



The INCREDIBLE TALES
of
**WEIRDWOOD
MANOR**

BOOK TWO



Chapter III



The enormous front doors groaned as they swung open to reveal the manor's main entryway. Oliver stepped inside. And then he stopped. And he stared.

He had heard stories about Weirdwood Manor — about its grandeur, its curious architecture, and its sheer immensity — but nothing could have prepared him for this!

Oliver heard a delighted squeal, as a thin, bookish woman in a bright floral dress swept him up in a tight hug that smelled of cinnamon and oranges. He hadn't had much experience in hugs; certainly the stiff-armed goodnights from his previous foster parents hadn't counted. But this hug was close and warm. It made him uncomfortable. He blushed, not sure if he should hug her back or squirm away.

Before he could do either, the hug ended. The woman stepped back and looked him up and down with an approving smile.

"Oliver Gryffon, our *artiste!*" she giggled, grabbing his hand in hers. "It's so nice to finally meet you! I could tell that Arthur was quite impressed with your entry, what with the way he went on about you. I can't wait to see your work!"

Oliver shook her hand politely. "It's nice to meet you too, Miss..."

"Oh! How rude of me! Here I am chattering away like a chummy old chipmunk and I haven't even introduced myself. You can call me Ms. Brimley. Or Mathilda if you like. Some of my students even call me Mad Hilda but that's another story." She chuckled.



“Officially, I’m here with the Ministry of Education, making sure you children learn something valuable during your stay.” She glanced around the room with mock suspicion then leaned in. “Unofficially, however, I’m going to do my darndest to make sure you kids have the most amazing

time of your lives!” She winked at him and smiled.

Tinsworth cleared his throat impatiently — a hollow, grating sound that set Oliver’s teeth on edge. Ms. Brimley’s eyes darted up at Tinsworth with just a hint of

annoyance, then back to Oliver with an excited smile.

“Well! Let’s not waste any more time lily-pickin’ about!” she said, standing up.

“We’ve got an exciting day ahead of us!”

They followed Tinsworth through a large, cavernous hallway, the purr of his motors echoing softly across the vaulted ceiling and marble floor.

“This place is just... *magical*, isn’t it?” said Ms. Brimley in a wistful voice.

Oliver nodded. He’d never seen anything like it before — not in books or on TV, and definitely not in real life. But there was more to it than that. There was something about this place he couldn’t quite put his finger on — a feeling that buzzed at the edge of his senses. He supposed Ms. Brimley’s “magical” was as good a description as any.

They passed through a doorway and into a room full of books, paintings, and elegant wooden cases displaying collections of strange and curious items. Oliver glimpsed a familiar shape out of the corner of his eye and stopped.

“No way!” he whispered, taking a step toward a small, winged creature in one of the display cases. He glanced back at

Tinsworth and Ms. Brimley who were already passing into the next room and seemed not to have noticed he had fallen behind. He hesitated for a brief moment, then made his way quickly over to the display case.

“No *way*!” Oliver said again, shaking his head in disbelief. Standing on the small pedestal before him was a detailed — and incredibly accurate — recreation of a creature he had known for many years. The soft fur, the gold-tinged feathers, the tiny teeth, and even the playful smile in its eyes were perfect! This was one of Oliver’s eadlings!

He had been just five years old when he’d first seen one of these tiny, feathered dragons. He’d called them ‘eadlings’ after the eerie calls they made; a keening that sounded like they were crying “Ead! Ead! Ead!”.

They had been the first and most frequent of the many dreamlike ‘visitors’ he had seen over the years. He liked them. They were playful, mischievous, and really quite intelligent. But more importantly, they were proof that his strange visions were more than just hallucinations.

Two years ago, Arthur Weirdwood released a book called **Arrow of the Skykin**. It



was an incredible adventure, full of floating islands, dastardly sky-pirates, heroic dragon-riders, and... eadlings!

At first, Oliver thought it was just a neat coincidence. One of the characters — an orphan boy named Elveri — had a small, feathered dragon he called ‘Eadie’. As the book progressed, however, the similarities between Elveri’s ‘Eadie’ and Oliver’s

eadling grew — even to the point where her call was described as sounding like an ‘*Eeed! Eeed! Eeed!*’.

Then he had come to an illustration of Elveri and Eadie. A thrill of excitement and fear had coursed up his spine as he peered at the impossible image. Although older, and dressed in the clothes of the Skykin, the boy looked incredibly similar

to Oliver. Eadie, on the other hand, looked *exactly* the same as one of Oliver's eadlings — right down to the tiniest detail.

