

# GEMSTONIA



By David Marubbi

## “Are We There Yet?”

The sun rays blazed through the car’s rear windows making the children even more miserable. They had been on holiday in France for a week now, having a great time at the beach and swimming pool. Today mum and dad wanted to do some travelling and planned a visit to a well-known French village. It was probably one of those places that had interesting stuff only adults cared about. Mum did try and make it more appealing by saying there was a castle and that we should give it a chance as we may just learn something.

“I hate car journeys,” groaned Joe from the back.

“Yeah, can’t we stay by the pool again?” added Max, “It’s much more fun there.”

Mum, sitting in the front seat of the car turned to face the two boys. “Look, this holiday is not just for you. Your father and I would like to see this village and that’s what we’re doing,” she said. Before the brothers could object



Mum added, “And if you either of you continue with your complaining there’ll be no ice creams for the rest of the week.”

The boys' shoulders drooped, followed quickly by their heads, as they knew it was no use arguing back.

After what seemed like hours dad pulled into the car park and with a triumphant, "We're here!" He turned off the engine and everyone got out. "Right, who's up for a climb?" said dad energetically. "Grab your rucksacks, were going up there," he said as he straightened his arm pointing almost vertically upwards. The two brothers followed the direction to which dad was indicating and were amazed to see a huge stone castle sitting upon top of a gigantic hill.

"Wow, how did we not see that?" Max said to Joe in amazement.

The family locked the car and made their way across the car park to the ticket booth. The booth was located at the start of a long path that wound around the hill and up towards the ancient stone structure.

Dad took out his wallet and approached the lady in the kiosk. "Four tickets please, two adults and two children," he said.

"Pardon monsieur?" replied the lady in the booth.

Dad moved closer to the window between him and the lady. "Four... tickets... please..." he repeated much slower.



The ticket seller also moved closer to the glass. “Par... don... mon... sieur...,” she replied.

“Let me,” said Joe as he stepped in front of his father. “Excusez mon père, quatre billets s’il vous plait.”

He handed over the the correct money and the lady gave Joe the tickets with a smile.

“Merci,” said Joe.

“Merci, my little prince,” said the lady.

# A Tale Of Two Princes

Up and up everyone went, following the long winding path towards the castle. The day seemed to be getting hotter with each step and it wasn't long before the complaints started again.

"How far is it? My feet are tired. Can I have a piggy back ride dad?" Max asked.

Max's father lifted him up and set him high on his shoulders. "Gosh, what have you been eating? You weigh more than usual!" gasped Dad.

"It's not me, it's what's in my rucksack," giggled Max knowing all the things he managed to fit in there. "I've got my water pistols, a chocolate bar, marker pens, scissors, a writing pad and some other stuff," he explained.

"When are you going to need all that?" Dad wondered as he continued to walk up the hill.

Finally they reached the castle entrance. Nearby on a small sign were the words "The Great Entrance." However, it could easily be seen that this majestic way in had long since been "Great." The drawbridge no longer existed, there was no ceiling and most of the supporting walls had crumbled away over the years. In fact, now that they were closer to the castle, they could see that the inside was

mostly in ruins. Joe and Max were clearly disappointed as they both expected to see a fully working castle.

“Is this it? Haven’t the builders finished yet?” asked Max.

“Very funny Max, I’m sure it was an impressive structure a long time ago,” dad replied. “Come on, let’s have a look around.”

After some time walking around the castle, climbing up dimly lit spiral staircases, looking through the only surviving towers’ windows and eventually climbing back down, everyone’s tummies started to grumble. Mum said they should stop and have lunch before visiting the dungeons.

“Dungeons! Cool!” thought the boys and quickly ate their sandwiches eager to explore.

The two brothers and their parents made their way to the start of the dungeon tour. “Dungeon Museum This Way,” read a sign over an old archway. They entered and went down some stone steps into the first of the museum’s rooms. In the room they found many modern glass display cases containing various old dug up items, pottery, cups, old knives and forks. Again, the two brothers were disheartened upon seeing such unexciting items.

“Hey, look at this,” said dad from the entrance to the second room.

The boys, eager to move on, ran past dad to find a much larger room full of armour, bows, swords and shields.

“Now this is more like it,” said Max.

“Wow, real Knight’s stuff,” added Joe.



Moving further into the room the brothers could now see the size of the collection. They could also see more items of interest. On the wall was a tapestry with the title “Feast of the Two Princes” engraved into a brass plaque underneath. The tapestry showed a picture of many people sitting down to a huge meal in celebration. As the family gazed at the faded work of art they couldn’t help but feel that there was something familiar about this image.

“What’s that on the smaller boy’s shoulder? Is it a monkey?” asked Joe as he pointed at the younger of the two princes.

“It looks like it,” said mum, “but I don’t see a tail.”

Dad had picked up a museum leaflet on the way in and began to read it out to the children:

*It is said that this castle has seen its share of dark times and has not always been the home of a King. A*

*long time ago, there was a good king who ruled this land with kindness, honesty and fairness. He was loved by all that lived here and all were happy and content....well almost all. You see, the king had an uncle who thought that he deserved the crown, so he plotted to kill the king and steal it away.*

*Unknown to all, the evil uncle practiced in dark magic and on the kings birthday, he poisoned the king and all his loyal followers. From then on the kingdom was ruled by the evil uncle who made all the people, work for him, children too. And if they didn't work they were put in the dungeons. Soon the land became colourless and not at all a nice place to live.*

*All seemed lost until one day a group of travellers lead by two brave young princes managed to...*

“Boring!” interrupted Max, “can we go yet?”

“There’s one more room,” said Mum, “let’s have a quick look in there and then see if we can find somewhere to buy everyone an ice-cream.” Mum and Dad continued to look at the exhibits and moved off into the next room.



# Wrong Place At The Wrong Time

Joe wanted to know more about this old story so he started to read from where Dad had been interrupted.

“Hey Joe, look at me, I’m Sir farts-a-lot.”

Joe turned round to see Max wearing one of the Knights helmets and marching on the spot.

“Put it back or you’ll get us in trouble,” whispered Joe looking round to make sure no one had seen.

Max continued to march but now no longer on the spot.

“Trump, trump, trump,” he went as he moved around the room making raspberry noises with each step.

“Put it back,” whispered Joe again.

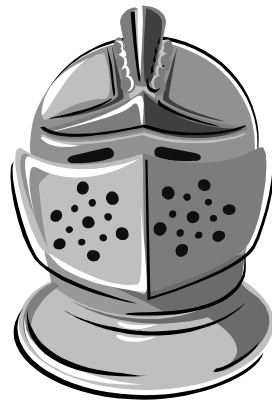
“Trump, trump, trump” went Max.

