





CHAPTER 19

We stay in the shadows of the forest until we reach a path that winds up into the mountains. We climb higher and higher until there isn't a bird or blade of grass in sight, just stones and rocks and volcanic dust that gets into my eyes and throat. When I feel like my lungs might burst I stop to catch my breath and check the map.

There's not far to go. The Crow's Nest is just ahead of us, beyond the next mountain, where the cliffs meet the sea. I push off and peddle hard after Win, trying to ignore the pain in my legs. Seeing those scarecrows has frightened me. Is

that what Grandad is like right now? Cold and trapped and staring into space?

Up ahead Win disappears round a bend and I follow. 'Win!' I shout. 'When you get stuffed, how long have you got?'

'Before you turn into a scarecrow for good? We never knew for sure, but Rose said it was to do with how old you were. You're eleven, so you'd have eleven hours.'

I almost smile. That's just the sort of bizarre rule Rose or I would have made up, but if Win is right, at least that gives us seventy-two hours to get to Grandad . . . No, less than that by now. The thought makes me pedal with a renewed energy, forcing my way up the hill.

When my heart is racing and I don't think I can go any further the path levels out and we start to go downhill.

'Look, there's the crack,' says Win.

The crack in the earth now runs alongside the path. Mist rolls down from the mountaintop, and we follow the crack as it leads towards the sound of thundering waves. When I can taste the salty

tang of the sea, I know we're getting close. Win hits the brakes and I skid to a stop behind him. 'We're here!' he shouts.

We've come out on a rocky cliff. Mist swirls around us and the wind is so powerful I have to hold on tight to the handlebars of my bike. The Bottomless Ocean lies in front of us, its waves pounding at the base of the cliff. The mist thins and, far across the sea, I see a monstrous shape rising out of the water.

'The Crow's Nest,' I whisper.

Win puts a hand on my shoulder. 'We're nearly there, mate.'

Crowky's castle clings to a rock and looks impossibly tall. It has four towers that twist like blackened branches towards the sky, and each tower is topped by a jumble of twigs that look like giant rooks' nests. Round windows puncture the walls, light flickering behind them. Even though the sea separates us, I still feel like the windows are blinking eyes, watching me.

I swallow. 'It's a bit . . . bigger than I remember . . .' Suddenly, more than anything, I wish that

Rose was standing next to me. I could do with some of her fearlessness right now. 'So where's this Magic Road?'

Win sits down and points at the sea. 'Keep watching and you'll see it. It's magic, remember?'

I sit next to him. 'Yeah, you keep saying.'

'*Magic*,' Win whispers, 'like me!' Then he points his wand, cries, 'Plump bubble!' and a small balloon appears in the air. It deflates with a sad squeal, disappearing over the edge of the cliff. He turns to me with an awestruck look. 'I've never magicked up a balloon before!'

'I liked it,' I say, then we go back to staring at the sea.

The Bottomless Ocean is wild here. Waves smash against each other and the wind flies over the surface of the sea with a mournful wail. I can see the jagged mountain peaks of The End far away in the distance. Sitting here with Win, I feel like I'm at the very edge of the world. No. I feel like I'm at the very edge of something far stranger than the world. This is a good feeling because it makes me think anything could

happen now . . . A Magic Road could even appear that will lead us all the way to the Crow's Nest.

Only it doesn't appear, and after half an hour all that's happened is Win's done some more rubbish magic and I've got an achy bum. 'It's just waves, Win,' I say. 'Loads and loads of waves.'

'Look . . .!' He scrambles forward and points. 'There it is: the Magic Road!'

All I can see is the sea, same as before, but then a wave sucks back and I spot something just under the surface. It's a big flat rock covered in seaweed. And then I see another and another, until the waves roll over them and they disappear.

'They'll come back,' says Win. He's right. Slowly the tide goes out, making the sea level drop until a whole line of rocks is revealed. The rocks stretch all the way to the Crow's Nest.

'I found it the day after the ground cracked open,' says Win. 'This is where the crack runs out across the sea and somehow it pushed the land up, although you can only see it at low tide.' He nudges me and grins. 'If we follow it, we can

stroll up to the Crow's Nest and walk right in!'



I look at the chain of rocks. They do lead to the Crow's Nest, but it's not like any road I've ever seen. A road is smooth and covered in tarmac, and you can travel along it safely. But these rocks have great big gaps between them – like giants' stepping stones – and in some places the road is just a pile of boulders covered in seaweed. I squint into the distance. 'You really think we can

go along there and get to the Crow's Nest?'

