

CHAPTER 1: MISSING

Stevie Scott awoke with a start. His bed was shaking like his mum's spin dryer and the white ceramic tiger Maisie gave him on turning twelve was doing a little dance on his bedside cabinet. A few seconds later, everything went still. He glanced at his watch. Not yet six, although outside the day was well under way.

With the dawn chorus replaced by a distant hum of vehicles on the Edinburgh road, it seemed as if going back to sleep was missing out on life. Maisie's dad always took the Edinburgh bus shortly after seven, and Stevie and Maisie usually met up after she and her father had finished *Tai Chi* practice by the river. The boy closed his eyes and tried to imagine what they might do together before school that day. He found this easier with closed eyes for he saw her face better.

Seeing her face, he remembered! He kicked off the duvet, scrambled out of bed and ran to the window. Everything appeared so quiet, so normal, but that shaking had been far from normal. It reminded Stevie of Maisie's description of an earthquake she'd experienced when visiting her aunt in southwest China near the Himalayas ... and of the girl's terror of monkeys.

More than a year had passed since Maisie fell in the River Tweed and Stevie dived in to rescue her, emerging in ancient China as White Tiger. If it hadn't been for that first letter, left by

the Jade Emperor's messenger underneath a stone at their Chinese-Roman camp, they might have believed their magical journey to retrieve the Blue Dragon's stolen red pearl and golden staff from the spiteful Monkey King was only a shared dream. The letter confirmed it was much more than that.

Stevie knew something mysterious bound him and Maisie together as White Tiger and Princess Hua-Mei. Inseparable as *Yin and Yang* (*thanks for that, Mr Moon Rabbit*, thought Stevie ... *cool one!*), they often shared dreams, discussing them down by the river before school. Sometimes these involved further travels in China, and occasionally ancient Rome, for before Maisie came to Scotland Stevie and his friend Andy liked to imagine they were Roman legionaries keeping order in the Scottish Borders. Now they'd become Chinese legionaries and Maisie loved to tell Stevie about China. Stevie, on the other hand, talked about his writing. He'd taken to writing stories about himself and Andy fighting in ancient China and valued Maisie's opinion on everything he wrote.

Since Christmas, Maisie always brought along her yellow notebook with a red flower on the front cover. Stevie had bought it for her since he knew the Chinese imperial colour to be yellow and the flower suited because her Chinese name, Hua-Mei, meant Pretty Flower. It had a small yellow pencil tucked into its spine and Maisie would write down bits of his stories in her notebook or show him things in Chinese calligraphic writing.

Then came the second letter...

That fateful day, a few weeks back, was Maisie's twelfth birthday ... or thirteenth by Chinese counting. Maisie had

teased Stevie, saying she was a year older than him although he'd been born two weeks before her.

"How can you be born one year old?" he asked.

"Chinese custom!" she replied, giggling. He loved her giggle.

Stevie had brought along his latest tale about a great battle in ancient China and was about to read it to Maisie when the girl interrupted him. She'd spotted the corner of another letter peeping out from under the same stone. Unfolding the yellowed sheet of paper, she stared at the Chinese calligraphy. He couldn't understand why her hand trembled as she read it but the terror written across her face when she looked up at him told the boy something was horribly wrong.

"What's the matter, Princess?" he asked. When alone together, Stevie always called Maisie either 'Princess' or, more simply, Mei.

"Very bad thing," she replied, on the verge of tears.

"What? Tell me! Is it from the Jade Emperor? Has the Blue Dragon got himself into trouble again?"

The girl shook her head.

"Writing different. See! Say 'you will dance again for me only ... this time forever!'"

Stevie took the letter. Although unable to read Chinese, he could tell the calligraphy was not the same as the last one. It was spiky, untidy, impatient ... and mean.

"Monkey King! I know it," she added.

"Can't *possibly* be the Monkey King." Stevie tried to sound reassuring. "We left him in Buddha's hands. Remember?"

"Buddha not prison!"

The boy felt angry. If Maisie was right, how could Lord Buddha allow the spiteful simian to invade their normal world in Peebles? They'd had such great times since becoming friends. Of course, he and Maisie never saw eye to eye over her religion – the girl had become Buddhist since meeting Lord Buddha on Mount Tai Shan – but they never argued about it. So what, he thought! He was Christian. No big deal! Besides, arguing with Maisie would've been pointless since Stevie only ever wanted her to win.

Both attempted to forget the letter but, whenever alone, Stevie would harp back to it and he could often tell from Maisie's expression she too was worrying. Even the word 'monkey' caused her pretty eyes to widen with fear.

