

MAGIC TREE HOUSE® #33
#1 MERLIN MISSION

Carnival at Candlelight



Mary Pope
Osborne

Here's what kids have to say to
Mary Pope Osborne, author of
the Magic Tree House series:

WOW! You have an imagination like no other.—Adam W.

I love your books. If you stop writing books, it will be like losing a best friend.—Ben M.

I think you are the real Morgan le Fay. There is always magic in your books.—Erica Y.

One day I was really bored and I didn't want to read. . . . I looked in your book. I read a sentence, and it was interesting. So I read some more, until the book was done. It was so good I read more and more. Then I had read all of your books, and now I hope you write lots more.—Danai K.

I always read [your books] over and over . . . 1 time, 2 times, 3 times, 4 times. . . .—Yuan C.

You are my best author in the world. I love your books. I read all the time. I read everywhere. My mom is like freaking out.—Ellen C.

I hope you make these books for all yours and mine's life.—Riki H.

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Magic Tree House[®] books, too!

Thank you for opening faraway places and times to my class through your books. They have given me the chance to bring in additional books, materials, and videos to share with the class.—J. Cameron

It excites me to see how involved [my fourth-grade reading class] is in your books. . . . I would do anything to get my students more involved, and this has done it.—C. Rutz

I discovered your books last year. . . . WOW! Our students have gone crazy over them. I can't order enough copies! . . . Thanks for contributing so much to children's literature!—C. Kendziora

I first came across your Magic Tree House series when my son brought one home. . . . I have since introduced this great series to my class. They have absolutely fallen in love with these books! . . . My students are now asking me for more independent reading time to read them. Your stories have inspired even my most struggling readers.—M. Payne

I love how I can go beyond the [Magic Tree House] books and use them as springboards for other learning.—R. Gale

We have enjoyed your books all year long. We check your Web site to find new information. We pull our map down to find the areas where the adventures take place. My class always chimes in at key parts of the story. It feels good to hear my students ask for a book and cheer when a new book comes out.—J. Korinek

Our students have "Magic Tree House fever." I can't keep your books on the library shelf.—J. Rafferty

Your books truly invite children into the pleasure of reading. Thanks for such terrific work.—S. Smith

The children in the fourth grade even hide the [Magic Tree House] books in the library so that they will be able to find them when they are ready to check them out.—K. Mortensen

My Magic Tree House books are never on the bookshelf because they are always being read by my students. Thank you for creating such a wonderful series.—K. Mahoney

MAGIC TREE HOUSE® #33
A MERLIN MISSION

Carnival at Candlelight



by Mary Pope Osborne
illustrated by Sal Mardocca

A STEPPING STONE BOOK™
Random House  New York



Dear Reader,

Carnival at Candlelight is the fifth book in a group of Magic Tree House books called the “Merlin Missions.” On their first four Merlin Missions, Jack and Annie traveled to mythical lands, where many magical things took place. I love writing books that take place in fantasy worlds, but I also love writing books about real life. So the next Merlin Missions will combine the two—Jack and Annie will have fantasy adventures in real places in real times.

One of the most amazing places I’ve ever been is the city of Venice, Italy. Venice is a group of islands in a lagoon between the Italian mainland and the Adriatic Sea. The water, the art, the architecture, the atmosphere—all make Venice one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Writing a Magic Tree House adventure set in Venice meant that I could return there in my imagination every day for many months. Working on this book was a very exciting journey. I invite you now to share my journey and discover the mystery and magic of Venice for yourself.

My Paper Stone

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Osborne, Mary Pope.

Carnival at candlelight / by Mary Pope Osborne; illustrated by Sal Murdocca.

p. cm. — (Magic tree house; #33)

SUMMARY: While on a mission to prove to Merlin that they can use magic wisely, Jack and Annie travel to eighteenth-century Venice, Italy, to save the city from disaster.

eISBN: 978-0-375-89455-8

[1. Time travel—Fiction. 2. Magic—Fiction. 3. Tree houses—Fiction.

4. Brothers and sisters—Fiction. 5. Venice (Italy)—Fiction.]

I. Murdocca, Sal, ill. II. Title. III. Series: Osborne, Mary Pope.

Magic tree house series; v #33.

PZ7.O81167Car 2005 [Fic]—dc22 2004018256

v3.0

For Gail Hochman, of course

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*I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
A palace and a prison on each hand:
I saw from out the wave her structures rise
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand...*

—Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*



CHAPTER ONE

A Book of Magic

Dawn was breaking in the Frog Creek woods. Jack saw a light shining up ahead. He ran toward it. He ran so fast, he couldn't hear his feet hitting the ground. He couldn't feel the frosty winter air.

As Jack got closer to the light, he could see the magic tree house at the top of the tallest oak. A girl and boy were looking out the window. The girl had dark, wavy hair and sea-blue eyes. The boy had tousled red hair and a big grin on his face. As the two kids waved at him, Jack felt incredibly happy.

“Jack, wake up!”

Jack opened his eyes. His sister, Annie, was standing beside his bed. She was wearing her winter jacket. It was barely light outside.

“I just had a dream about the tree house,” she said.

“Really?” Jack said sleepily.

“I dreamed we were running through the woods at dawn,” said Annie, “and when we got to the tree house, Teddy and Kathleen were there waiting for us.”

Jack sat up. “I just had the same dream!” he said.

“Meet you downstairs,” said Annie.

Annie left Jack’s room. Jack jumped out of bed, put on his glasses, and threw on his clothes. He grabbed his winter jacket and his backpack. Then he slipped quietly down the stairs and out the front door.

Annie was waiting on the porch. The February air was chilly. Frost sparkled in the grass as the sun rose over the Frog Creek woods.

“Ready?” asked Annie.

Jack nodded and zipped his jacket. Without another word, he and Annie hurried up their street and headed into the woods. They ran through the long shadows of early morning, between the bare winter trees. Then they stopped.

The tree house *was* back, just as Jack had seen it in his dream! It was high in the tallest oak tree, shining in the cold morning light.

“Wow,” breathed Jack. “Dreams *can* come true.”

“Yep,” said Annie. “Teddy! Kathleen!”

No one answered.

“I guess only part of this dream came true,” Annie said sadly. She grabbed the rope ladder and started up. Jack followed. Annie climbed into the tree house. “Oh, wow!” she said.

“What is it?” said Jack.

“They’re here!” said Annie in a loud whisper. Jack climbed in behind her. Their friends Teddy and Kathleen, apprentices to Morgan le Fay, were sitting under the tree house window. Wrapped in heavy woolen cloaks, they were both fast asleep.

“Hey, sleepyheads!” said Annie. “Wake up!”

Kathleen blinked and yawned. Teddy rubbed his eyes. When he saw Jack and Annie, he gave them a wide grin and leapt to his feet. “Hello!” he said.

“Hello!” cried Annie. She threw her arms around Teddy. “We both dreamed you were here.”

“Ah, then our magic worked!” said Teddy. “Kathleen suggested we

send dreams to let you know we were here, and it seems our magic sent us to dreamland as well.”

“But now we are all awake,” said Kathleen. “And I am very glad to see you.” She stood up, drawing her cloak around her. Her blue eyes sparkled like seawater in the dawn light.

“I’m glad to see you, too,” Jack said shyly.

“Are you taking us on another Merlin Mission?” said Annie.

“Not exactly,” said Teddy. “Merlin has a most important mission for you. But this time, we will not be going along.”

“Oh, no!” said Annie. “What if we need your magic to help us?”

Teddy and Kathleen looked at each other and smiled. Then Kathleen turned back to Jack and Annie. “Morgan thinks you may be ready to use magic on your own,” she said.

“Really?” said Jack.

