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Opening extract from

Young Wizards

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Chapter 1
Strange Things

Let me start by telling you that there was no magic on the Wizard Lea Estate. Wizard Lea was as un-magical as any housing estate can be. Oh, it was nice enough. The houses were modern, the gardens were neat, and most of the cars that stood in the drive-ways or at the kerbs weren't very old. But of real magic there wasn't a drop.

And this was the very thing that had drawn Mr and Mrs Pertinax to it. Well, that and its name, of course.

"The Wizard Lea Estate," they said when they heard of it. "Oh, we *must* move there."

So, almost a year ago, that's what they did.

Mr and Mrs Pertinax had three children: a girl and two boys. Ellie, the girl, was the eldest. The boys were twins, called Brin and Arlo. This story begins the Friday morning that Brin and Arlo became eleven years and six months of age.

Now, becoming eleven years and six months is nothing special. For one thing, as it's slap-bang between birthdays eleven and twelve you don't get presents and cards. The twins might not have minded this if it hadn't been the day before Ellie's thirteenth

birthday. The day she would be getting all the things that they would not.

"Why the long faces?" their mother asked when they went down to breakfast that morning.

"Want a birthday tomorrow," Brin said glumly.

"Well, you can't have a birthday tomorrow," she replied. "Anyway, I think eleven and a half is quite old enough for two growing boys to be getting on with."

As she said this, she looked at her husband, who was eating his toast and reading the morning paper. He looked worried.

Mr Pertinax said, "Apart from being jealous of your sister's birthday tomorrow, do you two feel ... all right?"



"No," said Arlo. "We're fed up."

"Not yet, you're not," said Mum. "Sit down and eat your breakfast."

They sat down, and while they ate, Ellie smirked at them across the table. *Tomorrow*, the smirk seemed to say, *I'll have a birthday and you won't*. It was because of that smirk that, after breakfast, Brin and Arlo made up their minds to give their sister a very un-special present tomorrow.

They found it in the cupboard under the stairs, at the back of a shelf covered in cobwebs. It was the most un-special present they could think of. Their late grandmother's dustpan and brush. It was so old and worn that it hadn't been used for years. "Tee-hee," they said, as they sneaked the dustpan and brush upstairs. In their room, they wrapped it in some left-over Christmas paper and put it under one of their beds.

Finding and wrapping the un-special present cheered the twins up so much that when their friends called for them, they were quite happy to go to school, for a change.

Mr and Mrs Pertinax, still very worried, watched them go.

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It was at school that morning that strange things started to happen.

The first strange thing happened in Maths. Mr Choi had set the class a test, and had filled the board with sums that he wanted everyone to try and work out before the end of the lesson.

“Is there a reward for anyone who gets them all right, sir?” Harry Pooter asked.

“Yes,” said Mr Choi. “A shocked grin from me. Go on, now, impress me!”

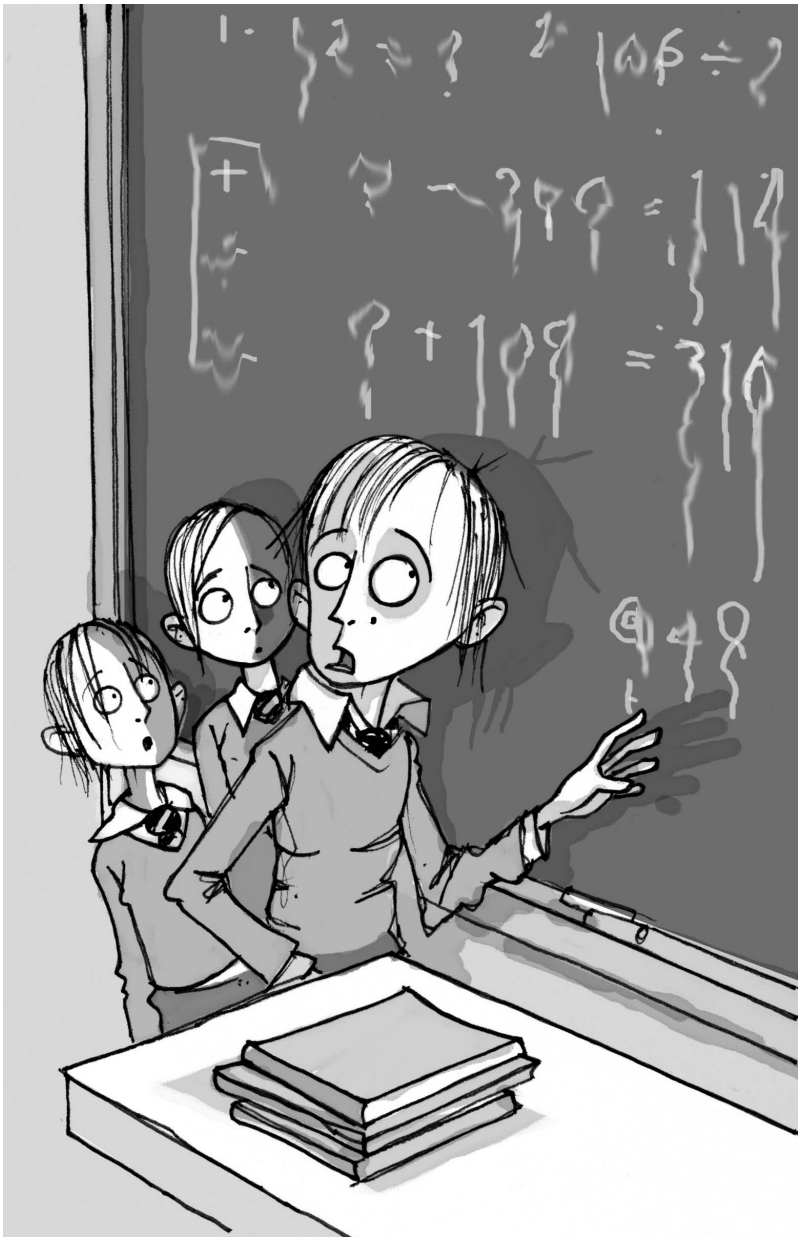
The class had been working on the sums for about five minutes when the deputy head looked in. There was a phone call for Mr Choi in the office. Mr Choi told the class to keep working while he was away, and left them to it.

For a minute or two after he'd gone, they carried on working, but then someone threw a paper-clip. Then someone else threw an exercise book. And in another minute, almost everyone was throwing things, standing on chairs, or fighting under the desks.

Arlo grinned. "This is better than doing rotten sums," he said.

"Anything's better than sums," agreed Brin. He waved his hands at the board like a stage magician, and hissed, "Vanish, sums!"

And that was when the first strange thing happened. The sums dribbled down the board,



ran off the bottom, and fell into a heap on the floor, where they faded to minus nothing.

Brin and Arlo just stared – first at the blank board, then at one another.

"Uh?" they said.

Then someone else saw it. "What happened to the sums?"

And someone else. "Where did they go?"

Then everyone looked, and wondered the same thing. They were still wondering when Mr Choi returned and asked crossly who had rubbed his sums off. When no one admitted to having done it, he gave the whole class extra Maths homework.