The boy nearly fell over in his haste to get dressed and he never stopped running till just yards from their riverside camp. What he saw stopped him dead in his tracks. Maisie's school skirt and top were there on the log where they usually sat and talked – her shoes neatly placed beside the log – but no Maisie! He dived into the water and swam below the surface, frantically darting this way and that, periodically surfacing for air, searching every square inch of river bed till exhausted.

Sopping wet, he ran with Maisie's clothes to her house. He banged on the door until Mrs Wu appeared. Already distressed her daughter was missing, she was horrified to see the girl's skirt and top in Stevie's hands and totally unable to comprehend the boy's garbled account of her getting kidnapped by the Monkey King. Soon the Wus' house was filled with police officers, neighbours and Stevie's parents. Mrs Wu became hysterical, defying all attempts by Stevie's mum to calm

her down, and Stevie was questioned over and over again ... the same question:

Why had he returned from the river with Maisie's clothes and no Maisie?

Everyone knew about their camp. Stevie's father often grumbled about him being too old to play make-believe, childish games; after all, they were almost teenagers, he would remind his son with obvious irritation. Now, *because* they were 'nearly teenagers', people implied he'd done the unthinkable to Maisie. They were accusing him of having harmed her. How could they?

Stevie responded by losing his temper ... *not* a good thing to do to a police officer!

"Yes, I know we're growing up and will soon be teenagers! And of course I know all about girls! D'you have to be so stupid?"

Later, at the police station, the social worker was even worse. She said he *must* tell her about their bust up and 'what he'd done to the girl'.

Done to Maisie? Stevie flipped! He hit red and in his mind's eye he saw the red of Maisie's dance dress as the poor girl was forced to dance forever for the hideous Monkey King.

"IF YOU DON'T GET ANDY, AMY AND ROSIE HERE AT ONCE I'LL CALL ON THE BLUE DRAGON TO WRECK EVERY POLICE STATION IN THE BORDERS!" he shouted. Without a gentle pinch from Maisie to calm him down, what else could he do?

Andy, Amy and Rosie, were co-legionaries. Rosie, now a good friend of Maisie, had recently joined them. A couple of

years previously she'd had a boil on the end of her nose. Girls in her class had teased her and that's how she'd come to join up with class bullies, Crazy Davie and Muckle Mikey. But Maisie made sure Amy and the boys never again called her 'Red-Nosed Rosie' for there was nothing wrong with her nose and the girl would no longer be seen dead with those two wasters.

Like the other three legionaries, she'd seen both letters and would vouch for Stevie. All four children gave the same story to the social worker and the police, accusing everyone involved of doing nothing to save Maisie from the Monkey King. They were finally freed and allowed to get on with the important job of working out how to get to ancient China. Meanwhile, a nationwide appeal for the Chinese girl was launched. Images of her appeared everywhere, on notice-boards, on TV and in newspapers. The assumption that Maisie had been abducted, hurt, even murdered, fanned Stevie's anger although he doubted murder had been on the monkey's mind.

Half a day had already been wasted at the police station and Stevie felt an escalating urgency to get back to mythological China. But *how*? The children were horrified to see police frogmen still dragging the river when they went there to look for clues. Stevie, who knew they'd not find a body, was about to give up searching when Rosie ran to the water's edge and scooped something into her hands.

"What's this?" she asked, showing him her find.

The others came to take a look. In Rosie's hand were three sparkling points of coloured lights. The weather was cloudy, so whatever glittered in the girl's palm was not reflecting sunlight.

"What on earth *is* it?" she repeated.

No one knew. Each sparkle seemed almost alive as the girl's hands shone with dancing rainbow patterns.

"Must've got disturbed by the frogmen!" suggested Stevie. "Doubt it's anything to do with Maisie disappearing ... but hang on to it, Rosie. Just in case. Keep it in your hankie."

"I don't have ..."

Stevie handed her his handkerchief.

"We're wasting time," said Andy. "*Everyone* knows King Arthur and his Knights are hidden inside the Middle Eildon Hill. They could do magic and stuff. With Merlin. Bet he's the only guy able to get us to ancient China. I'll find a spade in dad's shed and ..."

"Idiot!" accused Amy.

They all knew about Andy's recent obsession with King Arthur and medieval heraldry.

"Hey, just pull together, dudes, and keep focussed, can't you?" begged Stevie.

"Not my fault if Andy comes up with such crass ideas!"

"Okay ... *this* is what we'll do! I'll go with Rosie to the Chinese restaurant. They may be able to help. We'll show 'em Rosie's sparkly dust."