“Max,” said Joe a little louder now. He could see that the helmet was too big for him and that Max wouldn’t be able to see clearly where he was going.

“Trump, trump, trump,” the younger brother continued.

“Trump, trump, trump.” He was now heading dangerously close to an antique table in the corner.

“Trump, trump, trump.”



“Max! Watch out!” warned Joe but it was too late. Bang! Max’s head hit the table. The impact was so hard it should have knocked him out but luckily the helmet protected him and he was only knocked to the floor.

“Hey, these things really work,” said Max as he removed the helmet feeling a little dizzy.

“Are you OK?” said Joe rushing to help him up.

“I’m fine, but I think Sir Farts-a-lot has had the wind knocked out of him,” joked Max.

Joe helped his younger brother up and they inspected the table to see if it was damaged.

“That wasn’t there before,” said Joe as he pointed to a small drawer now sticking out of the side of the table.

“It must be a secret compartment,” Max said excitedly, “I’ve seen these on telly.” Joe slid the drawer open further to find a small corked bottle inside. He gently lifted the bottle for a closer look. There was nothing special about the bottle, it was made of clear glass and a string was attached to a cork in the top. However, what was interesting was its contents. Inside the bottle was a green liquid which seemed to swirl and rotate all on its own.

“Let me see, let me see,” Max said.

“Wait, it could be dangerous,” replied Joe holding Max back with his free hand.

“Let me see!” Max grabbed for the bottle but only managed to get hold of the string.

“No, wait!” said Joe still holding onto the bottle, “there’s something inside.”



It was too late. Max eager to see what they had found pulled on the string. Joe too pulled on the bottle not wanting to let go of it yet. The two brothers matched each other for strength both pulling as hard as they could. Pop! The cork flew out and they both fell backwards onto the floor again. The bottle, now uncorked, lay on the floor between them. Sitting up the two brothers looked at each other and then back at the bottle. Before they could move to grab it a cloud of green smoke started to come out of the end. More and more smoke came out, much more than the bottle could possibly hold inside and it was forming into a shape. The shape of a person.

Joe cried out, “Hide!”

The bothers quickly dived under the table and watched cautiously from the shadows. When all the smoke had

stopped exiting the bottle it formed the shape of a small person and in another second the misty green form became solid.

“Great Goblins breath,” said the new guest to himself. He was small, about the same size as the brothers, wore a saggy pointed hat and dark green robes. It looked like the little man took out a pocket watch and closely examine it. The boys couldn’t quite see his face but could tell that he was old from the sound of his squeaky voice. “This isn’t right, oh no, this isn’t right at all,” said the old man shaking his head. Suddenly, he stopped moving and the brothers thought that he had realised they were there. “The King, the King! I must save the King!”

Out of his robe the old man pulled a crooked staff with a glowing green stone at the top. The boys watched the old man quickly hold up the staff, stone aloft and then he began mumbling strange words to himself. Out of the stone grew a strange bubble of light. The man continued to mumble and the bubble of light grew in size. Larger and larger it grew and soon it engulfed the old man. Still growing and growing the bubble edged closer to Joe and Max.

“It’s going to surround us too,” Max said to Joe, “we need to get out of here.” It was too late, the bubble of light blocked their way and a second later it was large enough that both

boys and the old man were now inside. The old man abruptly stopped mumbling and zap, everything went dark.

# Gemstonia

Joe and Max held tightly onto each other in the darkness. They both felt as if they were falling through space, but in a few seconds there was another zap. The boys suddenly found themselves sitting in an empty fireplace being stared at by the old man who had a very puzzled look on his face. “Jumping Jelly Babies, who are you and where did you come from?” said the old man.

The brothers looked at each other and then Joe spoke. “My name’s Joe and this is my brother Max and we, er, we come from England?” he said nervously.

“No no no, how did you get in my house, in my fireplace?” squeaked the old man.

“We don’t know,” said Joe. “We were hiding under the table and then we were here.”

“We’re sorry we opened your bottle,” added Max.

“Sorry? Sorry?” A smile spread across the old mans face as he realised what had happened. “You boys have rescued me. I was hiding in that bottle but the cork got stuck and I couldn’t get out. There’s no need to be sorry. I am in your debt,” explained the old man. “Wait, where are my manners. My name is Wisbubble the Green, but my friends call me Greeny and I am wizard to the King of

Gemstonia. Please, come, sit, let me explain.” The wizard helped the boys up and out of the fireplace and directed them to two chairs. They sat down and Greeny began to explain.

“Let me see,” said the wizard as he pulled out a gold pocket watch from inside his cloak. As he looked at the time piece, the boys couldn’t help but see the 5 dials on the face of the watch rotating at different speeds for a few seconds then suddenly stop. “The year is 904 and if I’m not mistaken, it’s just after lunch time,” said Greeny.

“What do you mean 904?” asked Joe.

“Oh my boy, you see we’re not in your time anymore, we’re over a thousand years in the past. And if I’m correct, a year ago today I hid from Zorag’s guards in that bottle just after the King was overthrown and his Kingdom taken.”

“What!” said the boys at the same time.

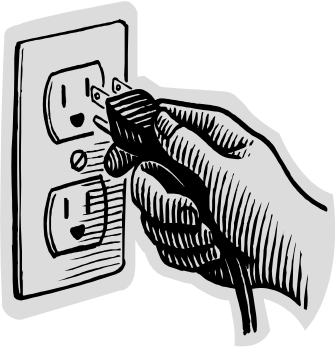
“The King was overthrown and his Kingdom...”

“No, the other bit. We’re a thousand years in the past?” interrupted Joe.

“Yes that’s right,” said Greeny.

“But we need to get home.”





“Well that shouldn’t be a problem,” replied the wizard. He took out his staff and held it up again like he did before. However, as soon as he did, the light in the stone faded and disappeared. “Oh bother,” said

Greeny as he lowered the staff. “I’m sorry boys. All the remaining moon stone energy has been used travelling here. I’m going to need to recharge my wand before I can send you back to your time.”

The boys looked at each other and sighed. “I suppose we can wait a few minutes for you to plug in your charger,” said Max.

“Plug in my charger?” said the confused wizard. “I’m afraid it’s going to be a problem. You see the wand can only be charged by the Moonstone, which.....” The wizard paused now remembering more from before his imprisonment in the bottle. He continued, “Which is in the Crystal Castle, and that is now in the hands of the evil sorcerer Zorag.”

“So we’re stuck here!” exclaimed Joe.

“I’m afraid so children. I am so sorry,” replied a very apologetic Greeny. “I should have checked I was alone



before casting my spell.” He then slumped in a nearby chair and sat scratching his head.

