

WEDNESDAY WEEKS

and the Dungeon of Fire



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 **LOTHIAN**
Children's Books



CHAPTER 1

Mrs Glock is running up and down our perfectly clean classroom. She's pretty much in full-scale panic, straightening artworks, polishing the whiteboard. I haven't seen her this worked up since I accidentally squashed Sasha Hammond with a mutant hippo-bug. And that was weeks ago.

'He's coming!' our teacher shrieks. 'He'll be here any moment!' She stares wildly around the room. If her carefully pencilled eyebrows climb any higher, they'll be visible from outer space.

'Sitting nicely,' she urges us. 'Smiles on.'

We're sitting nicely. Our smiles are on. Even Colin Murphy is smiling, though I can't decide if smiling-Colin reminds me more of a self-satisfied vampire or a lava lizard seconds before it bursts into flames.

Mrs Glock is even more frantic than usual. Something about the Board of Education scheduling a Special Investigator to visit our school has really hit a nerve.

I'd like to think the investigator is coming because Mrs Glock is in the running for Highest Number of Fire Extinguishers in a Year Six Classroom. Or maybe she's being recruited for the next season of *I'm a Primary Teacher . . . Get Me Out of Here!*

But it's more likely the Board of Education has got wind of the recent incident with the hippobugamus. Not to mention the other strange happenings at our school. Random explosions. Unexplained blackouts. Fireballs raining from the ceiling. And you know what they say . . . where there's smoke, there's probably some sort of fire that I unintentionally started.

'It's very important everything goes to plan.' Mrs Glock locks eyes with each of us as she roves the room. 'If we don't make a good impression, the Board of Education has the power to close down our school. So you all know what to do. We can't afford for anything to—'

She gasps.

Her eyes have come to rest on me. I sit up straight and smile my most convincing smile. Mrs Glock and I don't always get on, but we do have things in common. An on-again, off-again relationship with our eyebrows, for a start. And also . . . well . . . probably loads of other stuff too.

Mrs Glock seems to have gone into some kind of trance. She stares at me like she's been zapped with one of Grandpa's amnesia spells.

Alfie nudges me encouragingly. 'There you go. She's not ignoring you.'

Alfie is literally the smartest, most enthusiastic person I know. He can make the best of any situation, even this one. Now he smooths his crisp white shirt, checks the lucky hankie in his top pocket, and does absolutely nothing to his perfectly tousled hair. Because his hair always just looks like that. Total rock star, without even trying.

Now he gives Mrs Glock one of his enormous smiles – the type that makes you feel like everything's going to be okay. Alfie's the kind of person you want at your side when you're trying to convince an adult of anything. But moments pass and our teacher still doesn't move.

Alfie looks concerned. 'Is everything all right, Mrs Glock?'

Mrs Glock is usually putty in Alfie's mega-genius hands, but not this morning. The whites of her eyes are shining and she's just staring at me and staring at me and then . . . finally . . . she utters a single word.

'Wednesday.'

I guess I should be happy. It's the first time she's said my name since the hippobugamus incident. Only, she says it like I'm some sort of scarab beetle she's found in her salad.

Which is a little hurtful. I mean, all I was doing was trying to save our silkworms from being gobbled by a poorly trained messenger bug. It's not my fault the tiny bug accidentally transformed into a wingless, mooing mutant the size of a baby hippo.

At least, that's what Alfie says.

Besides, Mrs Glock doesn't really remember what happened. Or she shouldn't, if Grandpa's done his job properly. So why has she been acting so weird around me lately?

Grandpa says the difference between a good sorcerer and an evil sorcerer is what they do with their power. Which is why I'm hoping with all my heart – and the occasional calming spell – that our school won't be closed down. Instead, I can use my powers to convince the Special Investigator to give Mrs Glock a glowing report and a *GREAT WORK: KEEP IT UP* certificate and our lives can all go back to normal. Call me a nerd, but right now I'm really focussed on graduating from primary school. And I can't do that if my teacher is frozen in terror. Or if the Board of Education shuts down my school.

