

CHAPTER 1

Pandemonium in Panaceum

Nicolas dreamt and dreamt and dreamt. He dreamt of the Grand Wizard and the vials of pure essence that flowed from the manuscript, ‘Spatium Temporis Continui Copernicus’ – the golden manuscript; that wonderful sequence of notes that enabled their travels throughout the heavens. He dreamt of the vast outreaches of space, the wormholes of time in distant galaxies and the travels he had endured with the soothsayer, Nedebiah Jericho and his own family. He dreamt of all the fantastic places that he had visited in history and of all the mysterious people he had met, and he dreamt of the magical clock, that ticking, tocking time machine of perpetual motion. Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock.....

However, Nicolas awoke from his cosmic dream, and the piano and clock were nowhere to be seen. Instead, he felt the soft touch of green grass beneath his feet and the blanketing warmth of a beautiful spring day. Looking out over towards the horizon, Nicolas could see the familiar rocky plateaus and the thick jungles of twisted liana vines and tropical plants as the wailing cries of distant animals could be heard. Then, a horrible thought surfaced in his mind.

Oh, no! Not the Valley of the Dinosaurs again!

Here, the time-travellers had descended who were implanted into the very spot where all of their adventures had begun a year or so ago. However, everything is *not* always as it seems, for in Meadhonach’s recent past, the scurrying footsteps of Soren, the shrew, could be heard echoing deep down inside the caves of Subter Terram. Here, the gruesome cave master, the most insidious of overlording creatures, bellowed his instructions.

“Soren! Soren! I smell the *stink* of humans near. Beware, my mischievous mole, for we cannot allow the crystal waters to be tainted with their flesh. I gave the Grand Wizard my word. Do you understand me? You, rambunctious rodent!”



“Indeed, sir. Indeed, I do, I do, I do. Well, a fine little mess we have here then. A fine little mess indeed,” prattled Soren uncontrollably as he fidgeted about.

“Well, don’t just stand there. Go and check on the alluvium quarter and report back to me any sightings!” bellowed the cave master.

“At once, my liege. Yes, indeed. That is *precisely* what I shall do. At once, indeed,” he nervously prattled as he bowed slightly to his overwhelming presence.

Not wanting to aggravate him any further, Soren scampered off in search of the intruders, but he did so knowing full well that they had entered the hangman’s ferry hours ago whose fate was completely unknown. Some hours later, he returned having conducted an arbitrary inspection of the tunnels when he reported his findings.

“All is well, my liege. All is well, indeed. If there were humans here, then they are long gone, and I am pleased to report that the crystal waters are untainted and remain pure. Oh, yes – most pure. What relief! Oh, what it could have been, I just can’t imagine. No, no, no. It is all well and good. Just as well I say. Yes, indeed,” said Soren in a feverish twaddle.

“Oh! Shut up, will you, Soren? You’re giving me a headache,” thundered the cave master who was now losing his patience. “Now, get back to your post before the Grand Wizard hears of this!”

“Ah yes, my post. Where the devil is my post.? Oh, yes, I know. My post. Yes, that is where I must go. Well, I shall see you later when I make my report, indeed my report,” said Soren nervously as he scurried off while his verbal nattering echoed around the caves’ walls.

The cave master rolled his eyes who was now feeling happy to be free from the verbal ulcerations of Soren's constant jabbering. However, he knew that he served him well despite the nuances of his energetic personality. Slowly and audibly, the sound of Soren's incessant babbling diminished into the darkness while the cave master dipped his wooden vessel into the crystal waters and brought the sample to his nostrils. Inhaling the heavenly odour in, he could detect no scent of a foreign infiltration when he breathed a sigh of relief. With a contented smile, he placed the container into his swag, and then hoisted it up over his shoulder before he braced himself for the long journey ahead....



Meanwhile, months before, approaching the burning flames of hell, the rancid, black tentacles of the Luciferin guards had dragged the Grand Wizard's screaming body down to the depths to confront the beast master in a compelling inauguration – for the instigation of his immortal servitude. After an agreement was reached for the dispensation of some of his powers and in absolute desperation, the Grand Wizard removed the last vial of pure essence hanging from around his neck before he uttered the ancient verse for a time-travelling command.

***“Release thy spirits, dark tentacles that bind,
Commit thy soul to thy world ye find,
With the power of this dust and to the light of day,
Send thee hither. I command the way.”***

There was a puff of powdery dust and a swirling, upward thrust of light. Suddenly, with unimaginable speed, he was sent careering towards the wormhole when he tossed, turned, tumbled and spun uncontrollably towards the first eon. Here, his ability to travel to alternative realities in time remained intact. For now, he was saved, but the natural balance of souls that festered in the netherworld would see the necrotic fingers of death in seeking him out. A soul for a soul. That immortal, mortal-less cry would scream through the ages. There was no escaping that!

In the meantime, back in the cave, Soren caught his breath who searched high and low for any more intruders. However, there were none to be found; only the gentle swishing sounds of the crystal waters as they meandered their way through the immense underground chasms of Subter Terram. He sniffed the air with his sensitive snout when he detected the malodorous stench of the cave master's scent that was, unfortunately, still highly present. So setting his mind to his task and having wonderful, intuitive, navigational skills, he set forth who was now feeling happy in the knowledge that he naturally knew the way. He would be gone a few weeks or more, a welcomed relief from the cruel, condescending castigations that the cave master inflicted upon him. So, with a heart full of joy and gladness for a temporary reprieve, Soren ventured off into the long, winding recesses of the cave. At last he could feel some joy who was now feeling happy that he could pay good riddance to him.

That mindless ogre! That overbearing beast of a bore. Why do I put up with his menacing moods? Oh, not to mention the smell of his breath that would make a fishmonger blush.

Onward Soren scampered while his little legs pumped with frenetic speed as he dashed over the ground. He hadn't seen his family for years who dared not mention them for fear of a reprisal, for he missed his beloved Panaceum in the Forests of the Shrew so very, very much. So, in a shrewdly calculated equation, he summoned his courage before he decided that he would venture home. To cover his tracks, he followed the tunnels and the swirling crystal waters to the upper reaches in the south. This way, he could make a report to that gross manifestation of a creature that overlorded him. Finally, in a twittering, twattering, jibbering, jabbering muddle, he left his post and made for the Great Southern Quarter as thoughts for obtaining his freedom tinkled over in his mind.

Oh dear! To think that I've spent my life in the service of that loathsome leviathan. And his stinking feet. I've smelled better odours in the fish markets. Oh, I won't miss him at all. No, not at all thought Soren.

