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Also by Darren Stevens

A Collection of Stories (2011)

Although the events in this story are the work of fiction any similarities with persons within are intentional by the author.

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Four young boys set off on an epic adventure to London searching for an item that has been locked away for centuries. As they begin their search they are made aware that time is against them as a rival is only one step behind. Before their quest is over they will experience hope, despair, fear and happiness all in equal measure...but in the end there can be only one winner.





CHAPTER

ONE

One hot summers day Alexander the Soldier decided that he was bored...bored...bored. The years are passing by and he was yet to have his first real adventure, what was he to do? He had often heard about other people's experiences and they did sound exciting. He gazed out the window and wondered what it would be like to explore London, even for just one day.

His mother, Viola the Dancer, loved to visit all the famous sites and wished she could go more often. Secretly she longed to become a tour guide and work there full time, every night she prayed that her dream would come true.

His father, Marek the Wanderer, travels to London every day and it sounds like a great place to visit. Although, he just sits in his office with his feet on the desk dreaming about actually working. When he isn't sleeping he drinks tea or counts his pocket money, there is so much to do!



Alexander the Soldier suddenly felt tired, stretching his arms he yawned. He had cleaned the house from top to bottom whilst his Mother and Father watched television. Beata the Runner had been out jogging again so he had been very busy...it was time for bed. He hadn't been asleep very long when he woke suddenly, thinking he had heard a noise! He listened carefully hoping to hear it again but a little scared in case he did. It seemed to be coming from outside...he decided to take a look out of the window.

It was dark but he could just make out three shapes through the gloom. He thought they were young but could not be sure in such poor light. They were all talking at once and they looked like they were planning something exciting. He decided it was too late to go outside, it would have to wait until the morning. He lay back down and was soon fast asleep once more.



After breakfast Alexander the Soldier made his way outside and looked for the three strangers but they were nowhere to be found. It seemed he was too late! He was about to give up when he heard voices, low and hushed. They were coming from around the corner, so off he ran as quietly but as fast as he could.

The strangers did not notice him approaching at first as they were lost in their conversation. It seemed they were about to go on a journey but did not know the way. They needed someone who knew the streets of London otherwise their quest would be over before it really began.

Well, Alexander the Soldier could contain himself no longer. "One second, I know London.... Upminster, C2C, 25 Moorgate" he blurted out. Well the three strangers were so surprised they scattered and jumped into the bushes! Who was this stranger that had appeared before them?



When everyone calmed down there were introductions and handshakes all round and they were soon good friends. But when Alexander the Soldier revealed he wanted to join their quest there were worried looks all round. Their journey would be dangerous, they said, he might not be safe! He had to think fast otherwise they might go without him. "You still need a guide" he began "Why don't you give me a test?" They agreed and chose three difficult questions to which he quickly replied "There are over 7 million people, the river is 215 miles long and the Great Fire started in 1666.

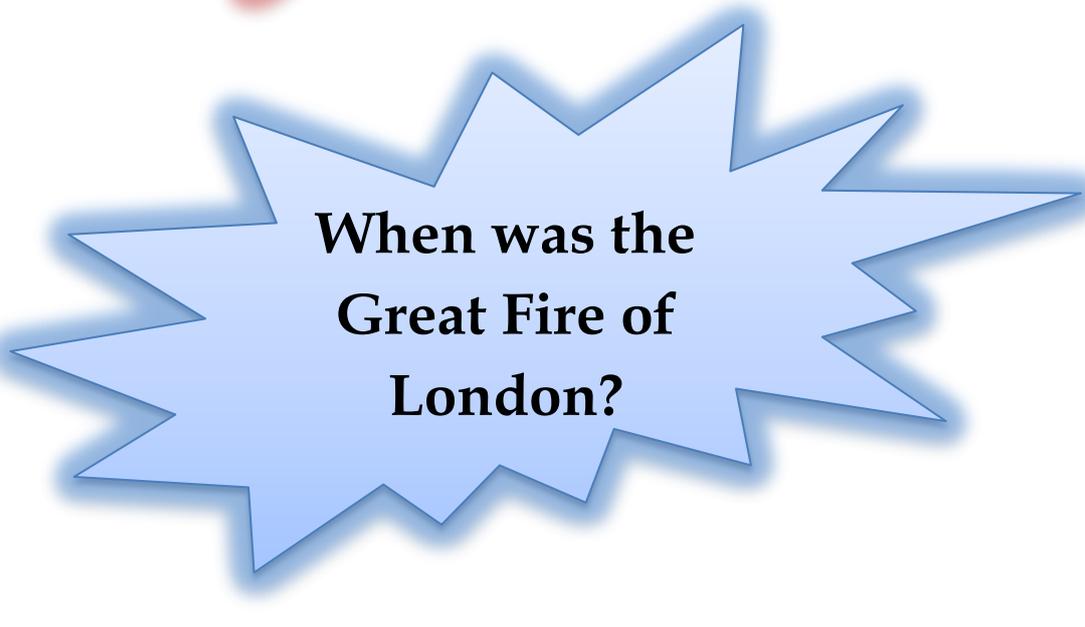
Well, there really was nothing more to be said on the matter, Alexander the Soldier was now their guide! As he walked towards the station, he wondered what lay ahead. It was true that big cities were dangerous, but London was ok wasn't it? What were they looking for? This all sounded very mysterious indeed!



**How many
people live in
London?**



**How long is
the River
Thames?**



**When was the
Great Fire of
London?**

As they neared the station they thought it was a good time to discuss their special talents. They didn't know what to expect when they arrived in London, so they had to be prepared for anything.

First Maniek the Brave announced he was a master swordsman. "I have won many battles and none have passed when I was on guard" he said and added "I am also a light sleeper which helps when enemies try to sneak up on us!" With that he swung his sword back and forth, pretending to fight an imaginary enemy.

After a few minutes he had to put his sword away as he was starting to get very tired. It was hard work playing in this warm weather, dressed in his best fighting costume. As well as being a great swordsman he also declared he could jump very high. Surprisingly though, he finished his little speech by announcing that he was afraid of the dark!



Leuś the Hungry began by announcing that he could talk to the animals to gain their trust and help. “I once visited a zoo and led all my friends to freedom” he announced with pride. Then a little strangely he added “It is always good to have food on a long journey!”

Leuś the Hungry was getting very excited now as he had helped plan the quest from the start. “My animal friends will help us on our way” he declared before adding “They will bring us news of the road ahead”. This sounded very good at first and made them all feel at ease, but then of course it would all depend on what the news was!

Alexander the Soldier asked if there would be enough food for such a long journey. To which Leuś the Hungry quickly replied “I always carry my trusty sack on such long journeys, leave it to me” and that was all he would say about food for the moment.



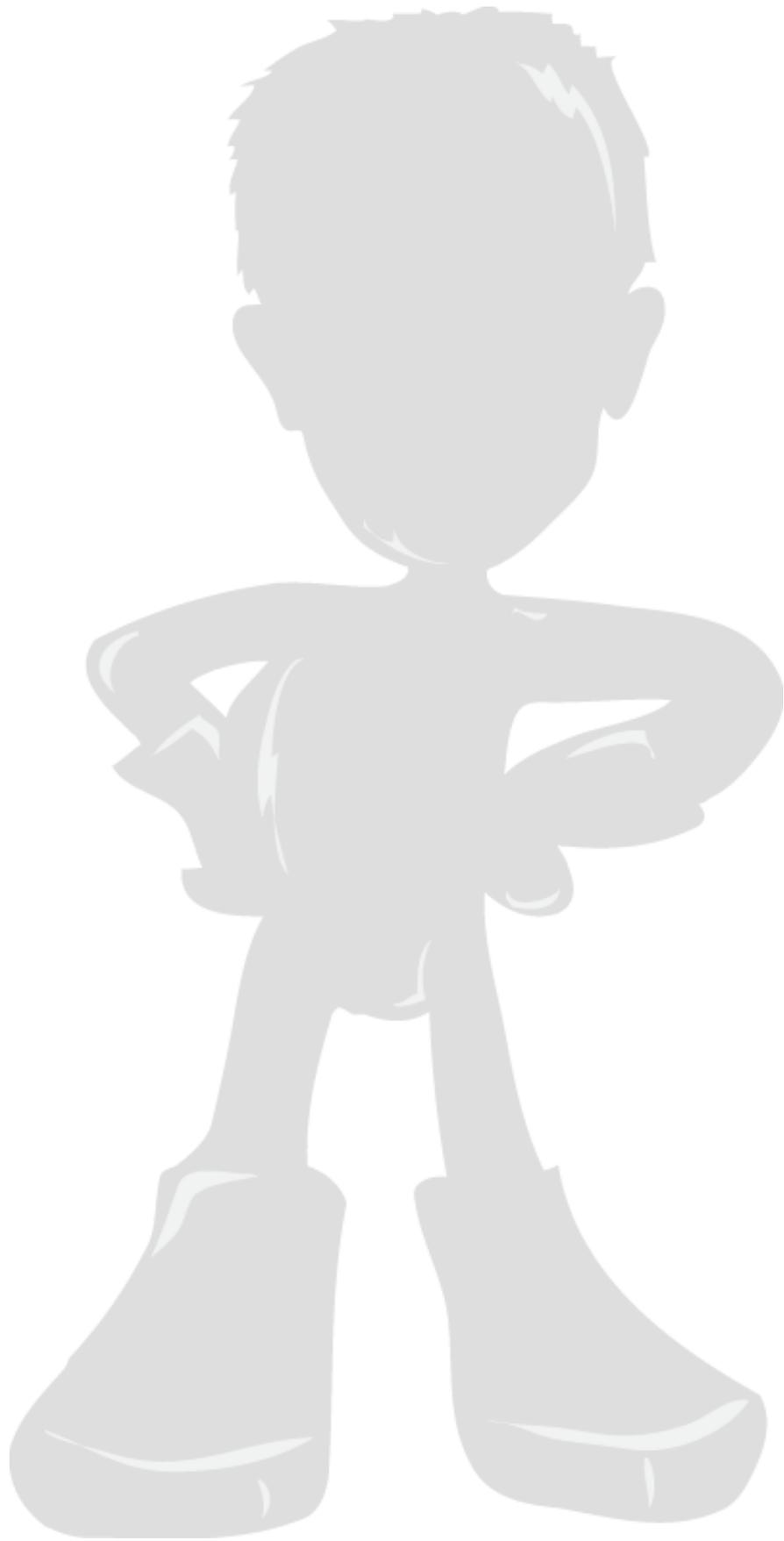
Benek the Forgetful was a little unsure about his talents, he couldn't remember what they were! He had been in charge of the map to London but had put it down somewhere, this is why they had needed a guide. "I am the brains of the group" he proclaimed, "I have got us where we are today!" When asked why he wore only one sock, he answered "I keep our money in the other one of course!" All of this worried Alexander the Soldier greatly, he would have to watch Benek the Forgetful very closely.