“Yes,” said Teddy, “but Merlin is *very* cautious about sharing magic powers with mortals, even with two as worthy as you. He is also wary of magic being used outside the realm of Camelot. Nevertheless, Morgan has convinced Merlin to let you prove yourselves. You will be tested on four missions.”

“But we don’t know any magic,” said Jack.

“Remember what I told you on our last adventure?” said Teddy. “If we all work together—”

“Anything is possible!” said Annie. “But you just said you weren’t coming with us.”

“That is true,” said Kathleen. “And that is why we bring you *this*.” She reached into a pocket of her cloak and pulled out a small handmade book. She gave the book to Annie.

The cover of the book was made of rough brown paper. Written on it in neat, simple handwriting was the title:



“You made this for us?” said Annie.

“Yes,” said Kathleen. “One line of each rhyme is in Teddy’s language, and one is in mine, the language of the Seal People.”

Annie opened the book to the table of contents. She and Jack skimmed the list of rhymes, and Jack read some of the entries aloud:

“Fly Through the Air Make. Metal Soft.

Turn into Ducks—”

Annie giggled. “These are so cool!” she said. “Let’s all turn into ducks!”

“Not now,” said Kathleen. “You must use these rhymes very sparingly. There are only ten rhymes in the book, and each can only be used once. They are meant to last you for four journeys.”

“Four?” said Jack.

“Aye,” said Teddy. “Merlin has agreed that if you can use our magic wisely on four missions, he will teach you the secrets that will allow you to make magic on your own.”

“Oh, boy!” said Annie.

Jack put the book of magic rhymes in his backpack. “So where are we

going on our first mission?” he asked.

“This research book from Morgan will tell you,” said Teddy. He took out a book and handed it to Jack. The cover showed a bright, colorful city surrounded by water.

Jack read the title aloud:

A VISIT TO VENICE, ITALY.

“I’ve heard of Venice,” said Annie. “Last year Aunt Gail and Uncle Michael went there on vacation.”

“Aye, ’tis a city that has long welcomed travelers,” said Teddy. “But you and Jack will travel to the Venice of two hundred sixty years ago.”

“What will we do there?” asked Jack.

“Merlin has prepared careful directions for you,” said Teddy. He pulled a letter out of a pocket in his cloak and gave it to Jack. “Read this when you get to Venice.”

“Okay,” said Jack. He put Merlin’s letter and Morgan’s research book into his backpack.

“Wait a minute,” said Annie. “If we take the tree house to Venice, how will you guys get back to Camelot?”

Teddy and Kathleen smiled and held up their hands. They each wore a ring made of pale blue glass. “These magic rings belong to Morgan,” said Kathleen. “They will take us home.”

“Remember,” Teddy said to Jack and Annie. “Follow Merlin’s directions carefully. If you prove yourselves to be wise and brave helpers, he will call for you again soon.”

Kathleen nodded. “Good-bye now,” she said to Jack and Annie. “Good luck.”

Kathleen and Teddy raised their glass rings to their lips. Together they whispered words too softly to be heard, then blew on the rings.

Before Jack and Annie’s eyes, the two young sorcerers began to fade into the cool morning air. In an instant, they had disappeared

completely.

“They’re gone,” breathed Jack.

“I guess it’s time for us to go, too,” said Annie.

Jack took a deep breath. Then he pointed at the cover of the Venice book. “I wish we could go there!” he said.

The wind started to blow.

The tree house started to spin.

It spun faster and faster.

Then everything was still.

Absolutely still.



CHAPTER TWO

Carnival

Annie laughed.

Jack opened his eyes. He and Annie were wearing purple and pink outfits with huge ruffled collars. On their heads were funny hats. On their feet were red slippers with big bows.

“Who are we?” Annie asked.

“I don’t know,” said Jack. He didn’t feel like a wise and brave helper in his red slippers. He felt stupid.

Together Jack and Annie looked out the tree house window. They had landed in a small tree inside a walled garden. The sky was gray. Jack couldn’t tell if it was morning or evening, but the air felt damp and heavy, as if a storm was about to break.

“I guess this is Venice,” he said.

“Let’s check our book,” said Annie. She opened their research book and read aloud:

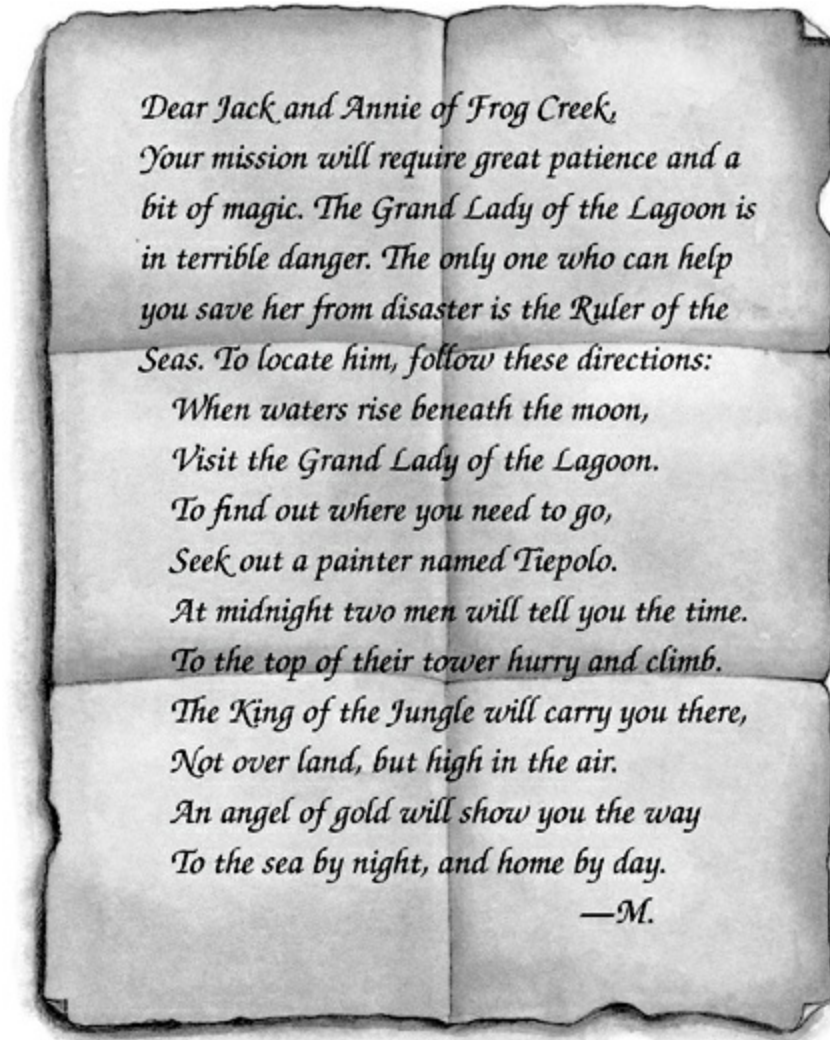
Today the city of Venice (say VEN-iss) is one of the most popular tourist spots in the world. It lies in a lagoon of the Adriatic Sea. Instead of roads, Venice has waterways called canals. People glide along the canals in shallow boats called gondolas (GON-duh-luz). A man

called a gondolier (gon-duh-LEER) stands in the back of the boat and uses a long oar to propel the gondola through the water.

“That sounds like fun,” said Jack.

“Yep,” said Annie. She closed the book. “Let’s go.”

“Wait,” said Jack. “We don’t even know what our mission is yet.” He took out Merlin’s letter and unfolded it. He read aloud:



Jack pushed his glasses into place. “Hmm,” he said.

“I wonder who the Grand Lady is,” said Annie. “And why do we need to save her?”