The boys went silent for a while, now fully understanding their situation. Suddenly Max stood up off his chair, “Right, how do we get in this castle and find this moonstone thing?”

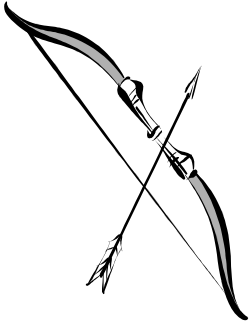
Both Joe and Greeny lifted their heads.

“You’re a wizard, surely you can get us in,” continued Max.

Greeny’s bushy silver eyebrows raised and part of the smile from earlier returned to his face. “He’s right, what we need is a plan,” said Greeny. Jumping up he continued, “and all adventurers can do with as much help as possible, so I have a couple of items for you that may assist us on our quest.”

Greeny went over to an old dusty chest barely visible under a pile of scrolls. He dragged it over to Joe and Max and opened it.

“These belonged to the King when he was young,” said the wizard as he pulled out two chain mail tunics and handed them to each of the brothers. “They’re enchanted by elves so they will protect you from even the sharpest blade.” He continued to rummage in the chest and pulled out a curved wooden stick. “Hmmm, for you I think,” he said handing it over to Joe.



“What is it?” asked Joe.

“It’s Bolan’s Bow, try it, but be careful. In the right hands it can be very powerful.”

“How? I have no arrow and it doesn’t have a string.”

“Well use it as if it does. You’ll see,” explained the wizard.

Joe held up the bow in his left hand and with his other hand placed his fingers around the imaginary string where the end of the arrow should be.

“Now pull back the string,” said Greeny, quickly adding, “but don’t let go. Not inside at least.”

Joe using his right hand pulled back the imaginary arrow. All at once there was a sudden whooshing sound and a string made of a bright glowing beam connected each end of the bow. In the middle of the string and bow appeared an arrow made of the same strange radiant yellow light.

“Wow!” said a surprised Max.

Not wishing to let go of the arrow, Joe eased forward his hand and the glowing arrow and string faded away. Just to make sure he wasn’t imagining it, he tried again. “Whoosh!” the brightly glowing arrow re-appeared.

“Keep that close at all times,” said the wizard, “you never know when it could save your life.” He turned to Max and handed him what looked like a shabby old blanket.

“What’s that?” Max said, slightly offended. “Where’s my weapon?”

“The best knight is one who can win without swinging a single blow. Go on, wrap it around you,” said Greeny.

Max reluctantly draped the blanket around himself. As the blanket went over his shoulders, his body disappeared. All that was left was Max’s head hovering in the air. He pulled the blanket up and over his head and was gone.

“Ouch,” said Joe, “something’s just pinched me.”

A muffled giggle could then be heard somewhere in the room. Suddenly, one of the cups on the table rose into the air and then moved towards Joe. He watched it as it went around his head twice and then landed back on the table.

“OK, you’ve had your fun. Now put that somewhere safe, we need to leave,” said the old wizard. Max removed the blanket and placed it in his rucksack. Greeny took out two cloaks, some clothes and handed them to the brothers.

“Cool, what do these do?” they both said.

“These are extra special, put these on and you will be....” the old man paused, then triumphantly said, “warm!”

Laughing, the wizard added, “Not everything needs to be magical to be useful you know, plus they’ll make blend in. Now put them on and let’s go. I’ll explain the plan on the way”. With that he headed out of the door. The two brothers quickly changed and wrapped the cloaks around themselves and followed Greeny outside.

# Belch

“We were celebrating the Kings birthday and he was giving a speech to all the people in the castle. All the knights were there and, in line with tradition, everyone was given a glass of castle brew. At the end of the speech the King made a toast, the great bell toiled and everyone raised their glasses and drank. Soon people started to freeze exactly where they stood, their skin changing to a grey stony colour. The brew had been poisoned. They had all been changed to stone,” explained the wizard.

“What about you?” asked Max.

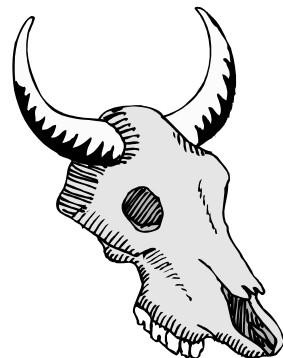
“I very nearly drank the poison too,” said Greeny. “It wasn’t until the last moment I detected a faint smell of brimstone, the main ingredient in rock related potions.

“What happened next?” asked Joe eager to know more.

“The castle gates were unlocked and an evil army of Borks were let in,” answered the wizard.

Joe and Max looked at each other, puzzled. “What’s a Bork?” they said together.

“Oh it’s a horrible beast. Made by magic, it’s a creature formed from the bones of long dead animals.



The dark spell binds different body parts together and then brings them to life. Dark magic at its worst,” Greeny explained. He could see the brothers looked confused so he continued. “Each Bork will look different in size and will move differently depending on what bones are used, but all of them will completely obey their maker. A Bork could have the legs of a dog, body of a pig and the skull of a rhino with the teeth, claws and horns of all. Making one ugly and very dangerous skeleton of the undead.”

Max and Joe realised how much of a dangerous situation they were in now but they both knew they must face their fears to get home. “So how did you escape?” asked Max.

“Once I knew there was nothing I could do to stop the siege I used my wand’s magic to teleport here, I wanted to get reinforcements and take them back to the castle.

Unfortunately, once I arrived here there were already Borks sniffing around outside so I hid in the bottle, got stuck, and the rest you know,” explained Greeny.

“What’s the plan to get into the castle?” enquired Joe not wishing to dwell further on explanations of the dangers ahead. He had a feeling they would have to deal with them soon enough.

The wizard continued, “We first need to visit the enchanted pool of life to seek the advice of the mermaids. They will hopefully help us in our quest,” said the wizard.

“Mermaids,” Joe said quietly to Max as the wizard lead the way forward, “whatever next?”

They walked for what seemed like hours, first following the path of a river, then climbing over rocks and boulders. When they were past the rock the travellers were met with a wall of trees.

“The Forgotten Forest,” announced the old wizard. “Deep in this wood we will find the pool of life, but unfortunately it’s not going to be easy. Many an adventurer has lost his way in this wood. We must be very careful for it is said that the trees can move and once inside the forest you can end up walking in circles for years never finding your way out again.”

“What if we mark our way? Then we wont get lost,” said Joe. He turned to his brother, “Max, can I have your note pad and a pen from your rucksack.”

Max handed over the items and Joe quickly drew an arrow on one sheet.



Then, finding a stone, placed the paper on the floor with the stone on top. The arrow pointed towards them and away from the forest.

