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# Troubletwisters 2: The Monster

Written by

## Garth Nix

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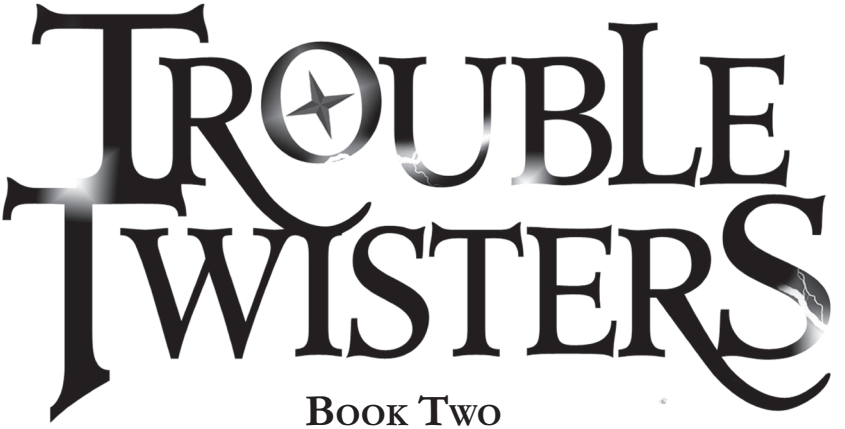
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## Book Two

## THE MONSTER




BOOK TWO

# THE MONSTER

GARTH NIX
SEAN WILLIAMS

EGMONT

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*To Anna, Thomas and Edward,*
*and to all my family and friends – Garth*

*For the boys – Finn, Ryan, Seb and Zander.*
*And for Nick, who I hope will never grow up – Sean*

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## Prologue
# Strangeness in the Night

It was quiet in Portland, the calm, still quiet of a small town at two o'clock on a rainy Monday morning. The streets were empty, there was no traffic, and the only sound was the soft tap dance of the rain and the slow background beat of the surf rolling in on Mermaid Point.

Through the pre-dawn silence, something moved in the middle of River Road – something huge and dark and struggling. The length of a bus, but not as high, it moved awkwardly, sliding sideways as it propelled itself with great effort up the slight slope towards Main Street.

As it drew near the next street light, it raised one strange, dark eye – and the light went out. The thing opened its great maw to let out a soft, almost yawning hiss of satisfaction, then dragged itself on, leaving a trail of slime and a line of fizzled-out street lights behind it.

Soon its destination became clear. It was heading towards a big old house on the slope below the Rock – a house with a widow's walk around a high-pitched roof, topped with an

eccentric weathervane shaped like a crescent moon with several attendant stars.

Right now, even though there was no breeze, the weathervane was wavering between south-west and north-west – pointing in the rough general direction of the thing squelching ever closer to the house.

The creature paused at the intersection of Parkhill Street and Watchward Lane, and its huge wide mouth opened again. But this time its whole body convulsed, ripples moving through its form like shaken jelly.

A moment later, with one final, particularly violent spasm, it vomited up half a dozen partially digested rats. The thing sniffed at them warily, then continued on its way, crushing its rejected dinner as it slid up the lane.

It moved faster as it neared its goal, helped by another shower of rain that made the cobbled lane wet and eased the monster's strange progress. Bright arc lights suddenly flickered on down at the marina and the fish market, urging the creature to greater speed. The night was ending, the boats were coming in and soon there would be people about.

The monster needed to hide. Fortunately it knew exactly where to go.



## Chapter One
# The Monster of Portland

'It's kind of hairy like a gorilla,' said one of the boys, whose name Jack Shield hadn't quite managed to remember yet, even after a week of being in the same classroom.

'No it isn't,' scoffed Miralda. She was the mayor's daughter and the self-proclaimed expert on everything to do with the town. 'Everyone knows it's as big as an elephant and has a shell like a giant insect. And it has a really wide mouth and teeth like a shark.'

'What does?' asked Jaide Shield, who'd gone to get a drink of water the moment Mr Carver had let the class out for lunch, and had missed the beginning of the conversation.

'The Monster of Portland,' said Kyle. He'd been unfriendly from the first moment the twins had started at the school, so it was no surprise when he added, 'Nothing you'd know about.'

'True,' said Jaide, as if she didn't care. 'I don't believe in monsters anyway.'

'Yeah,' added Jack. 'I guess *we're* too old for that stuff . . . Kyle.'

'You wouldn't say that if you'd seen it,' insisted Miralda. 'The Monster of Portland is real.'

'Who *has* seen it then?' asked Jaide.

'My brother,' said Kyle.

'My aunt,' said Miralda. Several other children gathered together in the playground to chime in that various relatives or friends had seen the monster, but no one claimed to have seen it themselves.