“I’m wondering lots of stuff,” said Jack. “What about the King of the

Jungle? We're in a city, not a jungle. And what about that angel? And —”

“Let's just take one thing at a time,” said Annie. “What are we supposed to do first?”

Jack looked back at the letter and read:

*When waters rise beneath the moon,
Visit the Grand Lady of the Lagoon.*

“So let's start by finding the Grand Lady,” said Annie. She headed down the tree house ladder.

Jack put Merlin's letter into his backpack, along with Morgan's research book and Teddy and Kathleen's book of magic rhymes. Then he climbed down the rope ladder and caught up with Annie.

Jack and Annie walked over a pebbly path as the sky darkened. *Good*, thought Jack. *It's night*. He didn't want anyone to see him in his silly outfit—especially the red slippers with the bows.

“That must be the way out,” said Annie. She led Jack to a wooden gate in the garden wall and pushed it open.

Jack and Annie stepped through the gate onto a quiet, empty walkway. Next to the walkway was a narrow lane of water.

“I guess that's a canal,” said Jack.

“And that must be a gondola,” said Annie. She pointed to a long, curved black boat rounding the corner. In the last light of day, the gondola was gliding silently up the canal toward them.

“Yikes,” whispered Annie.

There were two people in the boat—a gondolier and a passenger. Each wore a black cloak, white gloves, and a ghostly white mask. The masks had long, pointy noses shaped like bird beaks. The passenger sat in the middle of the boat, holding a lantern. The gondolier stood in the back, pushing a long oar through the water.

“They look a lot weirder than us,” said Annie.

“No kidding,” said Jack.

“Hello!” the passenger shouted.



The person’s voice was muffled behind the white mask. “Do you need help?”

“Yes!” Annie shouted back. “Can you take us to the Grand Lady of the Lagoon?”

“Yes, of course. She is back that way!” answered the masked passenger. “Come.”

“Great!” said Annie. She grabbed Jack’s hand and pulled him over to the gondola. The gondola rocked a bit as she and Jack climbed aboard and took seats between the gondolier and the passenger.

The gondolier pushed the gondola away from the landing. His long oar made soft splashes in the water as the boat moved up the canal.

Jack cleared his throat. “Um, excuse me,” he said. “Why are you wearing bird masks?”

“For Carnival, of course,” said the passenger. “That is why you are wearing clown costumes, no?”

“Oh, yeah, sure,” said Jack.

As the gondola slid through the canal, Jack snuck their research book out of his backpack.

“Oh, boy, a carnival!” Annie whispered to Jack. “I hope it has a roller coaster.”

“I don’t think they had roller coasters two hundred sixty years ago,” whispered Jack.

Jack looked up *carnival* in the index. He found the page. Then he and Annie silently read together:

For many centuries, Carnival has been the most famous yearly festival of Venice. For Carnival, people disguise themselves as anything they want to be. Rich, poor, male, female, young, and old—all are equal during Carnival.

“Look, that’s us,” whispered Annie. She pointed to a picture of a colorful costume with a white ruffled collar and red slippers with bows.

“Yeah, and that’s them,” whispered Jack. He pointed to a picture of a person dressed in a black cloak and a white mask with a bird’s beak.

Jack closed the book and put it away. The gondola people didn’t seem so weird anymore. But he still wondered why a grand lady was in terrible danger at Carnival.

As the boat glided around a bend, Jack caught his breath. He saw dozens of gondolas rocking on the choppy waters of a wide, open canal. They were all decorated with ribbons and flowers. Candlelight from their lanterns danced on the dark, rippling water.

“Look, that must be Carnival over there,” said Annie, pointing.

In the distance, thousands of candles twinkled along the shoreline. Sounds of laughter, clapping, and shouting floated over the water.

“Hold on tightly!” said the masked person in the front of the gondola. “The tide is high tonight!” As their gondola joined the fleet of boats heading toward Carnival, the wind picked up. The waves grew taller.

Jack and Annie held on to the sides of the boat. Jack heard a faint rumble of faraway thunder. He saw a zigzag flash of lightning in the distant sky. *Is a storm coming?* he wondered nervously. *Is the storm part of the disaster that’s going to happen to the Grand Lady of the Lagoon?*

“This is going to be fun, isn’t it?” said Annie cheerfully.

“Sure,” said Jack. He tried to shake off his worries as the wind and tide helped push the gondola toward the twinkling candles of Carnival.



CHAPTER THREE

The Grand Lady of the Lagoon

The gondola glided toward a landing at the edge of the canal. As the gondolier tied up the boat, water was sloshing from the canal onto a wide walkway filled with Carnival-goers.

The gondolier reached a gloved hand toward Annie and helped her out of the boat. He then held out a hand to Jack. When Jack grabbed it, he was surprised that the gondolier's hand felt small under the white glove, like a kid's hand.

As soon as Jack had stepped out of the boat, the gondolier untied the rope, pushed off from the landing, and began rowing away.

“Bye! Thanks!” called Annie.

The two strangers in the white bird masks waved.

Jack and Annie watched the gondola disappear over the choppy waters. Then they looked back at the shore. The Carnival crowd was parading up and down the wide walkway along the canal.

“Hey look,” said Annie. “There's a bunch of people dressed like us! And like the two people in our gondola!”

Jack saw lots of black cloaks, bird masks, funny hats, and ruffled

collars. He also saw people dressed as chickens, pirates, and knights. None of the costumed people seemed to mind the water spilling over the edge of the canal, soaking their boots and slippers.

As Jack and Annie stared at the crowd, a distant bell began to ring. The bell rang nine times. "I guess that means it's nine o'clock," said Jack.

Just then another bell began to chime. Jack counted again. This time, *ten* chimes rang out. "Ten?" said Jack, puzzled. "So what time is it? Nine o'clock or ten o'clock?"

"Don't worry about that now," said Annie. "I think I see the Grand Lady of the Lagoon!"

"Where?" said Jack.

Annie pointed to a tall woman at the edge of the parade. She was wearing a black mask. She wore piles of jewelry, a white wig, and a wide hoop skirt.

Jack and Annie moved toward the lady. "Excuse me," said Annie. "Hi."

The lady looked at Annie. "Hello," she said in a deep man's voice.

"Whoa," said Jack, stepping back.

Annie laughed. "You're a man!" she said.

"Of course," said the man. "But for Carnival, I am a very beautiful lady, no?"

"We're looking for someone called the Grand Lady of—" started Annie. But before she could finish, a giant chicken grabbed the man's hand and pulled him away into the crowd.

"Oh, brother," said Jack, looking around. Lots of people were dressed as grand ladies! "How are we supposed to know who to visit?"

"Maybe it's time to use one of Kathleen and Teddy's rhymes," said Annie.

"No, we should save our rhymes," said Jack.

"Then let's just skip visiting the Grand Lady of the Lagoon for now,"

said Annie. “What’s the *next* thing Merlin tells us to do?”

Jack looked at Merlin’s directions and read aloud:

To find out where you need to go,

Seek out a painter named Tiepolo.

“Good, that’s clear,” said Jack. “Let’s see if Tiepolo is in our research book.”

As the noisy crowd celebrated around them, Jack pulled out the book. He stood near a lantern and looked in the index. “He’s here!” said Jack. He turned to the right page and read:

Tiepolo (say tee-EP-uh-lo) was one of the greatest painters of Venice in the 1700s. He painted bright, beautiful oil paintings for palaces and villas.

“If the guy’s so famous, people must know where he lives,” said Annie. “Excuse me!” she called to a clown walking by. “Can you tell us where the painter Tiepolo lives?”

“Near the Church of San Felice,” the clown said.

“Thanks!” said Annie.

“But you won’t find him home now,” the clown called over his shoulder. “He’s in Milan, painting.”

