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MAGICALIA

Race of Wonders



JENNIFER BELL

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Elle McNicoll

"A super-exciting and unputdownable story."

Thomas Taylor

"A proper rip-roaring adventure!"

Dominique Valente

"A spellbinding read."

Rachel Chivers Khoo

"An absolute tour-de-force."

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"A monstrously fun adventure."

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"A 2024 must read."

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"True magic."

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"Jennifer Bell makes the impossible seem possible ... an absolute triumph!"

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For Beth

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MAGICALIA

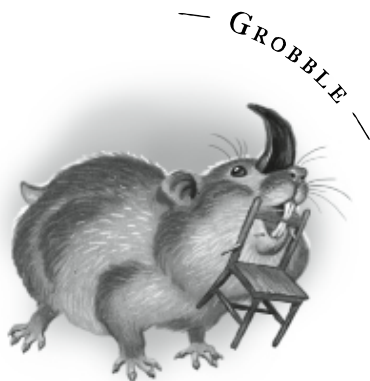
Race of Wonders



JENNIFER BELL



WALKER
BOOKS



1

Until a monster swallowed her PE kit, Bitsy's evening had been going to plan.

She'd finished all her homework, tidied her room and defeated her best friend, Kosh, at *Mario Kart*. *Twice*. After dinner, the two of them had blown up an inflatable mattress so he could stay over this weekend while his parents were away and join Bitsy and her dad on a holiday to Paris on Monday. There was only one thing left to do before they could call it a night.

"Recording in three, two..." Bitsy tapped a button on her laptop, adjusted her headphones, and leaned closer to the wireless microphone on her desk. "Hello and welcome to *Poddingham*, the local news podcast for Oddingham village. It's Friday the twenty-ninth of March. I'm your

host, Bitsy Wilder, and this week I'm joined by our sports correspondent—"

"—Koshan Ranasinghe!" Kosh declared his Sri Lankan surname like a football commentator announcing a goal. Sitting beside her, he had a tatty Oddingham FC beanie pulled over his floppy black hair and was wearing his usual slouchy T-shirt-and-tracksuit-bottoms combo. "Some of you might also know me as the boy who delivers your newspapers and *accidentally* rides a bike through your flowerbeds. Shout out to Mrs Harris on Bridge Lane for always being so chill about it!"

Bitsy covered the microphone with the sleeve of her cardigan. "Mrs Harris is *not* chill about it, by the way. I saw her yelling at your mum yesterday."

"You did?" Kosh paused. "Maybe edit that bit out."

Shaking her frizzy blonde curls, Bitsy ploughed on. "Coming up, Kosh has the lowdown on last night's football match between Oddingham and Bletchy Town. First, though, the headlines." She flipped open her trusty reporter's notebook and tried to ignore a heavy feeling of disappointment as she read, "*Tarmac trouble*: residents concerned as potholes worsen on Church Street. *Wood you believe it?*: sighting of rare woodpecker thrills local birdwatchers. And *Gotta ketchup-all*: Oddingham gardener grows tomato shaped like Pikachu."

“*Gotta ketchup-all?*” Kosh laughed. “That’s got to be one of your best puns yet.”

Bitsy gave him a weak smile. As much as she enjoyed devising witty headlines, she wished there was more interesting news in Oddingham. She’d never understood why her dad had relocated from London to such a boring village in the middle of nowhere, but if she was ever going to become a professional journalist, she had to start by reporting the experiences of the community she lived in. Even if that meant talking about lookalike vegetables.

She gazed at the pinboard above her desk, cluttered with newspaper clippings of the articles her mum had written. Matilda Wilder had passed away in a car accident when Bitsy was five, but Bitsy’s dad, Eric, talked about her all the time – how she’d been an investigative reporter for the BBC and had adventured around the globe, sniffing out important stories that exposed corruption and fought injustice. Matilda had recorded her investigations in reporter’s notebooks too. Someday, Bitsy was determined to follow in her footsteps.

Glancing back at her notebook, Bitsy was about to begin her report on potholes when a rumbling *boom* reverberated around the house.

“What was that?” Kosh asked. “It sounded like thunder ... but *inside* the house.”

Bitsy slid off her headphones. She could hear voices

talking downstairs – her dad and someone Bitsy couldn’t place. Something about her dad’s tone made Bitsy’s heart race.

Stuffing her notebook into her jeans pocket, she rushed to open her bedroom door. A strange shadow was climbing the stairs. It looked like the outline of a large animal with long whiskers and a bulbous head. “*Dad?*” she called uncertainly. He had a goofy sense of humour; perhaps he was playing a practical joke. “Dad, are you—?”

But her question wedged in her throat as a hamster the size of a bathtub heaved itself to the top of the stairs, wheezing heavily. Amethyst-purple fur covered the beast’s entire body, except for a bald patch above its nose where a jagged black rhinoceros’ horn protruded. The beast’s violet eyes glittered as it spotted the wicker laundry basket on Bitsy’s landing. Scurrying forward, it snared the basket in its claws, opened its mouth – revealing four overgrown incisors – and tossed the contents, PE kit and all, to the back of its throat.

“What in the world is *that*?!” Kosh choked, jumping out of his chair.

Bitsy stumbled back. For a split second, she thought she might be hallucinating – after all, a purple hamstoceros couldn’t possibly be real – but that didn’t explain how Kosh could see the monster too. “I don’t know!” she spluttered, diving behind her bedroom door. “Hide!”

Kosh dashed across the floor and flattened himself against the wall beside Bitsy. “Do you think it’s friendly? What if it wants to eat us?!”

The wobbly pitch of his voice matched the jumpy feeling in Bitsy’s stomach. She peeked through a gap in the door. The hamstoceros was sitting on its hind legs, gobbling the contents of her dad’s bookcase. Its diet seemed to consist of absolutely everything... “We need to sneak downstairs and find my dad – he could be in trouble,” she whispered, desperately hoping he was OK. As the hamstoceros tramped into her dad’s bedroom at the other end of the landing, she steadied her nerves and snuck out from behind the door. “Come on, this is our chance.”