The image had scared him, confused him, and at the same time given him hope. Was this just some incredibly bizarre

coincidence? Or had the great Arthur Weirdwood seen what he'd seen, and heard what he'd heard?

For the first time in his life, Oliver had dared to hope that he might not be alone.



For the first time, he was able to believe that there just *might* be answers!

“Master Oliver?”

Tinsworth’s metallic voice echoed loudly through the hall, making Oliver jump. The metal man held a large, wooden door open at the opposite end of the hall. Ms. Brimley popped her head through the door and gave a cheery wave, which was in stark contrast to Tinsworth’s dour expression, and impatient posture.

“Coming!” Oliver called out as he left the curiosity cabinet behind and jogged to catch up. He glanced back at the eadling one last time, and smiled.





Chapter IV



They soon arrived at what appeared to be a sort of reading nook. Plush sofas and lavish chairs were arranged in a cozy semi-circle beside the towering bookshelves. A boy and a girl both stood up as they approached.

The boy had thick glasses and a funky brown bowler hat. He gave Oliver a big excited grin as they drew near. The girl was pretty. Very pretty. She smiled politely and nodded at Oliver. He smiled back, then looked quickly away. He felt his cheeks starting to go red and got really annoyed with himself. He hoped she hadn't noticed.

"Master Oliver Gryffon" announced Tinsworth, "I'd like you to meet Master Eugene Donalds and Miss Celia Mei." He bowed slightly as the children said their hellos.

"And now children — if you'll excuse me — I shall go to prepare your roomMs. Ms. Brimley." He nodded at them crisply and exited the hall with smooth mechanical grace.

"Amazing, right?" The boy — Eugene — said in a hushed voice. "They say he used to be a real man, but he had some sort of gruesome accident and now he's like ninety percent mechanical." He leaned in closer, "Even some of his *brain* is robot now. Right barmy, if you're askin' me!"

Ms. Brimley interrupted before Oliver could ask what 'barmy' meant.

"Alright children! Mr. Weirdwood will be joining us in just a few minutes, but in the meantime, why don't we get to know each other a bit? Have a seat!" She waved them to sit down.



Oliver took a seat on one of the chesterfields and was surprised when Celia sat down next to him. He tried hard to just relax, play it cool, but he could feel his cheeks starting to get red again. So *annoying!* he thought.

“Ooh! That looks like quite a sunburn you have there.” said a sweet, sympathetic voice beside him. Oliver’s insides twisted

at the almost musical quality of her voice. He turned to her with a shy smile.

“Oh... thanks, I mean — yeah, it’s not actually a ‘sunburn’, per se... just kinda warm in here and...” he trailed off when he caught the teasing smile in her eyes. Oliver thought he was going to die of embarrassment. Thankfully Ms. Brimley began to speak.

“So, how about we all share a bit about who we are and how we got here? Who would like to start?”

Eugene’s hand shot up, and he began speaking even before Ms. Brimley had a chance to acknowledge him.

“So, I’m Eugene. Spelled the normal way — if there’s a normal way to spell Eugene!” he chuckled at his own joke. “Anyway, I’m pretty much the world expert on all things sci-fi and fantasy. Books, TV, movies, RPG’s, ARG’s, MMO’s... you name it, I know it!”

“Oh... but I don’t do vampires. Don’t get me started on how they ruined vampires. Although, *you’d* probably like ’em now, wouldn’t ya, Celia?”

Celia, just snorted at him.

He pulled something that looked like a pen out of his pocket and twirled it in his fingers. “Tinkering. That’s my joy, my life, my... how the Frenchies say — my ‘raisin tetra’.”

“Raison d’être.” corrected Celia in perfect Parisian French.

“Right. Anyway, it’s how I get me giggles. These days I’m building working replicas of my favourite sci-fi gadgets. This little

beaut right here was my ticket to Weirdwood! Twenty points to the first person to guess what it is.” He paused.

After a somewhat awkward silence Ms. Brimley hazarded a guess. “Well, it looks like a pen of some sort.”

Eugene looked a little disappointed — but only for a moment. “Yes, well, I suppose it does have that function too. Five points for makin’ yourself heard, Ms. Brimley!” He brightened, twirled the device again, then held it out for all to see.

“This — my new-found friends — is a fully functional replica of the Pen-dra-Gun from the world’s best sci-fi series in history — **The Amazing Who!** Watch this.”