“Where’s that?” shouted Jack.

“Over a day’s ride on horseback,” said the clown. Then he disappeared into the crowd.

“Hmmm ...,” said Annie. “Do you think Merlin wants us to go to Milan?”

“We don’t have time,” said Jack. “I think we have to skip Tiepolo, too.”

“Yeah,” said Annie. “Hey, maybe we should just skip all this stuff and try to find the Ruler of the Seas on our own. Our letter says he’s the only one who can help us save the Grand Lady.”

“I don’t know ...,” said Jack. “In his letter, Merlin tells us to be patient—”

But Annie was already calling to a pirate passing by. “Sir, do you

know where we can find the Ruler of the Seas?”

“What?” shouted the pirate.

“The ruler! Do you know where he lives?” yelled Annie.

“In the palace on Saint Mark’s Square!” said the pirate.

“Where’s that?” Annie called. But the pirate had disappeared into the crowd.

“I’ll look up Saint Mark’s Square,” said Jack. He turned the pages of their book until he came to a map of Venice. “Oh, cool,” he said. Jack loved maps.

“Okay, let’s see,” Jack said. “We’re *here*.” He pointed to the walkway along the canal on the map. “And we want to go to Saint Mark’s Square.” He pointed to another place on the map. “It’s really close.”

“Yeah, and it looks like everyone else is headed there, too,” said Annie. “Come on.”

“So, if we go this way ...,” said Jack. He traced their route with his finger.

“Come on, Jack!” called Annie.

Jack looked up from the map. Annie was already walking with the crowd. Jack closed the book and hurried after her. Soon they came to a huge, open square.

“Wow,” Jack said breathlessly. Saint Mark’s Square was filled with candlelight and musicians. Acrobats balanced on tightropes. Boxers boxed in a ring. Knights fenced with swords. Clowns walked on tall stilts, raced wheelbarrows, and tried to catch live eels in their mouths. All around the square were candlelit buildings.

“Venice is beautiful,” said Annie.

“Yeah,” said Jack. He looked back at their book. He found an illustration of Saint Mark’s Square. Jack read the descriptions of the buildings:

The watchtower of Saint Mark’s Square is the tallest building in Venice. The weather vane on top once helped sailors by showing them which way the wind was blowing.

Jack looked up. “I can barely see the weather vane up there,” he said. “But I think it’s pointing north. So the wind must be blowing from the south.”

“What about the ruler’s palace? Where’s that?” asked Annie.

Jack read on:

The clock tower is one of the most beautiful towers in the world. On top of the tower, a bell is struck every hour by—

“Jack, skip to the ruler’s palace!” interrupted Annie. “Please!”

“Okay, okay,” said Jack. He read about the palace:



The palace of Venice’s ruler is one of the most splendid structures ever built. It has a great hall where as many as 2,000 nobles once met to discuss city matters. It also holds the city’s grim prison cells. Above the palace door is a sculpture of Saint Mark showing a book to a winged lion—

“There’s the palace door!” said Annie.

Jack looked up from the map. Annie was heading toward a huge door with the sculpture of a man and a winged lion above it. Jack closed the book and hurried to catch up to her.

A guard was standing by the palace door. The guard wore a uniform

and held a rifle. “Wait,” Jack whispered. “Is he a real guard? Or is that just a costume?”

“I’ll find out,” said Annie. She walked over to the guard. “Excuse me, sir. Is the ruler of Venice inside the palace now?”

“Begone, clown!” the guard said gruffly.

“But it’s important,” said Annie. “We need to talk to him about something.”

“I said begone!” the guard growled. “I am tired of clowns wasting my time!”

“She’s not really a clown,” said Jack, coming forward. “We’re on a mission. We—”

“Go! Both of you! Or else!” roared the guard. He held up his rifle. *He’s definitely not wearing a costume*, thought Jack.

“Okay, sorry, sorry,” said Jack. He and Annie moved away from the palace entrance.

“What a grouchy guy,” said Annie.

“He’ll never let us in,” said Jack.

“Maybe it’s time to use one of Teddy and Kathleen’s rhymes,” said Annie. “Maybe we should turn into ducks. The guard wouldn’t mind if a couple of ducks—”

“No,” said Jack. “We have to save our rhymes.”

“Well, how will we get inside?” Annie asked.

“Patience,” said Jack. “Remember—”

Before he could finish, Annie broke in, “Hey, look!”

Two clowns on stilts were dancing around the guard. One grabbed the guard’s rifle and tossed it to the other.

“Hey!” the guard yelled. “Give that back!”

“Now’s our chance!” said Annie. “Quick!” She ran to the entrance and slipped through the door.

“Oh, no—oh, man!” said Jack. While the guard chased after the two clowns on stilts, Jack rushed to the doorway of the palace and slipped

inside, too.



CHAPTER FOUR

Rats!

Jack found Annie standing behind a column in a lantern-lit courtyard. The courtyard was quiet and empty. “Everyone in Venice must be at Carnival,” said Jack. “I just hope the ruler is home.”

“Yeah, we’ll ask him if he knows the Grand Lady of the Lagoon,” said Annie. “And we’ll tell him he has to help us save her from a terrible disaster.”

Jack looked at his map of the palace. Several rooms were labeled *Ruler’s Living Chambers*. “I guess that’s where he lives,” said Jack. “We have to go up some stairs called the Giants’ Stairs to get there.”



“The Giants’ Stairs?” said Annie.

“Yeah,” said Jack. “Listen to this.”

These stairs are called the Giants’ Stairs because they are guarded by two large statues of gods from Roman mythology: Mars, the god of war, and Neptune, the god of the sea.

“Cool,” said Annie. “Let’s go.”

Jack and Annie hurried down the passageway that ran along the courtyard until they came to a wide staircase. On either side of the stairs were giant marble statues of strong-looking men.

“Mars and Neptune,” said Jack. “This is it. Come on.”

Jack and Annie quickly climbed the Giants’ Stairs. At the top, Jack looked at the map again. “Now we turn right and head for the Golden Staircase,” he said.

Keeping an eye out for more guards, they crept down a hall until they came to a fancy staircase under a gold ceiling.

“There it is,” said Jack. “Let’s climb up.” He and Annie hurried up the Golden Staircase. When they got to the top, they froze. Another

guard was slouched against the wall by the stairs. His eyes were closed, and he was snoring softly.

Jack motioned to Annie, and they tiptoed past the sleeping guard to the entrance of the ruler's living chambers. Jack glanced at the map. "This is it," he whispered.

The door was open. Jack and Annie peeked inside. "Knock, knock?" Annie said in a soft voice.

No one answered.

They stepped through the doorway. A fire blazed on the hearth. Overhead many candles burned brightly. The dancing flames cast shadows on a marble floor and a carved gold ceiling.

"I have a feeling the ruler's not here," said Annie. "Maybe we should leave."

Jack looked at their book. "Wait, the next room is the Map Room," he said. "Let's just take a look."

"Okay, but we'd better hurry," said Annie.

Jack led the way into the Map Room. Colorful maps hung on the walls. In the middle of the floor were two huge globes. Jack sighed. "I love this room," he said.

"Look, more lions," said Annie. She pointed to three paintings of winged lions on one of the walls. "Why are there lions with wings everywhere?"

Jack looked up *winged lions* in their book. He turned to the right page and read:

The winged lion is the symbol of Venice. Represented in paintings and sculptures all over the city, the lions stand for strength on both land and sea.

As Jack and Annie looked back up at the lion paintings, they heard footsteps. The grouchy guard and the sleepy guard rushed into the room.

"Hi, we're looking—" began Annie.

"There they are! The thieves!" the sleepy guard shouted at the grouchy guard. "I *told* you I heard voices!"

