
SUPER

THE HEADS OF HORROR

POWERS



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PUFFIN

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JUST IMAGINE...

a ruined and crumbling castle on a grassy hillside surrounded by a deep dark moat.

As the sun's rays fall on the one remaining tower, a loud grinding noise shatters the silence and a section of the tower's thick inner wall begins to crumble. The noise fades and the dust clears, leaving a rectangular hole.

Two hands grip the edge of the hole and a man looks out of the wall. Deep wrinkles appear to be carved into his face and his hair is long and tangled. His heavy-lidded golden eyes look across the keep to the gatehouse opposite.

Six magical pictures glow in the stones around the arched castle gateway – a pair of wings, an arrow, a shield, a tree with an acorn, a leaping stag and a lion. They are traced in lines of burning white fire.

'My powers!' the man shouts despairingly to the sky.

As the words leave his mouth a jagged bolt of lightning rips down. The man instinctively shuts his eyes against the blinding light. When he opens them



again a woman is standing beside him. But this is no ordinary woman. This is the goddess Juno. As tall as two normal people, her dark hair is piled up on her head and a cloak of brown-grey feathers swirls around her. She looks at the trapped superhero.

'Yes, Hercules. Your lost superpowers.' Her black eyes flick to the gatehouse wall. 'Speed, accuracy, size-shifting, defence, agility and courage. Yesterday, your first superpower – strength – was



won back for you, but I still hold the other six powers and until you get them back you will remain my prisoner in this tower.' She looks at him mockingly. 'And your only hope is that two pathetic human boys can help you.'

Hercules thumps the walls of his prison. 'No! I will *not* have those two boys risk their lives for me again.'

Juno laughs. 'You have no choice. They made a deal with me. If they can complete the remaining six of the seven tasks I set them yesterday, all your powers will return.'

'And if they fail?' the superhero demands.

Juno's voice is as cold as the deepest sea. 'They die.'

'No!' Hercules exclaims.

The goddess leans closer to him. 'Accept it, Hercules. They agreed to the deal and now they must complete the tasks.'

Hercules glares at her. 'But they get



to choose one superpower each day to help them with each task.'

‘They do.’ An evil smile spreads across Juno’s face. ‘But you know as well as I that, even with a superpower, it is impossible that they will succeed. They are ordinary human boys. They won your strength back yesterday by mere luck.’ The goddess twirls a lock of her dark hair gloatingly. ‘Today they will fail.’ Turning her head, she looks towards the path that leads to the castle. ‘Listen. They are coming, Hercules. I can hear them.’

‘No,’ Hercules whispers.

‘Oh yes!’ Juno says. ‘Now it is time for them to meet their fate.’ She claps her hands together. ‘The Nine-Headed River Monster awaits them!’ A crash of thunder shakes the castle walls and the next instant she has gone.

High overhead a hawk cries out mockingly and a single brown-grey feather floats down through the sky.

CHAPTER ONE



THE CHOICE

Finlay charged down the stairs. Reaching the third from the bottom step at maximum speed, he leapt from it, clearing his younger sister's Furby in one easy bound. He skidded to a halt on the wooden floor right next to where his older sister, Jasmine, was adjusting her hair in the hall mirror.

'Where are you off to, Fin?' she asked as he grabbed his coat. 'Oh yeah. You've got that half-term football course on at school this morning, haven't you?'

'Later on,' Finlay replied, shoving his arms in the sleeves of his coat. 'Max and I have got stuff to do first.'



'What sort of stuff?' Jasmine asked curiously.

Finlay wondered what his older sister would say if he told her the truth. What would happen if he said: 'Well, actually, Jasmine, Max and I have got to go to the castle on the hill because the superhero Hercules has been magically imprisoned in the walls of the tower there by the evil goddess Juno. We're going to help him get his superpowers back. Yesterday we captured a sabre-toothed lion that Juno had set loose in the woods and got back his super-strength. Today we've got to get another superpower back for him by killing a nine-headed river monster.' What would Jasmine say to that?

