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opening extract from

Ms Wiz Mayhem

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published by

Macmillan Children's Books

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You're Kidding, Ms Wiz

Ms Wiz Smells a Rat

Ms Wiz and the Sister of Doom

The Secret Life of Ms Wiz

Terence Blacker

Illustrated by Tony Ross

CHAPTER ONE

A Very Regrettable Announcement

All day long, a tall, dark-suited stranger had been seen around the classrooms and corridors of St Barnabas School.

He had wandered in and out of the staff room, a weird, distant smile on his face. At lunch, he had sat in the dining room with the head teacher Mr Gilbert and had picked at his food, nodding seriously as the older man spoke.

He was sitting at the back of Miss Gomaz's classroom as Class Five arrived for their afternoon lesson. When Caroline Smith and Lizzie Thompson smiled at him, he made a note on the pad in front of him. Then Jack Beddows, who had always been something of a big mouth, asked him if he was a school inspector.

For a moment, the stranger had stared back with grey, unblinking eyes. "Not exactly," he said.

"Who *is* that weirdo?" muttered Jack as he sat beside his best friend Podge Harris.

"He's like The Thing From Outer Space," said Podge.

Miss Gomaz walked in. Somehow, she seemed paler than usual and ignored the man in the suit sitting at the back of her classroom.

"We shall be ending today's lesson ten minutes early," she said. "Mr Gilbert has an announcement to make to the whole school."

An announcement? At the end of the school day rather than at Assembly? The children of Class Five looked at one another. It was all very strange.

And it was just about to get even stranger.

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"Ahem." Mr Gilbert stood before the entire school in the school hall. Although he was a small man, he usually had a sort of bouncy authority to him. But today he looked shrivelled, dusty and old. Standing nearby, the tall, dark-suited stranger seemed to tower over him.

"Ah, well, I expect you're all wondering why I have asked you to gather here today." Mr Gilbert gave a sort of wince. "It's because I have a very important, very regrettable announcement." He hesitated, then took a deep breath. "This morning each of your parents will have received a letter. It tells them—" With a sudden movement, the head teacher reached into his pocket for a handkerchief and blew his nose loudly. When he looked up, his glasses were misted. "It tells them that, at the end of this summer term, St Barnabas School is to close."



There was a gasp from the children in the hall, followed by a confusion of whispered voices.

"But why?" asked Caroline, who was sitting with the rest of Class Five, leaning against the wall to Mr Gilbert's right.

"Why?" The head teacher gave a long and heartfelt sigh. Briefly he seemed to have forgotten what he was going to say, until the tall stranger standing nearby cleared his throat. Mr Gilbert glanced in his direction. "Perhaps I could ask Mr Andrews, the local Education Officer, to explain to you the reasons why St Barnabas has to close."

The Education Officer stepped forward. He clasped his hands in front of him, looked down at the children, then suddenly bared his teeth like a man who has been taking lessons on how to smile but hasn't quite got the hang of it yet. "It is of

course a matter of the deepest regret when any educational establishment is forced to close," he intoned.

"Yeah, he looked really upset," muttered Lizzie.

The Education Officer glanced irritably down at Class Five. "Not that I see this as really a closure. It's more an extension of parents' choice to use another school."

"What's he talking about?" said Caroline.

Again the Education Officer paused and stared threateningly at the row of Class Five children before turning back to his audience again. "Which is why a decision has been made, after much heart-searching."

"He'd have to search to find his heart," said Jack.

"So, as from next term" – the Education Officer raised his voice – "the pupils of this school will be absorbed into that of your good

friends and neighbours, Brackenhurst Primary School."

"*Brackenhurst*, eurgh!" Podge spoke loudly as if he had just trodden in something disgusting.

"We will, of course, be prepared to listen to your parents' views but I have to say that it would take something very exceptional to make us change our minds."

Podge nudged Jack. "Very exceptional," he whispered. "Maybe this is a case for Ms Wiz."

"Yes!" Several of the children of Class Five picked up Podge's words. The whisper went down the row: "Ms Wiz, it's a case for Ms Wiz, we're going to find Ms Wiz."

The Education Officer had stopped talking and was staring down at Podge.

"Perhaps we could all share this private conversation of yours," he said nastily. "Who or what is wiz?"

"Ah, yes, wiz, er . . . " Podge hesitated, then smiled suddenly. "I was just saying . . . I'm really desperate to go for a wiz," he said.

The Education Officer sighed. "A wiz? What's a . . .? Oh, I see. Yes, all right then."

Winking at Jack, Podge stood up and made his way out of the hall.

Outside, the school was deserted. Podge walked down the corridor and into his classroom. There he sat gloomily at his desk and buried his face in his hands. "Absorbed into Brackenhurst," he moaned. "I don't believe it."

"Bad show, eh?"

Podge looked up. There, sitting on Miss Gomaz's desk, was a rat. It smiled at him. "Yes, old boy, it's me," it said.

Podge had only met one talking, smiling rat in his life. Its name was Herbert and it belonged to Ms Wiz.



"Herbert?" said Podge.

"At your service, old bean," said the rat.

"Good old Ms Wiz." Podge laughed with relief. "She always said she went where magic was needed. We thought she had left the area – we haven't seen her for two years. She must have heard that St Barnabas was in trouble so she sent you along to find out what was—"

"You're joking." Herbert gave a

ratty little laugh. "There is no Ms Wiz these days. She's Mrs Dolores Arnold."

"You mean . . .?"

"Yup. Married," said Herbert. "Married alive. And worst of all—"

At that moment, the sound of children's voices could be heard coming down the corridor.

"Quick," said Podge, grabbing Herbert and putting him inside his jacket pocket.

The door was flung open. "So that's it," said Jack, who was followed by the rest of Class Five. "The best school in the world and they're going to close it down."

"Maybe," said Podge. "And maybe not."