When he finally arrived at the perimeter, Soren poked his extended snout out and up into the light that broke through the crack between the

cave's wall. It had been years since he had felt the radiant warmth of the sun's rays warm his face, and it felt wonderful – just wonderful. Sniffing his way, he broke the surface to discover a world long forgotten as his eyes bulged at the living reality.

“Trees! Grass! Earth! Oh my. Oh dear. Oh, what wonder. Oh, what glorious wonder,” he prattled to himself as the beautiful vision of the splendour of the Earth surrounded him.

Instinctively, he knew the way home; a genetic, navigational code that had been instilled into the shrews' minds for millennia. Without hesitation and in a forward thrust, he scampered to the forest floor while his small, but efficient legs propelled him forward when his senses became immediately aroused by the multitude of natural smells swirling around him.

“Oh, what a glorious feeling. To be finally free from the bile of that blithering boab. And the smells of my heart's desire. Oh! It's just *too* good to be true, just *too* good indeed,” he jabbered to himself while his snout investigated all the natural, wonderful odorous secretions around him.

Momentarily fulfilled in his joyous exploration, he sung to himself a happy melody.



**Song – “I Feel Like A Shrew Royale”
(Sung By Soren Sorensen)**

“Mushrooms, leaves, twigs and seeds,
Giving off a heavenly scent.
Near the brook, I'll have a look,

To see where the dragonfly went.
Foraging there, and digging here,
I find worms in the soyle.(pronounced soyarl)
And I'll eat the treat,
Oh, my heart skipped a beat.
I feel like a shrew royale.
Oh, yes, I feel like a shrew royale.

To feel the sun. Oh, my life has begun.
I've left that horrible cave.
To discover the delights,
Oh, the smells and the sights.
Yes, I feel I'm immensely brave.
I'm marching home to the fields overgrown,
I'll not return for a while.
Yes, I feel like a shrew, I most certainly do.
Yes, I feel like a shrew royale,
Oh, yes, I feel like a shrew royale."

He sang to himself completely joyously as he took advantage of the uninhibited freedoms that his natural environment provided. He repeated the verse before he hummed happily as his voyage of discovery extended beyond the fringes of the swaying tufts of grass florets and the fields of hooded mushrooms which eventually extended into the outer fringes of the thickly treed forest.

However, Soren, being a most inquisitive and naturally curious creature, instinctively knew the way home. He remembered how as an infant that he had been dragged underground against his will by the Alisaunian druid priests in a pact with the Grand Wizard that saw his separation from his family, only to be assigned the most arduous and thankless of duties in service to the cave master. Sensing his freedom, he scurried faster and faster over hill and dale until, eventually, the sun set beyond the horizon where the gangly branches of the trees dangled menacingly against a darkened sky. Feeling the need to satisfy his hunger, Soren then found some juicy, red berries on some raspus vines growing conspicuously in a shaded dell when, before too long, he was feasting merrily until he heard the voice of the berry's protest.

"Will you kindly leave my berries alone, young master?"

"I'm not a young master. I'm Soren, and I'm quite hungry thank you very much."

"Well, if you must. Do it quickly."

"What's shaking your leaves? I only wanted a few berries. It's not too much to ask, is it? Not too much at all, I should think."



“How would you like someone eating *your* tail? I think you would feel quite differently then, wouldn’t you?”

Soren thought for a moment about the raspus vine’s question.

“Well, yes. Yes, I suppose I would.”

The raspus vine, who was feeling quite remorseful for his snappiness, reconsidered his objection when he realized that Soren was hungry. So, with a more conciliatory attitude, he offered him his fruits to feed on.

“Well, I’m sorry, Soren. Please, have your fill, if you must.”

“Thank you very, very much. I am indeed at your service.”

Gladdened by the raspus vine’s change of heart and not requiring any further prodding, he ate to his heart’s desire whose gorging feast filled his belly with the sweet juiciness of the fruit. Now, feeling contented with his meal, he scurried off once more before he scampered over the forest floor while the blue owls hooted in the treetops as the orange crackenjack lanterns lit the way. Although he had been travelling for hours, Soren knew that it was much safer to travel under the cloak of darkness than in the full light of the day. Finally, finding comfort and camouflage at the base of some bilberry bushes, he dug down into the Earth and nestled into his burrow before he wearily closed his eyes while he awaited the break of morning.



Hours later, the beautiful, orchestral sounds of early morning life greeted Soren's acute senses. Slowly, he awakened to a multitude of flittering insects while a warm stream of light fell across his furry face. The new day was born, and he was very glad for it. Fidgeting about, he emerged from his shallow burrow as he sniffed the air when he became completely intoxicated by the wonderful scent of fruit-bearing bushes in his vicinity. Perhaps wisely, he avoided the Raspus vines when, after gorging on more splendid fruits of the forest, he headed due west, west to Panaceum.

With grim determination he scurried along, and all the while, he kept his eyes focused on the canopy up above. Through the mountain streams and deep into the gorges, his little, scurrying feet carried him. Through the sparse wooded fields and into the dense groves of forest trees, he ventured further and further west until the outer reaches of the Forests of the Shrew surrounded him. A warm, fuzzy feeling then permeated his heart knowing that he was within a day's travel to his place of birth.

The very next day he ventured into the heart of his homeland. Here, situated on the brow of the hill underneath the towering canopy of oak trees, he sighted the front door of his father's house.

Oh! Oh, how wonderful. Mama! Papa! I'm home. I'm home at last.

Without any hesitation, he made straight for it as his little legs turned and churned with remarkable speed. At first glance, nothing seemed familiar, but fast asleep in her favourite rocking chair in front of a glowing fire, slept Soren's mother, Felicity. It was the same face of an angel that Soren had lovingly remembered from his youth. At that moment, Soren's father,

Jasper, stood outside his front door, with his arms heavily laden with twigs for the fire when, suddenly, their eyes met.

"Well strike me down if I don't see a ghost. Soren! Is it *you*? Is it really *you*?"

"Yes, Papa. It *really* is me," said Soren.

Jasper then dropped his load of twigs when the realization of seeing his son hit home once more. He then stretched his little paws out wide as he shouted with joy. "Soren, my boy!"

Immediately, father and son rushed into one another's arms before they embraced as tears ran down their happy faces. During this wonderful

reunion, Soren's mother awoke who joined in the communal hug when her disbelieving eyes tried to come to terms with the reality of his presence.