Benek the Forgetful then asked where they were going in such a hurry as it was such a lovely morning. They should be playing football, hide and seek or some other game. Maniek the Brave had to remind him they were on a special journey. They were far away from home and had to take care. Nothing more needed to be said to him for the moment, he would only forget again anyway!



Now it was the turn of Alexander the Soldier to reveal his talents and he was a little undecided. There were so many things he could say about himself. At last he said “Well, I know London of course” which was met with nodding heads. “And I can also turn invisible when I want!” he added. This surprised everyone and they wanted to know more. “Show us then, if you can!” they all said together. With that Alexander the Soldier vanished and reappeared behind them which gave them all a terrible fright!

They soon reached Upminster and boarded the train, before settling in for the start of their journey. They decided they must save their energy now and get as much rest as possible. Alexander the Soldier informed everyone it would take about half an hour to reach Fenchurch Street. After that he would need to know more about the quest and where they were going!



When the heroic group arrived at Fenchurch Street they met a passing stranger who introduced himself as Andrzej the Chatterbox. He was dressed in pink clothing and they thought he looked very intelligent. But how wrong they were! When he spoke to them he was a gibbering mess, all dribbling and muttering. They did not know what to think when he began to dance around in a circle making funny noises!

Eventually he calmed down and sat in front of them crossed legged. "You will soon meet a good fairy who will help you on your way" he told them. This was good news and they all cheered. Then suddenly Andrzej the Chatterbox was up again scratching himself and blowing bubbles through his nose. Before they could ask him any more questions he jumped up a tree and disappeared from sight! What a strange character, they thought, I wonder who we will meet next?



Before they continued they decided it was time to tell Alexander the Soldier about the quest. They gathered in a circle, checked no one else was listening and Leuś the Hungry began the story.

“A long time ago Marcin the Wizard was asked by the King to make him a special present. At first he struggled to think of anything fit for a King. Then at last, he decided upon a magic key which would open any lock. The King was very pleased with his present but was also worried that someone might steal it. So he kept it hidden and only used it on special occasions. A long time passed and the key was soon forgotten. People told stories about it but no one really believed them. Until one day, centuries later, Maniek the Brave heard about a map. It showed the location of the key in the deepest, darkest room within the Tower of London. Our quest therefore is to find the map and take the key for ourselves!”





CHAPTER

TWO

Edyta the Fairy lived in a far off land and visited London whenever she got the chance. At night she was at her happiest stripping off wallpaper and decorating. During the day she transformed into a fairy with special powers.

The four boys saw her from a distance and hid, not knowing who she was. Could this be the fairy they had been told about? They decided not to take any risks. Alexander the Soldier turned invisible and sneaked up behind her. Now, although this was very brave it is not wise sneaking up on a fairy. Without warning she waved her wand and produced a flash of light!

After they had recovered their wits she called to them softly "I have been waiting for you, you are late" before adding "I know of your quest and I am here to help". This was good news for the four adventurers as they were now beginning to think they needed all the help they could get!



Edyta the Fairy began by telling them of a creature who lived under Tower Bridge. His name was Carlos the Troll and he annoyed everyone he met. They might be allowed to cross but first they would have to answer his three questions. Their path lay beyond the bridge and Edyta the Fairy insisted it really was unavoidable. Then she said goodbye and vanished with a puff of smoke!

Alexander the Soldier led them towards Tower Bridge, it was only a short journey but they took their time. They saw the bridge and it looked quiet enough, they even wondered if they could rush across. But, after further discussions, it was decided they should be more careful. Alexander the Soldier went ahead to have a look on his own. He crept quietly, got close and peered between two trees. Although it was dark under the bridge he could see Carlos the Troll in his little boat but he was not alone!



Paula the Troll was getting upset, she was trying to think of tricky questions to ask passing travellers and Carlos the Troll wasn't helping. She did hope their questions would not be answered so they could eat the people for their tea.

Alexander the Soldier crept along the bridge as quietly as he could. He got close enough so he could hear the trolls talking. When he had heard enough he decided to head back to the others. He had not gone very far when he trod on a twig, which made a loud crack! The trolls heard the noise and scrambled up to see who had made it.

The others waited patiently for Alexander the Soldier to return. Maniek the Brave stood guard listening for signs of approaching trolls. Leuś the Hungry called his bird friends and asked them for news. He was not pleased by their answers so he ate one of them, he thought this was a very strange land.



Alexander the Soldier had made a narrow escape when he trod on the twig. The trolls searched long and hard but could not find him, which only made them angrier! After a while he managed to slip away and head back to the others.

When he returned his three companions listened patiently to his story. They got very interested when they heard the troll was not alone as even one troll is dangerous. "I overheard them talking about Capital cities so that must be the questions they are going to ask!" he explained.

They approached the bridge slowly as everybody knows trolls do not like being surprised. As they drew near Carlos the Troll jumped up and called for them to stop. "Who are you and what do you want" he shouted. When they explained that they must cross to the other side without delay he said "Not so fast, I have some questions for you first".



“You must answer correctly or things will go very bad for you” he added with a sneer. The four travellers felt they could answer the questions ok but trolls are trolls so they still had to be careful.

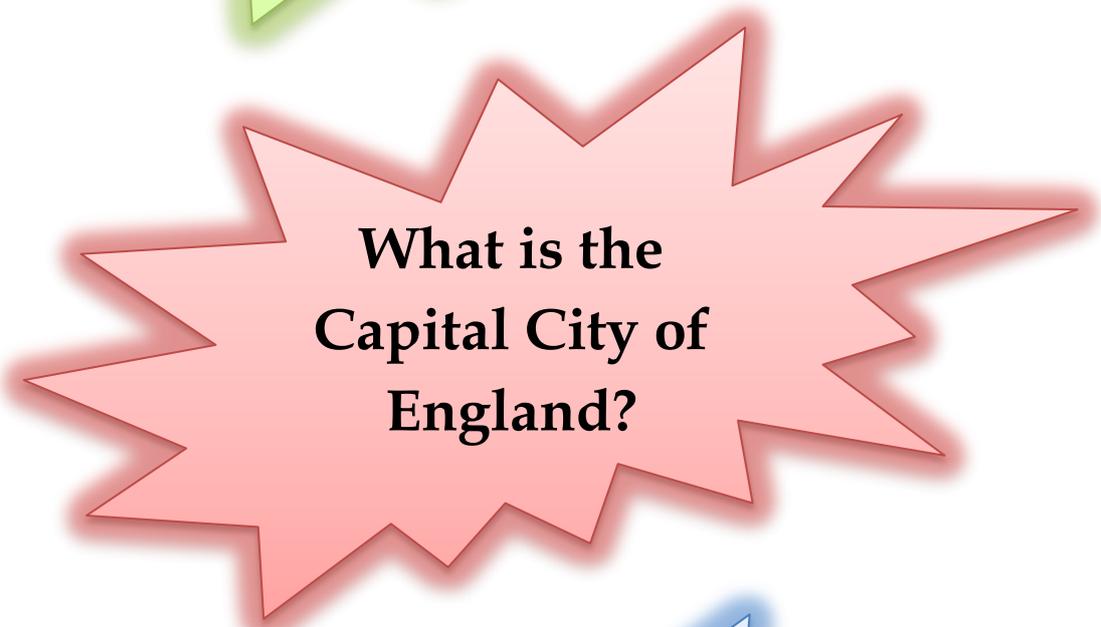
Alexander the Soldier answered the first question “The Capital City of Poland is Warsaw” he said. The rest of the group was glad he came along at this point.

The second question was just as easy to answer...the Capital City of England is London. The whole group got that one straight away except poor Benek the Forgetful who had it on the tip of his tongue.

The last question took a bit more time and Paula the Troll started to jump up and down with excitement. Carlos the Troll pressed them for an answer and Maniek the Brave came to the rescue. The answer of course was Berlin, the Capital City of Germany.



**What is the
Capital City of
Poland?**



**What is the
Capital City of
England?**



**What is the
Capital City of
Germany?**

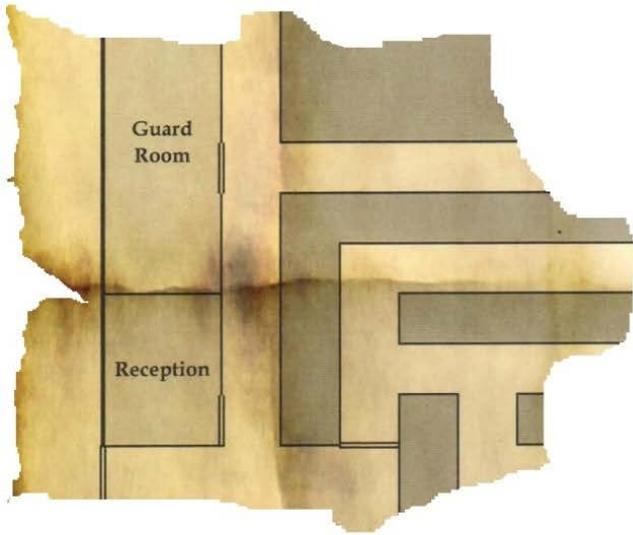
The trolls were not very happy but they let the travellers cross their bridge into the South of London. All of a sudden the sun came out and the clouds disappeared. The boys found real trees, not the metal ones they were used to in Essex. The air was fresh and all the people were good looking. At last they had found somewhere safe to rest their weary limbs.

Granny the Fairy Godmother was waiting for them by a fountain. "I have something for you" she said and handed over a piece of paper which Alexander the Soldier unfolded. "The map you are seeking is in six pieces and here is the first piece" she said and added "The other five pieces have been carefully hidden all around London". She then helped them on their way by saying "Your next challenge is to find a great circle in the sky. Once there, tell the gatekeeper I sent you and you will be asked some more questions".



Benek the Forgetful kept the piece of map in his pocket and promised to keep it safe. Granny the Fairy Godmother finished by telling them some bad news “You are not alone in seeking the key, so watch out!” Then she wished them good luck and said goodbye. As they watched her float off into the distance they began to wonder about the next part of their journey. Another person looking for the key was a problem, they would have to be on their guard at all times.

Leuś the Hungry asked Alexander the Soldier where they could find this great circle in the sky. He really had no idea what it could mean or where to find it. Alexander the Soldier thought very hard and knew of only one place...the London Eye of course. On a clear day they would be able to see all of London from the very top of it. It was also located on the good part of the river which again was most welcome!



On their way to the London Eye they were surprised by another colourful character. “Yahoo” she shouted to them and danced around waving her guns in the air. “Grażyna the Cowgirl is my name” she said. “Oh great” muttered Alexander the Soldier “Another lunatic”.