'What sort of stuff?' Jasmine repeated curiously.

Finlay grinned. At the moment, this was his and Max's secret. 'Just stuff.' He turned the door handle. He'd overslept and was really late already. 'See ya!'

'Not so fast, Finlay.' Mrs Yates, their mum, appeared in the hall. 'I'd like you to explain this!' She held out a trainer. It had several long rips running from the top of it to the bottom

and it was covered in puncture marks. 'I found it in your bedroom.'

Finlay's heart sank. 'I... um... I tore it a bit yesterday.'

'A bit!' Mrs Yates exclaimed. 'It looks like a dog's been savaging it!'

Finlay thought of the enormous sabre-toothed lion that had grabbed it and spat it out the day before. 'It wasn't a dog,' he said honestly.

His mum looked cross. 'You have to learn to be more careful. You're eight years old now, old enough to be responsible for your things...'



Finlay let his mum chunter on. His thoughts were far away from being careful. What was the river monster going to be like? How big was it going to be? What superpower would they choose to help them? Excitement swept through him. The day before, Max had got to be super-strong, which meant that today he definitely wanted to be the one who got the superpower. He'd stayed awake late into the night thinking about which power he'd choose, which was why he'd ended up oversleeping. He glanced at his watch. Oops, Max would have been waiting ages.

'Are you listening to me, Finlay?' his mum demanded suspiciously.

'Er... yeah,' Fin said quickly. 'I've got to be more careful and do as I'm told,' he guessed, knowing that this was usually what his mum told him. 'Can I go to Max's now, Mum?'

His mum sighed. 'Oh, go on then, but remember that the football course starts at school at nine. Don't be late.'

Finlay nodded and, grabbing his kit bag, dashed thankfully out of the house. The church clock was striking half past eight now. That hardly left him and Max any time to get to the castle and speak to Hercules before getting to school for football.

I wish I could run faster, he thought as he dodged round an old lady walking at a snail's pace with a very old golden retriever dog. He took the short cut down the footpath that led behind the church. A cat leapt out of the way with a surprised miaow as he hurtled past.

Max was waiting for him by the gate to his house, kicking his football impatiently against the wall. 'What took you so long?' he exclaimed, picking up his ball and shoving it into his bag. 'We'd better move it. Remember, Hercules can only see out of the tower wall for twenty minutes each morning before the bricks come back over his face and he's gone for the day. If we don't get there in time we won't be able to pick up a superpower!'

‘Sorry,’ Finlay panted. ‘I overslept, then Mum started telling me off. She found my trainer Max pulled a face. ‘Not good.’

‘No,’ Finlay agreed as they started to run along the street together. ‘She was really mad.’

‘My mum kicked up a fuss about this.’ Max showed Finlay his hand. On the back of it there was a deep cut, its edges still red with fresh blood, where one of the sabre-toothed lion’s teeth had caught him. ‘I had to say I did it while climbing a tree. Don’t know what she’d have said if I’d told her it was a sabre-toothed lion!’

They stopped at the edge of the pavement. As a couple of cars went past, Finlay looked at Max’s cut more closely. ‘It’s a strange shape – it looks like a hammer, doesn’t it?’

‘Yeah,’ Max agreed. He looked quite pleased. ‘Mum reckons it’ll turn into a proper scar.’

‘Cool,’ said Finlay. The road was clear now. ‘Come on! Let’s move it!’

The dark waters of the moat glittered as Max and Finlay raced over the bridge to the castle. Usually there were



ducks paddling from one side to the other, but today the waters were deserted.

‘I hope we’re not too late,’ Max panted as they scrambled through the gatehouse.

They ran into the castle’s grassy inner keep. Relief flooded through Finlay as he looked at the tower and saw Hercules staring out desperately ‘It’s OK. There’s Hercules!’ He swung round to look at the gatehouse entrance and saw six pictures burning in the stone. ‘The symbols are there too.’

‘Boys!’ Hercules’ voice rang across the keep. ‘You have come.’