She was simply overjoyed. "We thought that you were dead, my dear boy. The druids told us that *no one* ever returns from Subter Terram."

"Well, they would say that, wouldn't they, Mama? What a fine little pickle to find yourself in. Oh, yes, what a fine little pickle indeed," said Soren.

"Come now, Soren, tell your mother all about your years away. Were they kind to you? Did they treat you well?"

Seizing the tenderness of the moment, Soren sank into the comfort of an acorn armchair whilst he divulged the grave injustices that he had suffered at the hands of the cave master. In his unveiling of the truth, the full deception of the druids' lies came to bear which drew an angry and dispirited response from his tempestuous mother.

"They shall get their comeuppance. Oh, yes. Of that, I am quite sure, my boy. Well, just wait until your sister and brothers hear of your return. What joy this shall bring! What sheer delight. A feast! Yes, we must feast to celebrate the return of our son."

And so it was that Soren was reunited with his family, his grandmother, Gladys, his grandfather, Aurelius, his sister, Penelope, and his two brothers, Weezil and Tweezil. Such glad tidings were brought to

bear in one another's loving company as they sat around the fireplace and reminisced about days of old.

Penelope was wide-eyed. "Are the waters *really* that clear? Are they magical?"

"Oh, yes. My word. They are indeed pure and must remain so. It is by the Grand Wizard's royal decree that they remain free from foreign invasion, or it's my head on the chopping block you know. And what a fine little mess that would be, a fine little mess indeed," prattled Soren.

The questions kept flowing while Soren familiarised his family with his past years as he regaled stories of the cave master's volatile nature and the many duties that were expected of him in service to the Grand Wizard. All their eyes were agog at the tales while only weariness and the late night dying embers of the flames prevented the continuation of the stories. Finally, after engaging in a grand feast and yielding to their tiredness, their heavy eyelids shut, everyone fell asleep, and the fire burnt out to a pile of residual charcoal.

The very next day, there was rejoicing in the hollows and the hills, and in the meadows near the daffodils. All were delighted at the return of the prodigal shrew, none more so than Jasper who, in his proud deliberations, presided over his son with all the love that a father shrew could muster. However, there was work to be done, for that night a secret meeting of the Tribal Council of the Shrew was to be held in the Great Hovel of the Hermitage, a wondrous expanse of a chasm where the parliamentary debates of government ensued. It was a wonderful place, full of huge flowering trees, grasses and flowers that grew towards the light that shone down through the cracks of the massive cave walls. Present at the public meeting were representative governors from the four Great Houses of the Shrew. Firstly, from the house of Sorenia was Siobhán Ravensquist, a rotund, aristocratic rodent whose perfunctory foibles of feeble, phlegmatic personality adhered her to this most royal and conciliatory of duties. Seated to her right, in a stoic, demonstrative dedication to the task at hand, was the plump and enigmatic Briskett Butterbeard from the house of Billington Booth. Seated piously on the chairman's throne was the overlording presence of Perry Periwinkle from the house of Pompousentia, with his most serious demeanour encapsulated by a pair of bifocal lenses that hung precariously on the end of his nose. And finally, but by no means as a last introduction, was the flamboyant and fabulously wealthy Ridley Ripplegrunt, a towering figure in the world of the shrew who was dressed to perfection in the ostentatious comfort of his station representing the house of Mammalia.



“Order! Order! I call this meeting to order,” shouted Chairman Perry Periwinkle over the droning assemblage. “Please, we must have order.”

Finally, the muttering died down while the chairman prepared himself to speak.

“Well, thank you one and all for your attendance this evening. I should like to commence this meeting by announcing that Cyril Plunkett and Ophelia Crotchett have officially decided to marry.”

Gasps of delight ensued followed by a smattering of polite applause before the assembly slowly returned to a quietened state.

The chairman felt as proud as punch. “Well, yes, as I was saying. We are here tonight to publicly discuss the most serious of matters, the most serious of matters indeed. However, before we discuss those melancholy duties, as fate would have it, our prodigal shrew has returned to us. Soren, welcome home, my boy. Welcome home.”

There were cheers and expressions of goodwill while Soren was invited to the rostrum to express his thanks. After acknowledging the chairman’s introduction, he was then pressed by the chairman to reveal

the secrets of the cave when, with bated breath and pricked up ears, the assembly waited on his every word.

“Yes, tell us all you know, my boy,” urged the chairman.

“Well, I’m sworn to secrecy, you know. The cave master’s wishes, you see. He shall be the very living death of me. Orders, orders, always giving orders, and I just have to obey them. Yes, I do, and without a second thought. Without as much as a note of thanks, a polite well done or a slap of my back. Oh no! Not he. No, no. Not even a whimper, nor a cry, nor even a hello – just orders. Go to the alluvium quarter, he commands. Do this! Do that! It’s a wonder I’m not in the infirmary. It’s a total wonder. And how did I survive this? Well, you see that’s another sad, sorry story altogether....”

The interested looks of concern on the faces of the governors slowly travelled with gravity to a lowly position of snide despair when the chairman could hear no more.

“Will you stop your infernal jabbering, Soren, and tell us of the Grand Wizard’s secrets?” he bellowed.

Stunned silence prevailed as the assembly communally refocused on Soren’s reply.

Nevertheless, Soren prattled away incessantly. “Secrets! Oh yes, there are many secrets to behold. For one, I know that he intends to use the crystal waters to sanctify a dozen vials of pure essence or more. And who knows? Why, it could be dozens. Oh, yes indeed. The druids are at this very moment working around the clock to procure an Epicurean quantity. Goodness me. Oh dear, oh dear. What if they should succeed? What then? I just couldn’t imagine it. I just could not imagine it at all.”

“Hmmm. An unlimited supply of the pure essence.” said Siobhán Ravensquist.

“Why, we’d be at the Grand Wizard’s mercy for a thousand years,” implored Ridley Ripplegrunt.

“We can’t allow that to happen,” remarked Briskett Butterbeard.

“Indeed, we cannot,” said General Alchador as he emerged out of the shadows.

“General Alchador! We are honoured, sir,” said Perry Periwinkle as he waved his paw about.

General Alchador stepped forward into the light with the throng of the shrew assemblage embedded at his feet when he proceeded to enlighten them.

“I fear the time has come, my friends, for affirmative action. We are holding the tunnels from Cryptomerium to Omniach, but the Grand Wizard’s forces are growing in strength. I don’t know how much longer we can fortify the entrances,” he said.