“We’re not thieves,” said Annie. “We were just looking for your ruler to ask for his help.”

“She’s right,” said Jack. “We have to tell him that—”

“Won’t admit your crime, eh?” said the grouchy guard. “The worst cells are reserved for criminals like you! Move!”

“But we—” started Annie.

“Move!” shouted the grouchy guard, raising his rifle and pointing to the door.

Jack knew there was no use arguing. He took Annie’s hand and led her out of the ruler’s living chambers. The two guards walked behind them, pointing guns at their backs.

“To the end of the hall and down the steps!” growled the grouchy guard.

Jack and Annie walked quickly down the hall, then down some steep, narrow steps. They moved through a low stone corridor, the guards close behind them.

“Over the Bridge of Sighs!” shouted the grouchy guard. “And be sure to sigh when you cross it—because you won’t be coming back for a long time!”

Jack gripped Annie’s hand as they crossed a covered footbridge to another building. Once inside, they started down a lantern-lit hallway filled with puddles. Jack’s shoes felt squishy and soggy as he slogged through the water.

“Halt!” shouted the grouchy guard.

Jack and Annie stopped in front of a heavy wooden door. The grouchy guard opened the door and pushed them into a dark, damp cell.

The door slammed shut. Jack heard a heavy metal bolt clank into place. Then he heard the guards splash away down the hall, arguing with each other.

The prison was eerily quiet. It was hard to breathe in the stale cell. It was hard to see, too. Only the dim light of the hallway shone faintly through the barred window. Under the window was a wooden bench.

“What now?” Annie asked in a small voice.

For a moment, Jack couldn’t answer. He was stunned. Minutes ago they’d been at the bright Carnival. Now they were locked in a dingy prison cell. “I—I’ll look in the book,” he said.

Jack felt shaky as he opened their research book. He moved close to the barred window to read by the dim light. He looked up *prison* in the index. He found it and read aloud:

The prison cells at ground level in the palace were called the pozzi, meaning “wells” or “pits.” They were dank, airless, and filled with rats. Even the government eventually decided they were too cruel.

Jack heard a squeak from a dark corner. He stopped reading and looked up. He heard the squeak again. The hair went up on his neck. *Was that a rat?* he wondered.

“Was that a rat?” said Annie.

The squeak came again from the dark corner. Then a squeak came from another corner. Jack heard rustling along the walls and more squeaking.

“Oh, man,” he breathed. *There were rats everywhere.*

“I think it’s time for magic,” said Annie.

“Yep,” said Jack, “definitely.” He kept his eye on the dark corners while Annie reached into his backpack and pulled out Teddy and Kathleen’s book.

Annie read from the table of contents: “*Make a Stone Come Alive. Make Metal Soft. Turn into Ducks.*” Annie looked up. “Are rats afraid of ducks?” she asked.

“Forget ducks!” said Jack. “Go back to *Make Metal Soft*—that’s what we need to do! You read the rhyme, and I’ll try to pull the bars apart.”

“Okay, good,” said Annie.

Jack jumped onto the wooden bench under the barred window. The squeaking grew louder.

Jack reached up and felt the iron bars. They were cold and hard and very solid. Jack couldn’t imagine bending them.

The squeaks were getting louder. Jack gripped two bars in the middle of the window and took a deep breath. “Read the rhyme!” he said.

Annie read aloud:

Iron or copper, brass or steel,

Bree-on-saw! Bro-on-beel!

As Annie finished the rhyme, the bars began to glow. They grew warmer in Jack’s hands. “I think it’s working!” he cried.

Holding the bars tightly Jack pulled in opposite directions. Slowly the glowing bars began to stretch and bend. Jack pulled till there was an opening large enough for Annie and him to fit through.



“We did it!” he cried.

“Great! Hurry, hurry! The rats are coming!” cried Annie as she jumped on the bench.

Jack heard a chorus of squeaks from all sides of the cell. He looked down. He saw the shadowy shapes of dozens of rats. They seemed to be sniffing the air below the window.

“Go! Go!” Jack cried to Annie.

Annie squeezed between the bars and jumped down into the hallway. Jack followed her. He hit the wet floor and scrambled to his feet. “Come on!” he cried.

Jack and Annie slogged down the watery hallway. At the end of it, they nearly bumped right into the two guards. Jack and Annie kept running.

“Hey!” the grouchy guard shouted, running after them. He reached for Jack. The other guard tried to catch Annie.



Jack and Annie dodged away from them. The guards crashed into each other, falling to the floor. Jack and Annie kept running. They dashed across the Bridge of Sighs. They ran through the corridor and up the steep stone steps.

“This way!” cried Jack. He and Annie tore down the hall, heading for the Golden Staircase.

“Hey! Hey!” the guards yelled from far behind.

Jack and Annie bounded down the Golden Staircase two steps at a time. They flew down the hall and down the Giants’ Stairs. They ran past the statues of Mars and Neptune and charged down the long, open passageway. Finally, they dashed through the entrance of the palace and escaped into Saint Mark’s Square.

Demo version limitation



CHAPTER SIX

Disaster

“We have to save all of Venice?” said Jack. “That’s a big responsibility. What do we have to save Venice *from*?”

“Well, if Neptune’s going to help us, it must have something to do with water,” said Annie.

“Yeah, like the water that’s flooding the alleys,” said Jack.

“But the woman at the café told us not to worry about that,” said Annie.

“I’m still worried,” said Jack. “Let’s look up *floods* in our Venice book.” He found *floods* in the index. He turned to the right page and read:

Most of the time, high water in Venice is not serious. But if several conditions are present at the same time, a flood disaster can occur.

“A flood disaster! That must be it!” said Annie. “So what are the conditions?”

“It lists them here,” said Jack. He read:

A high tide

Strong winds from the south

Heavy flow of water from the mountains

Severe storms at sea

“There’s a high tide tonight—the passenger with the bird mask in the gondola told us that,” said Annie.

“Yeah, and winds from the south—the weather vane told us that,” said Jack.

“And water’s flowing down from the mountains—the woman at the café told us that,” said Annie.

“Yeah, and storms out at sea—I saw lightning when we crossed the water,” said Jack.

“All the conditions are here,” said Annie.

Jack and Annie looked around. Water was now flowing steadily from the alleyways into the small square. It had risen above their ankles.

“I get it now,” said Jack. “The water will just keep getting higher and higher until it destroys the whole city. And no one’s paying attention!”

“Neptune’s the only one who can help us stop the flood,” said Annie.

“But Neptune’s not real,” said Jack. “I mean, he’s a character in mythology, and mythology’s not real life. It’s—”

“Okay, okay,” said Annie. “Let’s just take one step at a time. At midnight two guys will tell us the time, and then we should climb to the top of their tower, right?”

“Right,” said Jack.

“So what we have to do now is find those two guys!” said Annie.

“Let’s go back to the waterfront,” said Jack. “The man with the dog said everyone in Venice would be there for the fireworks.”

Jack put away their book. Then he and Annie retraced their steps over the footbridge and back through the alleys. Lots of seaweed was floating in the narrow lanes between buildings. *Water is definitely flowing in from the sea*, Jack thought.

When they got back to Saint Mark’s Square, people were streaming

toward the waterfront. Jack and Annie walked with the crowd. Everyone was talking and laughing as they looked up at the sky over the water, waiting for the fireworks to begin. No one paid attention to the damp winds or the seawater spilling over the side of the canal, soaking their shoes.

“Excuse me!” Annie shouted. “Can anyone tell us the time?”

No one answered, for just then the first explosion of fireworks shook the night. The crowd cheered as blue and red showers exploded in the sky.

In the distance, a clock started to chime. Jack counted the bongs.

“Twelve!” he said. “It’s midnight now, according to *that* clock.”