They tiptoed towards the stairs. Like most houses in Oddingham, Bitsy’s was old and the floorboards were notoriously creaky. Her knees trembled as she crept forward, trying to remember the quiet parts of the landing. Kosh trod carefully in her footsteps, holding his arms out for balance. At the top of the stairs, Bitsy grabbed the banister and lowered her slipper onto the uppermost step...

But as she shifted her weight forward, the door to her dad’s bedroom clattered and the hamstoceros waddled out, chewing on one of her dad’s work ties. Its cheeks had swollen to the size of beach balls and were now stuffed

with so many oddly shaped lumps, the hamstoceros could barely fit its head through the doorframe.

Bitsy froze as the monster caught sight of them. It hastily slurped down the rest of her dad's tie and lowered its horn like it was taking a bow.

Kosh hesitated. "What is—?"

"Yeeee!" With a high-pitched squeal, the hamstoceros charged.

"Not friendly!" Kosh wailed, pushing Bitsy forward. "Go!"

They scrambled down the stairs two at a time as the hamstoceros rammed into the wall behind them. As if struck by an earthquake, the staircase shook in all directions. Plaster crumbled from the ceiling, and a couple of pictures fell off the wall and smashed onto the steps. Coughing dust out of her lungs, Bitsy landed on the ground floor and raced along the hallway. Voices were coming from the lounge.

"Give the book to me!" a woman snarled.

"You can't have it," Bitsy's dad said fiercely. "It doesn't belong to you."

With a burst of speed, Bitsy bolted through the door ahead of Kosh and skidded to a stop in the middle of the carpet.

A tall, raven-haired woman with pale skin was pacing by the TV. Bitsy had never seen her before, but with her

shaved undercut, dark eyeliner, combat trousers and heavy biker boots, she cut a striking figure.

“Bitsy!” Eric Wilder blinked at her from behind his steel-framed spectacles. There were tea stains on his jumper and an empty mug rolling back and forth by his feet. “I’m, uh, just dealing with a surprise visitor. Take Kosh back upstairs and—”

But before he could finish, the hamstoceros barrelled through the door behind them, roaring furiously. Clumps of shredded wallpaper dangled from its horn and dust caked its whiskers like it had faceplanted in icing sugar. It surveyed the room and fixed Bitsy and Kosh with a malevolent glare as if to say, *Prepare to join your dirty laundry.*

Eric stiffened. “On second thoughts, both of you get behind me. Now!”

Bitsy grabbed Kosh’s arm and they dropped behind the closest sofa. “What’s going on, Dad?” she asked breathlessly. “What *is* that thing?”

“It’s called a *magicore*,” Eric said, backing steadily away from the hamstoceros. “They’re powerful beasts conjured from emotional energy. That particular species is conjured from greed.”

A beast conjured from greed? The concept pinballed around Bitsy’s head, making her dizzy. “I don’t understand. What’s it doing here? And who’s *she*?”

The raven-haired woman studied Bitsy with a wry smile. She wore studded leather gloves and a dagger-shaped bronze earring in one ear. Eric glowered at her, pain flickering across his face like it sometimes did when he spoke about Bitsy's mum. "I'll explain later. Just stay down, both of you."

A cold feeling spread through Bitsy's chest like she'd just been stabbed with an icicle. How did her dad know all this? Had he been keeping secrets from her? It didn't make sense.

The raven-haired woman stomped over to the hamstoceros. "Well?" she asked sharply, surveying the monster's bloated cheeks. "Did you find the book?"

As if it had understood the woman's question, the hamstoceros snorted. It wiggled its cheeks like it was gargling with mouthwash and, with a loud clatter, vomited up an assortment of her dad's possessions, including two pairs of shoes, a dozen astronomy textbooks, a long black telescope and a fleecy tartan dressing gown with a hole in the sleeve. Finally, it spewed up a week's worth of Wilder dirty laundry.

The raven-haired woman scrunched her nose as she kicked through the drool-covered pile. "It's not here. Keep hunting."

The hamstoceros huffed and, with its cheeks now shrunk to the size of watermelons, plodded towards a

glass cabinet that stood against one wall. Bitsy tensed. The cabinet contained a collection of her mum's journalism awards, plus several souvenirs from her mum's travels.

She sprang to her feet as the hamstoceros smashed through the front of the cabinet, reached inside and began devouring trinkets. "Dad, *do something!*"

Eric's expression tightened. He looked back and forth between Bitsy and the hamstoceros like he was wrestling with a decision. Finally, he pulled a fountain pen from his trouser pocket and aimed it threateningly at the raven-haired woman. "You have until the count of three to take your magicore and leave. One..."

"What's he going to do with *that?*" Kosh whispered as Bitsy crouched back down. "Squirt ink in her face?"

Bitsy shook her head. She'd never seen the fountain pen before.

"Two..."

The woman flared her nostrils. "I don't have time for this. If you won't give me the book, I'll have to take the next best thing." She signalled to the hamstoceros. "Prepare for extraction."

The hamstoceros' fur bristled. It promptly abandoned the statuette it had been about to eat and bared its teeth at Eric.

Eric's fingers tightened around his pen. Bitsy noticed the barrel glowing blue under his touch.

“Three!”

A cloud of twinkling copper particles burst from the pen with a soft crackle. They whirled through the air like a murmuration of starlings and formed a wavy sausage the width of Bitsy’s thigh. The sausage wriggled, and the particles blew away...

...to reveal a flying, silver caterpillar. Beneath its transparent skin, its body appeared to be made of dense fog that flickered with electrical sparks.

Kosh’s mouth fell open. “Tell me you see...”

“I see it,” Bitsy said, squeezing his arm. Her pulse was racing. Had her dad just conjured a – what had he called it? – *magicore*?

The caterpillar had a round face with a tiny black mouth, neon-blue eyes and a pair of squidgy antennae. As it whipped through the air, it kept changing direction like it wasn’t sure which way to go.

Bitsy’s dad smiled at the caterpillar like it was an old friend. “Quasar, over here. I need your help.”

The caterpillar zoomed to Eric’s side and nuzzled against his ribs, causing a fine layer of Eric’s sandy-blond hair to stand on end from a static build-up. Was Quasar the *magicore*’s name? Eric was an astrophysicist and had once told Bitsy that a quasar was a brightly shining nucleus in space...

“Protect Bitsy and Kosh at all costs,” Eric told Quasar

firmly. He jabbed a finger at the hamstoceros. “And extinguish that magicore!”