“Diplomacy!!” shouted Siobhán Ravensquist.

“Democracy!!” shouted a shrew from the assembly.

“Hypocrisy!!” shouted Briskett Butterbeard.
“Silence!!” roared the chairman as he stood up from his chair.

**Song – “Defending The Kingdom”
Sung by Chairman, Perry Periwinkle.**

“We shall act with wisdom in our thinking,
Before we take the sword,
For in defending our own kingdom,
I shall seek counsel with the Lord.
And with honourable intentions,
We shall negotiate a peace,
The words I aforementioned call
For hostilities to cease.

(Repeat chorus by all.)

Yes, the words he aforementioned
Call for hostilities to cease.

With diplomatic intervention,
In avoidance of a war,
I consulted with the wizard,
And with General Alchador.
In premeditative measures,
We negotiated peace,
For the pursuit of simple pleasures,
The hostilities must cease.

(Repeat chorus by all)

Yes, for the pursuit of simple pleasures,
The hostilities must cease.

(Question from Briskett Butterbeard, sung with recitative)

Q. But what of the illusion,
And the alliance with the west?
For all of that collusion,
He is feathering his nest!

(Reply from Perry Periwinkle, the chairman, answers with recitative)

I tell you, sir, most truly,
In what I can ascertain,

For intentions most unruly,
It's the Wizard's certain gain.
So take heed and strike the gauntlet,
For surely sorrow he shall wreak,
If we strike the harp and flaunt it,
Catastrophe, he'll surely seek.
No, dear sirs, we'll mind our measure,
And in timid steps we'll stride,
To countenance his pleasure
From his anger, we must hide.

(Repeat chorus by all)

Yes, to countenance his pleasure
From his anger, we must hide.

Q.(Question from Ridley Ripplegrunt)

But what of the intrusion,
The exclusion and the pact?
Surely our delusion necessitates our need to act.

(Reply from Perry Periwinkle, the chairman)

Sir, I tell you most sincerely.
You must recognize our pain.
For the wizard and his warlocks,
I have nothing, but disdain.

(Repeat chorus by all)

Yes, we tell you most sincerely.
You must recognize our pain.
For the Wizard and his warlocks,
We have nothing, but disdain.

Final Verse (Perry Periwinkle)

I have listened most intently,
And our wisdom shall prevail,
For our alliances are many,
And our mission shall not fail.
So in league with Queen Shoshana,
We must steer a certain course,
To seek out our nirvana,
And become a stronger force.

(Repeat verse 1)

We shall act with wisdom in our thinking
Before we take the sword,

For in defending our own kingdom,
We shall seek counsel with the Lord.
And with honourable intentions
We shall negotiate a peace.
The words he aforementioned,
Call for hostilities to cease.

(Repeat chorus by all.)

Yes, the words he aforementioned
call for hostilities to cease.

General Alchador seemed somewhat amused before he responded.
“Well, that is all well and good, Chairman, but I’m afraid that you are destined to fail.”

The chairman felt indignant. “Failure?! Us?! The shrew?! Well, I never.”

“No, he never,” echoed Soren.

“Never what?” asked Siobhán Ravensquist.

“Never have I been *so* incensed.” blasted Perry Periwinkle.

General Alchador responded with clarity. “The failure is not *yours*, Chairman. It is the Grand Wizard’s failure to honour *you, sir*.”

“He’s right. The Grand Wizard can’t be trusted. And if the druids produce more pure essence, there will be no more need for any of us, none of us at all,” protested the mayor, Cuniculus Cottontail.

“And then what?” an anxious shrew yelled from the assembly.

“Obliteration! Contamination! Annihilation!” came the anguished cries from the shrew brotherhood.

“No! Just complete *damnation*,” echoed General Alchador loudly.

Suddenly, all fell silent while the contemplations of future misery prevailed in their thinking until Soren found the strength to speak.

“My dear, dear friends. All is *not* lost, not lost at all. It is simply an illusion,” said Soren.

“Illusion?” grunted Ridley Ripplegrunt.

“Collusion more likely,” bellowed Briskett Butterbeard.

Sensing the confusion in the air, the Chairman, Perry Periwinkle, rose up from his chair once more to offer his final counsel.

(Final Two Verses- Perry Periwinkle)

“We shall act with wisdom in our thinking,
Before we take the sword,
For in defending our own kingdom,
I shall seek counsel with the Lord.
And with honourable intentions,
We shall negotiate a peace,

The words I aforementioned
Call for hostilities to cease.”

(Repeat chorus by all.)

Yes, the words he aforementioned
Call for hostilities to cease.

(Recitative verses spoken by the chairman)

In dispensation of my duty,
I must notably decree,
A solitary task of magnitude.
I must ask you, my dear Soren,
To return eternally,
To the caves with my sincerest gratitude.

To accommodate the council,
And achieve this grievous task,
I know, my boy, it's burdensome to bear.
For in seeking peaceful answers,
It's as much for me to ask,
The secrets of the cave, if you should dare.

(Final repeat verse in unison)

We shall act with wisdom
In our thinking before we take the sword,
For in defending our own kingdom,
We shall seek counsel with the Lord.
And with honourable intentions,
We shall negotiate a peace,
The words he aforementioned
Call for hostilities to cease.

(Repeat chorus by all.)

Yes, the words he aforementioned ,
Call for hostilities to cease.



And so it was publicly agreed, with the forlorn dispensation of shrew justice that Soren should return to the caves and act as a secretive conduit in the reporting of the Grand Wizard's affairs. For now, personal negotiations between government officialdom and the Grand Wizard would cease until the discovery of his true intentions was unearthed. Soren twitched and itched at the uncomfortable thought of returning to his vaulted chasm of depressive despair, but such was the love for his shrew community that never once did he flinch from his duty.

For a week, he sustained himself in the precious company of his family who indulged him in the delectable delicacies of scrumptiously succulent shrew sustenance. All culinary pleasures and pleasures of the heart were attended to with grace and gusto until the untimely moment for his departure arrived. Giving his final farewells, he kissed his brothers, his sister, grandfather and grandmother goodbye, but saved his most endearing hugs for his mother and father who remained incredulous at his departure.

"May God protect you," said Jasper as he wiped away the tears.

"Come back to me, Soren. I'll be waiting for you," lamented his mother.

Feeling overwhelmingly sad, Soren looked over his shoulder when, for the last time, he watched his family disappear into the haze of the purple oak leaves.