Jack and Jaide shared a quick, secret glance. When the twins said they didn't believe in monsters, neither was telling the entire truth. They knew that such things were very possible. In the previous week they had battled hordes of insects and rats, and creatures made up of many different living things, including a vast squid monster and a woman who had living rat heads coming out of her shoulders – all the work of an enemy so terrible it was known only as The Evil.

The twins' father's mother, whom they called Grandma X, was the local leader of a secret international order called the Wardens that had dedicated itself to fighting The Evil. But that wasn't all Jack and Jaide had discovered since moving to Portland. Just as The Evil had mysterious and terrifying powers, so too did the Wardens, powers they called Gifts. Most amazing of all, Jack and Jaide were developing Gifts of their own – magical powers they couldn't entirely control.

'How come everyone's talking about this monster thing today?' asked Jack, as casually as he could. Inside, he

was both excited and a little bit frightened. If there was a monster about, surely this meant that The Evil was back, despite Grandma X's assurances that they had beaten it last time.

'The new girl saw it last night,' said Miralda.

'What?' said Jaide. 'I didn't see –'

'Not you,' said Miralda impatiently. 'The *new* new girl, the one who started today. Tara. You know.'

Jack and Jaide turned from the huddle to look at a girl who was coming out of the school. Mr Carver had introduced her that morning, but they hadn't had much of a chance to look closely at her. She was tall, and had glossy black hair cut in a very fashionable style, as well as expensive-looking clothes. Unlike Jack and Jaide's old school, the Stormhaven Innovative School of Portland did not have uniforms, but even so, about two-thirds of the other students seemed to have an unspoken agreement to wear particular kinds of clothes.

'Hi,' said the new girl as she approached the huddle, which, taking the lead from Miralda, immediately broke apart, leaving just Jack and Jaide behind.

'Hi, I'm Jaide. This is Jack.'

Jaide didn't need to explain that they were brother and sister. Though they were not identical – Jack had the darker complexion and hair of their father while Jaide took after her mother, who was a fair-skinned redhead – they did look very much alike.

Jack held up a hand in greeting and raised the corner of his mouth in a fractional smile.

'I'm Tara,' said the girl. 'Tell me – is Mr Carver always that weird? What's with the tin whistle and the "happy song of beginning"? I mean, come on.'

Catching herself, she added, 'Uh, sorry if he's like your favourite teacher or something.'

'Not likely,' said Jaide. No matter how often he insisted, they would never call Mr Carver by his first name, Heath. 'We're new as well. We only started a week ago.'

'Oh, thank goodness I'm not the only one,' said Tara. 'I have to start at a new school almost every year, so I've had lots of practice. But never one this small.'

'Why do you have to move schools so often?' asked Jack. Tara didn't look like a troublemaker, but then it could be hard to tell. One of the most innocent-looking kids at his last school had been expelled for taking the head teacher's car for a joyride.

'My dad is a property developer,' Tara explained. 'He's always finding some great new opportunity, so we have to move while he gets it built. Then he sells whatever it is and off we go again.'

'Our mum's a paramedic on a rescue helicopter,' said Jaide, feeling a little twinge of competitiveness. 'And Dad is an antiques expert.'

'Well, he's come to the right place. This whole town is an antique.'

'He's not here at the moment,' said Jaide, falling into their cover story. 'He's away overseas, looking for some lost masterpiece, and we've come to stay with our grandmother for a while.'

'Where does she live?' asked Tara.

'You can see it from over there.'

Jaide led the way to the corner of the playground and pointed east. Though the most obvious landmark was the huge hill of stone that thrust up out of the headland, which was appropriately called the Rock, to the north of this they could also see the top of Grandma X's house, from the roof with its weathervane down to the widow's walk. There was also a huge Douglas fir behind the house, which weirdly wasn't always visible, though today Jaide could see it clearly.

'No way,' said Tara, suddenly clutching Jaide's shoulder with a deadly grip. 'Not the big old house on Watchward Lane?'

'Yes,' said Jack, feeling slightly left out of the girls' instant bonding. 'What do you know about it?'

'Only that my dad's bought the wrecked-up place next door. He's going to rebuild it himself while his next big development is on hold. Hey, you must be the kids whose old house exploded! You're famous!'

Inside, Jack groaned. He'd made a mistake on his first day of school, when Miralda had grilled him about his and Jaide's origins. Everyone had seemed perfectly sympathetic as he had recounted the story of the destruction of his family home in a gas explosion and their sudden flight to Portland. He had left out all the real facts of course, like the intrusion of The Evil, and the twins' instinctively using their Gifts, which had got out of control and contributed to the disaster.

Gifts getting out of control was pretty typical for young Wardens and the reason they were called troubletwisters. And that was why they had come to Portland. The accidental awakening of their Gifts in the city had drawn The Evil to them, and they would remain vulnerable until their Gifts settled down and they learned to use them properly, under the instruction of Grandma X.