'Erm,' I say. 'Mrs Glock?'

Mrs Glock blinks. 'Wednesday,' she says, pushing the word out from between clenched teeth. 'You can't be here when the investigator comes.'

Okay, ouch. Thanks for the vote of confidence, Mrs G.

I mean, six weeks ago, maybe I could see her point. But I've come a long way since the time I accidentally exploded our class model of the Harbour Bridge and melted an expensive robot into a pile of toxic sludge. Back then, I was all alone and struggling to learn even the teensiest bit about magic. Try being the first human in seven generations to be born with magical powers, and you'll get my drift. Then try having my grandpa as your best and only hope for learning to control those magical powers, and you'll kind of want to bury your head in the Great Slug Swamp.

But then Alfie came along, and there's something about Alfie that even Grandpa's Sword of Reckoning likes. And that means Grandpa likes him too. So now we're in it together – me and Alfie, Apprentice Protectors of the Realms. And it's a billion times better than being alone.

But if even a single fireball rains from the ceiling while the Special Investigator is here, it will raise suspicious eyebrows at the Board of Education. And if any eyebrows get singed, vaporised or in any way magically mismanaged, the board has the power to close down our school. Permanently. And that means I'll need to change schools. Again. And be separated from Alfie.

No. Way.

The only way I can make sure that doesn't happen is by making absolutely certain the investigator gives our

class a glowing report. By any means necessary. And I can't do that if I'm not here.

Besides, my poster about the geology of volcanoes is practically a work of art. I can't wait to hear what the investigator has to say about it.

'Five minutes,' Sasha Hammond calls. Sasha has the stopwatch and the desk closest to the door.

Mrs Glock looks around the classroom like she's hoping a portal to another dimension might open up and swallow me away. Which, in fairness, could actually happen.

I sit up even straighter and push my face into an expression of reliable dependability. At the same time, I check the clasp on my anti-magic bracelet, a clever gadget that protects me – and our school – from magical disasters.

Except when I take it off.

Which I am totally not doing now.

Not unless it's absolutely necessary.

Suddenly, Sasha makes a kind of choking noise. The entire class turns to stare at a figure in the doorway. The figure holds his head high, one hand outstretched, a circle of darkness flickering around him.

Okay, seriously?

'Inspector,' Mrs Glock croaks, a smile frozen on her face. 'Welcome to Room 17.'

Now, I'm no expert on Board of Education Special Investigators, but I'm fairly certain your average

investigator might favour smart-casual fashion. A tailored blazer, perhaps, with a collared shirt, some smart shoes, a clipboard and a name badge. Not a hooded cloak, a wooden staff, and a green-jewelled belt.

But this doesn't seem to occur to Mrs Glock. Like I said, she's been under a lot of stress lately.

'Do come in,' she gushes. 'The children are so excited to meet you.'

The figure lowers his hood, revealing vivid grey eyes. His face is stern, artfully framed by his way-too-carefully crafted beard. I want to roll my eyes. If Grandpa spent half as much time tidying his basement as he spends working on his appearance, we'd never have to waste another weekend searching for lost firebird eggs or missing bottles of boomslang fangs.

Not that I'm still upset about that.

I mean, why would I want to spend my weekend doing anything else?

Anyway, he's here now, and that means I should be filled with a feeling of safety and calm, because he's the adult and also the Protector of the Realms, Master of the Seven Transformations, etc, etc. Except, during our last couple of adventures, Grandpa has ended up in the Deep End of Serious Trouble . . . and guess who's had to save him?

Yep. Me and Alfie. Apprentice Protectors of the Realms, Chief Searchers for Missing Firebird Eggs. And Year Six Kids Desperately Trying to Graduate.

The Ruby Ring is still glowing red on Grandpa's finger after his journey through space and time. Power and magic thrum through the air when he speaks, and that's just the way he likes it.

'Apprentices,' he says gravely, nodding at me and Alfie in turn. 'We must leave at once.'

Alfie shoots me an expectant look. The rest of the kids just stare, open-mouthed.