‘Of course,’ Max said, crossing the short grass. ‘Did you think we wouldn’t?’

‘I was not sure. It is a very brave thing to do,’ Hercules told them. ‘You could still call the deal off. I can get Juno to come here and tell her that you have changed your minds. The Nine-Headed River Monster is deadly: it can strike from all directions. Even a practised swordsman would have little chance against it and you are just boys.’

Finlay felt a shiver of fear but he forced it away. ‘We fought the Nemean Lion yesterday,’ he pointed out bravely. ‘We’re going to fight this monster today and kill it and get you your powers back.’

‘Yeah,’ Max said stoutly.

‘But this is madness!’ Hercules protested.

‘Well, we’re doing it.’ Finlay looked at Max. ‘Are we going to take it in turns to have a superpower each day?’

Max nodded. ‘OK.’

Finlay felt excitement beat through him. ‘Then it’s my turn to get one today!’

He began running towards the gatehouse wall, his eyes fixed on the symbols. Which one was he going to choose? *Super-speed*, he decided, thinking about how he’d felt when running to meet Max. Being super-fast would be brilliant!

‘Wait!’ Hercules called urgently.

Finlay stopped.

‘If you must do this then it is important that you choose correctly,’ Hercules said. ‘To defeat the river monster you must put your hand on the arrow and choose accuracy. It is the only power that I think will enable you to defeat the monster.’

Finlay felt a stab of disappointment. Accuracy didn’t sound as much fun as



being super-fast. He looked at the arrow and then at the wings, which were the symbol for speed. *If I had super-speed I’d be able to run so fast it would be like flying*, he thought. *It would be like being Dash in The Incredibles.*

He hesitated. Hercules had told him to choose accuracy. But surely it would be good to be super-fast if he was facing a nine-headed monster? He’d be able to get out of the monster’s way when it tried to attack him. He ran up to the gatehouse arch and looked from the wings to the arrow. Should he take Hercules’ advice or follow his own feelings?

‘Choose wisely, boy!’ Hercules’ voice echoed across the keep.

‘I am doing,’ Finlay whispered. And making his mind up he ran forward and banged his hand down on the burning white wings...

CHAPTER TWO



TOO LATE!

‘No!’ Finlay heard Hercules exclaim as the warmth flooded from the magic symbol into his hand. It tingled up his arm and spread through his whole body. After a few moments the stone under his fingers went cold. Finlay lifted his hand away. The symbol had gone.

‘Hey!’ he breathed as he turned slowly round. His body felt incredibly light, almost as if he might float away into the sky at any moment. A wave of giddiness hit him and he had to blink.

‘Are you OK, Fin?’ Max called.

‘What have you done, boy?’ Hercules’ voice rang out in dismay as Finlay nodded and walked towards the tower. ‘I told you to choose accuracy!’

Finlay looked at Hercules’ shocked face. ‘I know, but I just thought having speed might be useful,’ he said. He looked down and kicked his foot against the grass. Now he had to explain himself to the superhero, suddenly choosing speed didn’t seem such a great thing to have done. ‘At least I’ll be able to get away from the monster,’ he said hopefully.

‘But you’re not supposed to get away from it – you’re supposed to kill it!’ Hercules stared at him despairingly ‘How can you hope to do that with speed?’

‘Um, I’ll think of a way,’ Finlay said.

‘So are you super-fast now?’ Max demanded.

‘Guess there’s only one way to find out,’ replied Finlay. ‘Got your watch?’

Max nodded; he had a stopwatch function on his watch.

‘Why don’t you time how long it takes me to run round the castle?’ Finlay said.

‘Good idea.’ Max punched the buttons on his watch to set it up. His fingers waited, poised over the start button. ‘OK.’ The air shimmered for a second where Finlay stood.

‘Well?’ demanded Finlay.

Max frowned. ‘Well, what?’

‘How fast was that?’ Finlay said.

‘How fast was what?’ Max asked.

‘That!’



Max looked at Finlay as if he'd gone mental. 'What do you mean?'

'How long did it take me to run round the castle?'