More fireworks exploded over the waterfront, and another clock began clanging. This time, Jack counted only eleven bongs. He shook his head. “This is crazy!” he muttered.

Jack looked around at the crowd. “Can anyone tell us the real time?” he yelled. “Is it midnight yet? Can anyone tell us?”

No one answered—not even *one* man, much less two. Everyone was *oohing* and *ahing* over the dazzling fireworks.

Another clock began to sound. This one was much louder than the first two.

BONG!

“This is hopeless!” said Jack.

BONG!

“We’ll never know the right time,” he said.

BONG!

“Jack, look over there—” said Annie.



BONG!

“We’ll never find the two men with the tower,” said Jack.

BONG!

“Jack, look—” said Annie.

BONG!

“All of Venice is about to drown in a flood,” said Jack.

BONG!

“And everyone’s just cheering for fireworks!” said Jack.

BONG!

“*JACK! LOOK!*” said Annie. She pointed toward the clock tower in Saint Mark’s Square.

BONG!

Jack saw a huge bell on top of the tower. Two bronze statues were holding a club and striking the bell.

BONG!

The statues were of *two men*.

BONG!

“At midnight two men will tell you the time,” said Annie.

BONG!

The two men struck the bell for the twelfth time and then stopped.

“Come on!” cried Jack. “We have to climb that tower!”

More fireworks thundered over the canal as Jack and Annie pushed their way back through the crowd. They ran into Saint Mark’s Square and splashed their way to the tall tower with the two men on top. They ran to the arched entrance of the tower and stepped inside. The air was damp and musty.

“Stairs!” said Jack. He ran to a dark, winding stairway and started up. Annie followed. They climbed and climbed until they reached the top of the tower.

Jack was breathing hard as he pushed open a heavy door that led out onto the bell terrace. The two statues were frozen on either side of the bronze bell.

As soon as Jack and Annie stepped onto the terrace, the wind blew their hats off their heads. The air was filled with cracking and hissing sounds as more fireworks burst through the sky. Everyone on the waterfront was clapping and cheering.

“What’s the next thing Merlin tells us to do to find Neptune?” Annie shouted.

Jack pulled out Merlin’s letter. Holding on to it tightly as it flapped in the wind, he read aloud:

The King of the Jungle will carry you there,

Not over land, but high in the air.

“The King of the Jungle is a lion,” said Annie. “So it sounds like we need to find a flying lion!”

“Right,” said Jack. “But where?”

“How about *that* one?” said Annie. She was pointing over the terrace railing.

Jack looked down. Standing on the wide ledge below was the stone

statue of a lion. Growing out of the lion's back were two powerful-looking carved wings.

“But that's just a statue,” cried Jack. “How can a statue take us anywhere?”

Annie grinned. “I think it's time to use a little more magic,” she said.



CHAPTER SEVEN

The King and the Ruler

“Oh, yeah. Of course,” whispered Jack. He’d forgotten all about Teddy and Kathleen’s book of magic rhymes!

Jack pulled the book out of his backpack. He and Annie studied the table of contents. “*Make a Stone Come Alive*,” said Annie. “*Make Metal Soft. Turn into Ducks. Fly Through the Air*— that’s it!”

“No,” said Jack. “Go back to *Make a Stone Come Alive*.”

“Why?” said Annie.

“Because the lion’s supposed to carry us,” said Jack, “and he already has wings. But he’s made of stone. So what we need to do is make him come alive.”

“Oh, right,” said Annie.

“But then what?” said Jack. “Where will we go?”

“Merlin’s letter said an angel of gold would show us the way, remember?” said Annie.

“Angel of gold?” said Jack. “Where are we going to find that? And how will we find Neptune? How will he help us save Venice?”

“*Patience*” said Annie. “If we need more magic, we’ll go back to the book.”

“Okay. But let’s hurry,” said Jack. He opened Teddy and Kathleen’s book to the second rhyme. He took a deep breath. He looked down at the lion on the ledge. Then he read in a loud, clear voice:

*Stone so silent, cold, and hard,
Cum-matta-lie, cum-matta-skaard!*



A cracking sound seemed to come from deep within the lion’s body. As Jack and Annie peered down at the statue, the lion’s stone mane ruffled into a mass of shaggy fur. His stone back softened into a sleek golden coat. His stone wings stretched into long, luminous feathers.

“Wow,” breathed Annie. Jack couldn’t speak. Before their eyes, the statue had turned into a living lion with magnificent golden wings. The lion shook his mane and yawned. He had huge, sharp teeth and a long pink tongue. His ears twitched. His tufted tail swayed back and forth.

The lion crouched and leapt off the ledge like a cat. He spread his wings and caught a strong current of wind. His wings flapped, and he began circling above the square.

“Here! Here!” Annie shouted. She waved wildly.

The winged lion turned and flew back toward the tower. He glided silently onto the terrace, landing just a few feet away from Jack and Annie. He stared at them with his golden eyes.

“You have to help us save Venice from a flood disaster,” Jack said.

“Can you carry us to Neptune?” said Annie.

The lion padded toward them. He kept staring straight at them. He tilted his tremendous head and let out a long growl, as if he was trying to answer.

“We have to climb on your back,” said Jack.

“I hope we won’t hurt you,” said Annie.

The lion let out another growl, but he didn’t sound angry. He sounded as if he was telling them to hurry. He crouched down so they could climb on.

“I’ll go first,” Jack said to Annie. “I’ll hold on to his mane, and you hold on to me.” Jack slipped off his backpack and dropped it onto the terrace.

“Take the book of rhymes,” said Annie.

“Got it,” said Jack. He tucked the book under his arm and carefully climbed onto the lion’s back.

Annie climbed on behind Jack and wrapped her arms tightly around his waist. Jack twisted his fingers into the lion’s mane. The mane felt surprisingly soft.

“Okay we’re ready” said Jack.

The lion stood up. He trembled slightly. Then he leapt off the terrace.



“Ahh!” Jack yelled. The rhyme book slipped from under his arm and fell down into the flooded square below.

“Oh, no! Our book!” cried Jack.

“Hang on!” cried Annie.

The lion flapped his great wings and rose through the sky. Jack pressed his knees into the lion’s warm back and clung to his mane.

The lion flew toward the fireworks. A shower of red sparks was opening like an umbrella. Booms and whistles filled the night. Fiery bits rained down through the darkness, whistling into the canal.

“Help! We’re heading straight into the fireworks!” cried Annie.

The lion dipped and turned away from the fireworks. The red showers gave way to bursts of blue and green.

“Which way do we go?” shouted Annie.

As the lion flew back toward the square, Jack saw the gold weather vane on top of the watchtower. *It was in the shape of an angel.*

“The angel of gold!” shouted Jack.

The weather vane was no longer pointing north with the winds. The angel was turning slowly around and around, pointing in all directions.

“Fly closer to the angel!” shouted Annie.

The lion turned and flew toward the watchtower. As they drew near the golden angel, Jack called out, “Which way do we go? Which way?”

The weather vane turned in a full circle and then came to a complete stop. The angel was pointing toward the southeast, over the choppy water.

“To the sea!” Annie called over the wind.

The lion turned and soared into the wind, his strong wings shining like gold.

“Oh, wow!” cried Annie.

The flying lion glided past the fireworks and over the wide canal. Leaving Venice behind, he flew high over the stormy seas.

Jack gripped the lion’s mane with all his might. The lion sailed in and out of thick, fast-moving clouds. He flew above crashing waves and past bolts of lightning. He flew through screaming winds and pelting rain.

In the middle of the sea, far from land, the lion began circling above the water. “What’s he doing?” cried Jack.

“Looking for Neptune!” shouted Annie.