Before they knew what was happening they were all standing in a row with tin cans on their heads. Grażyna the Cowgirl danced around firing at the cans but she was not a very good shot! “Stand still, you varmints” she cried before letting off another volley. She actually hit one can and this only encouraged her more.

Things were now getting desperate and strong action was needed. Maniek the Brave wrestled Grażyna the Cowgirl to the ground. It was a tough fight but he is very experienced in these matters. They left her upside down in a rubbish bin with her hands and feet tied together.



Alexander the Soldier knew the London Eye was located on the edge of the river so he hoped they would not meet any more trolls. They had a fortunate escape last time and did not want to push their good luck. After walking for a few hours it was soon in sight, he knew a short cut so that had saved them some time.

When they looked up they counted the pods around the perimeter of the wheel. The counting took some time as the wheel was moving and they couldn't agree on the number the first time round. Eventually they all agreed on thirty, hopefully their next challenge would prove easier!

They noticed one of the pods was painted red and stood out from the rest. They all agreed that this must be a special pod but what it contained they could not guess. They needed to consider their next move very carefully, the gatekeeper might not be friendly.



Before they went any further they decided it was time to eat. Leuś the Hungry unfolded his sack and went for a walk on his own. The others would try not to think too hard about the sacks contents when he returned.

The first creature he came across was Sara the Hedgehog who was minding her own business walking amongst the flowers. They greeted each other in the way animals do when they first meet. It was when he tried to get her into his sack that things started to go badly. She quickly rolled into a spiky ball and rolled around sticking her spikes into several painful places, it seemed this time Leuś the Hungry had met his match!

They didn't know why they had salad for dinner as Leuś the Hungry wouldn't say. He also did seem to have trouble sitting down. After they had eaten they decided they must put it off no longer, it was time to seek out the gatekeeper!



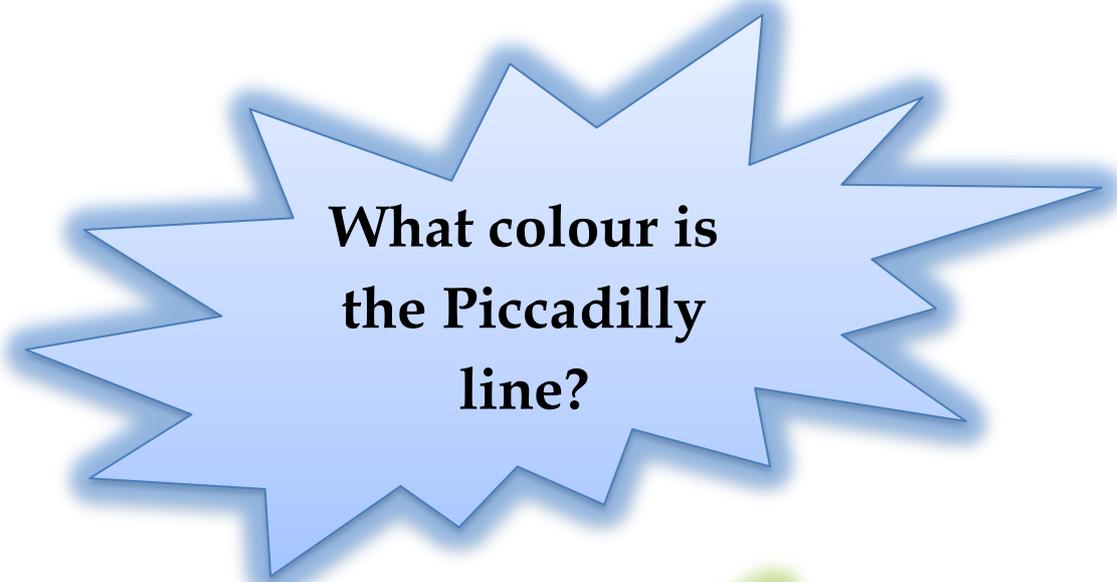
Magda the Gatekeeper was a little smaller than they expected and Leuś the Hungry got his sack ready once more (he never learns!). They were just wondering what to say when she leapt at them with such speed and savagery. It was a terrible battle that even Maniek the Brave had not seen before. They were thrown to the left and right, up and down. Although they fought very well, they were losing, so there was no alternative but to retreat to a safe distance.

Once they regrouped they checked themselves over for bumps and bruises. They talked over a plan and it was decided that Alexander the Soldier would go back alone. He crept forward and was soon spotted. "Have you come for more fighting?" she said. "No" Alexander the Soldier replied "One second, I just want to talk". He then explained that Granny the Fairy Godmother had sent them and he was prepared for some questions.



Magda the Gatekeeper agreed to talk but only for a short time as she was very busy. "I do have questions for you" she said "But they will not be easy". This worried Alexander the Soldier a lot but he dared not show it. "If you answer correctly then you may enter the special pod and claim your present" Magda the Gatekeeper announced pointing up above to the red pod. The questions were all related to the London underground and he replied "Blue, green and red". She stepped aside and let him pass. "Be careful, you might find something you do not expect" she said.

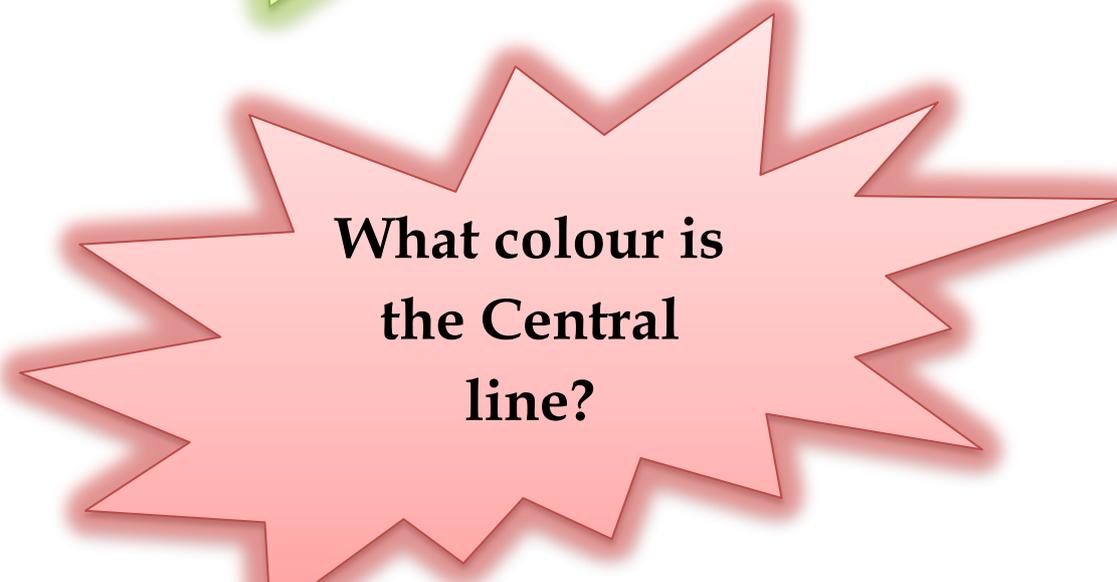
Once inside he took a good look around. In the corner he saw a box and he approached it warily. He wanted to just grab it and run out the door but the pod had started to move now. All he could do was sit, look at the view and wait. When the wheel had turned full circle he grabbed the box, leapt off and headed back to the others.

A blue starburst shape with a white outline and a slight drop shadow, containing text.

**What colour is
the Piccadilly
line?**

A light green starburst shape with a white outline and a slight drop shadow, containing text.

**What colour is
the District
line?**

A light red starburst shape with a white outline and a slight drop shadow, containing text.

**What colour is
the Central
line?**

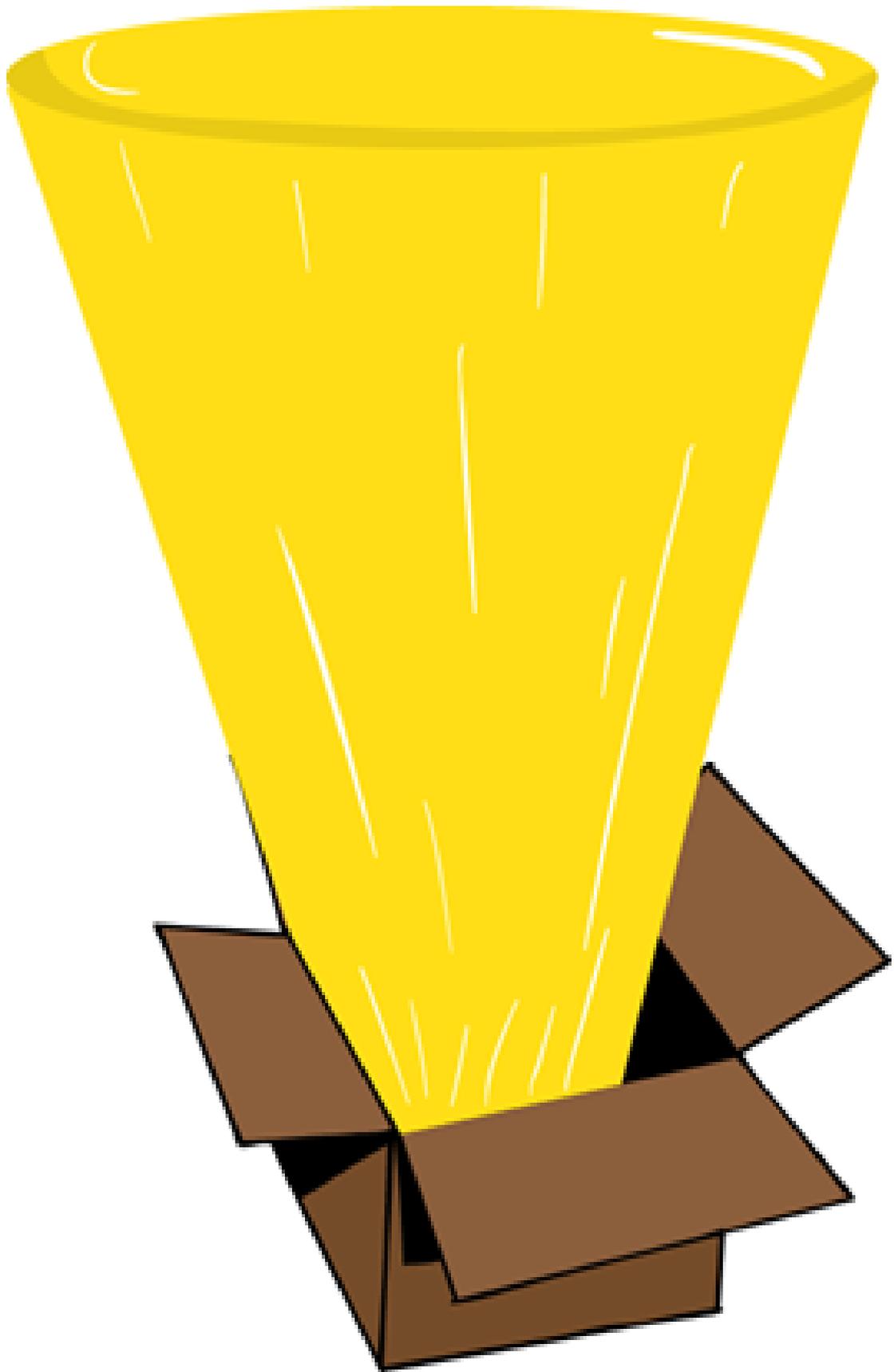


CHAPTER

THREE

The group were getting worried as Alexander the Soldier had been gone for a long time. They were planning a rescue and had decided to send Benek the Forgetful next as he had already forgotten about the last battle. Just then Alexander the Soldier rushed into the camp knocking them all over! They were so surprised to see him it took them a few minutes to ask about the box. They looked at it, walked around it and even poked it with a stick. It seemed harmless enough so they decided they must open it without further delay.