Meanwhile, within the gardens of the Grand Wizard's mountain lair in Castille, the bumbling, stumbling ogre, the cave master, Magnus Gropemungus, approached in trepidation with a sample of the crystal waters contained within his vessel.



“Approach, you lumbering sod,” said the Grand Wizard as he waited in anticipation.

“I have the sample from the Southern Quarter, my lord.”

“Excellent, excellent. Yes, you have done well, my friend. I’m sure Lord Grezniak shall be most pleased,” said the Grand Wizard as he snatched the vessel from the cave master’s grasp.

The druid lord, Lord Grezniak, had been summoned from the netherworld in a promise of total obedience to the Grand Wizard’s will having previously tried to usurp him. Perhaps unwisely, the Grand Wizard decided that he could serve him better alive than dead.

“Now, return to the crystal waters at once, and keep your eyes peeled for any human presence.”

“Yes, my lord. Ergh...there is no truth to this rumour, is there?”

“Heh, heh, heh. They are, but a mere inconvenience to me, Magnus. Now, go and do your duty.”

That very night under a dark, cloud-covered sky, the sample of the crystal waters were added drop by drop into the simmering cauldron of Lord Grezniak’s potion. Muttering his pagan vespers, the potion bubbled and boiled while the screams of a virgin sacrifice echoed in the distance somewhere behind the dank walls of Omniach. Lord Grezniak stared into the black, bubbling broth with his dark, opal eyes gleaming with excitement at the imminent procurement of the premature time-travelling liquid. Arrogant, defiant, proud and bullish, his mannerisms and

posturing superiority spoke volumes of his deceitful nature. Turning to warlock Sarkhoum to give him the good news, he spoke his vile truth.

“Inform the Grand Wizard that a year from now after the purification and distillation process has been completed he shall have his rudimentary vials.”

“The Grand Wizard shall be most pleased,” acknowledged the warlock before he made haste for Castille.

This was simply an unbearable equation as Queen Shoshana watched with displeasure from the reflection of her pools in Amahl. Speaking anxiously, she commanded her servant fairies into action.

“Alert the western alliance and summon my advisors. This is simply intolerable.”

Within hours, representatives of the Great Western Alliance, the Mortensian Resistance Movement and heathen separatists from all quarters of the Earth had gathered in Amahl to hear the judgement of the queen. Gradually, the murmurings of the military advisors died down when the queen prepared herself to speak.

“If I had not seen it with my own eyes, I would not have believed it. Despite his assurances, the Grand Wizard is, at this very moment, colluding with the druids of Omniach in producing a quantity of pure essence so powerful that we shall be at his mercy for a thousand years. I, for one, shall not allow this monster to dictate the terms of democracy any longer. No, he has bargained with my patience for long enough. Now, he shall feel the full force of our fury. Summon the Nasdjarkian dragons. We are at war!”

And so, war beset the queen’s realm once more. With the venomous vexations of vengeance burning in their blood, the queen’s collective armies marched defiantly out of Amahl for the long journey ahead to the fortifications of Castille. It would be one of many declarations of war that she would make.

In the meantime, the lords of the Druids League had gathered in the magnificent, palatial hall of Omniach’s Occulean temple where, with arrogant effrontery, they aggressively debated their plans of action. The beautiful light from the moon glowed like a white, shining disc in the sky.

“Am I to understand that despite the Grand Wizard’s singular assurance that he would not seek to control our sacred vials, that he, indeed, now seeks to have them in his keeping?” asked an aggrieved Lord Euphonis.



A momentary silence prevailed before Lord Oxar, the legendary, aged druid lord, moved forward to respond. His heart was feeling heavy as he inhaled his laboured breaths.

“Lords of the League, my eyes weep. They weep deep, sorrowful tears, not for me, but for the members of this esteemed league. I remember a time when we were free from the evil cunning of this wizard. True, King Elvorix

was no angel, but at least we could live our lives without the constant fear of war hanging over our heads. I remember days of silken rain and poetic fields of flowers that grew upon these lands. Hmmm. They seemed such peaceful days. Yes, I can still smell the flowers now, but those days are sadly gone, and so is the hope of reconciliation with this brutish beast. I fear, my friends, that our end shall come with a simple twirl of his staff at his whim and fancy. Yet, we must stay true to the cause of our forefathers and defy this madness, this sweeping sorrow that surges in our cities. Yes, I’m afraid that we must defy him.”

The druid lords sat in stony silence whilst they processed Lord Oxar’s passionate plea before the very learned Lord Kolkwis responded.

“Lord Oxar, I thank you for your commitment to this league and yes, we are faced with a dilemma, a quandary that this league has never faced

before. But what should you have us do? If we defy him, we shall be swept into the sands of time with a wave of his staff, and we shall be no more. What say you, my friends? No, we must concede if we are to survive.”

“Traitor! Lord of deceit! You are an embarrassment to this league,” thundered Lord Calamund Ostraphim. “My father would have never allowed such discussion. The mere notion to consider giving this wicked wizard our sacred vials makes my blood boil. We are the Lords of the Druids League. Our brothers and sisters in arms depend on us to guard this temple and our sacred vials with our lives. I shall die fighting for this cause. Who of you shall stand beside me?”

Song – “You All Know What To Do”

Song sung by Lord Ostraphim. Chorus sung by all the wizards.

“My lords, the time has come,
For us to make a sound decision.
Free from the Grand Wizard’s wrath,
And free from his derision.
A binding verdict, safe and sure,
Committed to the cause.
For we must show the light of day,
To open up our doors.

Chorus

So stand with me and fight as one,
We must stand firm and true.
As lords of this eternal league,
You all know what to do.

Fear not, my friends, his wicked ways,
For his hate shall not prevail.
When his days of lording over us,
Are destined to – hmmm, yes, fail.
My noble friends, with this righteous cause,
Our course is plain to see.
So, blow the winds of fear and doubt,
Yes, blow them out to sea.

Chorus

So stand with me and fight as one,
We must stand firm and true.
As lords of this eternal league,
You all know what to do.

Now, gather all your strength within,

And listen to your beating heart.
For now, the time has come, my friends,
From our company, he should part.
Let loose your rage and grasp the sword,
For the death knell surely tolls.
We seek his death in this ungodly hour,
According to the sacred scrolls.

Chorus

So stand with me and fight as one,
We must stand firm and true.
As lords of this eternal league,
You all know what to do.”