“Marvelloso!” cried the wizard. “The arrow points the way out, if we keep adding these we can follow them back out once we have found the pool.”

The small group set off and every twenty metres Joe drew another arrow and placed it on the ground pointing the way they had just come. Soon they were deep within the wood. Greeny lead the way followed by Joe and then Max. Max thought he saw something poke out behind a tree then disappear again. “Must be the light making shadows,” Max thought to himself. A few minutes later it happened again. There was something watching them. Max decided to investigate. Not wanting to be seen he took out his blanket of invisibility and placed it over his head. Retracing his path he headed back towards the last arrow marker. As he got closer to the paper he heard a rustle in the bushes to one side. As quick as a flash a small black creature jumped out, ran up to the paper marker, promptly screwed it into a ball and ate it. “Burp! Yuck!” went the creature and then shot off back into the bush.

Max surprised at this event, knew Joe and Greeny must be told. Before he ran off to catch up with the others he took out another pen so that he could re-draw the arrow marker.

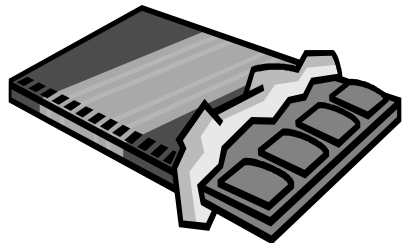


“Oh no,” thought Max, “I don’t have another notepad.”

Looking in his rucksack Max could see the wrapper to his chocolate bar was made of paper. Still wearing the invisibility blanket he quickly took off the paper wrapper and drew an arrow on it. He placed it back on the floor, put a small rock on top to stop it from moving and then set off to find the wizard and his brother. Max hardly made a few steps when he heard behind him, “Burp! Yum, yum!” Slowly turning, Max could see that the paper wrapper with the arrow he just drawn on was gone. Sitting in its place, in the middle of the path, was that same black creature.

“Why hasn’t it run off?” he wondered. Then he knew, “Chocolate!”

Again Max went looking in his rucksack, this time for the bar of chocolate. Breaking off a piece he dropped it on the floor and took a couple of steps back. Instantly the creature sniffed the air. As quick as a flash the strange black being ran up to the chocolate, sniffed it first and then in one quick motion grabbed it and thrust it into its mouth. There it sat, happily munching away on a square of milk chocolate almost the same size as its head. It was only a few feet away now and Max could see it much clearer. It was the size of a



kitten, completely black and had a tail as long as its body. It seemed to move like the small monkey that Max had previously seen in the zoo, but this animal was completely smooth like silk. It had large eyes with huge shiny black pupils, and its two small pointy ears that looked like they belonged to a cat. Max decided to slowly remove the blanket but before he did he made sure he had another piece of chocolate in his hand. The creature was far too occupied enjoying his treat to notice Max. When he finished he looked up, saw Max and “Buurrrppp!” The small black animal let out an enormous belch and ran off behind a nearby rock.

“It’s OK,” said Max, “I won’t hurt you.” Holding out the chocolate Max gently spoke, “Come on, yum yum.” Max could see the creature was scared, but he could also tell that it was very interested in getting more of that wonderful tasting food he had just eaten. Slowly Max tempted him into taking a second piece. By the third piece, the creature was happily sitting on Max’s shoulder munching away.

They had become friends.

# Mermaids

Max caught up with the others and rejoined the party of adventures.

“Where did you go?” asked Joe not looking behind. “Don’t drop back too far or you’ll get lost.”

“Burp!” came a loud reply.

“Max!” said Joe. “That’s disgust..” Joe stopped mid word, he had spotted the black animal perched on his brother’s shoulder. “Don’t move. There is something on your shoulder!”

“Oh that. It’s nothing. That’s just Belch,” replied Max calmly.

“Belch?” questioned Joe in amazement.

“Yeah I found him eating your paper arrows,” Max explained, “but we’re friends now.”

“Come on you two, the lake we’re looking for is just behind these trees,” interrupted Greeny. “Ah, I see we have a new member in our group. What you have there is a wood imp. They are rarely seen and it’s even more rare to befriend one. Be careful as they are extremely mischievous and quite rude.”

“That makes two of them,” remarked Joe.



As they walked further on they finally came across an opening in the forest. There glistening in the sunlight was the calmest pool the brothers had ever seen. Not a single ripple could be seen. The water reflected the sunlight like liquid silver.

“Now what?” asked Joe.

“We have to summon the Mermaids,” replied the wizard.

“How do we do that?” said Max as he passed Belch another piece of chocolate.

“We have to offer them a gift,” answered Greeny. “and if they like it they will help us, if not then we’re stuck.”

Max broke off a piece of chocolate and threw it into the water, much to Belch’s dismay. The adventurers waited. Nothing happened.

“I have heard that these Mermaids are a little strange,” said Greeny uneasily. “They er, are, er, how should one say, a few straws short of a haystack,” he explained hoping the two boys would understand.

“Oh they’re bonkers!” replied Joe.

“Yes. Bonkers,” said Greeny. “Perhaps something shiny would entice them into talking to us?”

Joe thought as hard as he could but couldn't come up with any ideas. Frustrated he thrust his hands into his pockets and sighed. As he did, he felt a 2 Euro coin that he was going to use to buy himself a 'Glorious Gumball Gobstopper'. Looking at the coin he could see that it was made of a silver and gold coloured metal, and shone brightly in the sun's rays. “Oh well,” he thought and tossed the coin into the pool. Almost immediately bubbles started to appear where the coin entered the water. The bubbles became bigger and bigger until the water was splashing and foaming quite aggressively. All of a sudden, out of the erupting water popped two girls, one with dark hair and the other blonde.

“Mine!” said one to the other. “I saw it first.”

“No you didn't. I spotted it first, you were busy dressing up your pet frog,” the other replied.

“No I wasn't you swamp toad.”

“Yes you were, you dung beetle.”

“It's mine!”

“No, it's mine!”

The two Mermaids were both pulling at the coin unaware of their onlookers.

“Get off you marsh monster!”

“You’re a marsh monster and you smell of squid poop!”

“No I don’t, you do!”

“No, you do!”

The Mermaids now had a hold of each other hair, pulling back and forth and continuing to squabble.

“Ahem,” interrupted the old wizard.

The two water maidens, oblivious to the wizards request, continued to fight.

“Gerroff you rotten trout.”

“Ow, you slimy fish face.”

“Ahem!” Greeny repeated, this time a little louder. Still they continued to push and pull each other, totally ignoring the adventurers. Greeny muttered a spell and tapped his throat twice.