The box was sealed very tight and Maniek the Brave had to use his sharp sword to cut the seals. This only added to the tension and the waiting was almost unbearable. It seemed to take an age until all of a sudden the lid opened with a pop. They nervously peered inside...and saw it was very dark. Suddenly a bright light burst out from within the box and a figure stood before them!



“Hello, I am Louisa the Genie, thank you for releasing me” she said “Is there anything you wish from me in return?” It took a little while for the four explorers to gather their wits. “Why were you locked away in the box?” Alexander the Soldier asked at last, although he thought he knew the answer. He could smell his parent’s special medicine and Louisa the Genie was having trouble standing. But her reply “For being very naughty” was all he could get from her.

When they told Louisa the Genie of their quest she replied “I know of this map, there is another piece of it in Big Ben”. With that news Alexander the Soldier could feel a sense of dread building up inside him. “Big Ben is on the other side of the river isn’t it” he said. Louisa the Genie answered “I am afraid so, it’s on the North side”. He sighed, deep down he knew there would be sacrifices to make on this difficult journey.



Alexander the Soldier thought he should call home and let everyone know he was safe. He looked around for a red telephone box in order to make his call. This didn't take long as there are many of them in the streets of London. He dialled the number and waited patiently for an answer. When it was picked up he pushed some money into the slot and spoke to his family. He did not go into too much detail about his adventures but it was good to hear their voices once more.

Once this task was complete it was time to get serious again, they must continue with their adventure no matter where it took them. Maniek the Brave asked Alexander the Soldier who 'Big Ben' was. Was this a giant they had to fight? He did sound quite fierce. Alexander the Soldier explained that Big Ben wasn't a person at all. It was in fact a famous bell inside a tall tower located on the end of the Houses of Parliament.



They did not have far to travel before they were opposite Big Ben and needed to cross the river. They decided against using the nearby bridge, which was understandable after their previous encounter. As they were looking around they spotted a pirate who was cleaning his boat. They explained their problem and agreed to pay his fee, Benek the Forgetful gave him some money from his sock and the four boys got on board.

Last to board was Krzysztof the Pirate who hopped in and made yet another hole with his wooden leg. The boat was now so full of holes it was more holes than boat! His new 'shipmates' had to keep baling out the water as they crossed and they were beginning to wonder if they would survive the journey. After what seemed like a life time they finally made it across the river. When they looked up they saw the Houses of Parliament and St Stephens Tower, home of Big Ben.



They thanked Krzysztof the Pirate for his help and watched as he tried to get back to the other side of the river. Half way across he sank which did look very funny as he splashed about. When he had reached the far shore he shook his fist at them, which made them laugh even harder.

The Houses of Parliament was a very old building and the English Government sat there most days talking about important matters. This was going to make it very difficult to get inside and reach the second part of the map. They walked around the back of the building looking for the easiest way in. At last they found a small window and helped Alexander the Soldier to climb in. He didn't bother telling the others he could only remain invisible for a few minutes at a time. But this was a problem. He could not hope to reach the top of the tower and get back again without meeting someone!



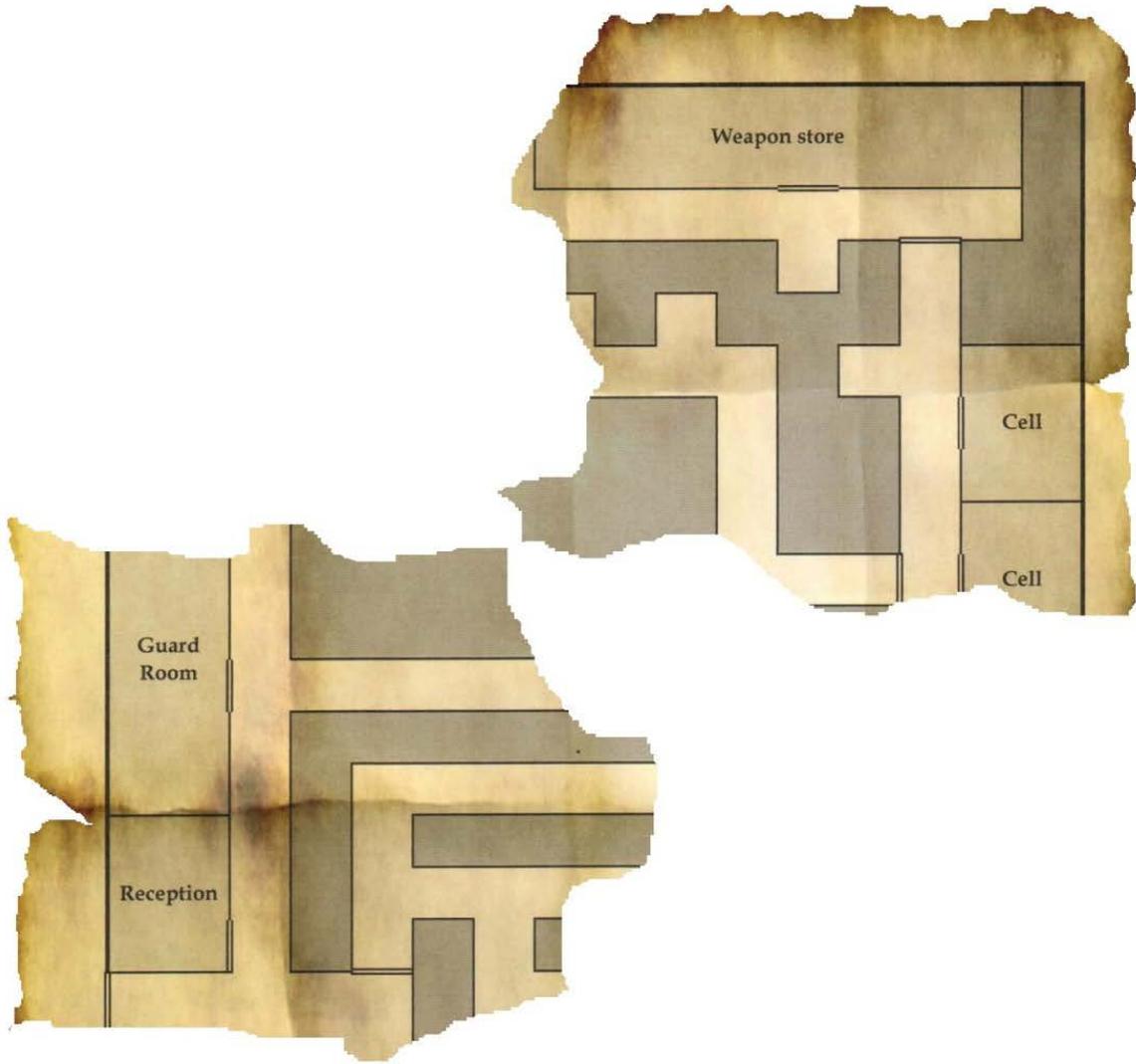
As he made his way along the corridor to the stairs he heard someone singing. There was a woman cleaning the floor in front of the staircase, blocking his path. He would not be able to pass her even if he was invisible as he would leave footprints on the wet floor. He decided to take a chance and pretend he was a lost visitor.

Agnieszka the Trueful did not see him approach and carried on with her work. When he said hello she was a little surprised as she thought she was alone. "Hello there young man, you look tired and dirty" she said. Agnieszka the Trueful always spoke the truth no matter who she was talking to. Alexander the Soldier told her he was lost and was looking for somewhere to have a wash. "Do you know where the bathroom is?" he enquired. "It's upstairs on the next level" she replied. "Please hurry, you do smell!" she added rather needlessly.



Alexander climbed up flights and flights of stairs until he reached the top of the tower. He was able to keep visible as he had not encountered anyone else on the back stairs. When he entered the bell tower it was gloomy so he waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. He looked over towards the large bell and hoped it would not take long to find the map piece.

Just then Big Ben started to move, slowly at first before gradually picking up speed. It was two o'clock and time to start the first of its two chimes. The noise was incredible and he was forced to hold his ears. After the second chime it was silent once more and he began his search. Alongside the great bell, near the mechanism he found what he was looking for. He placed it carefully in his pocket and headed for the stairs. As he made his way down he heard footsteps, they were loud and sort of flip flop sounding...very strange indeed!



Michał the Clown was patrolling the corridors waiting for Alexander the Soldier to return. His friend Agnieszka the Trueful had told him about a stranger who was heading upstairs in a hurry. Alexander the Soldier turned invisible just in time and managed to creep passed. But before he had gone but a few steps more he slipped on the wet floor and came down with a terrible crash!

Michał the Clown called to him “Wait, don’t go, I have a message from Edyta the Fairy”. Alexander the Soldier turned visible once more and introduced himself before asking “What is the message you have for me?” Michał the Clown pulled a letter from up his sleeve and read it aloud. “Greetings Alexander the Soldier, you must now visit Westminster Abbey” he read “A piece of the map is hidden in a statue”. With that Michał the Clown bid him farewell, tripped over his big feet and fell down the stairs!



Benek the Forgetful was excited to learn that they were going on a London bus as he could not remember travelling on one before. Alexander the Soldier had returned and handed over the second piece of the map to him. There had been a little bit of confusion while he searched for the first piece. But after a while he found it in one of his pockets and placed them both together.

Westminster Abbey was a short bus ride away and they waited at the bus stop. They didn't have long to wait before the big red double decker bus turned the corner into view and they got on board. They settled down and discussed their next problem, the only clues they had so far involved Westminster Abbey and an unknown statue. They would have to split up and search them all one by one. But if the piece of map was actually inside a statue how would they find it? This was a most puzzling task and would take some time to solve.