He snapped his hand forward in a dramatic pose, as a beam of green light shot out from the Pen-dra-Gun and onto Oliver’s chest. Ms. Brimley let out a shriek, and Celia gave Oliver a look of surprised horror. He looked down and saw a fleshy, round hole in the middle of his chest!

Eugene chuckled as he flicked the device and the hole disappeared. “Brilliant, right? The Amazing Who’s Death Ray! Just a trick though, as it doesn’t actually cause death or anything. Really just a simple

matter of post-refractive projection! Oh, and check this out..."

Eugene flicked another switch. A half dozen ghouls appeared out of nowhere and began to swoop around the room with horrible — if somewhat tinny-sounding — groans. Oliver shivered as one of the ghosts flew through him. From certain angles they looked kind of flat and distorted but still — this was really impressive stuff!

Eugene was grinning from ear to ear as he watched his ghastly creations float around the room. "Season 8, episode 14 of the *Amazing Who* — when the evil Dr. Wen — who had trapped Who in a where-cage — released a whole whack of wereghosts who were confused about where they were and caused a whole world of woe for the warriors of Witchwood."

Eugene took a deep breath. "Now *that's* good programming!"



Oliver put his hand through one of the wereghosts. "So, are they holograms or...?"

Eugene's eyes lit up "Actually, they're something better! I call 'em SPECTRES — Synchronetic-Phase Electro-Coil Tele-optical REsonance Systems. I'm gonna submit the plans to the Young Inventors World Congress this year!"

"Anyway, the real fun is in getting them back into the Pen-dra-Gun! Here Oliver. Why don't you give it a try!" Eugene deftly tossed the device to Oliver who just barely caught it. It was heavier than it looked, but more surprising was that it buzzed with that strange, yet familiar power that always accompanied one of Oliver's 'visions'.

Eugene misread his hesitation and said, "Right! Just push the wee button on the left there, and get to suckin' those ghastly ghoulies right back into the Pen-dra-Gun!"

Oliver aimed the Pen-dra-Gun at one of the SPECTRES and pushed the small, black button. A beam of energy shot out from the device, enveloping the wereghost in a haze of twisting, greenish-yellow light. The SPECTRE screamed and thrashed against the energy, but the beam seemed to be holding it in place — barely.

"Sweet snag Ollie!" Eugene shouted over the ghastly screams, "Now, push the other button to reel 'em in!"

Oliver pushed the button Eugene had indicated, and the beam began to suck inward - like a tractor beam from some old sci-fi TV show. The ghost glared at Oliver, then redoubled its efforts to break free. The Pen-dra-Gun lurched in Oliver's hands as the ghost bucked and writhed against the entangling beam. Oliver's knuckles whitened as he gripped the device tighter, making sure to keep the beam focused on the wild, thrashing form of the wereghost.

The Pen-dra-Gun grew warm, and then hot, as it drew the ghost ever nearer. Suddenly, the prongs on the tip of the Pen-dra-Gun snapped open releasing a crackle of energy that twined and curled around the ghost. There was a hideous shriek, a blinding flash, and then the wereghost was suddenly gone.

Oliver blinked as the world slowly came back into focus. He coughed, and waved away the small plume of smoke that rose from the now-lifeless Pen-dra-Gun. What was that smell? Apple pie?

Eugene shot him an embarrassed look, but Oliver beamed back at him with a big

smile. He coughed once more, then handed the Pen-dra-Gun back to Eugene. “That was *awesome!*”

Eugene visibly relaxed, then said, “Thanks mate! Knuckle-bump of well-respect!” The two boys bumped knuckles and sat down beside each other. Oliver thought that Eugene was probably the oddest, nerdiest, and yet — somehow — the coolest person he’d ever met.

“Well! That was *wonderful*, Eugene!” Ms. Brimley clasped her hands together and gave Eugene a proud smile. “Those wereghosts were really quite good! Of course — in real life — it would be horribly impolite to go around sucking them up like that. They’re terribly sensitive creatures you know.”

Eugene gave Ms. Brimley a confused look, but she didn’t seem to notice. “Celia!” she exclaimed, “How do you feel about going next?”

Celia nodded and stood up. Eugene leaned over and whispered in Oliver’s ear. “Now there’s a babe-o-saurus, if I’ve ever seen one! I’m gonna make a move! Chicks go nuts for nerds these days. ’Tis the Age of the Dweeb, my friend!”

