

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 there was bright and colorful. 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.