There were roars of approval and shouts of encouragement as the druid lords stood as one and showed their support. However, they were hollow cries driven by fear and anxiety with uncertainty as their companion. For now, Lord Ostraphim had stirred the emotions of his brothers, but at what cost? Nothing, it seemed, was certain in these difficult times as the lords of the league gathered together to congratulate themselves on their draconian action. Such false proclamations of grandeur, they would come to regret as the world spun on its axis and time rolled on...

In the meantime, two thousand miles away in the Forests of the Shrew, Soren scampered lightly over the forest leaves as he sniffed for the trail that he had roamed previously. He looked skyward when the heaviness of the clouds collected into a grey, cauliflower mass.

“Oh dear, oh dear. It’s going to rain. And to think that I had a warm burrow to sleep in. A fine little mess. Oh, yes. What a fine little mess indeed!” babbled Soren.

Fidgeting and scurrying about, he searched for a place to scratch a temporary burrow into the ground. Finally, after much pedantic indecision and procrastination, he found a softness in the Earth and dug his burrow. Soon enough, he was sleeping soundly while the raindrops gently fell to the ground outside.

The sun slowly emerged in the eastern sky as the faint solar arms of energy gripped the Earth in a warm embrace. Birds chirped cheerily, butterflies fluttered breezily, and the jitterbugs jittered in the glow of the early morning light. In a spontaneous reaction to the crisp morning air, Soren poked his snout out of the burrow who tested the air for foreign scents, but only the fragrant odours of heavenly scented nectaries greeted him.

“Oh! What sheer delight. I shall have a feast. A feast indeed,” he said to himself.

So, eagerly, out he popped from his burrow. Now, paying conspicuous attention to the flowering buffet on offer, he gorged himself on the salubrious selection of the sugary sweet fruit and berries available. Culinary pleasures completed, he swiftly picked up his trail as he scampered over hill and dale through the wooded woods and the gorgeous gorges, through the meandering meadows and the fluffy, flowering flowerets of the plains until he had reached the entrance to the caves of Subter Terram.

Slowly, with an apprehensive descent, he clambered down into the craggy gap in the rocks and into the summit of the tunnel. From there, he descended further and further into the bowels of the mountain before he heard the swishing sounds of the crystal waters bringing comfort to his ears. Further and further his little legs carried him. All the while, the swishing, churning rapidity of the crystal waters’ flow sounded near. In the distant reaches of the cave, he could hear the cave master’s voice echoing his searching cry.

“Soren! Soren! Where is that infernal marsupial? I’ll grind his petite posterior into a putrid pulp if he doesn’t show himself soon.”

“He’ll be here somewhere, Magnus,” said his wife, Quimsy.

“Well, I’ll be having shrew stew for dinner tonight if he doesn’t show his face soon,” the cave master bellowed.

“Oh! Don’t be so ogressive, Magnus. You know it does nothing for you whatsoever,” his wife protested.

“I’m here. I’m here,” Soren jabbered as he scurried back towards the huge stinking feet of the ogre.

“Well? Where the hell have *you* been?” growled the cave master.

“Oh! Just checking on the southern quarter, my liege. Following your instruction to the letter. Yes, indeed. Following orders, and may I say following them completely to the letter. Yes, to the letter,” prattled Soren.

The cave master rolled his large, grey eyes again before he issued his command.

“Oh, shut up, will you, Soren? You, blubbering blimp of a burden.”

He then inhaled a large breath as he tried to bring his anger under control.

“I am pleased to report that the Grand Wizard was delighted with the samples from the Southern Quarter. But now, he needs some fresh samples from the Northern Quarter. I’m just *too* tired to venture there today.

However, you, my flee-born flibbertigibbert, shall go there and make sure that the waters are pure. So, move your pestilent posterior and make



for the Northern Quarter at once, and report back to me in a few days-time.”

“Oh, yes. The Northern Quarter. I’ll be there before you can say flibbityjibbetyjabbetyjoo. Yes, my leige. I’m leaving now,” said Soren.

“Flibity, dibbity...dabbety...what is this nonsense? Well, be off with you before I eat you for a snack.”

“Yes, my liege. Yes, indeed. To the Northern Quarter, I must go,” muttered Soren inaudibly.

“Go!! You, rambunctious rodent,” he screamed.

**Song – “Flibbityjibbetyjabbetyjoo.”
Sung by Soren Sorensen.**

“Flibbityjibbetyjabbetyjoo, scurrying all day,
I just know what to do.
Scampering here and scurrying there,
The life of a shrew just seems so unfair.

With a twitch of my snout and a flick of my tail,
I’m bound for the far Northern Quarter.
But if I should fail in achieving this task,
My life as a shrew shall be shorter.

Flibbityjibbetyjabbetyjoo, scurrying all day,
I just know what to do.
Scampering here and scurrying there,

The life of a shrew just seems so unfair.

Scurrying and hurrying, I leave in a flash,
To the Northern Quarter, I know, I must dash.
To find the pure water of crystals most rare.
It's an honourous task I simply can't bear.

Flibbityjibbityjabettyjoo, scurrying all day,
I just know what to do.
Scampering here and scurrying there,
The life of a shrew just seems so unfair.

The cave master's orders, I must duly follow,
And return unto him the day after tomorrow.
With a flask full of liquid to gain satisfaction,
I'll be the toast of the town, a great shrew attraction.

Flibbityjibbityjabettyjoo, scurrying all day,
I just know what to do.
Scampering here and scurrying there,
The life of a shrew just seems so unfair.

Having convinced himself to diligently carry out the cave master's orders, Soren scurried off into the dimness of the cave. It was a lonely life being a shrew in service to that bombastic beast. He simply didn't understand anything at all about the shrew and particularly, Soren. And what a temper, he had. He was forever shouting his instructions with not a thought for poor, Soren's welfare. Do this! Do that! Go here! Go there! Never a moment's peace to be had. Poor Soren. What a brave, little soul, he was. So off, his little scampering feet carried him. After travelling for an hour following the gentle lapping sounds of the crystal waters, he decided to rest when he lay his body down on the gentle cushion of some reeds at the water's edge. Here, he breathed a heaving sigh when the memory of his family remained close to his heart while the aggressive amplitude of the cave master's voice still rung loudly in his floppy ears. Feeling the need to lift his spirits and soothe his soul, he settled himself down before he sang a soft, lamentable song to ease his pain.

Song- "Soren's Lament."

"I lie here in my troubles lamenting all day long,
While all the world is spinning in my brain.