When they got off the bus they stood outside Westminster Abbey and looked up. It was an impressive looking building that didn't look too big from the outside. As they entered they split into two teams and went in opposite directions.

Leuś the Hungry and Benek the Forgetful began on the left hand side and began gently tapping the statues. They were listening for hollow sounds and looking for hidden panels. The Abbey looked a lot bigger now they were inside; this was beginning to look like an impossible task.

Alexander the Soldier and Maniek the Brave started on the right hand side beginning with the names on the statues. There might be a clue in the name which would lead them to the next piece of map. After a couple of hours searching they were about to give up when Alexander the Soldier leaned on one of the statues. Just then a panel opened at the bottom and a dark hole appeared!



They all gathered round the statue and stared into the hole. Maniek the Brave reached his hand inside and pulled out a well-worn piece of paper. He blew off the dust and carefully opened it...they now had the third piece of the map.

When they put the pieces together they could now see there was a secret door at the bottom. This would be their best chance of entering the Tower of London undetected. They could also see the guardroom and the weapon store which did not look so good. Benek the Forgetful folded up the pieces and kept them safe.

They made their way outside, sat down and had some food that Leuś the Hungry had helpfully provided. They were now half way to finding the pieces of map but needed some new direction. There was only one person they could think of who could help them on their way but he was not always easy to find!





CHAPTER

FOUR

Eventually they found Irek the Wise dressed in his best suit sitting on top of a pile of cardboard boxes. It is widely known that if you needed advice, Irek the Wise was the man to turn to. What you did with the information would determine whether it would be of any use or not! He was expecting them and spoke as they neared. "I will answer any question you care to ask" he said "But choose carefully my friends, for I will only answer one question per day".

Well as you can imagine there were so many questions they would like the answer to. In the end though, it was Alexander the Soldier who asked the most important one. "Where may we find the next piece of the map we seek?" he asked. "You must travel to the Royal Albert Hall and join the tour" Irek the Wise answered. They gave thanks and left him to his meditating once more, sitting upright with his eyes firmly closed.



Alexander the Soldier led the team to the underground station as it was too far to walk to the Royal Albert Hall. Benek the Forgetful picked up a London Underground map and kept it safe in his pocket.

They arrived and waited patiently for the tour to begin. The tour guide led the way downstairs to the archives where all the important documents were stored. Years of history had been collected and displayed in cabinets for the people of today to view. There were vast amounts of programmes, paintings, posters and all sorts of other souvenirs.

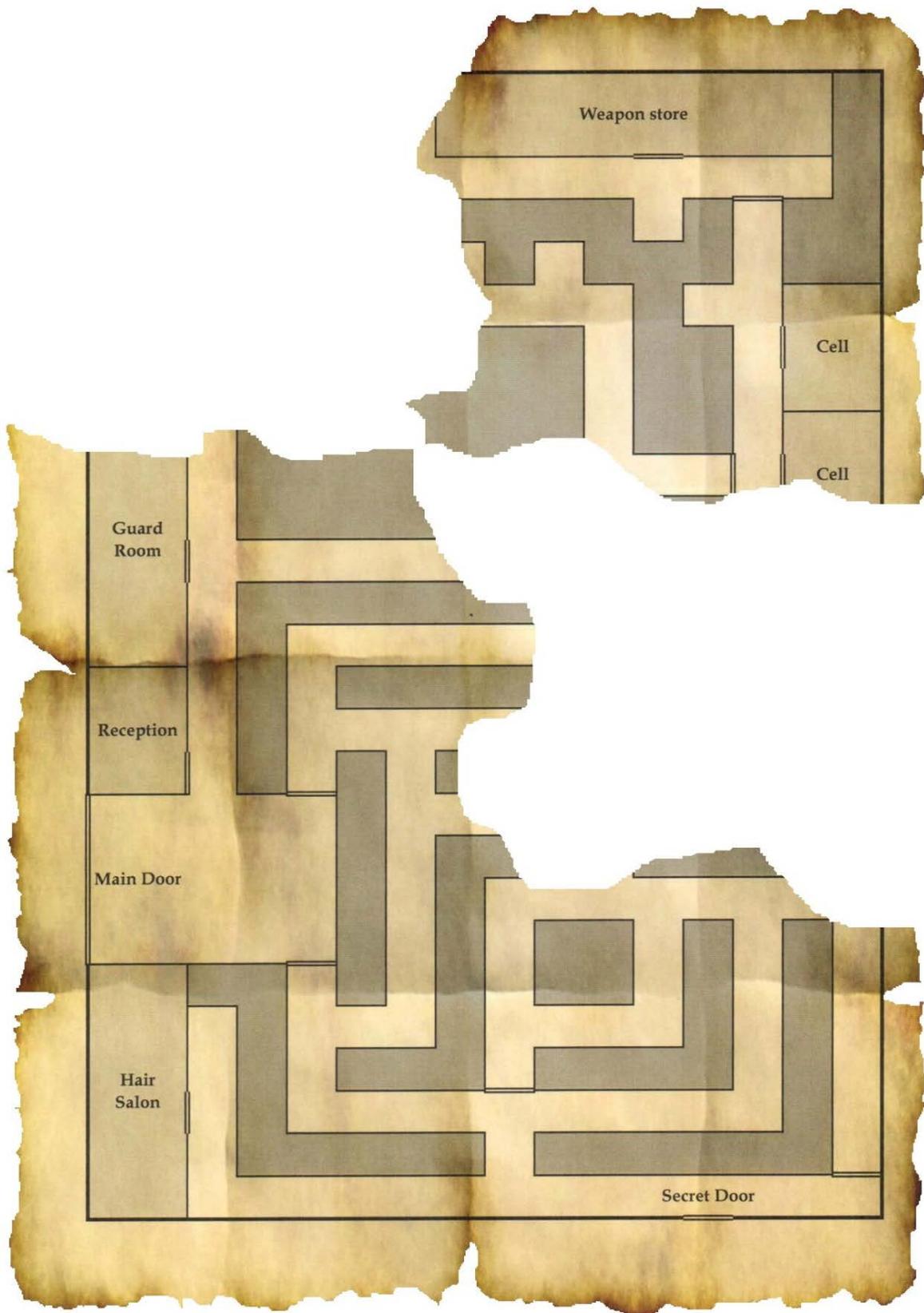
It was Leuś the Hungry who saw it first, in the corner, secured in a picture frame. "What's this" he asked the tour guide. "That is a piece of a very old document" the guide replied "Nobody knows where it came from". As they left the archive room Maniek the Brave slipped it into his pocket without being seen.



They put some distance between themselves and the Royal Albert Hall and looked at the latest piece of map. When they added the piece they could see the Main door and a Hair salon. It still did not show the location of the key but the paths were now becoming much clearer.

Leuś the Hungry spoke to a passing cat who only hissed and turned her nose up at him. A dog was more helpful, as they usually are. After hearing news that they were not being pursued the dog was sent to teach the cat some manners. The cat was very sorry soon afterwards.

Having the map nearing completion made them even more determined than ever to find the last two pieces. They thought long and hard about the next step and which road to take. In the end they decided to wait and see if they would meet any more friends...they did not have to wait very long!



After a short while a stranger stumbled into view and said "Good day my friends, I hope you are well. I wanted to greet you all but instead I just fell!" They all looked at each other not knowing what to think. "I am Pawel the Rhymer out for the day. I thought you might like to come and play". Well this was all a bit much but before they could answer he continued. "The weather is fine, look at the sun. If you have the time we could have such fun!" With that he danced around making funny noises and clapping his hands together.

Alexander the Soldier thought this was a great idea and he did need a break from the journey. They had been walking such a long time and they should find some time to have a game. "Are you alone my friend, we would very much like to play" he asked. "No, I have someone I want you all to meet. Come now get up, rise to your feet" Pawel the Rhymer replied.



Ewa the Rhymer appeared out of the grass right on cue. "What is this, who have you found, there I was asleep in the ground" She asked and without waiting for an answer added. "At last we can play all around town but wait...I see one of you has a frown".

Maniek the Brave was getting impatient, he wanted to move on and had no time for games. But after a while he too started to enjoy himself and joined in the fun. They played hide and seek, football and ran around until they could run no more. Pawel the Rhymer and Ewa the Rhymer certainly knew how to enjoy themselves.

They could have played all day and all night but they knew deep down they had to carry on with their quest. Benek the Forgetful said their goodbyes in the best way he could "It was good to meet you both, thanks for the day. We will think of you whenever we go out to play".



Marlena the Angel was doing handstands in her garden when the four boys walked passed. "Hello, good day to you all" she said upside down. Leuś the Hungry got his sack ready and Maniek the Brave put his hand on his sword. Although they were wary of this person Alexander the Soldier thought things would be ok. They sat on her porch and drank lemonade whilst chatting about their journey, although at first they left out the important details just in case.

After a while though, they had to ask Marlena the Angel for some advice. She had never heard of the map but did meet a lot of people on her travels. After thinking for a while she said "Andrzej the Chatterbox told me there are lots of secret papers and treasures hidden in Buckingham Palace". Well this lead was worth exploring so they thanked Marlena the Angel for the lemonade and left. It seemed they were off to see the Queen!



The Queen of England lives in Buckingham Palace and it is where she spends most of her time when she is not out shopping. They stood and watched as the guards marched up and down before them. When things quietened down they walked round the back and climbed the high fence. They reached the nearest window and forced it open, setting off the silent alarm without knowing it. As they left the room they heard footsteps running towards them, so they ducked inside the nearest cupboard and waited!

After a while it was quiet once more and they peered out through a crack in the door. They hoped to see an empty corridor but instead they saw a guard looking around and scratching her head. They could ill afford any kind of delay, they needed to take action. They decided to speak to the guard and hope she would take pity on them...this was risky but they had no choice!



Ola the Guard could not understand why the alarm had gone off and there was no one to be found. She was just about to go back to her comfortable chair when she heard a noise from the cupboard. As she drew near it burst open and the four boys poured out knocking her over!