"Why does it have to be you and *Rosie*?" pouted Amy. "Anyway, the restaurant might be closed!"

"Don't care. I'll bang on the window. See whether the Chinese woman there can tell us if Rosie's funny stuff has anything to do with ancient China. Amy, you go dig the Eildon Hills with Andy. Who knows? He might be right. No other leads!"

Stevie, loyal to his friend, took every opportunity to help

Andy woo Amy, the 'love of his life', although the wooing never seemed to work.

"Can't Rosie go with Andy?" Amy suggested. The other girl's eager expression showed that for a change she was in full agreement with Amy. "She's always trying to make excuses for him!"

"No mutiny! *Please!* Just think about ..." Stevie turned his face away. He didn't want them to see his eyes moisten. "Think about Maisie! Right?"

All had sensed the tremor early that morning. Their parents and the police accused them of talking rubbish when they suggested this had something to do with Maisie's disappearance.

"Peebles is most definitely not on a fault line, so it must've come from China," Stevie insisted. "A sort of earthquake! And *we* felt it 'cos something opened up a door between us and ancient China when the Monkey King came to steal Maisie. Like the Jade Emperor was letting us know."

"Could've been King Arthur and his knights stirring in the Eildon Hills," offered Andy. "In their sleep, perhaps."

Amy groaned.

"Can't you keep him under control?" she asked.

Rosie frowned.

"Keep *yourself* under control! Stop being so mean to Andy. Maybe he's got a point about King Arthur. No one knows what lies buried under the Eildon Hills!"

Andy looked downcast. If only *Amy* would stand up for him like that ... as if he was *her* hero, not Rosie's. Whenever Stevie spoke she went all gooey-eyed, but *he* only had to open his mouth and she'd accuse him of spouting rubbish.

“Seriously! Something weird must’ve happened when they took Maisie,” added Stevie. “A time-space thing, perhaps?”

So Stevie and Rosie set off for the Chinese restaurant in the hope that someone there might know the origin of the sparkly rainbow dust, whilst Andy and a reluctant Amy were driven to Melrose and the Eildon Hills by Andy’s ever-tolerant elder brother, Ross, armed with a garden shovel. All agreed Maisie had been abducted by the vengeful Monkey King. None expected ever to see her again, and worst hit was Stevie for whom the Chinese girl had become more of a soul-mate than a friend.

CHAPTER 2: DRAGON NOODLE

"You shouldn't let Amy go on like that about Andy," Rosie admonished Stevie. "She's so mean! Only puts him down 'cos she's keen on you."

"What's that?" Stevie's mind was somewhere else.

"Anyway, perhaps he's right about King Arthur."

"Andy? Yeah, Andy's okay! Just a little ... well, different, I s'pose. Good legionary, though."

"D'you think the Monkey King will harm Maisie? Do those horrid things they talked about in the police station?"

"I don't want to *think* about it! Curses! Restaurant's closed. *Hell!*"

"There's someone in there. Look! Sitting by the window."

"That funny old guy? Never seen him before. *She's* there, though. The Chinese lady who does our takeaway!"

Stevie knocked on the window to catch her attention. It worked. She opened the door, her face aglow with that usual friendly smile.

"Hi children! Hungry already? Today special menu. Dragon noodle! You want try?"

"Um ... not exactly hungry. See, we wondered ... like wanted to know ..." began Stevie.

"Come in! See menu. But why no want dragon noodle?"

Stevie and Rosie followed her into the restaurant.

"What's this, please?" asked Rosie deciding there was no

point in beating about the bush. Removing her hankie, she opened out it to show the woman the three glowing points.

"Yes! Like I say ... dragon noodle! Special!"

"No, you don't understand. We wondered what this sparkly stuff is."

"Like does it have anything at all to do with ancient China?" added Stevie.

"Me no understand? *You* no understand! Dragon noodle! Ask *him!*"

"Who?"

With a slight turn of her head, the smiling woman indicated the still figure seated like a statue in a corner by the window. Rosie and Stevie gawped at an elderly Chinese gentleman with bright eyes, white hair, a droopy moustache and goaty beard. He reminded Stevie of the old guy in one of the Chinese scroll paintings on the wall in the Wus' living room. When Maisie had informed him the man was a sage, he'd told her sage was what you put in turkey stuffing, together with onions, at Christmas. The girl had laughed, but insisted a sage was a wise man. Later, the dictionary confirmed both to be right.

"Show *him!* He like see!" the woman said.

Rosie cautiously approached the man who, though staring straight at her, also appeared to be looking *through* her at something way in the distance, and his face showed no expression whatsoever ... like in that painting.