On command, Quasar whirled around to face the hamstoceros. It wiggled its bottom and shot towards its opponent like a giant silver bullet. The hamstoceros growled and lowered its horn. Just as it prepared to charge, Quasar hurled a bolt of electricity at its feet.

A loud clap pierced the air, making Bitsy flinch. The hamstoceros squealed and rocketed to the ceiling in a cloud of smoke. Shrieking in outrage, it rushed at Quasar, slashing with its claws. Broken furniture went flying as the two magicores grappled with each other, tearing around the room in a purple and silver blur.

In the tussle, the hamstoceros got its foot tangled in the electrical cord of a table lamp. The lamp went flinging through the air and struck Eric hard on the side of the head.

“Dad!” Bitsy cried, jumping up.

“Bitsy...?” he slurred, wobbling forward. “Stay—”

But then his pupils rolled back in his head and he collapsed onto the floor like a sack of potatoes. Although Bitsy could see his chest moving, the rest of his body was motionless.

“Look out!” Kosh yanked on Bitsy’s leg and she ducked just in time as a flaming table leg came frisbeeing over their heads and smashed into the wall behind.

She protected her face with her arms as fiery debris rained over them. “We have to help my dad!”

But her voice was drowned out by another rumble of thunder. Lightning flared across the ceiling. The floor vibrated.

Then all at once, the room fell quiet.

Bitsy listened carefully for sounds of movement but there was nothing.

“Is it over?” Kosh asked, lifting his head out from under his arms.

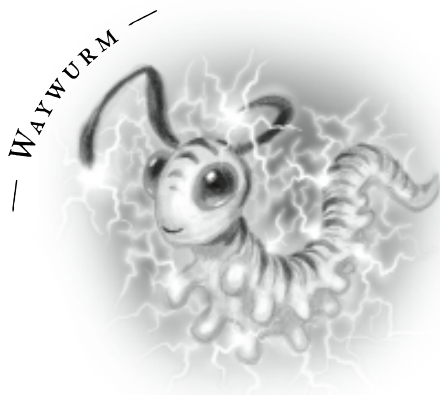
Gripping the sofa tightly, Bitsy pulled herself to her feet.

The room looked like a bomb had hit it. Scorch marks peppered the walls, ripped cushions and broken furniture lay strewn across the floor, and sparks jumped from a crack in the TV. A splintered heap of wood rested in the middle of the carpet where a coffee table had once been.

But the damage wasn’t what troubled her. As Bitsy surveyed the room, a bubble of panic rose to the back of her throat.

The raven-haired lady, the hamstoceros, Quasar and her dad...

They had all vanished.



2

“This is impossible,” Kosh said, emerging shakily from behind the sofa. “They can’t have just disappeared into thin air.”

Adrenaline was still coursing through Bitsy’s veins as she staggered into the centre of the room. “Then where did they go? They didn’t escape into the garden because the patio doors were locked, and the only other exit was via the hallway behind us.” She paused as she pictured her dad sprawled on the carpet. “Also, my dad was unconscious. He couldn’t have moved anywhere.” Her insides churned with worry. She had to find him.

“In that case, the goth lady must have taken him somewhere,” Kosh concluded. “It’s the only explanation. The question is: why?”

A feeling of dread crept over Bitsy as she remembered something the raven-haired woman had said. “She was looking for a book. She warned my dad that if he didn’t give it to her, she’d be forced to take the next best thing. I think... I think she meant *my dad*. When she told her hamstoceros to prepare for extraction, she must have been referring to him! Kosh, he’s been kidnapped!”

It suddenly felt like the room was spinning. Bitsy had no idea where her dad was or what was happening to him. But that woman looked dangerous. She grabbed Kosh’s arm to steady herself, feeling woozy.

“It’s going to be all right,” he said, squeezing her shoulders. “Listen to me. Wherever she’s taken him, we’ll find him together.”

Bitsy nodded, but her head was swimming. *Conjuring... Magicores...* How was she going to rescue her dad when she didn’t even understand what was going on?

Kosh pulled his mobile phone out of his pocket and tapped the screen.

“We can’t call emergency services,” Bitsy said, shaking her head. “If we tell them Dad’s been snatched by a lady with a hamstoceros, they’ll just think we’re pranking them. No one in the village is going to believe us, either. And your parents are away.”

“I’m not dialling 999 or my parents,” Kosh said,

holding his phone to his ear. “I’m calling your dad. If he’s got his mobile with him, we can track his location.”

Hope blossomed in Bitsy’s chest, although it wilted a moment later when the voice of Buzz Lightyear rang out from the sofa.

“To infinity ... and beyond!”

Her dad’s ringtone. She rummaged under the cushions and found his Samsung lodged in a crevice at the back. Her spirits plummeted further as she swiped at the screen and saw that the device had a biometric lock. She couldn’t even search it for information. “Any other ideas?”

Before Kosh could offer a suggestion, something buzzed under the broken coffee table. It sounded like an enormous bee.

Bitsy stepped closer. The rubble was vibrating. She poked her foot inside the heap and glimpsed a patch of silver. “It’s Quasar!” she realized.

Together, they tossed away the splintered wreckage, freeing Quasar from beneath. The caterpillar’s antennae had been flattened and there was a dazed look in its blue eyes. It hummed on and off like a defective generator as it levitated unsteadily into the air.

“Whoa...” Kosh murmured, his eyes wide.

Goosebumps rippled along the backs of Bitsy’s arms as she watched electricity light up Quasar’s foggy innards.

The air around Quasar smelled fresh and metallic like rainwater. She still didn't understand how Quasar could exist; everything about them seemed impossible.

Kosh signalled to a dark gash in Quasar's side. "Looks like it was injured in the fight. How are we going to help it? We can't exactly call a vet."

"I don't know," Bitsy admitted worriedly. She gently lifted a hand towards Quasar's glassy skin. Her scalp tingled as her fingertips made contact, and she felt her hair go static like her dad's had earlier.

Quasar turned to look directly at her. With no obvious nose, all of the magicore's expression came from its eyes, mouth and antennae. Its lips parted and its cheeks twitched, almost as if it was trying to smile...

And then it spat in Bitsy's face.