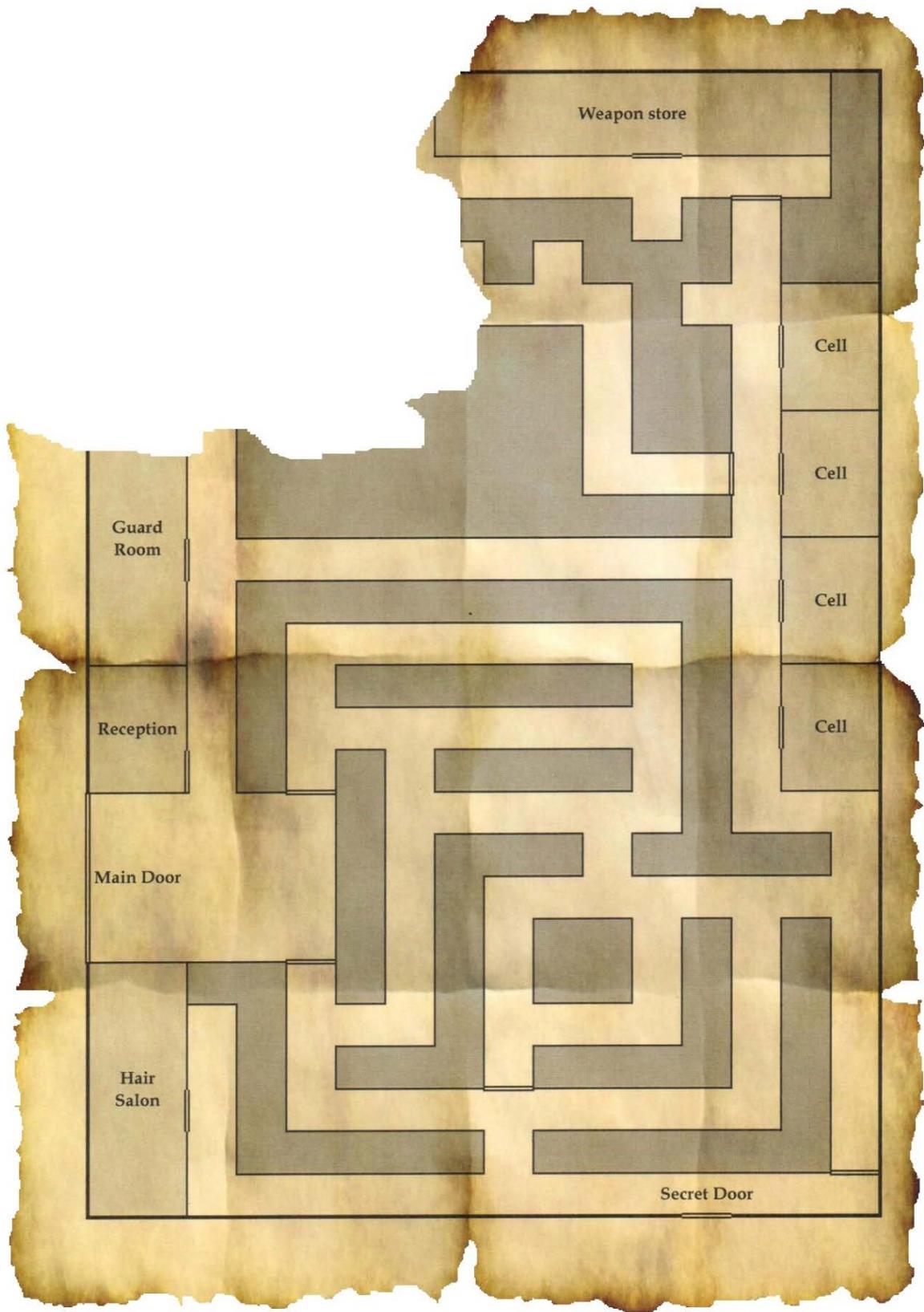
They sat on her as quick as they could and asked her not to struggle. Only after she promised to behave did they let her up. Alexander the Soldier apologised for their behaviour and said “We are on a quest and need your assistance, will you help us?”

Well Ola the Guard did not know what to say, she was worried the Queen would find out she had let intruders overpower her. “What is it you want?” she asked. They showed her the map but did not tell her what it was for. “I have seen one of the missing pieces” she said “Now just let me think where it was”.



Ola the Guard led them to the kitchen and closed the door behind them. They were all alone as the kitchen staff had the day off. She reached up and took a very old teapot off the top shelf. "This has not been used for a very long time" she said "The cook told me it held something important and I must not touch it". She added "But one day I peeked inside".

She took the lid off the teapot, looked inside and took out the folded piece of paper. Ola the Guard was now starting to get worried again "If you take this piece of map I will get into trouble" she said. Alexander the Solder replied "Not if we put something in its place!" They quickly drew a copy and they used cold tea to match the colour of the paper. After they had finished they said their goodbyes and slipped out the kitchen door into the street. One more piece to go, they were nearly there!





CHAPTER

FIVE

As they walked along the street looking for a clue to their next destination they met Janusz the Hopper. He bounced all around the group making them feel quite dizzy. Even when he was talking he did not stop for even a moment.

“Good...day...where...are...you...going?” he asked, his voice shaking as he bounced. Maniek the Brave replied “We are on an adventure around London”. He did not think it was safe to say anymore for the moment, they did not know who this person was. “Can...I...come...too?” Janusz the Hopper asked. Maniek the Brave did not have to ask the others, he already knew what they were thinking. “Not today my friend, it is not safe” he replied.

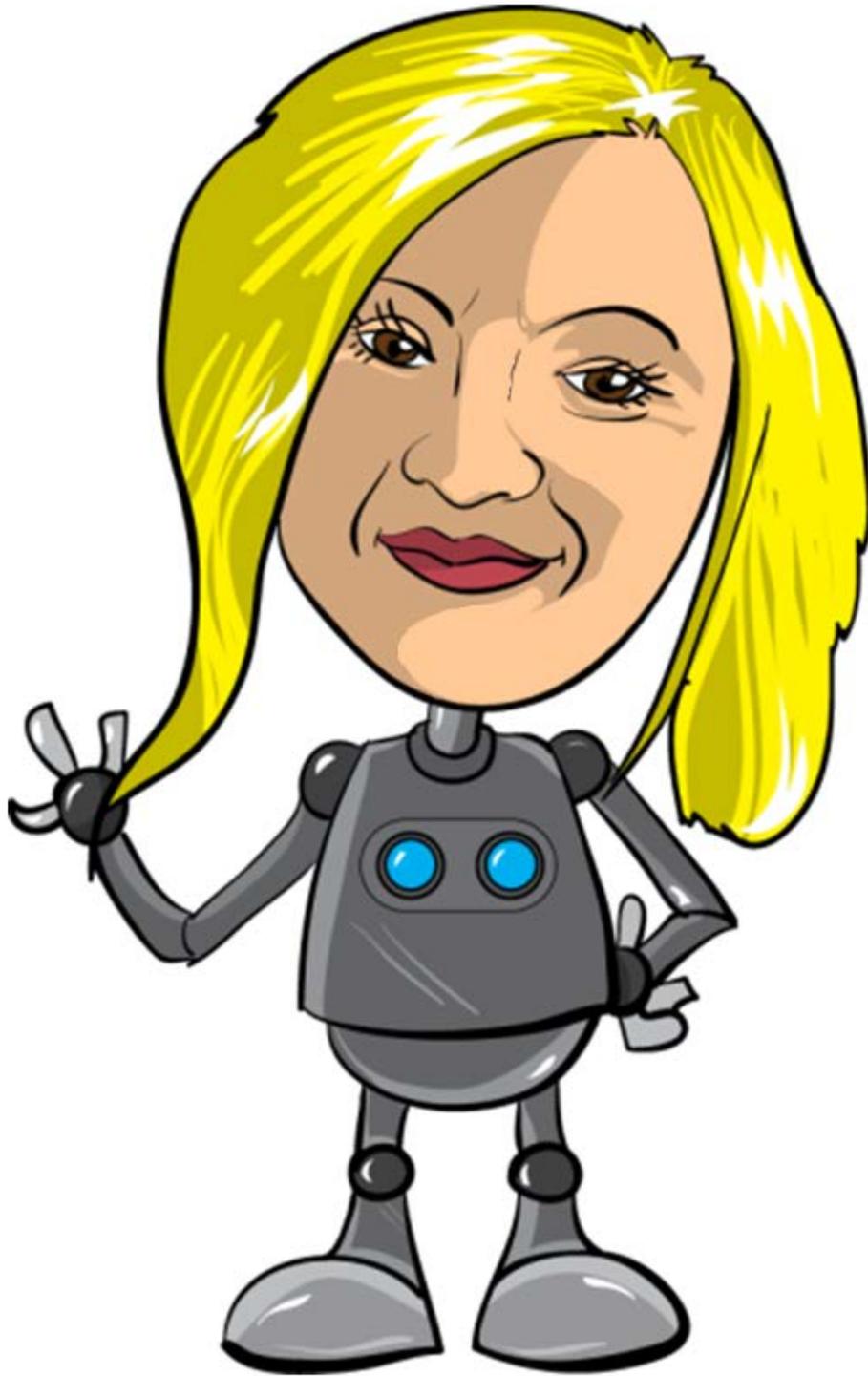
Janusz the Hopper was disappointed but said “Ok...but...can...you...hop...with...me...a...while”. So they all played follow my leader, jumping and hopping around until they were exhausted.



They heard their next challenge before they saw her. Renata the Robot walked very slowly but made a lot of noise as her joints needed oiling. When they crossed her path she stopped, looked at them and said “Beep, bubba, beep, beep, sneep, boop”.

If they were going to learn anything more this was going to be difficult. She did seem to be trying to tell them something. “Beep, bubba, beep, beep, sneep, boop” she repeated. They checked all round and all they could find was two buttons on her front. They decided to press one of them and Alexander the Soldier reached out his hand.

Renata the Robot had a panel on her front which dropped down when the button was pressed. Hidden behind the panel was a small picture of St Pauls Cathedral...their next destination! Renata the Robot then walked away, her job finished for the day.



St Pauls Cathedral is England's most famous church, it is open to the public so they had no problem looking around. However, the last piece of the map was proving difficult to find. They had started at the top and had been searching for hours, there was now only one place left to try.

The crypt was dark and damp, the walls were crawling with spiders and other creepy crawlies. It really was a horrible place, one that is only visited in desperate times. Maniek the Brave stayed up stairs as he could not face the dark and as he said, someone had to keep watch.

They found several drawers and boxes full of very old papers. The map piece was at the bottom of the last box and they were almost too tired to celebrate. They were completely unaware of a person in the shadows looking down upon them. It seemed they were not alone...they were being watched!



Krzysztof the Crafty was watching people come and go from St Pauls Cathedral. He too had been seeking the map but kept arriving at the other locations too late. This time was different as he had received Renata the Robot's message earlier in the day. All he had to do now was wait for the boys to arrive and steal their map!

Benek the Forgetful kept the map pieces safely in his pocket. He was glad the quest was nearing the end as this burden weighed heavily upon him. As Krzysztof the Crafty kept watch he noticed Benek the Forgetful kept patting his back pocket. He crept nearer and nearer until he was very close indeed. There were lots of people around the exit so nobody noticed when Krzysztof the Crafty squeezed by. It was quite a few minutes later that Benek the Forgetful noticed his back pocket was empty. The map pieces were gone, their quest was over!