"Um ..." she began timidly, offering him a glimpse of the points of light in the hanky.

The old fellow nodded wisely. Stevie, reminded of both sages and Maisie, felt his sadness become unbearable. Would he

ever see the girl again? As for her and the Monkey King being together, he'd once lost his temper when she'd told him how Crazy Davie had asked her out to the movies in Galashiels. Although she'd turned the other boy down, and had never once given Stevie cause for concern, he realised for the first time that nothing was certain. *This* is what had made him angry rather than Davie asking her out. He wanted the thing between him and Maisie always to be certain.

The thought of never seeing her again, and her being alone with the Monkey King, made him furious with the old man for having such a vacant look on his face. Sages were supposed to be wise, not daft!

"Look, whoever you are, sir, Rosie's asking you if you know what this stuff is. It might help us find Maisie Wu. The missing girl! Didn't you hear it on the news? She *is* Chinese, you know!"

"Chinese *princess!*" corrected the man.

Stevie pricked up his ears. Only he and his friends called her 'Princess'.

"Like lady tell you. Dragon noodle!"

"What are you on about?"

"Long noodle made from dragon sparkle. Travel anywhere, time or space. Come from ancient dragon, long ago. Dragon sparkle spill from dragon like trail. Go many places through time. Men once knew this. Men from city called Rome. These men came here. To Scotland. To collect dragon sparkle. Save for future. Make noodle."

Stevie stared with renewed wonder at the sparkle for it began to make sense. What if somewhere hidden on the river bed was a collection of the same stuff, so concentrated it formed



one end of a mysterious 'noodle' of magical light that would link them to the past and to China?

"Yeah ... of course! Dragon noodle! Thanks!" he exclaimed.

"Helps us a lot. You've no idea!"

"Uh?" queried Rosie, puzzled.

"Never mind! Hurry back to the river. Start looking for our end of the noodle before the others return from Melrose."

"Dragon noodle?"

"You'll see!"

The girl shrugged her shoulders and accompanied Stevie back to the river ... wishing he could magically turn into Andy! Why couldn't *Amy* have gone with Stevie if she was that nuts about him?

* * * * *

If only Andy was Stevie, thought Amy as she sat alone in the back of Ross's car wondering how she could be crazy enough to agree to join up with a freak who planned to dig King Arthur and his knights out of the Eildon Hills with a garden spade. She reckoned someone ought to get Ross to sort out his little brother for once and for all. Perhaps he needed the attention of one of those psychiatrist doctors who make holes into people's minds with funny questions.

"I'll sit and read my book here for an hour and half," announced Ross after pulling into the lay-by beside Bowden Loch at the foot of the Eildon Hills. "If you and your girlfriend aren't back by then, together with King Archie and the Arabian knights, I'll call out the Mountain Rescue. Bit of luck they'll ban you from ever setting foot outside the house again!"

"I am *not* his girlfriend!" objected Amy.

Ross paid her no attention. He waved his mobile phone at them.

"Countdown starts now!"

"Hmmmph!" the girl grunted, clambering out of the car. Andy removed the spade from the boot and they made their way to the top of the highest, middle, Eildon whilst Amy denied every alternative to 'girlfriend' that Andy could come up with. 'Pal', 'acquaintance', 'colleague' – even just 'friend' – were all rejected. At the summit she informed him she'd make her way back to Ross in twenty minutes and until then would sit alone on a rock since she had no intention of doing anything so unladylike as digging.

"Okay!" exclaimed Andy. He was so smitten with her he'd agree to anything the girl suggested. "So ... um ... how about 'special'?"

"Special what?"

"Our relationship. Special! Sounds cool! Like you can get special fried rice at the Chinese restaurant. So ... Amy, Andy's *special* friend!"

"Shut up! It sounds stupid!"

She sat and sulked on her rock as Andy dug on, muttering loudly enough for the girl to hear:

"Or mate? Could be my girl mate. No! Girl chum. Yeah! I like it. Andy's special girl chum, Amy!"

"Yuk!"

Andy stabbed and scraped at the tough, stony ground with his spade, as with Amy making no impression whatsoever.

"Why on earth they chose this place to bury themselves, I've no idea!" he complained when he paused for a breather, resting

folded arms on the spade handle. "Hey ... what *are* you doing, Amy?"

She'd got up from the rock and was kicking with determination at something in the dirt.

"Trying to work out what I've done wrong to deserve being lumbered with you for the morning. OW!" She'd stubbed her toe and hopped about on the other foot. "Look, come and do something useful for change. Help me with this!"

Andy came immediately, like an obedient puppy.

"What?" he asked.