A small projectile hit her on the bridge of her nose and bounced to the floor. "Ouch!" She rubbed the spot where it had struck. "What was that for?"

"Bitsy, look!" Kosh reached down and picked up her dad's fountain pen. "Quasar must have been keeping this in its mouth."

Bitsy didn't understand how Quasar had got hold of the pen. The last time she'd seen it, it had been clutched in her dad's hand. She took the pen from Kosh and wiped it clean on the bottom of her cardigan. The barrel was made from smooth brown stone, marbled with lightning-bolt

seams of copper. As she turned it over in her hand, the stone glowed where her skin had touched it: red, yellow, purple, green, white and blue. She remembered it had reacted to her dad's touch, too, except it had only changed to blue. "Perhaps it's heat sensitive?" she guessed, passing it back to Kosh.

The barrel shimmered the same six colours when he held it. "It looked like your dad used it to conjure Quasar. Sort of like Quasar came *out* of the pen."

He returned the pen to Bitsy and she tried aiming it in front of her like she'd seen her dad do. She tightened her grip around it, but no flecks of twinkling dust appeared. She experimented by twisting the top of the pen and pressing the nib against the back of her hand, but nothing happened.

"Something's wrong," Kosh said, pointing at Quasar. The magicore was shaking. The fog inside its body had darkened and its electrical sparks sputtered like a dying car engine.

Bitsy stuffed her dad's pen into her pocket and tried to cradle Quasar in her hands. "What should we do?!"

"It's made of electricity, so maybe we should connect it to a live wire?" Kosh flapped his arms. "Or, I don't know, feed it batteries?"

Quasar bobbed forward and wobbled to a stop in front of the glass cabinet containing Matilda Wilder's awards

and souvenirs. Its antennae strained as it attempted to point to something on the bottom shelf.

Bitsy glanced between the cabinet and Quasar, realizing the magicore was trying to tell them something. “What is it, Quasar?”

But she was too late. The final sparks inside Quasar fizzled out and the magicore burst into copper dust. The particles twinkled as they fell through the air, disappearing before they reached the floor.

Kosh’s jaw slackened. “How did...? What even...?”

A lump rose to the back of Bitsy’s throat as she realized Quasar was gone. She might have only known the caterpillar for a few minutes, but she had seen how friendly it was with her dad, like a family pet.

She dropped to her knees in front of the cabinet, determined to understand what Quasar had been trying to communicate. “Quasar used the last of its energy to direct us over here. There’s got to be something important it wanted us to see.”

She examined the bottom shelf of the cabinet. Behind a couple of toppled photo frames, a wooden flute was mounted on a silver tripod. Her dad had told her that her mum had purchased the instrument on a trip to Austria, although Bitsy had never been sure why. Her mum couldn’t play the flute. She stretched her hand towards it, but when she went to pull it out, it wouldn’t budge.

“Found anything?” Kosh asked.

“There’s a flute down here, only it’s stuck.” Bitsy tried wiggling the tripod and the flute in different directions, but it felt like they were glued together to the base of the cabinet. As she repositioned her fingers for a better grip, she pressed several of the flute’s keys ... and heard a soft *click*.

The floor vibrated. Bitsy scrambled back as a crack appeared down the cabinet’s centre, splitting it in half. The two sides slid soundlessly away to reveal a small, brick-lined space no bigger than a cloakroom. Inside was an ornate chest of drawers, inlaid with ebony and mother-of-pearl.

“A secret room...” Kosh gawped as he stepped inside. “It’s like something out of James Bond.”

Bitsy pushed herself to her feet, struggling to understand how she didn’t already know about this. She pictured the layout of the ground floor of her house. Behind this wall were the kitchen and the hallway, only ... there had to be this hidden space between.

As she shuffled over the threshold, the cabinet closed behind her and a ceiling light flickered on. Bitsy spotted a lever on the back of the cabinet and gave it a tug. The cabinet silently rolled apart again. “Well, we know how to get out,” she muttered. “But what is this place? Why would my dad have it here?”

“I don’t know, but Quasar wanted us to find it for a reason.” Kosh opened the drawers in the chest. The first was empty, but the second contained three puzzling objects.

“Are those *leaves*?” Bitsy lifted out a small, toothed comb made of silver birch wood. It was covered in flaky white bark and had new leaves sprouting along its spine, as if the wood was still alive. “How can this be growing? There’s no light or water in here.”

Kosh inspected another item – an intricately twisted wooden key attached to a long gold chain. It was made of rough, lumpy plant roots covered in emerging shoots and was shaped into a capital letter E. “This is still growing, too. E for Eric – this must belong to your dad.”

Bitsy wondered what the key opened. It was too large for any regular keyhole.

The final item was a brown, teardrop-shaped pendant hanging from a length of black cord. Bitsy’s heart fluttered when she saw it. “This was my mum’s! I’ve seen her wearing it in old photos.” She picked it up and noticed the pendant glowing in different colours under her touch. “It must be made from the same stone as my dad’s pen. Maybe my mum used it to conjure magicores, too...” Her chest stung, realizing her mum had secrets she didn’t know about.

Tucking the pendant into her pocket, Bitsy returned the wooden items to the drawer and continued searching.

The remaining drawers were empty, apart from one at the bottom. Stored inside was a large, old, leather-bound book with discoloured pages. Bitsy removed it from the drawer and placed it on top of the chest. Its brown cover was damaged with scorch marks and water stains, and there were three slashes down the spine that looked worryingly like claw marks. Similar to the comb and key, tiny green shoots poked out of the book's headband, as if a living plant had trussed together its pages. Embossed in gold letters on the front cover was a single word: *MAGICALIA*.

"The woman who kidnapped Dad was looking for a book," Bitsy said, glancing nervously at Kosh. "This could be it."

Eager to learn more, she hooked her fingers under the cover and heard the pages crackle as she lifted it up. The endpapers were printed with a detailed world map drawn in muted shades of green and blue. Written in ornate script at the top were the words *CARTA MAGICORA* and a date, 1676. Bitsy had seen antique maps in museums before, but this one was different. Scattered across the oceans and lands were paintings of strange beasts labelled with tiny red text.