“But Neptune’s not real!” said Jack.

“I know!” shouted Annie. “We’ll have to use our imaginations! Like Lorenzo! Try to imagine Neptune!”

Jack tried to imagine Neptune, but he was too scared to think clearly.

“Neptune!” shouted Annie. “Rise from the water! Save Venice, Neptune! Help us!” Annie’s voice was lost in the wind.

Jack wrapped his arms around the lion’s neck. He buried his face in the lion’s mane. He tried desperately to imagine Neptune.

The lion let out a roar. With his hands under the lion’s throat, Jack felt as if he himself were roaring. The lion roared again. The roaring made Jack feel stronger and calmer. The details of Tiepolo’s painting came into his mind.

In his imagination, Jack saw Neptune, Ruler of the Seas, with his

white beard and long hair, his strong arms and shoulders. He saw a lovely lady who was Venice, the Grand Lady of the Lagoon.... He saw Neptune giving the Grand Lady a gift....

“I see something!” cried Annie.

Jack opened his eyes and sat up. “Where?” he cried.

“In the water!” said Annie.

Clinging to the lion’s mane, Jack peered down into the darkness below. Lightning flashed over the sea. Jack saw a huge three-pronged spear rising out of the foaming, churning waves.

The sea below the spear began to heave and billow. Lightning flashed again, and Jack saw a great mass of swirling seaweed rising from the waves. *Not seaweed—hair!* Jack realized. A man’s giant head and neck appeared above the surface of the water. Then the man’s massive shoulders, chest, and arms rose above the storm-tossed sea. The giant loomed high above them, as tall as a mountain.



“Neptune!” cried Annie.

The lion let out a roar and then another and another.

Lit by flashes of lightning, Neptune’s face looked as if it had been

weathered by thousands of years of wind and sand and waves. He had deep-set eyes, craggy cheeks, a white beard, and tangled hair hanging to his shoulders.

“Neptune, save Venice from the flood!” cried Jack.

“Please!” called Annie. “Save the Grand Lady of the Lagoon!”

Neptune looked at them for a moment. Then, with his powerful arms, he lifted his spear and thrust it down into the waves. When the spear pierced the surface of the water, the sea made a gurgling sound—and then a long *slurp*, as if water were flowing down a drain.

The thunder and lightning stopped. The storm-tossed waves grew calm. The wind died to a gentle breeze. The clouds parted, and the stars shined brightly.

Neptune raised his spear. He nodded to Jack and Annie and the lion.

“Thanks!” cried Annie.

“Thanks!” shouted Jack. The lion roared again.

Then Neptune began to sink back into the sea. His long arms ... huge shoulders ... thick neck ... craggy face ... floating hair—all disappeared. The prongs of his spear sank below the surface of the water.

The Ruler of the Seas was gone. Only a shimmering whirlpool swirled in the moonlight.

Demo version limitation



CHAPTER NINE

The Painting

The gondolier silently helped Jack and Annie into the boat. Then he untied the gondola and pushed off from the landing.

As the boat glided through the shallow waters, Jack looked back at Venice. Bathed in early sunlight, the Grand Lady of the Lagoon *did* seem timeless.

The gondola moved around the bend and up the narrow canal near the walled garden. The gondolier tied the boat to a striped pole. He then offered his gloved hand to Annie to help her out of the boat. Annie climbed out and the gondolier offered his hand to Jack.

As the gondolier helped Jack onto the landing, the boat rocked in the water. Jack tripped, pulling the glove off the gondolier's hand.



“Oh, sorry,” said Jack. As he handed the glove back, he gasped. *On the gondolier’s finger was a pale blue glass ring.*

Before Jack could say anything, the gondolier pulled his glove back on and pushed the boat away from the landing.

“Hey—hey!” Jack sputtered. “Teddy? Kathleen? Wait! Come back!”

Neither of the masked people looked back at Jack and Annie.

“Teddy and Kathleen? Where?” said Annie.

“His glove—it came off! There was a blue glass ring on his finger!” said Jack.

Jack and Annie watched the gondola disappear into a blaze of sunlight shining on the water. Had it just glided around the bend? Or had it vanished altogether?

“Are you sure it was them?” said Annie.

“Well, I guess *anybody* could wear a glass ring,” said Jack. “But still...”

“Maybe Morgan and Merlin told them to watch over us,” said Annie.

“Yeah, to make sure we’d be safe,” said Jack.

“And be patient and follow instructions,” said Annie.

“Right,” said Jack. “Well, Venice wasn’t destroyed by a flood. So I guess we passed our first test.”

“I think we did,” said Annie.

With Lorenzo’s canvas tucked under his arm, Jack led the way into the walled garden. Annie followed him to the rope ladder.

When they climbed into the tree house, Jack pulled Merlin’s letter from his backpack. He unfolded it and pointed to the words *Frog Creek*.

“I wish we could go there!” he said.

“Good-bye, Grand Lady of the Lagoon!” said Annie.

The wind started to blow.

The tree house started to spin.

It spun faster and faster.

Then everything was still.

Absolutely still.



A nippy wind rustled the Frog Creek trees. Jack and Annie were wearing their jeans and jackets again. It was dawn.

Annie sighed. “I wish we’d had a little more time to visit Venice,” she said.

“I’m glad Lorenzo gave us his painting to finish,” said Jack. “That’ll be like living our trip all over again.”

“Cool,” said Annie.

“We’d better leave Morgan’s research book here,” said Jack. He pulled the book out of his backpack and put it on the floor. “And this.” He took out Teddy and Kathleen’s book of magic rhymes.

“Wait,” said Annie. “Don’t you think we should take the book of rhymes with us? For safekeeping?”

Jack nodded. “We can’t use them in Frog Creek,” he said. “We’ll just keep it safe till we go on our next mission.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” said Annie. “Come on. Hurry, before

Mom and Dad wake up.”

Jack put the book of rhymes back into his pack. Carrying Lorenzo’s canvas, Annie climbed down the ladder. Jack followed.

As they walked through the chilly dawn woods, Annie held up Lorenzo’s canvas. The shimmering light and waters of Venice looked just like they had in real life. “So what should we put in our painting?” she asked.

“Gondolas, of course,” said Jack, “with people in costumes.”

“Wearing black capes and bird masks,” said Annie, “and fancy dresses and wigs.”

“And we could paint the clock tower in the background,” said Jack, “with the two men striking the bell.”

“And the watchtower, too,” said Annie, “with the gold angel on top.”

“And the ruler’s palace,” said Jack.

“And the old man and Rosa walking along the canal,” said Annie, “and, of course, Lorenzo.”

“And the lion flying across the sky,” said Jack, “and Neptune’s spear rising out of the water.”

“With Neptune himself peeking out!” said Annie. “We’ll show just the top of his head and his mysterious eyes.”

“That’s a lot of stuff for one painting,” said Jack.

“We didn’t even put ourselves in yet,” said Annie.

“We’ll paint ourselves on the back of the lion,” said Jack, “wearing our clown suits and red slippers.”

“Yeah, with huge smiles on our faces,” said Annie, “like we’re thinking, *Wow! Wow! Wow!*”

Jack laughed.

A chilly dawn breeze swept through the bare trees. The bells of a Frog Creek church began to chime. Jack and Annie took off running for home.



More Facts About Venice

Venice has been called a “timeless city,” as well as a city “frozen in time.” This is because so much of the city and its traditions has been preserved through time.

The festival of Carnival goes back over a thousand years in Venice, but it was most popular during the 1700s.

Gondolas have glided along the waterways of Venice for over a thousand years. In the 1700s, there were about 14,000 on the canals. Today there are around 400.