“She’s not really my type.” Oliver said. Which wasn’t a total lie. Talented,

intelligent, beautiful girls, tended to avoid Oliver like the plague. He figured he wouldn’t get on well with someone who treated him like a disease.

Eugene sat back and cracked his knuckles. “Great! Then it’s settled!” His smug smile annoyed Oliver way more than it should have.

Celia cleared her throat and stood poised — as if she was about to deliver a speech or perform a monologue.

“My name is Celia Mei, and I am a writer.” Every word she said was perfectly articulated, and even though her voice was soft, it seemed to carry to every corner of the room.

“My latest work is an award-winning novella called **Song of the Black Moth**. It’s a story about a girl — a fragile creature who falls deeply in love. The desire for her beloved eats away at her mind, body, and soul, until she becomes a mere shadow of the creature she once was. Then, in the shadow-lands where she has come to dwell, she finds herself anew as she learns to embrace the difficult *truth*...”

She let the word hang in the air with a dramatic pause, looked searchingly into the eyes of Ms. Brimley, Eugene, and finally Oliver. Then, in a voice soft full of

deep emotion she continued, "... the truth that love is tragedy unaware."

Oliver was surprised. He didn't think of himself as an overly emotional person, but something in her words just got him right in the guts! He looked over at Eugene who was rubbing his eyes and muttering something about ninjas cutting onions. Ms. Brimley blew her nose loudly into a lacy handkerchief.

Celia's posture relaxed and the entrancing nature of her words seemed to fade.

"That's just a rough overview. Of course, it's much more thoughtful and heart-wrenchingly tragic than that brief description would allow. I've actually already won a few competitions with it, including this one. It comes out in hardcover in a couple of months, but if you'd like to read it sooner, I did bring a few extra copies."

Ms. Brimley finished wiping the tears from her eyes and said. "That was *beautiful*, Celia! Magnificent! I can't wait to read it! Oh, and I wish we had more time for you to share, but Arthur will be here any moment, and we've yet to hear from Oliver!" She turned to Oliver and winked encouragingly. "Your turn, Mr. Artist!"



This was the moment Oliver was dreading. What did he have that could possibly compare with Eugene's Pen-dra-Gun or Celia's award-winning novella? Sure, he had some fairly decent sketches, but other than the Weirdy competition, they had never won him any awards or book-deals. Up until now, they had mostly just gotten him in trouble.

He cleared his throat and could feel his cheeks start to flush yet again. "Well, I'm Oliver. My last name is Gryffon — but some people call me Oliver Twist, because — well, I'm an orphan, so..."

He gave them a lame smile. Eugene chuckled politely, and Ms. Brimley gave Oliver an encouraging thumbs up which only made him feel even more pitiful. Celia, on the other hand, just chewed her nails and looked generally disinterested.

Oliver's cheeks reddened even more. He gritted his teeth — more bothered by his own reaction than by Celia's inattention.

"Anyway," Oliver picked up his sketchbook, "It's nothing like your award-winning stories or your super-cool inventions, but I guess Arthur — that is, Mr. Weirdwood — liked my drawings enough to invite me along. So... here they are."

He passed his sketchbook to Eugene. He hadn't thought he would feel so nervous about sharing his work, but Celia and Eugene were two of the most talented people he'd ever met. He braced himself for their reactions.

"Holy hand-grenades!" said Eugene, "This is... it's unbelievable, mate! I swear it's looking right at me!" He moved the sketchbook from side to side as if he was checking to see if the monster's eyes would indeed follow him.

Both Celia and Ms. Brimley came and looked over Eugene's shoulder.

"Huh." said Celia, somewhat surprised, "That's actually pretty good." She looked at Oliver with a sly smile, "Nice one, Sunburn!"

"Celia!" Ms. Brimley tsked, then turned to Oliver, "Oh, Oliver, these are spectacular. I mean *spectacular*!"

Eugene turned to another page and examined it closely, then sat bolt upright.

"Oh! It just moved! The freaky little bugger just winked at me!"

Ms. Brimley laughed. "Oh Eugene, you tease! But really, Oliver, these drawings are incredibly realistic."

Eugene cleaned his glasses, then squinted at the drawing suspiciously. Oliver grimaced.

It was rare for his drawings to come alive for others, but when they did — well — people tended to react poorly when faced with imaginary monsters who have just jumped out of a sketchbook. He said a silent prayer.

They flipped through the pages, oohing and ahing — until something fell out.



“Amazing!” Ms. Brimley said, picking up the page and holding it out for the others to see.