"Magicores," Kosh said, marvelling. He squinted to examine a key in the top left corner of the map. "It has their *species name* and *source emotion* written below

them. Didn't your dad say that magicores are conjured from emotional energy? That might be what a source emotion is – the emotion a species is conjured from.”

There were so many different species; Bitsy didn't know which to study first. In one scan she saw an enormous, flaming-hooved *grudgernaut* conjured from anger; a ghostly *flabberghast* conjured from surprise, and an impish *proxiwig* conjured from impatience. She pointed to a silver caterpillar floating above Brazil. “This looks just like Quasar – a *wayworm* conjured from confusion.”

A line appeared between Kosh's eyebrows. “Quasar did give off really confused vibes. It was zipping around erratically like it was permanently disorientated, and its body was made of fog, which is exactly what your brain feels like when you get confused.”

“You're right,” Bitsy agreed. “Maybe magicores are similar to their source emotions in some ways? The hamstoceros was a bit like greed – grasping and powerful with an uncontrollable desire to take whatever it wanted.”

Kosh tapped the date at the top of the map. “If this was drawn in 1676, then magicores have been around for about three hundred and fifty years. So, how do we not know about them?”

“My dad might be able to answer that,” Bitsy said hollowly. Knowing he had hidden something this momentous from her was a bitter pill to swallow.

Although she was itching to ask him about everything, she couldn't help but feel deflated that he'd never revealed any of it before. What else hadn't he told her?

But the questions would have to come later. First, she had to get him back.

She flicked past the map, to the very beginning of *Magicalia*. A paragraph of printed text filled the first page:

NOTE TO READER

Magicalia is the name for the kingdom of organisms known as magicores. Although these extraordinary creatures share some of the same powers, each species has its own unique gift. These are grouped into six types and indicated by the magicore's eye colour.



Armourer magicores are red-eyed and have a remarkable physical gift



Clairvoyant magicores are white-eyed and can influence the minds of others



Elemental magicores are blue-eyed and have the ability to control a particular force, energy or element



Metamorph magicores are yellow-eyed and are talented at transformations



Weaver magicores are green-eyed and can craft remarkable objects



Hunter magicores are purple-eyed and skilled in seeking particular things

Readers are cautioned to conjure magicores at their own risk. The publisher shall not be liable for any injury, loss of limb or death arising from any information contained in this book.

Bitsy glanced worriedly at Kosh before turning the page. A shining, gold-leafed capital A sat at the top of the next sheet. Written below was a list of magicores, organized alphabetically by their source emotion:

agitation
HUFFLUFF

[Armourer, gamma-level]



The huffluff is an extremely fidgety magicore with a flat, rectangular body that goes limp when the huffluff is frightened. Its eyes, ears, nose and mouth are located on its smooth, rose-pink underside, while its back is covered in a layer of wiry grey hair. The huffluff is a graceful flyer, even whilst carrying extraordinary weight on its back. Due to its restless nature, it never stays in one place for too long.

amazement

LORPLE

[Hunter, beta-level]



The nocturnal lorple is a furry beast weighing between thirteen and twenty pounds. It is quiet and slow-moving, with long arms and legs. The lorple has the largest eyes of any species of magicore, and its vision can penetrate materials as dense as lead. Like all hunter species, it is excellent at tracking and has a particular gift for hunting knowledge. Wild lorples have been known to gather on hilltops with beautiful vistas.

amusement

HIX

[Clairvoyant, alpha-level]



The hix is a mischievous and fun-loving magicore, known for its remarkably ticklish hair which can grow up to two feet long. It can weigh anywhere between six and thirteen pounds and is around a handspan wide. It has a spherical body and moves by rolling around at high speed. Once a hix has made someone laugh, it has the power to temporarily persuade them of anything. Its fur varies in colour from sunset orange to shades of red and gold.

“It’s like an encyclopaedia of magicore species,” Bitsy realized. “I wonder what the different levels represent?”

Kosh scratched under his beanie. “Maybe they’ve got to do with how powerful each species is or how difficult they are to conjure? We should look up ‘greed’ to find out more about the hamstoceros. It might tell us something about your dad’s kidnapper.”

Right at that moment, *Magicalia* rustled. A wodge of pages flipped over as if a breeze had lifted them, although Bitsy didn’t feel any shift in the air.

“OK...” Kosh murmured. “Am I imagining it or did *Magicalia* just move by itself?”

Bitsy’s skin prickled as she looked down and saw that the encyclopaedia now lay open on the entry for “greed”. “I think you might be right,” she admitted, nervously. “Look what’s written here – it’s as if the book heard what we were saying.”

Feeling equal parts alarmed and amazed, she turned her attention to the text.

greed
GROBBLE

[*Hunter, gamma-level*]



*Weighing anywhere between sixteen and thirty stone,
grobbles resemble giant rodents with stout bodies,*

round ears and long whiskers. Their thick fur is highly insulating and the horn above their nose is strong enough to pierce steel. They have a special gift for hunting gold and can detect deposits of the element from up to one mile away. Unique amongst hunter-type magicores, grobbles gather information by eating the objects around them. They have the strongest constitution of any species of magicore and have been known to store twice their own body weight in their extraordinarily stretchy cheek pouches.

Bitsy couldn't believe what she'd just read. The grobble, *née* hamstoceros, had been eating objects in her house in order to *gather information*. It was certainly one way of learning new things, although she didn't much fancy munching her way around her chemistry classroom in order to get a better understanding of the structure of an atom. She ran her finger across the page, rereading the entry. "If grobbles have a special gift for hunting gold, then maybe this *is* the book Dad's kidnapper wanted. There's gold leaf on some of the pages; she might have been using the grobble to detect it."

She fetched her notebook from her pocket. If she was going to rescue her dad, she needed to know more about the woman who had kidnapped him: who she was, what she wanted and where she had taken him.

As she started scribbling ideas, Kosh reached into the bottom drawer. “Hey, look. There’s something else in here.”

He pulled out a small brown envelope addressed to Eric Wilder, which had already been torn open along the top. Bitsy put her notebook down, took the envelope from Kosh and slid out a sheet of thick paper from inside. Typed upon it was a short letter with a design at the top showing a galleon within a ring of silver stars:



The European Conservatoire of Conjuring

Chancellor’s Desk

3 January 2024

Dear Mr Wilder,

It is my duty to inform you, as per the terms of the 1889 Statute of Conjuring, that any person aged twelve years or over, with at least one conjuring parent, is required to undergo a cosmodynamics test at their nearest conservatoire of conjuring.