“I SAID, EXCUSE ME!” The wizards voice boomed so loudly that birds in the trees for miles around flew away in fright. The Mermaids suddenly stopped fighting and, still holding onto each others hair, quickly turned to face Greeny. Both, now as red as a post box, promptly let go of each other.

“You have it dear sister,” said one mermaid to the other.

“No you have it,” was her reply.

“No you”

“Please, you have it”

“WHEN YOU’RE BOTH FINISHED!” again he boomed.

The wizard then tapped his throat a second time and his voice returned to normal. Brushing the hair away from their faces they addressed the visitors.

“Thank you, thank you for our gift,” said the water maidens together.

“My name is Meloonie,” said Meloonie.

“and mine’s Dazey-May” giggled Dazey-May.

“And we are the guardians of the pool of life,” they said together.

Dazey-May and Meloonie dived under the water laughing.

“I thought you said they would help us,” said Joe to the wizard.

“Watch, you’ll see,” he replied.

Then, like the cork out of a champagne bottle, Meloonie shot out of the water. You could now clearly see her fishy tail. At the peak of her jump she seemed to hang suspended in the air and uttered the words “We thank you

all so kindly..." Then *splash!* She was back under the water. At the same time as she went under, out shot Dazey-May and spoke mid flight just as her sister had!

"...for the gift you gave today." Then *splash!* In she went too. *Woosh!* Out popped Meloonie yet again.

"We will answer just one question..." said Meloonie high in the air, splash.

"...to help you on your way," finished her sister, splash.

Max looked at his brother and raised his eyebrows in bewilderment. "They really are nuts," he said quietly to his brother.

"How do we sneak into the Sunstone Castle?" asked Greeny.

The mermaids resumed their strange acrobatic double act, taking it in turns jumping out of the water and talking in half sentences.



"The castle is guarded..."  
splash.

"...by Borks day and night,"  
splash.

"So to enter by secret..." splash.

"...you must travel out of sight,"  
splash.



“Travel east to the great forest...”

“...and there you will see.”

“At the edge, standing proud...”

“...is an ancient oak tree.”

“As old as the hills...”

“...it has not one leaf.”

“And an entrance can be found...”

“...in the roots underneath.”

“But the door will not show...”

“...for just any passer by”

“The password must be uttered...”

“...Oogle Noodles you must cry”

“But before you leave...”

“...know this to be true”

“One drop of this water...”

“evil spells will undo”

At that the sisters waved  
goodbye and dove back under  
the water out of site.



“What do you think they meant by that bit about the water?” asked Max.

“I’m not sure,” replied Greeny, “but we perhaps should take some. You never know.”

Max searched in his bag for something to carry liquid in but all he could find were his two water pistols. “I suppose these will have to do,” he said and proceeded to fill them up. Once finished the adventurers retraced their path through the forgotten wood, helped by Belch as he had eaten most of the arrow markers, and then headed east.

## Secret Passage

Before them lay the planes of Gemstonia. It was now dusk so the group of adventurers decided it would be best to stop for the night. Staying close to each other the brothers soon fell asleep, tired from the day's travelling.

"Stay down," whispered Greeny as he hastily awoke Joe and Max early the next morning, "someone's coming." Unknown to the group they had camped a few metres away from the road that led to the castle. On the road, and heading towards them, was an old lady with a tired old donkey and cart. "I think it's safe," said the wizard. "You two stay here, out of sight, and I'll talk to her." Off walked Greeny towards the approaching traveller.

After a few minutes he returned and informed Joe and Max of his conversation with the old lady. She had told him that the castle was guarded by Borks and that she was on her way there to hand over all her valuable possessions. If she did not then she would be visited by Borks and they would take it anyway and most likely burn down her house. This was the same for all the people in the kingdom. The two brothers felt sorry for the old lady and wondered what would happen to the people of Gemstonia once they had left.

After a few hours walking they at last reached the edge of the Great Forest. Standing out amongst the other trees was a truly majestic looking oak.

“That’s it,” called Joe as he ran the last few metres towards it.

“Where’s the door?” asked Max walking around the grand tree looking for a way in.

“We need to use the password remember,” replied Joe.

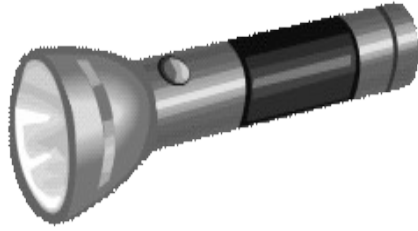
Both, standing now at the foot of the tree, spoke the secret words, “Oogle Noodles.”

Instantly the trees roots came alive and, moving like snakes, they parted making an opening big enough for a person to fit though. Through the entrance the travellers could see steps leading down into the darkness. Max grabbed a torch out of his back pack and headed down the steps.



At the bottom of the steps was a long tunnel leading off north into the distance. From the roof of the passageway hung more roots which must have been from the trees in the forest above.

“Burp!” went Belch feeling a little scared and the noise echoed down the endless underground corridor.



“Looks like we’ve got some more walking to do,” said the old wizard.

Along the path the group went, Max leading the way with his pocket torch followed by Greeny and then Joe. Occasionally they would see a confused looking mole or rabbit stare at them a while and quickly dart back into its tunnel in the side of the passageway, probably wondering what these humans were doing in their home.

The tunnel kept going in a straight line, although Max’s torch only lit a few steps in front of them. All of a sudden the torchlight disappeared.

“Max?” said Joe. No answer came. “Max!” he yelled again. This time he heard his brother.

“Weeeeeeeeeee,” came the distant reply.

“Greeny are you still there?” asked Joe.

“Yes, I’m h...” started the old wizard.

“Greeny? Greeny!” shouted Joe. He was gone too. Joe stood there in the dark, alone and now very concerned with the disappearance of his companions. Slowly he stepped

forward. All of a sudden his feet gave way and he found himself falling. “Arrgghh!” he yelled thinking this was the end.

Joe soon stopped yelling as he realised that he was not falling but sliding. His body was still in contact with the ground only he was moving downwards at speed. “This feels like the water toboggan at our holiday resort,” he thought to himself. In the distance he could hear the voice of his younger brother shrieking with delight. He continued to slide down.

Soon a light appeared in the distance and he was quickly heading straight for it. The pool of light grew bigger and bigger. It was getting closer and closer until finally it was upon him. This time the floor did give way and he was falling, but not for long. Splash! Joe landed in a pool just deep enough to break his fall. He swam to the surface to the cheers of his brother.

“Wow!” said Max excitedly, “what a ride.”

Max was sitting at the side of the pool holding out a hand ready to help his brother out of the water. Greeny wasn’t far away, he was wringing out his soaked cloak.

