma Greg and Grandpa Greg. We’ve had an amazing, magical adventure,” said Trevor.

“And here you all are, safe and sound again. Oh, good,” Mrs. Parry smiled. “Oh,” she confessed, “but we’ve had such an awful day. The bus company wouldn’t bring us another bus today, because all the other buses were fully booked up for other trips. So, we were stuck at the side of the road for ages, until Mr. Beedles asked a different bus company to bring us back to White Stone School, for it had become much too late in the day to continue to London. So, we are taking the trip to see the dinosaur bones tomorrow, instead.”

“Where did you all disappear to?” Mr. Beedle prompted his questioning again.

“We went to the Magic Islands, to The Land of Now and Then,” Trevor replied.

“Hush!” Megan said. “Ambrosious told us to keep our magical trips a secret.”

“He may have told *you* that, but he didn’t tell me anything about any secrets, so I’ll explain it all, shall I?”

So, Stefan and Megan shrugged their shoulders, and allowed Trevor to continue.

“We saw some of the extinct beasts that Ambrosious had collected, saved and given the magical powers of life to, for I’m certain there must have been heaps more extinct beasts in Dinosaur Country, but we got scared and left rather quickly.”

“There were these huge dinosaurs in The Land of Now and Then. I was scared of them, too,” Megan admitted, quietly, “because they looked ferocious.”

“Of course, we didn’t have enough time there to see all of them, anyway,” Stefan added.

Trevor continued: “We first met the Gigantopithecus and the muskrat, but we hid from the Tyrannosaurus Rex and Brontosaurus, beneath the trees in the darkened forest of Dinosaur Country. The

Pinta Giant Tortoise blocked our tracks and the Dodo, Iguanodon and Pterodactyl were there, too. There was also a rather naughty duck-billed bird – a *Parasaurolophus* – who lurked in the kitchen chimney. She was the mischief who took the Box of Secrets and hid the key. There was only one of each species, apart from the Terror Birds, of which there were many.”

“I dug up this book from the gardens. It has pictures in it of all the extinct species that Ambrosious has magically taken to The Land of Now and Then,” said Stefan. “Now it’s mine and I can keep it.”

“The Purple Wizards have settled in at The Cave of Curiosity, in The Mountain of Learning, with all the fictional beasts. We met the Great Chimera Beast, which had the head of a lion, the head of a goat and its tail was a snake. All the fictional beasts were vile-looking, but Izzy Odorous, the leader of the Purple Wizards, loved them, so that’s where the Purple Wizards are now living, and they have all settled in happily. It really was magic... believe it or not!”

Trevor grinned, feeling very proud of himself, and looked up questioningly at Mr. Beedles. “Do you believe in magic?” he asked everyone.

“Yes!” yelled the children in the class.

The girl in a blue dress stood up. “I do,” she smiled.

The tall boy stepped forward. “I do, too,” he said.

“We all do,” the children agreed.

“Do you believe in magic, Mr. Beedles?” Mrs. Parry asked.

“I most certainly do, Mrs. Parry. I should never have doubted the children’s words in the first place. Magic has its own powers, Mrs. Parry, yet sometimes magic can also be incredibly baffling to me.”

“Sometimes magic can become scary, though. I hated it when Osmo was changed into a mouse,” Trevor recalled.

“I hated it in the Dinosaur Forest, when the Brontosaurus

touched my shoulder with his head,” Megan explained.

“I hated riding in Cart, for he galloped and jumped along. Serve him right for crashing into pieces,” Stefan mused. “But magic, it seems, can also be quite secretive and truly awesome, too.”

Mrs. Parry looked across at Mr. Beedles, and they both shrugged their shoulders. It would be a task for Mrs. Parry to bring all the excitable chatter away from magic, and change the subject toward the topic for her forthcoming class. So, she took a deep breath, smiled at Mr. Beedles and began to explain how the trip to London would prepare the children for the term’s work ahead.

“When we see the dinosaurs’ bones tomorrow, in the Natural History Museum, in London, we must all think about the survival of our living species; not only of the extinct beasts of long ago, but of the endangered species on our Earth today, from bacteria to baboons. We shall discuss nature’s decline, and how we can take positive actions to help the preservation of species.”

It had been an amazing, magical day, which would never be forgotten by all at the little school, in the Welsh town of White Stone. A day in which Mrs. Parry decided to start a collection of money, to donate from White Stone School toward saving endangered species surviving in our world today. Hadn’t that been a good idea?

Perhaps the most awesome occurrence on the magical day had been the way so many of the children and staff of White Stone School had promptly admitted that they really believed in magic, and that magical happenings *were* possible, if one believed – *really and truly* believed – in the powers of magic.

As all of his classmates and teachers gave Trevor his “Happy Birthday” wishes and cards, Trevor, Stefan and Megan grinned with delight, repeating their magical stories. Somehow, Trevor’s stories always ended with his spellbinding words, as he reminded everyone:

“It’s magic!

“Believe it or not!”

The End.

If you enjoyed this *Magic Islands* book by Irene Edwards, check out Irene's website and discover all the latest news and new titles. Available from your favourite local bookshops, Amazon, Publish & Print or direct from the author:

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