My records indicate that your daughter, Miss Elizabeth Wilder, will turn twelve years old on the

26th of July. Therefore, with your permission, I would like to invite her to attend a cosmodynamics test on the 27th of July. This test will decide whether Elizabeth has an aptitude for conjuring magicores. If the test is positive, she will be invited to enrol at the conservatoire to study conjuring in the summer term.

I have written to Elizabeth's cosmodian, Miss G. Greynettle of 7 Andromeda Mews, to inform her of our invitation.

Please feel free to contact me should you wish to discuss this matter further.

*Yours sincerely,
Chancellor Edith Hershel*

Bitsy's hands trembled as she finished reading. "Kosh, this is about *me*. I've been invited to be tested at some sort of school to see if I can conjure magicores like my dad."

"Is that what *conservatoire* means?" he asked, reading over her shoulder. "School?"

She nodded, her gaze fixed on the letter. The last thing she'd been expecting was for any of this to connect to her. Why hadn't her dad said anything? "The letter's dated January. My dad received this nearly three months ago..."

“Maybe he wanted to tell you, but something happened and he couldn’t?” Kosh suggested. His eyebrows knitted as he scanned the final paragraph. “Do you know who this other person is? *Miss G. Greynettle?*”

Bitsy shook her head. *Cosmodian* sounded like a professional title, but she had never seen the word before.

Kosh took out his mobile phone and googled the address. By a stroke of luck, there was only one result. “Andromeda Mews is in Kensington, West London.”

“That’s only a few hours away on public transport,” Bitsy realized. “We’ve got to go check it out. It’s our only lead.”

“All right, but it’s too late to get a train to London now,” Kosh said, noting the time. “We’ll have to leave first thing in the morning.”

Bitsy’s stomach tightened. She didn’t want to wait until tomorrow to continue their investigation. She wanted to start looking for her dad now. She looked Kosh in the eyes. “Fine, let’s go tomorrow. But are you sure you want to come with me? It might be dangerous.”

Kosh gave a determined frown. “I told you, wherever that woman’s taken your dad, we’ll find him together. He’s like family to me, too; I’m not about to let you rescue him without me.” He added quickly, “Besides, it can’t be more dangerous than school dinners and I eat those every day.”

Bitsy laughed. Somehow, even in the most daunting of situations, Kosh could always lift her spirits.

She returned her notebook to her pocket, collected *Magicalia* and the Chancellor's letter, and left the secret room. Pausing by the pile of grobble vomit in the lounge, Bitsy picked up her dad's dressing gown. He had been wearing it earlier that morning as he made her breakfast. She pictured him in the kitchen, pouring her a glass of orange juice with one hand while stuffing a slice of bread into the toaster with the other. Despite the gown being covered in grobble-slobber, Bitsy clutched it tightly to her chest. It still smelled like him, of pencil shavings and aftershave.

Hold on, Dad. We're coming.

— THIMBULL —



3

It was early morning, but the parade of designer cafés and high-end boutiques on Kensington High Street was already buzzing with activity. Staff were busy laying tables or vacuuming floors while locals sauntered by, walking their dogs. The air hummed with the drone of traffic and the clang of distant building works.

As Bitsy and Kosh walked past shop windows, Bitsy tried to push down her frustration at all the unanswered questions whirring through her head. She and Kosh had spent the train journey searching through *Magicalia* and asking it questions – where was her dad? Who is Miss G. Greynettle? What does *cosmodian* mean? But the book had remained still. Either it was no longer listening to them or it didn't have the answers they needed.

Kosh glanced at his phone and then pointed towards a row of leafy chestnut trees in the distance. “That’s the edge of Kensington Gardens. We need to take a right opposite there to get to Andromeda Mews. It’s twelve minutes’ walk away.”

The journey so far had been relatively straightforward: a bus from Oddingham to the local train station, a high-speed train to London and then an underground train to High Street Kensington. Bitsy had taken her dad’s wallet and paid for everything using his debit card, which in the circumstances, she didn’t think he’d mind. She pushed her hand inside her satchel to reassure herself that *Magicalia* was still there beside her dad’s fountain pen and her mum’s teardrop pendant. The letter from Chancellor Hershel she’d tucked in her coat pocket next to her notebook, while the wooden comb and key were hidden in the secret room back home. “Assuming we find Miss G. Greynettle at this address, I don’t think we should tell her about *Magicalia* or the other items we’ve discovered,” Bitsy said. “At least, not until we know we can trust her.”

“Copy that,” Kosh replied.

As Bitsy’s fingers grazed her dad’s fountain pen, she worried whether he might need it, wherever he was. She hoped not.

They turned off the main road and continued along a few side streets until they came to a cobbled lane flanked

by modest terraced houses. It looked unassuming and quiet – not the kind of place you’d expect anyone involved with magicores to be living.

“It’s this one.” Kosh stopped outside a small, shabby-looking building with cracked pebble-dashed walls. Several of the roof tiles were missing and a broken section of drainpipe had been repaired with string and tape. The white front door had a brass knocker shaped like a shield with a lily in the centre.

As Bitsy approached the door, she took a deep breath and tried to focus. This was their first real opportunity to learn why her dad had been kidnapped and how they might rescue him. She reached up and banged the knocker. After a few seconds, a shadow moved behind the glass.

“One moment!” called a chirpy voice.

Bitsy heard several clicks and scrapes that sounded like multiple locks being undone. There was a creak and then the door opened onto a stocky, olive-skinned woman in a pinafore dress and long-sleeved blouse.

“Yes?” she asked, smiling. She had twinkly hazel eyes and an abundance of silver waves that were fixed in a wobbly pile on top of her head with what appeared to be a chopstick. Deep wrinkles extended around her mouth and eyes.

Bitsy blinked. “Are you Miss G. Greynettle?”

“That’s right.” Miss Greynettle arched an eyebrow. “And who might you two be?”

Trying to hold her nerve, Bitsy fetched the letter from Chancellor Hershel. “My name’s Bitsy and this is my friend, Kosh. We got your address from this letter. It says you’re my ... *cosmodian*?”