After catching his breath Joe looked around at his new surroundings. The party of adventurers were now in a huge cavern lit in a warm red light. The source of this light

was a lava stream flowing across the middle of the huge cave. Spanning the flow of molten rock was a chequered bridge and carved into a boulder near the bridge was some writing. As the group moved cautiously towards the bridge they could feel the burning heat growing from the river of lava.

Eager to cross, Max stepped on the first slab of stone.

“Wait!” yelled Greeny but it was too late. The slab instantly crumbled to dust and Max fell, down towards the deadly river below.

Unexpectedly, he stopped falling. Looking up he could see Joe fully stretched holding onto his back pack, and Greeny holding onto Joe’s legs. They had grabbed him just in time.

Pulling for their life they hauled up both Max and a very scared Belch, then all of them fell in a heap on the floor.

“I think it’s good practice to read signs before jumping in feet first,” said the exhausted wizard. “Especially if it’s one warning us of danger nearby.”

Gathering themselves, they moved over to the rock to look at the words chiselled into it.



**The smallest steps first,  
then onwards in the knight,  
thrice forward to the castle  
and a bishop twice right**

“It’s instructions,” said Greeny.

“That’s not how you spell night,” said Max. “It doesn’t have a K at the start.”

“Not the night you’re thinking of,” replied Joe. “A night with a K in front is the knight used in a game of chess.” Joe continued, “Each line must be how you move across the bridge.”

“And the bridge is made like a chess board,” added his brother. “But what’s a big hop twice right?” said Max.

“I think that’s a letter ‘S’ not a ‘G’,” answered Joe. “That’s how they used to write letters.”

“Well done boys,” congratulated Greeny. “I’ll cross and you follow but I’ll need you to tell me where to step. I never was one for board games.”

“OK, the smallest steps first. That must mean the smallest piece on the chess board is how we must start,” explained Joe.



“I know that,” added Max. “It’s the pawn which can move one or two places on its first move. So steps must mean two”

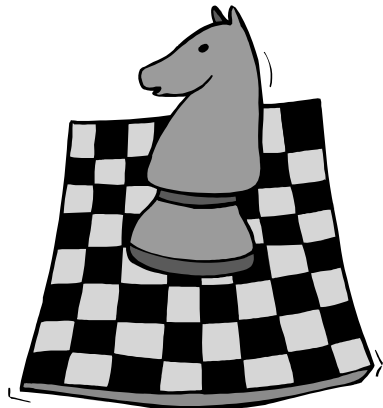
Greeny, ever so carefully, stepped over the now missing slab of rock onto the next square. It was solid. “Phew,” he uttered quietly.

Joe continued, “then onward in the knight.” He knew that Greeny needed to take two steps forward and then one to the left or right, but which one? Looking at the bridge it was clear. The wizard was at the left side of the bridge so there was only one choice. “Move to the slab two in front and one to the right,” shouted Joe.

The old wizard obeyed and leapt to the correct slab. Again, it was solid.

“Thrice forward to the castle?” thought Joe. He knew the wizard needed to move forward in a straight line but how much? “You need to move forward, but I’m not sure how much thrice is,” called Joe.

“That’s OK, I do,” came the reply. “It’s an old way of saying three.” Greeny jumped three places forward and landed safely.



“Right, last one. A bishop twice right,” thought Joe to himself although it didn’t take him any time to work this one out. He called out to Greeny, “You need to move two places diagonally to the right.”

Greeny followed the instructions and in one leap made it to the correct slab. From there he could now reach the other side.

“That really was a big hop,” giggled Max.

The brothers did exactly the same as the wizard and both were soon at the other side of the bridge. Carved in the wall of the cavern they could now see a stone door. The adventurers, very pleased with their achievement, headed towards it.

## Petrified

It took the strength of all three adventurers to open the stone door wide enough for them to squeeze through. Greeny cautiously entered first, followed by Joe and then Max.

The group emerged in to a small dark room. Using his torch Max could make out that they were in a prison cell, and in the far wall was very strong looking door made of thick iron bars. Furthermore, after trying to open it they found the door to be locked.

“What do we do now?” asked Max.

Joe took out his bow and pulled back on the imaginary string aiming at the lock. The room lit up with a bright yellow glow from the arrow of light.

“Wait,” whispered Greeny quickly placing a hand on the young travellers shoulder, “the noise will alert the castle’s occupants above.”

Looking through the bars, Max could see a small person a short distance away. It was a dwarf but he wasn’t moving, not even breathing.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“Nothing we need to worry about, it’s just the prison guard and as you can see he’s completely petrified,” said Greeny.

The wizard was right. Frozen in time, there he stood, transformed to stone. Nearby the dwarf was a small dusty wooden table and on the table stood an equally dusty jug and mug.

“Looks like he drank the evil sorcerer’s potion,” exclaimed Max.

“Of that there is no doubt,” added Greeny.

Max could just make out a key dangling from a hook on the wall behind the dwarf.

“I have an idea,” said Max. Opening his back pack he took out a piece of chocolate and shown it to Belch who’s eyes widened at the sight of this delicious treat. Max then pointed at the lock and using the torch lit up the key on the wall. “Get the key belch,” he added. Belch immediately understood.

Squeezing through the bars, the little creature cautiously hopped across the floor and using the table to climb onto, he grabbed the key and quickly scurried back to his friend.



“Well done,” praised Max and gladly gave Belch his reward.

The door now unlocked and the way ahead clear, the team of adventurers exited the cell into the corridor.

“Right boys, you two must stay here while I sneak into the great hall and recharge my wand,” said Greeny. Then looking at the younger brother, he continued, “I’ll need to borrow that invisibility blanket if you please.”

Max handed over the magical blanket and they both watched Greeny turn and walk towards a staircase further down the corridor.

At the bottom of the stairs and looking back over his shoulder he added, “Now remember, stay here and stay quiet. I will be back very soon”.

It felt like hours had gone by since the wizard had left but in fact it was only a few minutes. The boys knew to follow the instructions they were given and sat quietly waiting for the old wizard’s return.

“He’d look good in our garden,” whispered Max to Joe.

“What?” Joe quietly replied.

“Him, that dwarf. I’m sure dad could find somewhere to put him,” replied Max.

“Don’t be silly,” Joe said in a very serious tone, and then added jokingly, “he’d scare the cat.”

“Doesn’t scare me,” Max boasted. Directing his comments at the stone statue, and in his best gangster voice, said, “You looking at me? You looking at me?”

Joe rolled his eyes and shook his head. He hadn't noticed that Max had removed his 'super soaker water pistols' from the back pack. He and Belch were now pointing them at the life size 'Warhammer' model.

"Just move one millimetre and we'll shoot," joked Max and with that they both pulled the triggers and let the stone dwarf have a short burst.