Saint Mark the Apostle is the patron saint of Venice. According to legend, the saint’s corpse was stolen from its grave and brought to Venice in the ninth century. Since the traditional symbol of Saint Mark is a winged lion, that image is depicted all over the city in paintings and sculptures. In Saint Mark’s Square alone, there are no fewer than fourteen!

In Venice, there are approximately 3,000 alleys and 200 canals. Over 400 bridges connect 118 lagoon islands.

Many world-famous painters are from Venice. Giovanni Battista Tiepolo is considered the most important of the 1700s. His two sons, Giandomenico and Lorenzo, were also painters.

Neptune is the Roman counterpart of the sea god Poseidon from Greek mythology. Neptune’s three-pronged fish spear is called a trident. When astronomers named the planet Neptune, they chose the trident to be its symbol.

Author's Research Note

Whenever I start work on a new Magic Tree House book, I begin the great adventure of research. I visit libraries, the Internet, bookstores, and museums. I talk to people who are knowledgeable about my subject, and if I'm able, I visit the place where the story occurs.

I chose to write a Magic Tree House story about Venice because I was eager to visit that wonderful city again. I had been to Venice a few years earlier, and when I returned home, I couldn't stop thinking about it. I especially remembered the warm summer night when I'd first stepped into Piazza San Marco, or St. Mark's Square. I remembered the beauty and magic of the square's architecture, the candlelit outdoor-café tables, and the sweet violin music played by musicians in tuxedos. I was dying to go back to Venice. What better excuse than to write a Magic Tree House book about the city and have a good reason to return?

On my second trip to Venice, I brought my guide book, camera, and notebook. I visited museums and bought books filled with paintings of Carnival costumes from the 1700s. I took photographs of the watchtower and the clock tower. I visited the Palazzo Ducale, or Doge's Palace, on the Piazza San Marco and took notes on the statues of Neptune and Mars, the paintings of the winged lions on the wall of the Map Room, and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's painting *Neptune Offering Venice the Gifts of the Sea*, which now hangs in a palace chamber.

My most unforgettable experience in the Doge's Palace was a visit to the historic palace jail on the ground floor. I walked down a series of narrow, damp passageways and stone stairways and over the Bridge of Sighs until I came to the empty cells. In my notebook, I sketched diagrams of barred windows and heavy wooden doors.

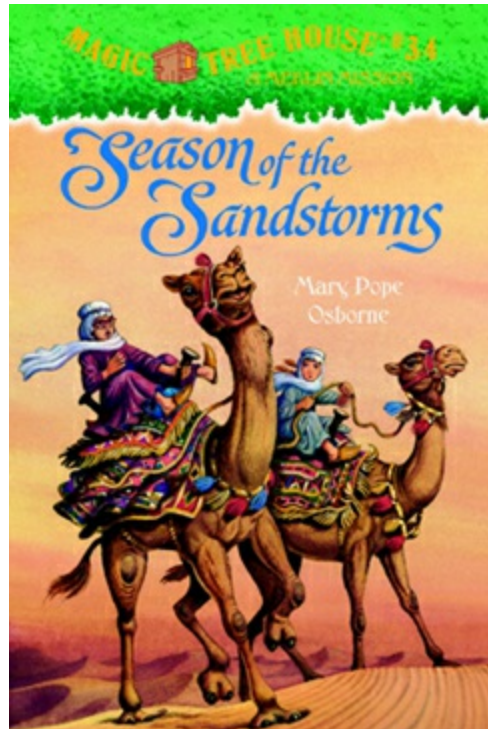
As I tried to leave, I became confused about how to get out of the

prison. Breathless, my heart pounding, I rushed through the musty-smelling passageways and up and down the steep stairways.

Finally I found my way back out onto the beautiful, sunny square. Once I had escaped from the palace, I happily thought, “Now, when I write about Jack and Annie’s experience in the doge’s jail, I’ll *really* know how they would feel!”

On the morning I left Venice, I rode in a gondola and took notes on how the gondolier pushed his oar. I took notes on the pink early-morning light shimmering on the canal waters. I photographed the ancient city from offshore, trying to record its beauty and sense of timelessness. But no photographs can truly do Venice justice. No notes or diagrams can truly capture her. Venice lives best in memory, stirring the deep waters of the imagination.

**Here's a special preview of
Magic Tree House #34
(A Merlin Mission)
Season of the Sandstorms**



Available now!

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Published by Random House Children's Books,
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CHAPTER ONE

The Golden Age

Jack put his math homework aside. He opened the drawer beside his bed and pulled out a small, handmade book. For the hundredth time, he stared at the title on the cover:

**10 MAGIC RHYMES FOR ANNIE AND JACK
FROM TEDDY AND KATHLEEN**

For weeks, Jack had kept the book hidden in his drawer, wondering when he and Annie would be able to use its magic again. The book's ten rhymes were to be used on four missions, and each rhyme could be used only once. Jack and Annie had already used two rhymes on a mission in Venice, Italy.

“Jack!” Annie rushed into Jack's room. Her eyes were shining. “Bring the book! Let's go!”

“Where?” said Jack.

“You know where! Come on!” Annie called as she ran back downstairs.

Jack quickly put Teddy and Kathleen's book into his backpack. He pulled on his jacket and took off down the stairs.

Annie was waiting on the front porch. "Hurry!" she cried.

"Wait! How do you know it's there?" Jack said.

"Because I just saw it!" Annie shouted. She hurried down the porch steps and crossed the yard.

"You saw it? Actually saw it?" yelled Jack as he followed Annie through the chilly afternoon air.

"Yes! Yes!" Annie yelled.

"When?" shouted Jack.

"Just now!" said Annie. "I was walking home from the library and I had this *feeling*—so I went and looked! It's waiting for us!"

Jack and Annie raced into the Frog Creek woods. They ran between the budding trees, over the fresh green moss of early spring, until they came to the tallest oak.

"See?" said Annie.

"Yes," breathed Jack. He stared up at the magic tree house. Its rope ladder dangled above the mossy ground. Annie started climbing up. Jack followed. When they got inside, Jack pulled off his backpack.

"Look, a book and a letter!" Annie said. She picked up a folded letter from the floor, and Jack picked up a book with a gold cover.

"Baghdad," Jack said. He showed the book to Annie. Its title was:

THE GOLDEN AGE OF BAGHDAD

"A golden age?" said Annie. "That sounds cool. Let's go!"



“Wait, we should read our letter first,” said Jack.

“Right,” said Annie. She unfolded the paper. “Merlin’s handwriting,” she said. She read aloud:

*Dear Jack and Annie of Frog Creek,
Your mission is to journey to Baghdad of long
ago and help the caliph spread wisdom to
the world. To succeed, you must be humble
and use your magic wisely. Follow these—*

“Wait, what’s a *caliph*?” said Jack. “And what’s Merlin mean—‘spread wisdom to the world’? That’s a big responsibility.”

“I don’t know,” said Annie. “Let me finish.” She kept reading:

*Follow these instructions:
Ride a ship of the desert
on a cold starry night.
Ride through the dust
and hot morning light.
Find a horse on a dome,
the one who sees all,
in the heart of the city
behind the third wall.
Beneath birds who sing
in the Room of the Tree,
greet a friend you once knew
and a new friend to be.
Remember that life
is full of surprises.
Return to the tree house
before the moon rises.*

—M.

“This sounds pretty easy,” said Annie.

“No, it doesn’t,” said Jack. “All these instructions are so mysterious. We don’t know what any of them mean.”

“We’ll find out when we get there,” said Annie. “But first we have to get there. Make the wish.”

“Okay,” said Jack. He pointed to the cover of the book. “I wish we could go to the golden age of Baghdad,” he said.

The wind started to blow.
The tree house started to spin.
It spun faster and faster.
Then everything was still.
Absolutely still.

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