Miss Greynettle’s mouth shrank to a small “o”. “Elizabeth Wilder? Does your father know you’re here?”

“No,” Bitsy said, relieved that Miss Greynettle at least knew who she was. “That’s why we’ve come. He’s been kidnapped and we need your help.”

“*Kidnapped?*” Miss Greynettle swayed. “You’d better come inside. Quickly.”

She ushered them into a draughty hall with threadbare carpets and shut the door behind them. The air inside smelled clean and fresh, like cotton sheets. “Your father didn’t say you use the name Bitsy,” she muttered, signalling for them both to remove their shoes. “You can call me Giverna.”

As Bitsy kicked off her trainers, she spotted a rucksack stuffed with medicine vials, brown bottles and bandages at the foot of the stairs. “What *is* a cosmodian?” she asked, wondering if Giverna might be some type of doctor.

“Your father still hasn’t told you?” Giverna tutted as she placed their trainers on a rack by the door. “A cosmodian is a conjuring mentor. Young conjurors-in-training are

called *initiates*. They hone their skills at conservatoires like the one where you were invited to attend a cosmodynamics test.”

She spoke so breezily that it was as if she was talking about something completely normal. Bitsy had to shake off her shock in order to concentrate.

“A negative test result indicates the participant is cosmotypical and unable to conjure magicores, but a positive test result indicates the participant is cosmodynamic and can become an initiate,” Giverna explained. “If successful, every initiate has a cosmodian with whom they can talk about their training. Your parents asked me when you were born, should your cosmodynamics test be positive, if I would be your cosmodian. I was one of their tutors at the European Conservatoire, but I retired a few months ago.”

Bitsy shared an incredulous glance with Kosh as Giverna led them along a narrow corridor, towards the back of the house. She’d always known her parents had met at school, only she’d assumed it was the type of school where you studied maths and English, not magicores and conjuring.

They entered a bright room with floor-to-ceiling windows along one side that overlooked a well-tended vegetable garden. A network of tarnished copper pipes scaled the walls, passing through cupboards

and feeding into various beakers, flasks and test tubes before channelling into a wide porcelain sink. Given the presence of a fridge and cooking stove, Bitsy couldn't tell if Giverna used the room as a kitchen or a laboratory. In the middle of the ceiling, a dusty stained-glass chandelier cast muted rainbow splinters onto a wooden dining table below. Giverna pulled out a couple of chairs on one side. "First things first, have either of you had breakfast? I can make you some toast."

Bitsy had tried to eat earlier but her stomach felt like a cement mixer. "Thanks, but I'm good," she said, pulling out her notebook as she took a seat.

"I would love some toast," Kosh replied, happily. Although he'd already munched a large bowl of cereal and an apple before they'd left, Bitsy was pleased. Kosh's mood was directly linked to his stomach and she did not want a hungry partner on this rescue mission.

"Excellent. You can't solve problems on an empty stomach." Giverna slotted two slices of bread into a toaster and collected three glass mugs out of a cupboard. Like the other cookware on display, the mugs looked like they might have come from a laboratory. They had twisted glass stems and strange markings up the side, like on a measuring flask. "I'll make some chamomile tea, too."

Bitsy skimmed the questions in her notebook, wondering which to ask first. "Do you know why

Dad has never told me anything about magicores or conjuring before?”

A sad look crossed Giverna’s face as she carried a kettle to the sink. “After your mother passed away, your father turned his back on the conjuring world. He moved to your village to try to forget it all. When I received my copy of that letter, he told me he didn’t want you to take a cosmodynamics test and that would be the end of it.”

So that’s why we moved to Oddingham... Bitsy fell back in her chair. She wished her dad could have told her this himself.

“You said he’d been kidnapped?” Giverna prompted, turning on the tap and holding the kettle underneath.

“By a woman with a grobble,” Kosh explained. “It happened yesterday evening.”

“A *grobble*?” Giverna recoiled. “What did the woman look like?”

Bitsy turned back a few pages to consult her notes. “Tall with pale skin and dark hair. She had a dagger-shaped earring in one ear.”

The kettle wobbled in Giverna’s hand, sending water sloshing into the sink. A scowl deepened on her brow. “Melasina Spires,” she growled. “The leader of the Hunter Guild.”

“What’s the Hunter Guild?” Bitsy asked. She instantly didn’t like the sound of it.

“To answer that, I need to tell you a story. It’s one that initiates usually hear on their first day of training.” Giverna returned the kettle to the side and switched it on. She reached into the pocket of her dress and pulled out a white cotton handkerchief printed with tiny multicoloured polka dots. As she spread it flat on the table in front of Bitsy and Kosh, the polka dots started *moving*.

Bitsy leaned closer, staring. At first, the polka dots whizzed around chaotically, bumping into each other like static-charged polystyrene balls. But then they moved with purpose, shifting into a pattern of coloured pixels.

“This is a thinkerchief,” Giverna explained, keeping one hand on one corner of the fabric. “They’re made by thimbulls – weaver-type magicores conjured from sympathy. Conjurors use them to display what *they’re* thinking.”

As Giverna spoke, the pixels on the thinkerchief resolved into the image of a shaggy-haired yak with six horns sprouting from its temple. Threads of white yarn were looped between its horns like the string of a cat’s cradle. It seemed to be spinning another small white handkerchief.

A *thimbull*, Bitsy guessed, scribbling notes. It looked both cuddly and terrifying. The pixels shifted and the thimbull was replaced by a fireball streaking through a dark night sky.

“Long ago,” Giverna went on, “a meteorite landed on a remote island in the Atlantic Ocean. It was found in 1656 by the six surviving crew members of a shipwrecked vessel. Exposure to powerful cosmic matter at the landing site affected the crew on a cellular level, turning them cosmodynamic. They named the meteorite *farthingstone* and discovered that they could use it to conjure powerful beasts to do their bidding. Magicores.”

The image on the thinkerchief changed. It showed the bottom of a sandy crater where six men with straggly hair and ragged, old-fashioned clothes were gathered around a mammoth boulder of metallic rock. One wore a once fine coat and bicorn hat; one carried a bag of navigational equipment and another wore a sleeveless shirt and knife through his belt.