"Max!" forcefully whispered Joe managing not to shout, "that's not very nice, just sit down."

"Uh oh," came Max's reply closely followed by a scared sounding "burp" from his small companion.

"Uh oh? Uh oh good? Or Uh oh bad?" enquired Joe.

"When has 'Uh oh' ever been good?" replied Max.

Following Max's gaze Joe could see it too. Exactly where the water had hit the stone statue colour was returning, and it was spreading, quickly. In less than ten seconds it had completely spread all over the dwarf and to make matters worse, he was now starting to move.



Shaking his head, and slowly gaining his senses, the dwarf caught sight of the two boys. "You, YOU! You put me under that spell!" bellowed the very annoyed prison guard.

In a flash he had pulled the double edged axe out of his belt and was advancing on them. Joe, Max and belch backed away but were blocked by a solid wall. Closer and closer advanced the dwarf with his axe now raised aloft. Just as he was about to swing there was a flash of green light and the axe flew out of his hands and across the room away from the young adventures. With a thud it buried itself into the wooden table.

“Stop!” commanded a familiar voice from the entrance to the stairs. It was Greeny, he was back and by the looks of things, his wand was now fully charged.

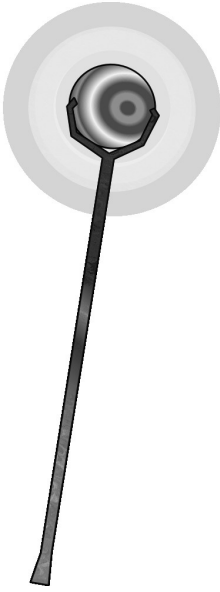
“Greeny?” asked a puzzled looking dwarf.

“Yes!” was his stern reply, “and these two are not your enemy.”

The dwarf looking very embarrassed spoke. “My humblest apologies,” he said. Turning to face the brothers he added, “please forgive my misunderstanding.” The dwarf continued. “My name is Dundel Orkenfold, prison guard for his majesty the King of Gemstonia.”

“It looks like you have a magical weapon in your hands there Max,” said Greeny gesturing towards the water pistol.

“The water, from the lake, that must have reversed the spell,” said Max looking down at his super soaker.



“Unquestionabubble, you are correct my little friend, but pressing business is ahead for me so I must not delay. The wand is recharged and we need to get you boys home,” instructed the wizard.

Greeny stood before the brothers ready to cast the spell to send them forward in time. The boys prepared themselves, and then looked at each other. Instantly they seem to know what the other was thinking.

“Wait!” shouted Joe. “What’s going to happen to you?”

“and the Kingdom,” added Max.

“That is not your concern young ones, your time is not here,” the old wizard gently reassured them. “It is time for you to go home.”

“No,” Joe interrupted again. “You have helped us, it’s now our turn to help you.” Looking at his brother he knew Max felt exactly the same. With a new found confidence he continued, “Come close. I have a plan.”



## Water, Whooshes And Wizards

The adventurers, now joined by Dundel the dwarf quietly made their way up the steps from the prison cells beneath the castle. Cautiously, they surveyed the courtyard.

From a sheltered archway at the top of the staircase they could see a large open area, the many buildings of the bailey, and the tall castle walls surrounding it all. There, dotted throughout the inner castle in groups of different sizes and frozen in time were all the Kings knights. Again, like their first encounter with the dwarf, they stood still like oversized garden stone sculptures. But they weren't alone. Also, in equal number throughout the bailey was another army, only this one was quite unfrozen. In groups, on their own, some lazing, some squabbling, but all bony and all deadly.

"Borks," exclaimed Joe.

"I can swing an axe as good as any soldier, but we can't beat those odds," said a concerned Dundel.

"We don't need to. We have something better," said Joe.

"What we have is the element of surprise."

Greeny spoke, "I wish you well young adventures." Then looking at Dundel he added, "You make sure nothing happens to those two."

“Eye, you have my word,” replied the dwarf with a nod.

“Good luck,” and with that, Greeny sneaked off in the direction of the main castle tower.

“There, that’s what we need,” said Joe pointing at the horse and cart they saw earlier that day, now clearly empty of the old lady’s contents. “Right, you know the plan.”

At that, Max placed the blanket over all of them and as quiet as mice they slowly moved towards the transport. Once they were next to the cart they sprang into action. Joe and Max jumped into the cart (with belch now safely tucked in the rucksack) and Dundel made for the drivers seat and reins.

“Ha!” yelled the dwarf and with a jolt the horse, cart, driver and passengers took off towards the first groups of knights. Instantly, the Borks stopped what they were doing and looked towards the commotion, but they was too late. Super soakers in both hands Max had begun squirting the nearest stone knights. The surprise had worked, so far.

“Here they come!” yelled Dundel as he swerved the horse and cart towards the next group of frozen knights.

Two large identical Borks which looked like a cross between a lion’s body and a wolf’s head came bounding towards them. Joe raised the bow and fired off a first bolt. Woosh! It hit one of them directly between the eyes (or

rather eye sockets seeing as they were skeletons). It exploded in flash of light sending bits of bone pieces scattering. Joe stood there amazed at his own shot.

“Well don’t stop, hit em again!” yelled Max as he continued to fire off shots of his own.

The second lion/wolf was closer now, almost on top of them. It leaped in the air directly towards the cart and the two brothers. Again, there was an explosion of light and bone.

“That was close,” said a relieved Joe.

By now the knights that had already been hit with water were waking up from their spell. And as with knights, it didn’t take any time for them to realise the situation they were in and start attacking the Bork army themselves.

What a sight, there weaving between building and battling knights went the dwarf driven horse and cart. Jets of water and bolts of light rapidly firing out of the vehicle. Slowly but surely more and more knights were freed from their spell and the tied of the battle was turning.

“I think that’s almost all of them freed,” yelled Max to Joe.

Suddenly there was a crack of thunder, and lightening seemed to appear from the highest part of the castle.

“Look,” said Joe pointing towards two figures who seemed to be locked in combat at the top of the bell tower. “That’s Greeny!”

“We need to help him,” added Max, “Dundel?”

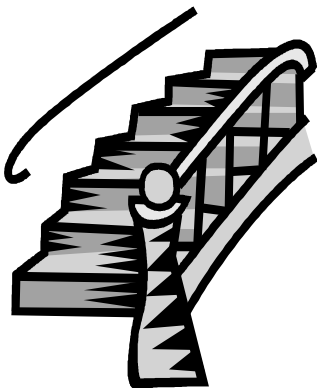
“No problem, on my way!” came the reply as the dwarf pulled the reins to guide the horse towards their new mission.