“Wow!” said Celia.

“Jimminy Cricket’s great aunt Mildred!” Eugene gawped.

Ms. Brimley was holding the letter from Merryl Buxley in her hands, staring at the great dragon who had taken over the page.

Oliver hesitated, but when that familiar dark feeling started to creep back, he snatched the paper away from her and stuffed it roughly in his pocket.

The feeling subsided.

“Sorry, Ms. Brimley!” he said “It’s just that, well, that one’s not ready yet.” He smiled apologetically.

“What!?” Eugene spluttered. “That was like, the best one of the lot! Come on, Oliver, give us another peek!”

Ms. Brimley gave Oliver a strange look and was just about to say something when...

Arthur, the great *Arthur Weirdwood* — the world’s best known author, inventor, and artist — entered the room...





Chapter V



Everyone turned to look at the tall, slender man descending the grand stairway. With a smile, Arthur Weirdwood raised his right hand in welcome and spoke in a strong voice that resounded through the hall.

“Three talents forged in flame.

*Behold them now! The prize they claim
For what appeared to be a game*

*But was — in truth — a means to tame
The gift and curse of Fae-born flame.”*

Oliver felt a chill go down his spine as the last “flame” echoed throughout the hall. There was something about those words...

“The Prophecy of Tor Aarlaí!” said Eugene, beaming with nerdy pleasure, “Well, the first stanza anyway. Page three hundred eighty-six of **Mages of Mitherfall.**”

“Well, well! Colour me three shades of impressed!” Arthur laughed, “You must be Eugene. I had thought the first stanza of Tor Aarlaí an appropriate welcome.”

“After all, three talents,” with this, he gave a slight bow to the children, “all here to claim your prize, etcetera, etcetera.”

Eugene chuckled. “Yeah, but let’s just hope the second and third stanzas stay *well* out of it! Am I right?” He winked and elbowed Oliver in the ribs. “I mean, dragons and

magicians are cool but the whole ‘*Betrayed they’ll be, to death and worse, Betrayed — all three — by dragon’s curse.*’ — well, I’m pretty sure we could do without that part!”

Oliver forced a smile and nodded. All this talk of *curses* was starting to make him feel really uncomfortable.



“Yes, well,” Arthur said after a time. “That would be, er... an unfortunate coincidence.” He frowned slightly and patted the pockets of his dark suit coat with a distracted air.

After a brief but awkward moment of staring off into the distance, Arthur seemed to collect himself and smiled down at the children.

“Ah! But where are my manners? Eugene, Celia, Oliver, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to Weirdwood Manor! I pray your stay with us will be filled with wonder, and magic, and above all...” Arthur paused briefly as his eyes met Ms. Brimley’s. She raised an eyebrow. He cleared his throat. “Yes, well, *above all*, we hope your stay will be a quality

educational experience.”

Arthur gave Ms. Brimley a polite smile, which elicited one of her signature flowery giggles.

Celia stepped forward, took that same speech-stance she had used before and began to *speak*.

“Mr. Weirdwood, sir, I want to be the first to tell you what a great honour it is to finally meet you...”

A warm, giggly feeling spread over Oliver as she spoke. He stared at Celia — beautiful Celia — unable to stop the big silly grin he could feel spreading across his face. He knew in his head that all she was doing was introducing herself to Arthur, but somehow, every word she spoke seemed so eloquent, so profound, so... *beautiful!*

He vaguely noticed the goofy, slack smile on Eugene’s face as the boy let out an unconscious giggle of delight. Oliver himself nearly started to laugh at how ridiculous Eugene looked but stifled the feeling, not wanting to interrupt Celia’s incredible speech.

SNAP!

Arthur snapped his fingers, startling everyone. Something like a quick, cold burst of air swept past them, making Oliver catch his breath and causing the warm, giggly feeling in his stomach to stretch, and thin, and then snap like an elastic band. All three of the kids looked up at Arthur with surprise and not a little bit of confusion.

Celia looked like she was about to say something when a ridiculously loud hiccup burst from her lips and echoed through the vaulted ceilings of the manor. It was such an odd turn of events that Oliver and Eugene couldn’t help but burst out in laughter. Arthur smiled and even Ms. Brimley tried to stifle a laugh.

Celia looked confused at first, then indignant. She hiccuped again, causing the boys to laugh all the more.

“Now, now Miss Mei!” Arthur admonished, “As impressive as that display was — and it was impressive indeed — it is generally considered impolite to try to wordcraft one’s host.”