Win nods confidently. 'I know we can. I've done it!'

'Really? You climbed over all those rocks, jumped over the gaps, and got to the castle before the tide came in?'

'Well, not *all the way*,' Win admits, 'but close. It was getting dark and I was hungry and I saw this massive octopus.' He shivers. 'It *really* freaked me out . . . but I'm sure I could have done it if I'd wanted to.'

I lean forward. The road starts about halfway down the cliff. 'How did you even get on to the first rock?'

Win's eyes light up. 'That's the best bit: to get to the Magic Road we have to go down the Magic Tunnel!'

Of course we do. Before I can even ask what the Magic Tunnel is, Win's jumped up and climbed on his bike. 'Come on,' he says.

I cycle after Win back the way we've just come. After a few minutes he stops and points at the ground. 'Look.' The crack disappears into the

rock face at this point, but when Win lifts a curtain of shrivelled ivy I realise that it's actually cut a narrow tunnel right through the rock.

'Behold the Magic Tunnel,' Win says, then he pushes off and cycles between the leaves.

I follow him down the dripping tunnel, the wheels on my bike slithering over wet stones. Win starts whooping as our bikes shoot along, getting faster and faster.

'What's so magical about this tunnel?' I shout, ducking to avoid a dangling root.

'It's so steep!' Win cries, and I see that he's right. The tunnel is sloping dramatically downhill. I squeeze my brakes. Then I remember that I don't have any brakes.

My bike picks up speed. 'Win . . . where does this tunnel come out?'

'Here!' he cries, hitting his brakes. 'Right on the Magic Road!' I swerve to the left and zoom past him. Directly ahead is the opening of the tunnel. 'Mate!' Win calls. 'You might want to slow down!'

I put my feet on the ground, but all this does is

make tiny stones fly up in my face. 'I CAN'T!' I yell and my bike hurtles out of the tunnel straight towards a thin spit of rock covered in seaweed. I see the flash of waves smashing against it as I shoot straight across it

'Keep pedalling!' yells Win. 'And don't look down!'

I do what he says. I don't have any choice. I zoom along the spit of rock until it opens out into a lovely wide space. Suddenly the wheels of my bike skid on a fat bit of seaweed, the bike slips out from under me and I crash down. Sea spray rains down and the wheels on the bike spin.

Win laughs. 'SO GNARLY!'

I lift up my head and see him standing at the mouth of the tunnel. After carefully propping his bike up, he picks his way over the narrow rock, avoiding the worst bits of seaweed and pausing whenever a particularly large wave strikes.

He helps me to my feet. 'That was the most awesome thing I've ever seen in my life. I was tempted to try it myself, but, you know . . .'

'You didn't want to die?' I pull seaweed out of

my hair and shuffle towards the middle of the rock where it feels a bit safer.

'Yeah, something like that.'

'So what now?' I look along the line of rocks that leads to the Crow's Nest. From down here the castle manages to appear both enormous and unnervingly far away. Mist drifts across the sea and starts to roll over the Magic Road.

'We start jumping,' says Win. 'It's fun.'

He walks to the edge of the rock we're standing on and takes a big leap, landing on the next one.

I go to follow him, but when I get to the edge, I stop. The rock I'm standing on is big and flat. It feels safe, but the next rock is about a metre away and it's small and curved. Win made it look easy, just jumping across like that, but now my toes are hovering on the edge I'm not sure if I can make it. And when the waves pull back I see the drop.

Win shouts back, 'Do you want to save your grandad, Arthur?' and then he's off, leaping from one rock to the next.

So I focus on Grandad trapped somewhere inside that castle, arms outstretched, cold and

alone, and I jump across the gap. I land clumsily,
my knees slamming down and my hands
scraping across barnacles, then I get to my feet.
One down, only another fifty or so to go. 'I'm
coming!' I shout.

Chapter 19

Questions



1. Look at page 97/98. If you were nine years old how long would it take before you turned into a scarecrow for good? How long has Grandad got? (2 marks)
2. Look at page 98/99. Describe what Crowky's castle looks like. Use the text to help you. (2 marks)
3. Look at page 100. What is the 'magic road'? (1 mark)
4. Look at page 103. What problem does Arthur have with his bike? (1 mark)
5. Look at page 104. Why does Arthur stop on a rock and what helps him to get across to the next one? (2 marks)