It was then they met Emily the Curious who was out shopping for the day. They were frantically searching all around thinking the map pieces had just been dropped. Emily the Curious approached them and asked what they were doing. "We have lost something very important" Alexander the Soldier replied. "When did you last have it?" Emily the Curious asked. Benek the Forgetful answered "I don't remember!"

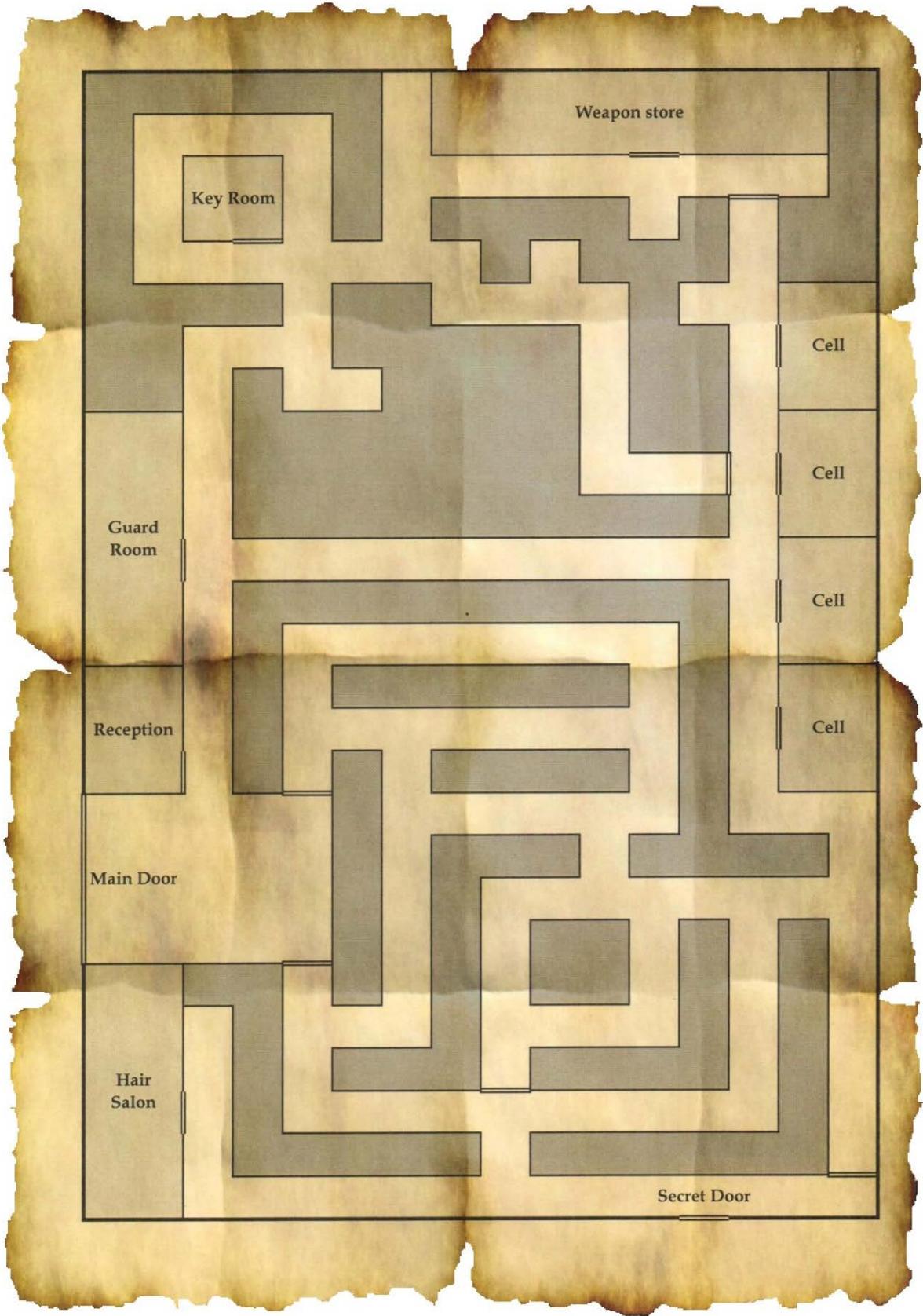
They carried on with the search and their new friend helped out as best as she could, continuing to ask lots of questions. They retraced their steps and tried to remember everywhere they had been in the last few hours. They had not even dared to think it could have been stolen just a few minutes before. Eventually, just when they were about to give up, Emily the Curious asked Benek the Forgetful "Are you sure it is lost, could it not be in one of your other pockets?"

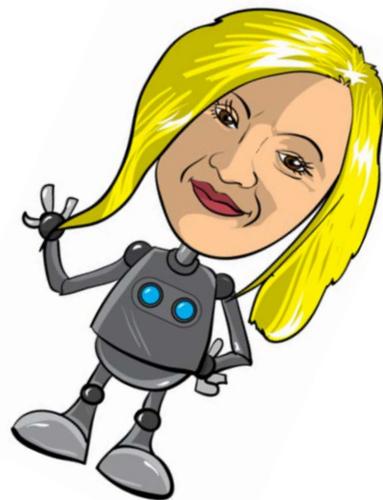


Everyone gathered around Benek the Forgetful and watched as he checked all his pockets until at last he pulled out some paper. They held their breath whilst he unfolded the pieces to reveal the map!

Krzysztof the Crafty was not a happy man. He had found a quiet place to view his stolen prize, but when he unwrapped the paper he found a London Underground map! How he screamed with rage when he realised he had now missed his last chance to lay his hands on the key.

Finding the map had taken them on a long journey all around London. Now it was complete they were ready to face the most dangerous part of the quest...the Tower of London. The map looked easy to follow but the path to the Key Room would take them near the Guard Room. To avoid the guard room they might have to unlock some gates, neither option looked good!





CHAPTER

SIX

The secret door to the Tower of London has been hidden for many years so they had to approach it carefully. As darkness fell they crept along the river slipping into a narrow opening. At the end they could just make out the door which was covered with bushes. The hinges were rusty so they creaked and groaned as they pushed against it. Eventually they managed to slip inside, closing the door behind them with a bang.

They strained their ears for sounds of the Queen's guards but all was quiet. Slowly they made their way along the underground tunnels hardly daring to breathe. The darkness and the cold floor made it seem even creepier. All of a sudden a bright light shone down upon them! The noise of heavy footsteps and shouting echoed off the walls all around. Finally hands grabbed at them from all directions not allowing them to move...they had been captured!



They were marched to a cell deep in the heart of the tower and thrown roughly to the floor. It was a dark and damp room lit only by a single candle in the corner. They started to think that this may be as close to the key as they were going to get, they desperately needed help.

As they sat and awaited their fate Alexander the Soldier looked out of the window. Just then he spotted a passing superhero and he called out "One second, can you help us". The figure flew to the window ledge and peered between the bars. "I am Darren the Great, who has summoned me!" he roared. "It was I Alexander the Soldier" came the reply "We need your help". After listening to their story Darren the Great agreed to send a message. "Wait here" he said. When the others asked Alexander the Soldier who the message was for he became very mysterious "You will just have to wait and see!"



Back home and Viola the Dancer, Marek the Wanderer and Beata the Runner were sitting down with their feet up. They were tired, without Alexander the Soldier to help around the house there was so much to do. It really was a nuisance that he wasn't here, where had he got to?

So when Darren the Great arrived with a message there was a lot of excitement. They read the note several times not really believing what it said. How could Alexander the Soldier be locked away?...and in the Tower of London of all places!

After dinner they set off to rescue the boys from their prison cell. Darren the Great showed them the way before leaving on another mission. By the time they arrived outside it was still dark and they had thought of a plan. Viola the Dancer and Beata the Runner distracted the guards with their famous dance routine and Marek the Wanderer slipped inside the door.

HELP I AM

LOCKED IN THE

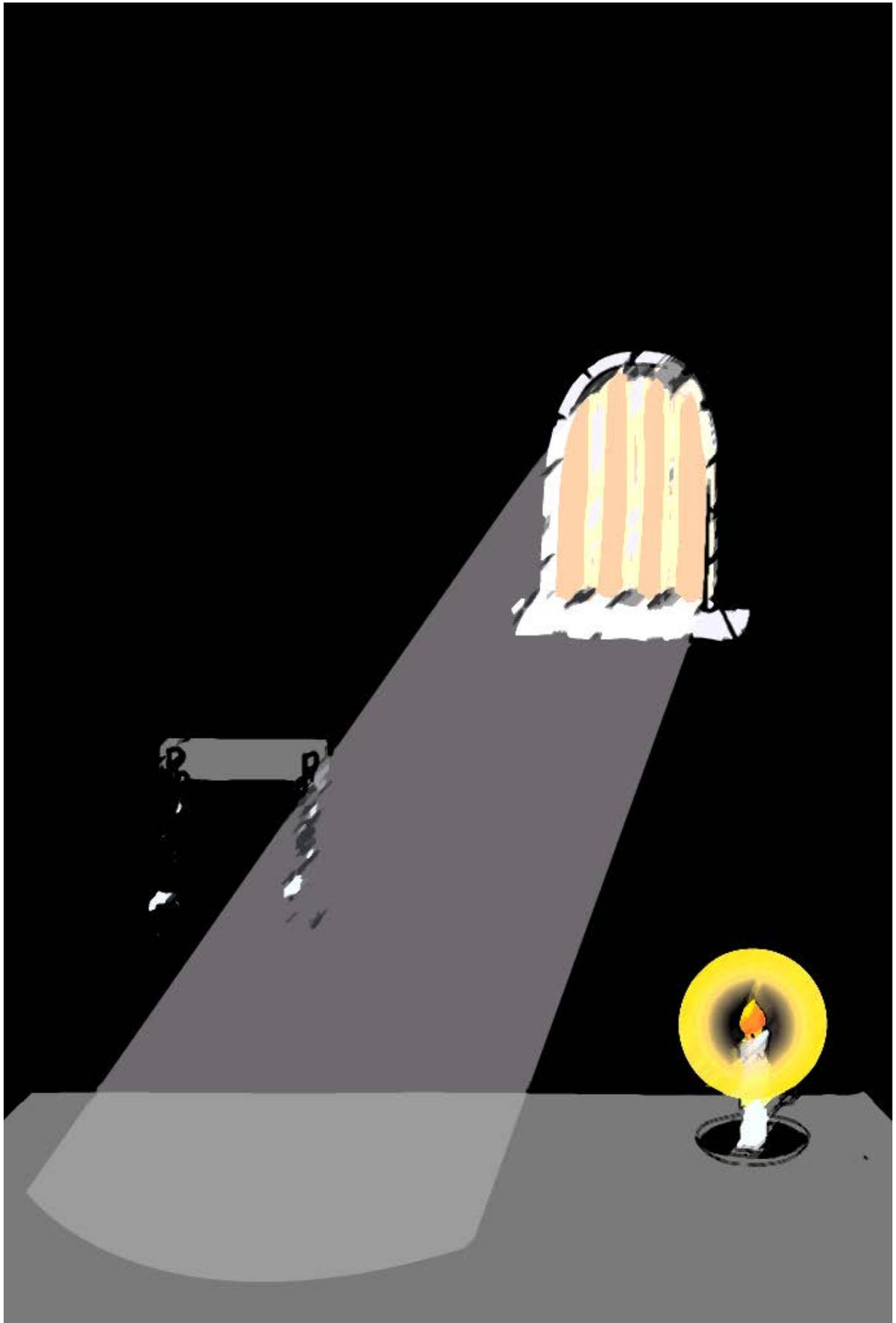
TOWER OF

LONDON

Alexander the Soldier was starting to getting worried, he hoped his message would get delivered. The guards would be back soon and they would ask a lot of questions. As they would not tell them why they were there they could be in this cell for a long time. He looked down at the map thoughtfully, knowing they were so close.