'You didn't...' Max started to say but then his eyes widened. 'You ran round the castle?'

Finlay nodded.

'But that was quicker than I could even see,' Max told him. 'I didn't even know you'd gone. You *really* ran all the way round the castle?'

'Yeah,' Finlay replied. 'I'll do it again. Watch.' He set off, racing round the castle walls. The air blurred around him. It was like going on a super-fast roller coaster at the fair. The next second he was back standing by Max. 'There!'

'That is so cool!' Max breathed. 'You were back before I could even press the buttons! You really are super-fast!'

They exchanged high fives in delight.

A groan from Hercules made them swing round. He was holding his head in his hands. 'You will never defeat the river monster – never!' He sounded so full of despair that Finlay felt sorry for him.

'It'll be OK, Hercules,' he said bravely. 'I bet we can think of some way of using super-speed to help us.' A thought struck him. 'I can't wait to see what happens this morning; just think how fast I'll be when we're playing football!'

'You must keep the power secret,' Hercules said urgently. 'Or the deal will not stand. Remember what Juno said when she set the tasks yesterday?'

The boys looked blank.

'If you complete each task successfully *on your own*, then that power will return to me,' Hercules reminded them. 'You must not let anyone know of your power and you must not let anyone know about me in case they interfere. Now listen...' His tone became anxious as he looked at the sun. 'My time is running out today. You have acted foolishly in choosing the power of speed, but maybe all is not lost. Maybe I can come up with a plan.' His forehead furrowed as he thought hard. 'Yes, perhaps...'

'What we really need are some weapons,' Finlay interrupted him.

‘Yeah,’ Max agreed.

‘A weapon is indeed important,’ Hercules said. ‘And I can help. Listen carefully.’ The boys stepped closer. ‘When I was imprisoned, Juno placed my sword...’

There was a loud crunching noise. The stones started to close up in front of Hercules’ face.



‘Wait!’ Finlay exclaimed.

‘You will find it...’ Hercules gasped, but before he could say any more the last stones reformed in front of him, shutting him in.

Finlay couldn’t believe it. ‘He was about to say where his sword was! That’s not fair! Hercules! Hercules!’ he shouted, banging on the castle wall. But there was no answer. The wall was solid stone once more. The superhero had gone.

‘What are we going to do now?’ demanded Max.

‘We’ll just have to think of something else to use,’ Finlay replied. He suddenly realized something. ‘Hang on, no one’s told us where to find this monster, Max.’

Max frowned. ‘You’re right. Where do you think it is?’

‘Dunno,’ Finlay replied. ‘It could be in any bit of water that’s big enough, I guess.’

‘Oh, great,’ Max groaned. ‘So now we’ve got to fight a monster, with no weapon, and we don’t even know where it is!’

Suddenly there was the sound of church bells ringing faintly in the village.

‘Oh no!’ Max said, looking at his watch. ‘It’s nine o’clock! We’re going to be late for football!’

‘But what about finding the monster?’ exclaimed Finlay.

Max hesitated. ‘If we don’t go to football, Mr Roberts will tell our mums and we’ll get into loads of trouble.’

Finlay felt torn. If his mum found out he’d missed the football course she probably wouldn’t let him go out all half-term and then there’d be no more helping Hercules! But he wanted to find the monster...

‘We have to go, Finlay!’ Max said urgently.

Finlay nodded. ‘Yeah.’ He broke into a run. The world whizzed by. Castle walls, the moat, trees and houses all sped past...

Houses! Finlay stopped dead. He had run so fast that he was now standing in the middle of the village with the school just in front of him. But where was Max?

‘Oh no,’ he muttered as he suddenly realized that Max was probably still up by the castle.

He turned and ran back. It was a very strange feeling. His brain seemed to take over, telling his feet where to go without him having to think about it at all. The wind whistled in his ears. This was cool!

He reached the castle just in time to see Max running down the hill shouting, ‘Fin! Wait!’

‘I’m here.’

Max swung round and gaped. ‘How did you get behind me?’