“In any case, I am too old and too darn stubborn to be affected by that sort of thing. However, it’s quite unfair to the poor boys here, and since they are my

guests, I would ask that you refrain from such displays in future.” He raised his eyebrow in a stern, warning look.

“I was just (hic), trying to say (hic), that I’m happy to be (hic) here.” Celia said coolly, doing her best to look dignified in spite of the over-loud hiccups. Oliver could see her cheeks turning pink, but whether from embarrassment or frustration he could only guess.

“Ah! And I am indeed happy to have you here as well, my dear!” Arthur patted her lightly on the back, any trace of sternness gone. She swallowed hard, then blinked, her hiccups apparently gone. Arthur smiled at the boys. “Indeed! Happy to have you all!”

Just then, Tinsworth appeared at the base of the stairs. “Dreadfully sorry to interrupt, but there is a Mr. Kingsworth from the Ministry of Education on the line for Ms. Brimley. Shall I take a message?”

“Oh, dear me!” Ms. Brimley flustered, “I suppose I should take it now. Mr. Kingsworth is ever so particular about checking in.”

She hesitated, then scrunched up her nose and said, “I don’t suppose there is a more private area where I might take the call?”

Tinsworth tilted his head to the side slightly. “The Manor has seven hundred and seventy-seven rooms, one hundred and thirteen of which are currently unoccupied. I’m sure we can find something that will accommodate your needs.”

He turned back toward the stairs, looked over his shoulder and said, “If you will follow me.”

“You children go on without me,” Ms. Brimley called over her shoulder, “I’ll meet up with you after this call. But don’t you dare have any fun while I’m away!” She giggled pleasantly and winked at the kids, then flounced away after Tinsworth.

Arthur stroked his small beard as he watched them go. Oliver had just about worked up the courage to ask about the eadling in the curiosity cabinet when Arthur suddenly clapped his hands together and cracked his knuckles.

“Now then, the *real* adventure begins!”

With a swish of coattails, Arthur bounded over to one of the giant walls of books that

surrounded them. Eugene and Oliver looked at one another with excited smiles and followed suit while a less-than-cheerful Celia brought up the rear.

“Let’s see here...” Arthur mumbled as he looked over the book titles. “**Secrets of Albion, Secrets of the Sacred Sect, The Secret Garden...** Ah! Here it is! **Secret Passageway.**”

Arthur tugged on a large book that was indeed entitled **Secret Passageway**, and a small section of the bookcase swung open revealing a long, dimly-lit corridor.

“Cooooool!” Eugene crooned.

“Very cool,” Oliver agreed.

“My, how original,” said Celia under her breath.

Oliver looked over at Celia who was leaning against a nearby pillar with a disinterested moodiness. He still wasn’t sure what to think about what had happened earlier. Arthur snapping his fingers and hiccups magically appearing, then disappearing again with a simple touch of his hand? Could it have just been a weird coincidence?

And what was it about Celia’s words that had made him feel so *strange*? Most of the

time she sounded normal — like any girl her age — but when she got in that speech-stance of hers and began to *speak*... Oliver didn’t know how to describe it. What had Arthur called it? Wordcraft?

“Excellent! Follow me, children,” Arthur said as he ducked through the small entrance and melted into the shadows that lay beyond.

The three children followed Arthur into the dark, candlelit passage. Eugene was fairly bouncing with excitement, and even Celia had difficulty feigning disinterest.

Oliver entered the passageway last and almost instantly the secret door began to slide closed behind him. He looked back and saw Tinsworth who seemed to be searching the room with some urgency — a lacy, white kerchief clutched tightly in his oversized metal hand. His eyes met Oliver’s just as the door slid shut, the anxious worry on his face unmistakable, even if it *was* made of metal.

Oliver jumped as the door’s heavy bolts locked into place, echoing loudly down the marble-lined corridor. He frowned as his eyes adjusted to the darkness, wondering what could have possibly made the large metal butler look so worried.

A hundred dire scenarios flitted through Oliver's imagination until finally he shook his head and let out a little chuckle. It was enough to deal with all the bad things that actually *did* happen around him without having to worry about completely imagined ones. Ms. Brimley had probably just forgotten her kerchief — and maybe her purse — and Tinsworth looked worried because he was having trouble finding it for her. Whatever it was, Oliver

was sure it couldn't have been that important. He rolled his eyes at his own silliness, then hurried to catch up with the others.