“The crew were from all over the world and had different beliefs and values. Gradually, they learned that each of them was able to conjure a different type of magicore, according to their personality. The ship’s creative carpenter could conjure weaver-types; the kindly surgeon could conjure clairvoyant-types; the brave gunner could conjure armourer-types and so on. After the crew escaped the island, they brought the *farthingstone* to England, where they split the meteorite into six pieces. They each wanted to use magicores for a different purpose, so they founded six different guilds

of conjurors. They pledged to keep secret what they had learned, and to work together in an alliance to use their gifts to benefit humanity from the shadows, hidden from the rest of the world.”

Bitsy’s heart raced as Giverna’s story swirled through her head, like whispers from the past. The old map at the beginning of *Magicalia* made sense now, although Bitsy still couldn’t believe this had really happened hundreds of years ago and yet nobody knew about it. She leaned closer as the pictures on the thinkerchief altered to show six coats of arms. They were shaped like shields with different objects inside each one.

“These represent the different guilds?” Kosh guessed.

“That’s right. Bitsy’s father is a member of the Elemental Guild.” Giverna pointed to a blue shield with a telescope in the centre. “Elementals are curious, bookish and experimental. They use their magicores to make progress in science and technology, exploring new fields of discovery and learning more about the universe. Eric used to work in one of the Elemental Guild’s laboratories when Bitsy was small.”

Bitsy’s forehead tightened. She didn’t remember that, but she did recognize her dad in Giverna’s description. He was always reading and asking questions; he loved travelling to new places and his experimental cooking was infamous.

Giverna tapped a green shield featuring a harp. “Bitsy’s mother belonged to the Weaver Guild – the creatives of the conjuring world. Weavers work as writers, musicians, artists and craftspeople, using their magicore to help weave extraordinary structures or objects, like the thinkerchief. Matilda had a particularly close bond with her mudtail, a weaver-type species that crafts items from organic materials such as paper and wood.”

Wood... Bitsy glanced meaningfully at Kosh, thinking of the key and comb they’d found in the secret room. Wondering if her mum’s mudtail had woven them, she suddenly wanted to examine them again. Perhaps *Magicalia* had been woven by her mum’s mudtail, too? That might explain why the book seemed to understand what they were saying...

“Which coat of arms represents the Hunter Guild?” Kosh asked nervously.

Giverna’s expression soured as she tapped a purple shield with a crown inside. “The Hunter Guild was founded by the ship’s greedy and arrogant captain. As time passed, he grew hungry for power and tried to steal a dangerous artifact from the Alliance. As a result, the Hunter Guild was expelled from the Alliance and became an organization of outlaws. For hundreds of years, hunters have attacked us, stolen from us and spied on us. When the Alliance was nearly destroyed by dark forces,

the Hunter Guild refused to come to our aid. They are cold-blooded, deceitful and ruthless.”

A vice tightened around Bitsy’s chest as she realized her dad was being held captive by a bunch of thugs. Whatever they wanted with *Magicalia*, it couldn’t be good.

The toast popped up with a clang. As Giverna went to collect it, she let go of her thinkerchief and the fabric went blank.

“The woman that took my dad – Melasina Spires – she asked him for a book,” Bitsy ventured, hoping Giverna might be able to shed some light on the matter.

Concern flickered through Giverna’s hazel eyes. Bitsy noticed her hands tremble as she placed the toast on a plate and spread it with butter and jam. “And how did he respond?”

“He wouldn’t give her anything,” Kosh replied. “He told her to leave, then he conjured a waywurm and there was a big fight. He got knocked unconscious in the battle.”

Bitsy watched Giverna’s face carefully. She had the distinct impression that Giverna knew more than she was letting on. Unfortunately, Bitsy couldn’t press Giverna without revealing that they had found *Magicalia*, and Bitsy wasn’t sure they could trust her with that information yet.

“It’s imperative we find your father as quickly as we can,” Giverna said, sliding the plate of toast in front of Kosh. “Melasina will probably want to interrogate him

about this book, and he might not be able to stay silent for long. If he's been hurt, he might need urgent medical attention."

Bitsy swallowed, hoping he was going to be all right. She wondered if he'd woken up already. "Do you have any idea where Melasina is holding him?"

Giverna touched her thinkerchief and the image of a vast, festering swamp appeared. A collection of military style buildings was half-buried in the bog. "The last I heard, the Hunter Guild was operating out of a series of secret underground barracks. I know there's been a recent spate of conservatoire thefts attributed to hunters. Maybe those incidents are connected to your father's kidnapping, but I need to talk to the Alliance. They'll have more information than me."

The vice loosened a little around Bitsy's ribs. It felt good to have a plan of action. She smiled hopefully at Kosh, who was already munching on his jam-smeared toast.

"I'll contact them now. It won't take a moment." Giverna tugged the chopstick out of her updo, letting her long silver waves fall to her shoulders. Then she aimed it at Kosh's toast.

Kosh curled an arm protectively around his plate, still chewing. "What-er-yoo-doing?"

It was only then that Bitsy noticed flashes of copper reflecting in the chopstick. As it glowed white under

Giverna's fingers, she realized it had to be made of the same stone as her dad's fountain pen and her mum's teardrop pendant.

Giverna winked. "Conjurors have magicore-means of getting everything done. Watch and learn."

Londoner JENNIFER BELL worked as a children's bookseller at a world-famous bookshop before becoming an author. Her debut novel, *The Uncommoners: The Crooked Sixpence*, was an international bestseller. She is also the author of *Agents of the Wild*, an adventure series for younger readers; *Wonderscape*, which was selected as a Waterstones Children's Book of the Month and is inspired by some of her favourite heroes from history and her love of gaming; and *Legendarium*, which celebrates incredible legends from around the world. *Magicalia: Race of Wonders* is the first in an exciting new fantasy series about incredible creatures called magicores that are conjured from different emotions.

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*"Up there
with Skandar
and Impossible
Creatures."*

Mel Taylor-Bessent

**When her dad is
kidnapped, Bitsy and best
friend Kosh are swept into
a secret world of ancient
meteorites and strange
beasts called *magicores*. With
the help of a powerful book called *Magicalia*,
the friends must follow a trail of clues in a race
to rescue Bitsy's dad from a mysterious villain...**



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