‘I ran down to the village and back,’ Finlay said. ‘I got there in about three seconds!’

Max was very impressed. ‘Wow!’

‘We’d better go!’ Finlay urged. ‘Mr Roberts is going to go mad if we’re late.’

Max looked worried. ‘You go on ahead. It’s stupid for us both to get into trouble.’

‘No way! I can’t leave you to get into trouble,’ Finlay protested.

‘You have to,’ Max told him. ‘Go on...’

But Finlay suddenly had an idea. ‘No! I know what. I can give you a piggyback!’ He appeared at Max’s side almost before Max had blinked. ‘Get on!’

Max hesitated. He was taller than Finlay. ‘But...’

‘Just get on!’ Finlay told him, bending down. Max gave in. Grabbing Finlay round the neck he scrambled on to his back. ‘Oof!’ Finlay exclaimed, his knees buckling.

‘I’m too big. You can’t do this,’ Max said, beginning to loosen his grip.

‘Oh yes I can!’ Finlay said



determinedly. And not giving Max a chance to get off, he began to run. Within a few strides he had picked up speed.

‘Oh, wow!’ Max gasped as the world blurred around him. They hurtled into the village and down the streets. Max bumped around on Finlay’s back, clinging on to his neck as they charged in through the school gates and into the playground. The church bell gave a last clang as Fin stopped. Losing his balance, he half fell to his knees and Max pitched off his back on to the hard ground.

'Ooof!' he gasped.

'Sorry,' Fin panted.

'Finlay Yates!' A teacher's voice snapped out. 'Max Hayward!'

Finlay and Max's heads shot up. Mr Roberts, their teacher, was standing in the school doorway, dressed in a black tracksuit and with a whistle around his neck. He stared at them sprawled on the ground in astonishment.

'Whatever do you two think you are doing?'

CHAPTER THREE



WHERE IS THE MONSTER?

Finlay and Max struggled to their feet. ‘We’re just practising our tackles,’ Max said.

‘Yes, rugby tackles,’ added Finlay.

Mr Roberts frowned. ‘Well, you’re here to play football, not rugby, and you should be getting changed, not rolling around in the playground. Inside now, boys!’

Finlay and Max hurried into school. Their friends were all getting changed into their football gear.

‘Thought you weren’t coming,’ George said as they began pulling off their coats.



‘Oversleep, did you?’ Matthew, George’s twin brother, asked.

‘Sort of,’ muttered Max, swapping looks with Finlay.

Mr Roberts blew his whistle. ‘OK, everyone! Outside and we’ll start with two laps of the playground.’ He fixed his gaze on Max and Finlay. ‘One minute, then I want to see the pair of you outside too – or it’ll be three laps.’

Max looked at Finlay. ‘You could do three laps in three seconds!’

‘But if Mr Roberts finds out I’m super-fast, it could ruin everything for Hercules,’ Finlay realized. ‘Maybe I shouldn’t have chosen super-speed today after all.’

As everyone trooped outside Max and Finlay quickly pulled on their shorts.

‘What are we going to do?’ Max said. ‘We’ve got a monster to kill before sunset. We don’t even know where it is at the moment and we’ve got to stay here for two hours!’

‘Or maybe we don’t,’ Finlay said, thinking fast. ‘I could use my super-speed to race off and

see if I can find the monster. If I'm quick I bet Mr Roberts won't even notice I've gone!

Max frowned. 'It's risky. I know you're fast, but you'll probably be gone for ages if you have to look for the monster.'