After a few twists and turns down the narrow passage, they came to a door that opened into another, larger hallway. Eugene whistled admiringly.



Thousands of incredible pieces of art filled the walls from floor to ceiling, lit entirely by the soft warmth of candles that flickered in sconces set every few feet. At a quick glance there seemed to be no end to the hall or to the paintings it held, the checkered marble floor leading some distance in either direction before bending slightly away and out of sight.

“What is this place?” Oliver asked with hushed awe.

“What indeed!” Arthur replied. “If I’m not mistaken, this is the, ehh...” he whipped out a silver and brass pocket watch that slid open with a whir and a click. “Let’s see... two-oh-three in the afternoon, so... this would be the fourteenth meandering hall of the west quarter of the north wing.”

He furrowed his brow as he pocketed the watch. “Ah well. I was hoping we’d make the *sixteenth* meandering hall so we could cut through the east under-kitchen and grab a snack, but I suppose we can always whip something up in the library.”

He turned and — waving the kids to follow — began to walk briskly down the hall. “Come along. Wouldn’t want to miss the two-twenty-two Dhor-Way.”

The kids scrambled to catch up to Arthur whose long, thin legs carried him swiftly

down the marble floor, past row upon row of the most amazing artwork Oliver had ever seen.

“Wait!” said Celia, who was the first to catch up. “Are you trying to tell us that if it was a different time of day, this would be some *other* hallway?”

Arthur chuckled, “Of course not, Celia. Hallways don’t just up and change place! It is of course, we who would be in a different hallway.”

“That... makes no sense,” said Celia with an incredulous look.

“Well of course it does!” said Arthur, “You weren’t in this hallway previous to two o’clock, were you?”

“No, but...”

“And now that it is two o’clock,” Arthur continued, “where do you find yourself?”

“Well, *here* obviously, but...”

“And there you have it! Empirical evidence that Einstein was indeed correct in stating that time and space are inextricably linked!”

“Same bat-time, same bat-channel!” Eugene said, imitating an old TV announcer’s voice.

“Precisely, Eugene!”

Celia looked like she was about to say something else, but Oliver beat her to it.

“So, there’s more of these halls, just covered in art like this one?”

“Goodness yes, my boy!” Arthur exclaimed, “This *is* Weirdwood Manor! But not all are covered in art — at least not in the traditional sense.”

“Some halls are vast greenhouses with exotic plants and animals. Some are ancient stone-ways carved out of the living rock. If you’re lucky, and it’s a clear night, you may even find yourself in the hall of constellations!” He smiled wistfully. “Ah yes, the Manor is a wondrous place and full of surprises!”

Arthur led them at a brisk pace, regaling them with wild — and often ridiculous — tales of this or that artist whose work was featured in the hall. Oliver tried to keep up but kept finding himself distracted by the wealth of artistry around him — paintings more like windows into imagined worlds than simple brushstrokes on canvas.

He let out a longing sigh as he turned to catch up with the others. Then something out of the ordinary caught his eye...

An old, faded photo was tacked to the wall, standing out like a sore thumb amongst the other pieces of art. In it were four men, three women, and a young boy all dressed in a very old style of clothing and staring at the camera with very serious expressions.

With a start, Oliver realized that one of the men was Arthur! Or at least a man who looked very much like him. He wondered if perhaps it was Arthur’s father or grandfather; the photo was obviously very old and the man in the picture looked only slightly younger than Arthur was now.

The tall man beside him also seemed strangely familiar, but Oliver couldn’t quite put his finger on who it might be.

Something small was written on the bottom of the photograph, but was too covered by shadow to make out. Oliver looked around, then grabbed one of the candles from a nearby sconce and held it up to the photo to take a closer look.

As the candle drew near, something in the photo moved. Startled, Oliver drew the candle quickly back, splashing hot wax on

his fingers and nearly blowing out the flame. He hissed through his teeth as the wax cooled and hardened. He brushed it off, then looked carefully at the photo as he slowly brought the candle back towards it.

As the candlelight fell on the photo, the forms and outfits of each person began to shift and change. Then colour began to bleed into the new shapes - like wet paint on porous paper.

“Wow,” Oliver whispered as the last form filled with wet, glistening colour. The scene and people had completely changed. What was once an old photo from the early 1900’s was now an incredibly detailed painting of medieval fantasy characters. One man had turned into a goblin.

Another had turned into a dwarf. There was a knight in armor, two wood-nymphs, an elf, and what looked like an old witch. Even Arthur’s outfit had turned into the dark flowing robes of a wizard. The boy, however, had mysteriously vanished.