My trouble only doubles while I'm thinking *what is wrong?*
Can't anybody feel my world of pain?
So, with silent faux objections, I relish the connections,
My thoughts are pure and honest to the core.
For, in emotionless depravity, my world is such calamity,
I yearn for love and peace and so much more.
For, in emotionless depravity, my world is such calamity,
(Sigh)
I yearn for love and peace and so much more.

There is sadness in reflection, with the slightest of detection,
A simpleton's dear life, I would pursue.
But in earnest thoughts of gravity,
I condemn my mind to insanity,
While I search the world for answers from the few.
I shall give myself most truly in rejection of the cruelty,
While the wizard seeks to wreak his rack and ruin.
For relentless time equality,
I must protect the small minority,
When evil shows its face all, but too soon.

And so, in my defiance with the strength of the alliance,
The choice is fairly simple upon review.
To retain a fierce tenacity, I must show a great audacity,
And reject the Wizard's evil point-of-view.
In the wisdom of my thinking, the evidence is linking,
Towards the independence of the shrew.
In the finality of analysis, there shall be no paralysis,
Now, I know exactly what to do,
Oh, yes. Now, I know exactly what to do."

So, with his mind made up, Soren fell asleep in the comfort of the reeds as the gushing waters lulled his senses and comforted him. Hours passed while he slept when, finally, with a quivering, blithering energy, he arose and scrambled across the vast chasm's floor until he came to the Sea of Serenity and the purple, vaporous mist that surrounded him. Looking out into the sea, he watched the gruesome hangman slowly drag his oars through the water in silence while he made his way towards him. Finally, he docked when the macabre figure of the hangman then spoke his hissing words from under the hooded blackness of his cloak.

"He who seeks passage across the sea must answer a riddle from you to me. Hisss, hisss."

Soren twitched and itched, bewitched by the beguiling presence of the insidious hangman. However, deciding in that moment not to be a prisoner of the Grand Wizard for eternity, he summoned his courage.

“I shall answer your riddle, dark spirit. Most certainly I shall. Come forth.”

“Hiss, hiss. Very well. Hiss, hiss. What has many keys, but no locks?” asked the hissing spirit.

Soren screwed up his face who felt somewhat perplexed by the ambiguity of the riddle’s clue. But suddenly, an epiphany entered his brain when, intuitively, he knew the answer.

“It’s the magic piano, isn’t it ?”

The dark spirit hissed again with most displeasure before he beckoned him over to the boat as his skeletal hands waved in a call to board. Slowly, silently, secretly, the boat motioned off into the purple mist when only the splashing, watery sounds of the oars slicing through the water could be heard. For hours, the hangman rowed and rowed when not a sound, nor a whimper could be heard as they moved ever closer to the shore. Feeling the impulses of his natural enquiring mind, Soren nervously popped his head out from his hiding place who stared at the huge, blue trees with their



gangly, trailing branches weeping to the water’s edge. It was a terrible sight before he gulped when he saw the ravens squawking over the remains of some unfortunate, dead corpses. *Well, I guess the joke’s on them, he thought.* Suddenly, the boat docked.

Turning his hooded head to reveal a black void of nothingness, the hangman slowly rose his skeletal arm up who pointed to the shoreline. Soren needed no further invitation when, with a jag and a jiggle and a hey diddle diddle, he scampered off the boat and jumped ashore. In the

dim distance, he could hear the effervescent, melodious resonations of the singing field of poppies when his ears pricked up to its calling. So off he went following the light of the tunnel as his little legs churned away restlessly. Scampering and scurrying, he followed the path past the noisy fuzzlewuzzle trees through the mossy sponges and to the source of the enigmatic music. Now, that he was getting closer, the singing became more pronounced when the joyous expression of the flourishing musical singing enveloped his ears. Soren knew that Erasmus, the choirmaster, would not be far away when, in seeking his counsel, he poked his snout out through the tunnel entrance to have a look. What a glorious vision then beset his oval eyes. Singing in wonderful harmony, the orange fields of poppies sang with all their gusto and pride as they heartily entwined their fragile stems around one another. Erasmus, the choir master, seemed mesmerized by the choir of singing poppies as he flailed his arms about in haphazard motion while the poppies sang their hearts out.

**Song- “When Poppies Go Marching Home”
Sung to a tune similar, but different to – “When Johnny Comes
Marching Home.”**

“When poppies go marching home again – Hurrah! Hurrah!
When poppies go marching home again – Hurrah! Hurrah!
When our flowers bloom and our stems do sprout,
The rain falls down and the seeds come out,
Then we all know that we poppies have much to bloom.”

The singing went on eternally in a rhetorical, spiralling crescendo of never-ending enthusiasm, and never once did Erasmus flinch. However, Soren was seeking answers for his quest when, in an indignant interruption to the poppies’ boisterous singing, he interjected.

“Oh me, oh my. Please! Please, Erasmus, could you tell me the way? I dare not go back. No, no, no, not now. Not back to *that* cave and that mindless ogre. No, definitely not. Positively, absolutely, definitely not,” babbled Soren.

Erasmus turned his head in Soren’s direction before he signalled for the poppies to stop their rehearsal. All the while, he protested his displeasure at the interruption.

“What the devil are *you* doing? Can’t you see that we are rehearsing? I’m a busy bumpkin you know. We can’t tiddle taddle all day, and we mustn’t fiddle faddle either. I’m a busy bumpkin, a most serious of lumpkins, you know!”

“A what?” asked Soren.

“A lumpkin! You know, a biddle, liddle, lumpkin,” answered the poppy prefect.

“A biddle liddle lumpkin. Well, I never! And to think I thought that you were just a choirmaster. Oh, how sorry I am. If I had known that you were a soulful specialist of serenading splendour, I would have never interrupted you,” babbled Soren.

“Hmmm. Well, since you have interrupted me, I shall sing you my most precious song, my little furball.”

With that being said, Erasmus raised his arms into the air as he proceeded to conduct the magnificent poppy choir.



**Song – “Biddle Liddle Lumpkin Bumpkin Li.”
Sung by Erasmus Bonklefittler**

“Biddle liddle lumpkin bumpkin li,
Watching the world just pass me by,
Happy little chappy I must be,
To remain in anonymity.
Biddle liddle lumpkin bumpkin li,
Singing all my songs so way up high,
Quirky little creature I must be,
To sing for eternity.

And now I'm most irreverent,
To every social segment,
Not a care in the world,
If the feeling's not there for me.