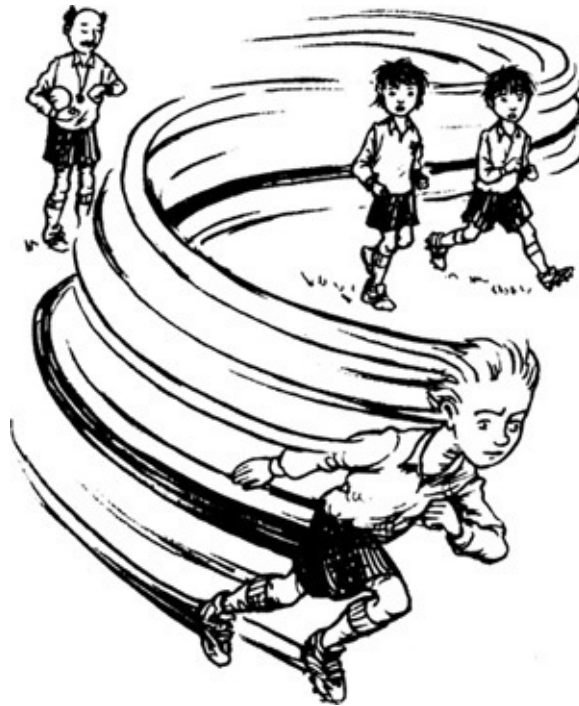
Fin squared his shoulders. 'I'll take the risk.'

*

It felt very strange going out to join their friends. George and Matthew were discussing the weekend's Chelsea versus Arsenal match. Amy and Anna were talking about a new pony at the riding stables they went to. It seemed impossible that everything was so normal. Finlay was filled with an incredible urge to shout at them all, 'I've got a superpower! I'm the fastest boy in the world!'

But actually he didn't need to shout it. He soon found out that it was very hard for him *not* to run super-fast. Even as he thought about how he would like to tell everyone about his super-speed, his legs speeded up and suddenly he was racing halfway round the playground and passing George and Matthew. He hastily slowed down and looked around. To his relief, Mr Roberts was checking his watch and hadn't noticed that one of his pupils had achieved a new school record.

George and Matthew had though.



They ran up to him, open-mouthed.

'How did you do that?' George exclaimed.

Max ran past looking very worried.

Finlay thought fast. 'The, er, wind blew me along.'

'What wind?' George frowned.

'*This* wind!' Finlay made a rude noise. 'I had two tins of beans for breakfast!'

'Ugh, gross!' said Matthew.

‘You should see how fast I go after three tins!’ Finlay grinned. ‘And how gross I smell!’ He made another, even longer, rude noise and held his nose. Just as he’d hoped, George and Matthew burst out laughing, both forgetting about his burst of speed. They held their noses too.

Mr Roberts noticed them mucking about. ‘No stopping over there! On you go!’

Finlay thankfully carried on running. He found if he tried to keep his own feet in time with George and Matthew’s he could just about manage to run at normal speed. ‘Left, right, left, right, left, right,’ he repeated under his breath.

But it was hard to concentrate all the time. His thoughts kept drifting to the monster. Where was it? There was a reservoir in the hills, maybe it was there? Or in the river in the woods? Or in the lake by the caravan site...

The next instant he found himself shooting on ahead. He had to race all the way round the playground, coming back to rejoin George and Matthew. Luckily he was so fast this time they didn’t even realize he’d gone.

By the time he had done this five times, he was very glad when they finished their supposed two laps and Mr Roberts called them into the middle.

‘Line up in two teams!’ the teacher called, placing two rows of cones up the playground. ‘First person in each team has to dribble a ball round these cones and back to their team, then the next person can go and the next. The first team with everyone back is the winner.’

There were exactly eleven of them in each team. ‘I reckon the monster could be in the reservoir,’ Finlay whispered to Max as they joined the end of their team’s line.

‘This could be your chance, Fin,’ Max said under his breath. ‘You could go and check it before your turn in the game. Mr Roberts will be too busy to notice.’

Finlay checked round. Everyone was looking at Mr Roberts, waiting for him to blow the whistle. ‘Here goes!’ he said and he set off.

The village whistled by – houses, gateways, the village shop, the church. Almost before he knew it, he was out on the roads, whizzing up into the hills where the reservoir was. This was brilliant! He was like a human rocket! A real life super-boy!

Suddenly he realized that the track around the reservoir was just ahead of him. He skidded to a stop and looked about.