Mrs Glock rushes to shake Grandpa's hand. 'I'm Alice Glock,' she says. 'It's an absolute pleasure to meet you, Inspector . . .' She trails off uncertainly, peering at Grandpa like she's trying to place his face.

Grandpa is clearly in a rush, but he bows and starts to introduce himself anyway. He's always been a sucker for protocol.

'As ever, dear lady—' he begins.

'Lovely to meet you, Mr Dearlady,' Mrs Glock gushes, taking Grandpa by the elbow. 'Allow me to give you a little tour.'

Grandpa looks astounded. Usually when he's introducing himself, he takes great pleasure in listing his full name and at least seven of his titles. But this time he doesn't get a chance.

Instead, Mrs Glock launches straight into our carefully prepared classroom tour, leading Grandpa across to our latest technology assignment. We had to design our own games using magnets. Sasha Hammond's group made a fishing game, with magnetic rods to fish out magnetic sea creatures. Allie Crenshaw's group made a maze, where you use magnets to steer little magnetic cars. And Colin Murphy's group made a magnetic version of Pin the Tail on the Donkey, where instead of a magnetic tail you pin a magnetic nose, a magnetic mouth and magnetic eyeballs, and instead of a donkey, you use an enormous picture of Colin. Super-entertaining – and surprisingly clever.

Alfie and I call our game Magneto-fetch. It doesn't use permanent magnets, which are magnetic all the time. It uses *electromagnets*, which are only magnetic when an electrical current flows through them. Basically, we attached a robotic arm to Alfie's robot, Alfie Junior, then added on a powerful electromagnet. Which means, with a simple voice command, we can instruct Alfie Junior to switch on the magnet, and *boom!* The little robot instantly attracts everything magnetic in the room. Sasha Hammond's magnetic sea creatures, Allie Crenshaw's magnetic cars, and, even funnier, Colin Murphy's magnetic face parts. It's like watching magnetic seagulls flock to a robotic chip.

But Mrs Glock doesn't mention Magneto-fetch. In fact, she's already moved on, and now she's talking so fast

it's hard for Grandpa to get a word in, which is kind of incredible. Grandpa's not known for his patience, in the same way that real Special Investigators aren't known for their cloaks and swords.

'This is our study of volcanoes,' Mrs Glock says, showing off our displays. She's so focussed, she doesn't realise Grandpa doesn't care a dragon's whisker about science. Grandpa is magic, magic, magic all the way.

Alfie and I have tried to explain some basic science to Grandpa, like the internet and solar panels and how toilets flush. But he insists all good things come from magic. 'Look,' he says. 'I push a button, and *abracadabra*. It all disappears!'

That's why Alfie and I exchange a nervous glance when Mrs Glock shows Grandpa our homemade Newton's Cradle. You know those nifty little desk toys? The ones with a row of silver balls suspended on strings? Well, we even got to make one of those.

'This is our work on energy transformation,' she says, lifting one ball and then dropping it. She shows him how all the balls click back and forth, back and forth.

'Potential energy transforms to kinetic energy and then back again!' Sasha Hammond explains, always eager to please.

'Nonsense!' Grandpa booms. 'People can transform into frogs. I can transform into a raven. But none of this

can happen without magic! Besides, transformation magic is far too complex for ordinary humans to understand.'

Yikes. He's clearly lost his patience. And accidentally caused all the ceiling lights to explode.

Mrs Glock looks shocked. Sasha Hammond just gapes. And I can't help wondering when the real investigator will turn up.

Grandpa swirls his cloak. 'Enough talk. Pack your things, Apprentices.'

Alfie grins like he's in a toothpaste commercial. 'Molten!' There's nothing he likes better than a magical adventure, the more hair-raising the better.

Me? I'm not so sure. I feel like something terrible must have happened to bring Grandpa here. I mean, Alfie and I have made the rules very clear: Grandpa isn't allowed in our classroom unless it's an absolute emergency. And lately, he's stuck to those rules.

So I brace myself. Because more than likely, we're about to be landed feet-first in a swamp-load of trouble.

And then there's a knock at the door.