The text was clear now too. It said “*May 22 1914 – The Mitherguard Council before the great Shadow-War.*”

Oliver raised an eyebrow. “This place keeps getting weirder and weirder,” he muttered.

He had to admit that the changing of the photo in candlelight was a really cool trick. But what was with those ridiculous fantasy costumes? And why mix it in with the whole 1914 theme? It was like someone had gotten really carried away with a Halloween photo shoot and couldn’t decide what was better — a 1900’s period piece or fantasy game — so they just did both. Oliver chuckled. He could only imagine how crazy Halloween must be at a place like Weirdwood Manor!

He was about to call out to ask Arthur about the photo, but when he turned he found the hallway eerily empty. There was no sight or sound of the others, only the faint hiss of candles and a soft, ghostly moan from some distant, drafty doorway.

He bit his lip and started off after them, then caught a flicker of movement out of the corner of his eye. Startled, he turned quickly to see the boy from the photo standing there — ghostly transparent and staring at him with blank, dead eyes.

Oliver stifled a yelp, then slowly let out a gasp of relief as he realized the boy wasn’t really in the room, but looking out from what appeared to be some sort of 3D holographic picture. Oliver smirked. These trick paintings were really something. He

would have to ask Arthur how they were made — and who that boy was.

A rasping breath broke the silence, sending chills down Oliver's spine. The boy turned his head slightly and blinked.

The colour drained from Oliver's face as the ghostly figure began to move, drifting slowly toward him with outstretched arms. Oliver stumbled back as the world around

him began to freeze over with a cold blue light. He heard the sound of far-off whispering voices, and caught the familiar scent of old books and lightning but mixed with something new; the icy smell of a winter's day.

"No... no, no, no!" Chills ran down Oliver's spine, as the frigid air closed in around him, clawing at his skin and making his panicked breath come out like smoke from



a dying fire. The ghost began to grow more solid, and his whispers grew louder.

"...iinn daangerr! Bewwarre Arthurr... thieff... murrderrer... jailerr..." The ghost looked down at the large, mechanical cuffs that bound his hands then turned back to Oliver with pleading, dead eyes, "Hellp me...Pleeease!"

"Hey! Ollie!"

The warmth of the room crashed back in on him. The whispers stopped. The ghost disappeared.

"Whoa! You alright, mate?" asked Eugene, concerned. "You look like you just seen a ghost!"

Oliver took a deep, steadying breath and glanced around the room. Just him, Eugene, and a few hundred pieces of priceless artwork. Oliver was used to strange visions, but something about this experience had felt very different. He couldn't put his finger on what it was exactly, but this vision had felt somehow more real than the others. It was almost like he had experienced his other visions from far away, whereas this one was close. Very close.

Oliver shivered but whether from the ghost's ominous words or the lingering cold he could not tell.

"Yeah, I'm okay," he finally said. "It's just... take a look at this!"

Oliver turned back to where he had found the photo of Arthur and the others. It was gone! In fact, none of the paintings that had been there a moment ago were anywhere to be found. He looked around, dumbfounded.

"What is going on?" he whispered, frustrated and embarrassed.

"Look mate, I know there's a lot of amazing stuff in here," said Eugene, "but Arthur asked me to bring you back post haste, before that whole space-time thingy catches up with us and we find ourselves in a different hall or something. Funny how he's still on about that. I thought he was just takin' the mick out of Celia earlier, but he seemed real serious."

Oliver gave up with a grunt of frustration. "Okay. Let's go."

Eugene gave him another look. "You sure you're alright? Your lips are as blue as a bogor's buttocks!"

Oliver just forced a smile and nodded. “Yeah, I’m fine. Let’s go!”

Eugene and Oliver broke into a light jog and headed down the hallway together.

“Man!” Eugene exclaimed. “Some of these paintings are so lifelike, I half-expect ‘em to jump out of their frames and try to eat me!” He shook his head. “I sure wouldn’t want to get stuck down here by myself for any amount of time. I mean, the artwork’s fine and all, but I keep getting this weird feeling that someone’s watching from just behind the paintings — you know? Creepier than a Corgothian crypt-keeper!”

Oliver raised an eyebrow at Eugene. “You have no idea.”



The INCREDIBLE TALES of
**WEIRDWOOD
MANOR**

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

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Sacha Raposo
Steve Huber
Luke Minaker
Jack Ront
Javier Mora
Steve Palmer

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