Just then there was a noise, the keys had been left in the door and now they rattled as it opened. A dark figure popped his head round the door...it was Marek the Wanderer! "Quick, we must hurry!" he said. Up they jumped and they slipped into the dark corridor without even saying hello!

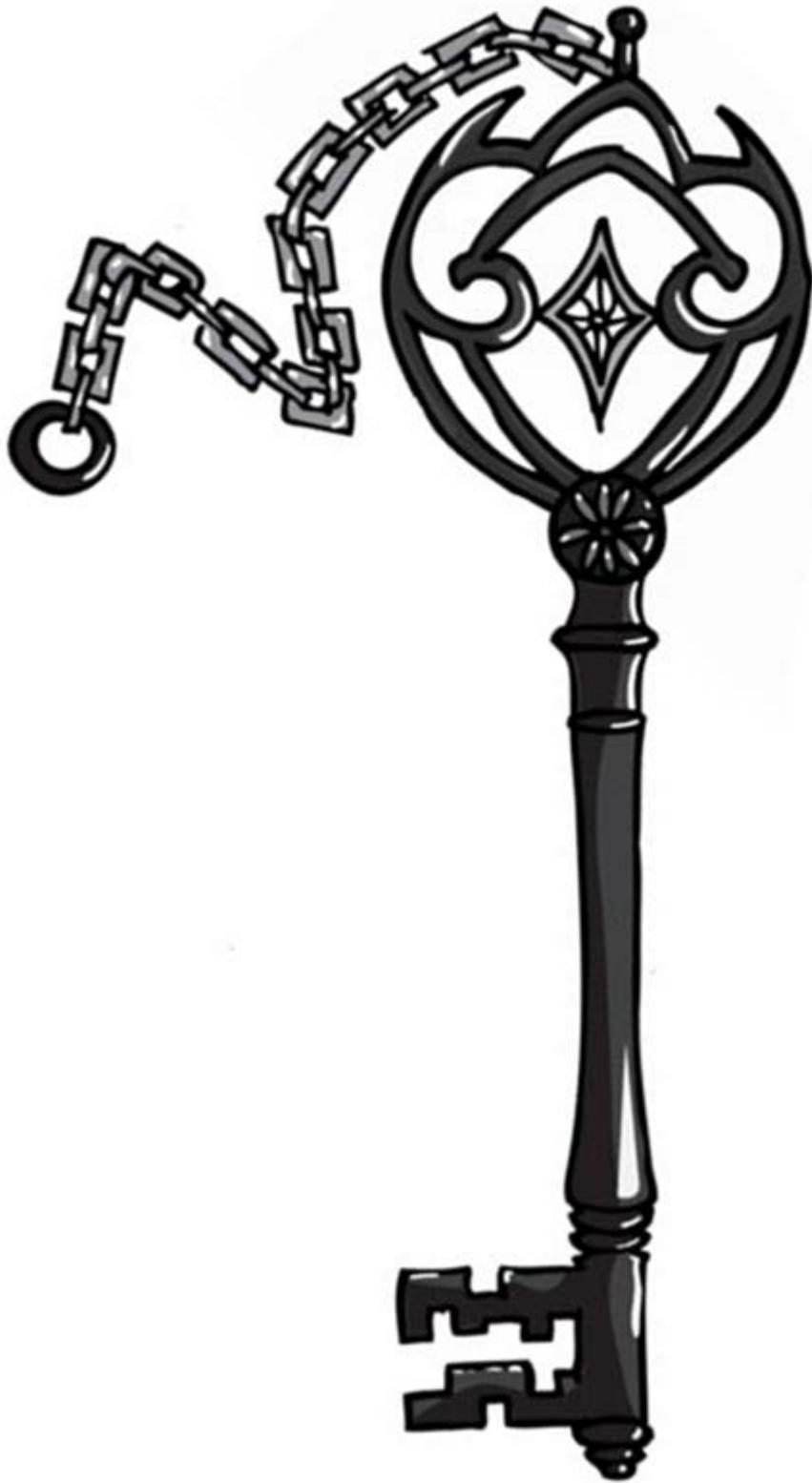
They had just started back to the secret door when Alexander the Soldier, remembering their quest, said "One second, go to the secret door, I have to get the magic key!" He left the others to explain to Marek the Wanderer about the quest and disappeared into the darkness.



It was dark as he ran along the corridors, he checked the map as best he could. He was getting near when he heard voices around the corner. He turned invisible and waited for the guards pass by. When he could no longer hear any sounds he turned visible once more. He would have to be careful as the guards were carrying torches.

He reached the key room but to his dismay, there stood a guard outside the door. He had to be quick, he could hide from the guards for days but the others could not. He picked up a stone and threw it through the window in the door. Then he threw another. The guard was startled at first but then decided to unlock the door to investigate.

It was now or never! He turned invisible and squeezed through the door. Once he saw the key on the pedestal he grabbed it. The guard shouted but it was too late, he ran off into the darkness as fast as he could.



Marek the Wanderer and the rest of the team waited by the secret door for Alexander the Soldier to return. They had tried to open it to save time but the only handle was on the outside of the door! They had no choice now, they needed Alexander the Soldier and the magic key. Sitting in the dark was playing on their nerves, Maniek the Brave was suffering the most. Guards passed by several times and they heard them talking of a ghost that was running through the passages.

When Alexander the Soldier returned he opened the secret door. As it opened creaking noises echoed off the walls. It sounded even louder than before and they felt sure they would be captured again. Slipping outside they breathed fresh air once more. As they started to close the door they heard running footsteps and shouts as the guards approached. These faded as the door was firmly secured behind them.



Viola the Dancer and Beata the Runner were getting tired now, it seemed like they had been dancing for hours. This was strange as the guards had left a long while ago, so they could have stopped! When they saw the others running towards them they re-joined the group. As they all made their way to the train station Alexander the Soldier realised he would soon have to say goodbye to his new friends. But first they had a little matter of the key to sort out. If they took turns who would keep hold of it first?

They all decided that Alexander the Soldier should hold the key first. They would visit him as often as they could and take their turn. Once this was decided they said their goodbyes and disappeared into the night. On the train home Alexander the Soldier shared his story whilst keeping a tight hold of the key, which was now secure on a chain around his neck.



THE

END



AUTHORS

NOTE



My second book is now complete and I am pleased to report there has been a lot of fun in the writing of it. As it was a piece of child orientated fiction it gave me the latitude to be as creative and silly as I felt in the mood to be. Fortunately for me this was quite often! I have tried to make each page (although part of the overall story) stand alone to keep younger readers attention

focussed on the text. I have also tried to add 'page turning' endings to as many of the pages as possible to also help hold their interest. In terms of the stories outcome I think I would agree there is a degree of predictability but conversely I planned the journey to be far less so. I would be surprised if anyone reading the story for the first time could foresee all the twists and turns before they occurred. This was largely because I didn't see them myself until the words appeared on the page!

When Viola first told me of Alexander's desire to star in his own book I thought of having some fun with it. From the beginning I had the idea of including friends and family as characters but I must confess I did not predict how many people would be included by the end. The words in a story are important of course but they were only part of the work in this piece. The character artwork evolved from photographed heads pasted onto cartoon bodies (as examples) to professional drawings by Fred Koceba. I think there are a lot of great pictures where the individual's features have been captured perfectly. The rest of the images consist of photographs I took whilst on my own adventure around London. Not as exciting as in the story but it was interesting all the same trying to find the right angles to best show off the structures. The characters themselves are, for the most part, all different and intentionally so. I felt it important not to make them too personal as there are some characters that are, by necessity, not as wonderful as the people are in real life. As Alexander the Soldier's first adventure is now at an end, my own is also complete as we travelled through the story together. Although in some ways his journey seemed a lot shorter than mine due to the nature of our individual participation.



Alexander Witczak as 'Alexander the Soldier'



Beata Rutkowska as 'Beata the Runner'



Marek Witczak as 'Marek the Wanderer'



Viola Witczak as 'Viola the Dancer'



Pawel Oliwiecki as 'Pawel the Rhymer'



Ewa Oliwiecka as 'Ewa the Rhymer'



Irek Czajczynski as 'Irek the Wise'



Granny as 'Granny the Fairy Godmother'



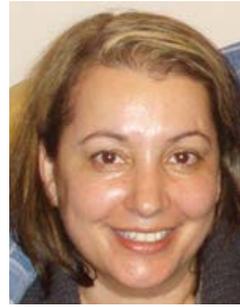
Edyta Olekszyk as 'Edyta the Fairy'



Sara Olekszyk as 'Sara the Hedgehog'



Carlos Santos as 'Carlos the Troll'



Paula Santos as 'Paula the Troll'



Magda Banach as 'Magda the Gatekeeper'



Louise Russell as 'Louisa the Genie'



Darren Stevens as 'Darren the Great'



Emily Fairman as 'Emily the Curious'



Irek Czajczynski as 'Maniek the Brave'



Janusz Rygiel as 'Leuś the Hungry'



Pawel Oliwiecki as 'Benek the Forgetful'



Krzysztof Rutkowski as 'Krzysztof the Crafty'



Krzysztof Dloniak as 'Krzysztof the Pirate'



Agnieszka Rudnik as 'Agnieszka the Trueful'



Janusz Rygiel as 'Janusz the Hopper'



Renata Rygiel as 'Renata the Robot'



Andrzej Kolanek as 'Andrzej the Chatterbox'



Grażyna Kurzajewska as 'Grażyna the Cowgirl'



Marlena Rutkowska as 'Marlena the Angel'



Ola Rutkowska as 'Ola the Guard'



Michał Witzak as 'Michał the Clown'



Marcin Witzak as 'Marcin the Wizard'



The Box



The Key