The reservoir spread out in front of him – an enormous expanse of still water. To Finlay’s relief there was no one there. He stared down at the water. It looked perfect for a river monster to hide in. Picking up a large stone he ran to the water’s edge and chucked it as far as he could. It fell with a splash, ripples spreading out away from where it had sunk. Finlay held his breath. What was he going to do if a monster erupted from the water?

Run, he told himself.

He waited.

Nothing.

Finlay waited for a few more moments and then tried chucking another stone. Still nothing. But how could he be sure? The reservoir was very large. The monster might be hiding under the water over on the other side.

As he stared at the flat surface of the water he remembered a scene from *The Incredibles* when Dash had run across the water.

I could run across the reservoir, Finlay thought. If the monster’s hiding underneath I bet it’ll come out to see what’s happening if it sees my feet!

It might also bite my feet...

He pushed away the horrible thought and ran straight towards the reservoir. In a second he was on the water. It felt like running on wobbly jelly. It was weird but fun. He charged back and forward from one side of the reservoir to the other.

‘Hey, monster!’ he called.

Nothing happened.

Feeling a mixture of disappointment and relief Finlay ran off the water and on to the far bank. The monster couldn’t be in the reservoir. He was sure it would have appeared if it was hiding there. And he knew he couldn’t afford to hang around any longer or he’d be missed at school. Turning round he ran back as fast as he could.

He arrived in the playground just as Max reached the front of the queue.



Everyone was yelling out names and clapping their hands, as they encouraged their teams on. Luckily no one apart from Max seemed to notice Finlay reappear.

‘Did you find the monster?’ Max hissed as Finlay arrived beside him.

Finlay shook his head. ‘It must be somewhere else!’ he gasped as George returned and Max took his turn with the ball.

The next exercise involved them working in pairs and taking it in turns to tackle each other. Max and Finlay retreated to the quietest corner of the playground.

‘Shall I go and look for the monster again?’ Finlay said. ‘I could try the lake by the campsite!’

Max nodded. ‘If Mr Roberts asks where you are I’ll say you’ve gone to the toilet.’

Finlay set off. He tried the lake and then the river in the woods, but there was no sign of the monster at either place.

He got back, puffing and panting, his hair sticking up, just as Mr Roberts came over. ‘You two look like you’ve been working hard,’ he said, looking at Finlay’s red face. ‘Good lads! We’ll have a match now. Hope your shooting’s up to its usual form, Max.’

Blowing on his whistle, he called everyone into the middle. They split into their teams. ‘We’d better stop looking for the monster now,’ Max whispered as everyone got into position. ‘Mr Roberts is bound to notice if you disappear in the middle of a game.’

‘But we’ve got to find it!’ Finlay said urgently. ‘We don’t want to be wasting time this afternoon when we should be trying to kill it. I’ll go and try the river up by Symthes’s farm.’

‘Don’t,’ Max hissed. ‘The game’s about to start...’ But he was too late. Finlay had already gone!

CHAPTER FOUR



GOAL!

The whistle went. Max looked round in alarm. The game had started! He felt his heart beating fast. What if Mr Roberts noticed Finlay was missing?

Luckily it was a quick game and Max was soon caught up in the action. After a few minutes George got the ball and raced towards the goal, but finding his way blocked by defenders, George turned and passed back to Max. Anna and Amy closed Max down, forcing him to cross it to Matthew. Harvey raced in to tackle Matthew. Matthew looked to pass the ball back to an unmarked player.

‘Where’s Fin?’ he shouted.

Mr Roberts glanced round.

Max’s stomach tightened with fear. No! Mr Roberts mustn’t realize Fin wasn’t there. ‘To me, Matthew!’ he yelled, pelting towards the right wing and leaving Fraser, who was marking him, way behind.

Matthew fired the ball in his direction.

Max whisked round with it and set off towards the goal. He was clear, just the goalie to beat.

‘Shoot!’ yelled everyone in his team.

From the corner of his eye Max could see Mr Roberts looking on in confusion. He was sure the teacher had realized Finlay was missing. He



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