Jack was soon glad that he *had* left all that out because Miralda had decided that even the basic cover story was a source of enormous amusement, which she had immediately shared with all the other kids. Jokes about gas and unintended explosions had haunted him and his sister ever since. It had taken days for Jaide to forgive him.

'We'd rather not talk about it,' his sister said now, shooting Jack a withering look.

'It is true though, isn't it?' Tara said, studying both of them in turn. 'I mean, how awful! It's lucky you weren't killed.'

*Or worse*, thought Jaide. Their house blowing up had only been the beginning of their struggle with The Evil. If it could take one of them over, The Evil would get to use the troubletwister's Gifts for its own purposes, absorbing them in the process.

'I'm not sure *lucky* is the right word,' Jack said, looking down at the ground. He was thinking about his father, who had saved them that first time. Hector Shield was a Warden like Grandma X. But Wardens could only have children with non-Wardens, and their mother, Susan, hadn't known about Hector's powers or responsibilities until they were married. She had tried to keep the truth from the twins until it was clear that their Gifts were going to come regardless of what they were told. Now Grandma X was teaching them, and Hector wasn't allowed anywhere near, in case his Gifts unbalanced theirs and caused a disaster.

'What big development is your father working on, Tara?' asked Jaide, to change the subject.

'Oh, the old building near the railway station,' she said. 'It was a sawmill once, then it sat empty for years and almost fell down. Dad bought it and he's going to turn it into apartments, once the town council stops arguing about it. It's going to be called Riverview House.'

'More like swamp view,' said Jack. 'Or rock view, since Little Rock will be right across from it.'

Little Rock was a hill of rough stone, a smaller version of

the Rock, since it was only about a hundred and twenty feet high. It had a railway tunnel through the middle of it. Though the regular trains had stopped long ago, there was a tourist steam train that ran once a day each weekday, and twice daily at weekends.

'Riverview sounds better,' said Tara. A slight frown passed across her face. 'I hope it does anyway. Dad's last development didn't work out very well.'

'Where was that?' asked Jaide.

'Over in Scarborough,' said Tara. 'You know the shopping mall? Dad and some partners built it, but there was a problem and he's not part of it any more. I think he lost a lot of money. We still live in Scarborough though.'

'What?' asked Jack. 'That's at least a forty-minute drive away. Why come to school here? It's not that great a place.'

'Because Dad has to be here all day, from the early morning,' said Tara. 'And my mum has to stay behind because she's got a new shop in the mall that's open really long hours.'

'Our mum is away for three days at a time,' said Jaide.

'Sometimes I *wish* my mum would go away that long,' Tara said with a dramatic roll of her eyes. 'Do you miss your mum when she's gone?'

'Yes,' Jaide admitted, even though the truth wasn't as simple as that. When their mum was away, the twins could continue the exploration and use of their Gifts without

interruption. The less their mother knew about their secret new life, the better. 'When she's away, it's just Jack and me . . . and Grandma.'

'Well, I guess that sucks.'

Jack cleared his throat. The girls were bonding again and he could feel himself being squeezed out of the conversation.

'Hey,' he said, remembering how they'd ended up talking to Tara in the first place, 'Miralda said you saw this "Monster of Portland" thing last night. Did you really?'

'I'm not sure,' said Tara. 'I just asked her if there was a circus in town because when I was waiting in the car for my dad last night, I saw something really big near the railway station. But the street lights were out, so I couldn't see it clearly, and then when I got out to have a better look, it had gone.'

'Was it really as big as an elephant?' asked Jaide, recalling Miralda's description. 'With insect skin and shark teeth?'

'I don't know about all that stuff,' said Tara, looking doubtful. 'But it *was* big. I was sleeping in the back seat and at first I thought I dreamt it, but when I brought it up this morning, everyone started talking about this monster of theirs . . .'

'You don't really believe all that, do you?' asked Jaide with sunny scepticism. 'It's just a story.'

'Something the locals tell to give each other a scare,' added Jack.

'I guess so,' said Tara, relaxing again. 'I mean, it has to be, right? Monsters aren't real.'

'Of course not,' said Jaide, even though she knew the exact opposite was true. 'Oh, listen – there's the music for the end of lunch.'

'What *is* that?' asked Tara. The song being played over the school loudspeakers sounded like wind wailing through the cracks in an old door.

'That thing Mr Carver plays – it's not a tin whistle,' said Jack. 'It's a nose pipe. This is one of his songs, called "Back to Learning".'

Tara laughed. 'No way!'

'Really,' said Jaide. 'You wait. There's different songs for break and lunch and home time. Sometimes he walks around us as we work, playing for inspiration. I think he's the only one who ends up feeling inspired.'

'Dad is not going to believe this,' said Tara.

The three of them started to walk back to class. Behind Tara's back, Jaide mouthed several words to Jack. She almost didn't need to because he already knew what she was thinking.

*We have to talk to Grandma X about this monster!*