(Repeat verse 1 & 2)

Biddle liddle lumpkin bumpkin li,
Watching the world just pass me by.
Happy little chappy I must be,
To remain in anonymity.

Biddle liddle lumpkin bumpkin li,
Singing my songs so way up high.
Quirky little creature I must be,
To sing for eternity.

And poppies are my pleasure,
Orange souls of treasure,
Singing little plants,
They're always in a trance you seeee!!

(Repeat verses 1&2)

Biddle liddle lumpkin bumpkin li,
Watching the world just pass me by.
Happy little chappy I must be,
To remain in anonymity.

(All of the poppies- repeat twice)

Biddle liddle lumpkin bumpkin li,
Singing all our songs so way up high.
Quirky little creatures we must be,
To sing for eternity.
Biddle liddle lumpkin bumpkin li,
Singing all our songs so way up high.
Quirky little creatures we must be,
To sing for eternity.”

“My my. What wonderful singers you all are. Very happy to make your acquaintance, Erasmus and dear poppies, very happy indeed,” said Soren in a nervous introduction.

“Ah, yes, Soren. You are the guardian shrew of the crystal waters, are you not?” asked Erasmus.

Soren thought carefully before answering knowing that an admission to a relinquishment of his duty would mean certain death.

“I’m temporarily on leave, sir. Ummm,.... yes, temporarily on leave,” said Soren.

“Fiddle sticks! Faddle sticks! Piddle sticks and paddle sticks! I’ve seen that ogre, that giant of a cave master and he is entirely rude, not to mention the odorous stench that exudes from his blubbery frame. A most ogressive fellow. Well, tut tut, don’t you worry. This little twiddle twaddle of a taddling, tiddling fellow won’t spoil your secret. Oh no, not I. You are in orange company now, a refuge of sincerity, and with great temerity, I welcome you to our fold. So listen, dear fellow, while I tell with clarity, and I shall inform you with no disparity an explanation of my view,” said Erasmus.

(rhythmically spoken with recitative)

“I tell you with discretion, the truth that I must mention, for I’ve heard the word that we’ve all incurred,” whispered Erasmus. “Yes, we’ve heard the word that we’ve all incurred,” repeated the poppies collectively.

“Indeed, I’ve heard the word that we’ve all incurred, you see,” said Erasmus

Soren felt confused. “What word? What word have you heard?”

Erasmus secretly revealed the word in a soft whisper. “The word, my dear fellow, is *Occulus*.”

“How innocuous!” exclaimed Soren.

“No, no, no. It’s Occulus, the druid legend,” said Erasmus animatedly.

“Yes, I know of him. He’s the druid lord who made time travel possible if I am not mistaken.”

“Well, if the rumours are true, then the Grand Wizard’s days may be numbered.”

“Whatever do you mean?”

Erasmus moved in closer to Soren to whisper his secret.

“There is a magic piano. Of that I have no doubt, and on that magic piano sat a magic clock. And *that* magic clock was made by Lord Occulus himself!”

Soren was completely taken aback. “A magic clock!”

“Yes. As legend has it, it was made to control the duration and direction of the piano’s journeys, but it was stolen, and from all reports it has stopped ticking.”

“Stopped ticking?! So what if its stopped ticking,” said Soren.

“Look! You don’t understand me, little fellow. Let me explain. Lord Occulus knew that the Grand Wizard wanted to control all of time in all the universes, and knowing this, he gilded a magical key and clock with the power of the pure essence.”

Soren put two and two together before he offered his conclusion.

“Well, what a fine little mess this is. What a fine little mess indeed. And I suppose, if the clock is found and wound, then the Grand Wizard should live forever,” said Soren.

“Precisely, my dear shrew. But, if the clock is not wound, then time shall slowly cease, and we shall all disappear into a distant memory. Well, tut tut! It’s a fiddling, faddling dilemma, Soren, and I must say my goodbyes, for we have rehearsals to attend. I’m a busy bumpkin, you know, with choirs to teach, plants to plantagnate,” he said enthusiastically.

Now, feeling happier about things he launched into his favourite song.

“Biddle liddle lumpkin bumpkin li,
Singing all my songs so way up high.
Quirky little creature I must be,
To sing for eternity.

(All of the poppies- repeat twice)

Biddle liddle lumpkin bumpkin li,
Singing all our songs so way up high.
Quirky little creatures we must be,
To sing for eternity.
Biddle liddle lumpkin bumpkin li,
Singing all our songs so way up high.
Quirky little creatures we must be,
To sing for eternity.”

Soren listened to their joyous singing, but it was obvious to him that Erasmus could be of no further assistance. So he thanked him for his explanations as he prepared to leave. However, with a final inquisitive question, he asked Erasmus if he had encountered the small children that had passed through the caves in Subter Terram weeks before.

“Oh yes. I guided them to the Valley of the Sequioas, and I left them there. I’m a busy bumpkin you know. Tut tut,” he said before they parted company on glowing terms.

Meanwhile, the time-travellers journeyed through time to the ancient, Jurassic world of the dinosaurs where they were reunited with Uncle Olaf’s long-lost brother, Marius. After Marius and Uncle Olaf were captured by the evil warlock, warlock Sarkhoum, the children departed the safety of their cave who ventured north and followed a trail of pink stars in the sky. Taking refuge in another cave, they narrowly escaped the clutches of the vicious Simians that prowled the plains of

Meadhonach before they entered the surreal world of Subter Terram and caught the hangman's ferry. After a perilous crossing, they entered into the world of the singing poppies when Erasmus guided them to the Valley of the Sequoias. Having followed the cumulus clouds that drenched the tree king, they eventually arrived in Vallucium when Elise showed him her vial of pure essence. Guiding their way, the tree king allowed them to climb his branches to the upper world when they found an abandoned witches' hut. Unbeknown to them in the middle of the night, the witches returned when, cackling heinously, they searched tirelessly for their human prey. Seizing his opportunity, Marius grasped the ancient symbol of the witches' alliance before they headed from the woods and found an old, rickety boat. Now, they felt all exhausted when, falling asleep, the boat was miraculously transported to the distant future by virtue of a leaky vial. Destiny, it seems, prevailed as they were led to the hut of the soothsayer, Nedebiah Jericho. Here, their adventures had only just begun.....

**Having avoided the hangman's noose,
Soren ventured onward.
Through the beautiful fields,
Of the singing poppies,
His fear remained unconquered.
Whilst in the depths of Castille's castle,
The Grand Wizard burst his bubble,
For the magical key of the golden clock,
Was nothing more than trouble.**