Dundel pulled up the cart at the entrance to the tower and the brothers jumped out. “You’ll need to take the staircase to the left for the tower. If you don’t mind, I got me some Borks to bash if those fancy knights don’t get to em all first.”

“Thanks,” said the brothers and quickly ran though the towers doorway.

Up and up the towers spiral staircase ran Joe and Max hoping that their friend was ok. As they neared the top they could see scorch marks and debris along the route.

“Greeny and Zorag must have fought through the castle



and headed upwards,” thought the brothers.

Suddenly the staircase went off into two directions.

“The left,” said Max leading the way. He didn’t get very far as he

soon found the way blocked. They could now clearly hear the sorcerer and wizard exchanging powerful spells above.

“We’ll have to take that other staircase,” said Joe.

The two boys ran as fast as they could to the second stairway hoping that it would lead them in the right direction.

Out onto the battlements sprang the two young adventures. They were now barely fifty feet away from Greeny but there was no way to get to him. From where they stood there was no path to the bell tower. They could only watch as a ball of fire blasted from the evil sorcerer’s wand and crashed into a battle tired Greeny knocking him to the ground and his staff out of his hand.

Moving closer the sorcerer was within feet of the fallen defenceless wizard. Zorag now directly under the great bell with his wand pointing menacingly at Greeny, prepared for the final blow. “Did you think you could defeat me, a simple magician like yourself?” mocked the evil sorcerer.

Refusing to give up, Greeny defiantly replied, “You’re beaten, look down below, your army is defeated.”

“Ha!” roared an angered Zorag, “this is merely a minor set back. I will restore my army and take back all that is rightfully mine! But unfortunately you will not be around to see, for it is time for you to die!”

Zorag raised the wand to cast the killing strike, but Joe had too raised his weapon.

“You can’t get a clear shot,” said Max.

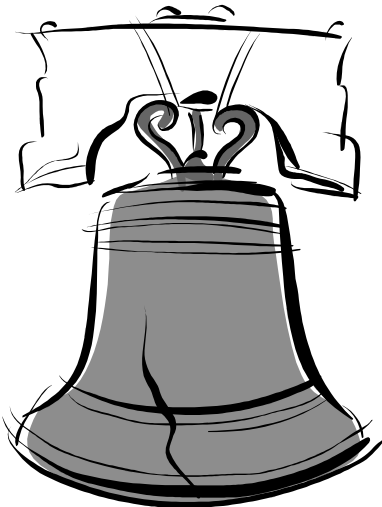
“Maybe,” replied Joe with the bow pulled fully back concentrating with all his might. Woosh! flew the bolt straight past Zorag missing him completely and up over the top of the bell. It vanished into the distant sky.

“Oh no, you missed,” shrieked Max.

“Did I?” came a calm reply.

All of a sudden there was a tearing of rope from the top of the great bell. The evil sorcerer looked up in surprise and realised where he was standing.

The thick rope holding aloft the great bell had been cut almost in two and what threads remained then snapped letting gravity do the rest.



Down went the bell landing with a huge “CLANG!” on top Zorag trapping him inside.

Up went a triumphant cheer from the spectators below.

The battle was over.

# Back To The Future

Over the next few days life started to return back to normal at the castle. The two brothers had wanted to stick around to see their wizard friend recover, plus they couldn't get home until he did.

On the night before the two brothers were due to leave, the King put on a huge banquet in honour of the two heroic young adventures (and not forgetting Greeny) and invited everyone in the castle.

To a fanfare of trumpets, the adventures were presented to the King. With crowds of knights, guests and a proud dwarf aligning the great hall, Greeny, Joe and Max walked triumphantly to the applause of everyone to stand in front of their royal hosts.

The king raised his hands and everyone fell silent.

Addressing everyone in the hall the king spoke, "Before you stand our gallant heroes. To them we owe our eternal gratitude for saving not only our lives but the kingdom of Gemstonia."

He approached the adventurers and drew out his sword.

"For showing great wisdom, fearlessness and for releasing the kings knights from an evil spell, I bestow the title of honouree prince of Gemstonia," spoke the King.



Carefully placing the flat side of his sword on Max's left then right shoulder he continued, "Arise, Sir Max".

Applause again filled the room. After a few seconds the King raised his hands again to silence the crowd.

"For showing great knowledge and courage against the odds

and for ridding the land of evil I bestow the title of honouree prince of Gemstonia," spoke the King. Gently placing the sword this time on each of Joe's shoulders, he then continued, "Arise, Sir Joe".

Again, the crowd applauded and again after a few seconds the king indicated for silence. The king moved to stand in front of the old wizard.

"For unfaltering loyalty and valour, I and the people of Gemstonia are forever grateful," thanked the King. "I know your not one for royal titles, but is there anything I can give you Wisbubble the Green?"

"Well," said Greeny and paused for a second as if thinking of some valuable gift. Then pointing towards the banquet, "I wouldn't mind one of those chicken wings if that's ok."



“Then so be it,” laughed the king, “let the festivities begin!”

That night was a wonderful occasion and everyone wanted to speak to the adventurers and hear of their tale.

The next morning Greeny had someone sent to bring the brothers normal clothes from his home.

After saying goodbye to all their new friends, Joe and Max got changed.

“I’m afraid you’ll have to leave the bow and blanket,” said Greeny. “It would be dangerous to take them back to your time.” He looked at Max, “and I’m sorry, but belch has to stop here too. Don’t worry, I’ll take good care of him for you.”

Max gave belch his last piece of chocolate, placed him on the wizards shoulder and patted him gently on the head.

“Right, so when and where do you want me to send you?” asked the old wizard.

“How about the courtyard just after we left,” replied Joe.

“No problem,” said Greeny.

“Will we ever see you again Greeny?” asked Max.

A large smile crept across the wizards face. “Perhaps,” he replied. “I can’t think of two better adventurers to have by my side,” and with a wink of his eye and the mumble of a spell, “pop!” the boys were gone.

Standing out in the sunshine, Joe and Max saw their Mother and Father coming out of the dungeon exhibit exit. Both brothers ran over and gave their parents a great big hug which seemed to last for minutes.

“Wow, that’s unexpected, but how did you two get out here?” asked Dad. “Never mind, I guess you’re bored of all this stuff. Lets go and get that ice-cream.”

Joe and Max looked at each other and grinned. “Actually Dad, we quite like castles, museums and that sort of stuff,” said Max.

“But perhaps a day at the theme park will be a nice rest,” said Joe as he winked at his brother before they both ran off towards the shop with the ice-cream.

“Rest. Rest?” Dad mumbled to himself with a bemused look on his face. “I don’t know, those kids are just unfathomabubble”.