"There! The thing I was kicking and stubbed my toe on."

"That old stone?"

"It's been carved. Not natural. You can tell. There's letters on it."

Andy got down on the ground and scraped away with his hands. The girl was right. The stone, half-buried buried in the hard earth, had a right-angled edge as if fashioned with a hammer and chisel. A crude D and an R had been chipped onto its rough surface.

"Amy, get my spade! Hurry!"

For a few moments she stood gaping, rubbing her injured toe against the back of her other leg.

"Quick!" he urged, scowling.

To his surprise, the girl hopped off to collect the spade and limped back with it. After Andy had dug around the stone, they used their combined strength to lift the thing from the ground with the flat of the spade. Andy sensed a tingle of delight when their arms briefly touched. Contact with the love of his life at last ... *and* he'd be proved right! He would finally become her

hero, for this object surely had something to do with King Arthur.

By the time the ground had yielded up the flat, rectangular stone, they only had half an hour left to get back to Ross and the car. Carrying it between them, they struggled down to the loch.

"Oh my God, what on earth have you got here?" Ross asked his brother, relieving them of their shared burden as if it weighed no more than a Nintendo DS. "Funny writing on it, ay?"

"Not funny! That's an ancient language as used by King Arthur and his knights."

Ross put the stone on the back seat.

"Like hell! Well, your girlfriend can look after King Archie's tombstone, right?"

"Girl *chum!*" corrected Andy. Amy groaned. "And it's King *Arthur!* I thought you were s'posed to be going to university next term!"

Ross dropped them off near the river at Peebles and they carried the stone tablet together to the camp. They were surprised to see Rosie and Stevie standing knee deep in water trawling the river bed with sticks. It hadn't rained much for weeks and the level was low.

"Hey, Stevie, you're wasting time! They've already dragged the river. I've found King Arthur's tablet on the Eildons. He or Merlin will get us to Maisie."

"I found it!" objected Amy. "And it's nothing to do with King Arthur. Just a bit of an old tombstone."

"Show us," said Stevie, wading back to the bank.

He helped the others lay the tablet carefully on the ground and rubbed off the dirt with his sleeve.

"Latin!" he proclaimed.

"There! An ancient language. Bet you King Arthur spoke Latin."

Andy's grin stretched from ear to ear.

"Bet he didn't," contradicted Amy.

"*DRACONIS LUMEN* ... er ... light of dragon ... dragon sparkle!" began Stevie, translating the carved out capitals. "Um ... *'ARCA IN FLUMINE* ... box in the river ... *'EST* ... is ... *TRES PASSUS* ... er ... three paces ... um ... double steps and they're about five feet. So, fifteen feet. That'll be from the bank. *RUPES* ... rock ... under ... um ... dunno ... hidden perhaps?"

The boy rubbed some more.

"There's Chinese characters too. I ken what they mean. Maisie and I were planning a pretend banquet for ... well never mind ... a sort of celebration involving just *us* ... and she wrote things in Chinese next to the English. Used these characters. Mean noodle. *Dragon* noodle."

He turned over the stone.

"Cool, guys! A map! There's the Roman camp at Trimontium. See! And the river ... and the Roman bridge near Trimontium. Been there ... or where it used to be! More camps here ... and there ...see! The noodle sign again. Could be Peebles. You're brilliant, Andy!"

"Keep telling *her* but she won't believe me," responded Andy, jerking a thumb in Amy's direction.

"I found it anyway!" Amy flashed her eyes hopefully at Stevie.

"I'll take a chance," continued Stevie. "Water's low. Search the river bed fifteen Roman-sized feet from shore near where

Rosie found the Dragon sparkle and we should find the box. And *our* end of the dragon noodle."

"Noodle?"

"Aye! The old sage Rosie and I met sort of explained it. A noodle of concentrated dragon sparkle. Left behind by one of the first dragons. Travels through time and space. The Romans who came here knew about it. All makes sense."

"Like doughnuts and hairdryers?" Andy suggested, grinning at Amy, but the boy's humour was lost on her.

"Don't make fun of Stevie! Just because it's got nothing to do with King Arthur ..."

"*Wasn't* making fun. Don't you get it? You could cook a doughnut by looping it over the end of a heated hairdryer. Wouldn't normally think of a connection ... so ..."

Amy stared coldly at him.

"Noodles ... dragon sparkle ... Maisie? Oh, never mind!"

"Think I'd better go alone," Stevie sighed with irritation.

"No you won't!" objected Andy, casting an 'I'm-braver-than-you-think' look in Amy's direction. "Legion business! Remember? One for all and all for one? The Three Legionaries?"

"Musketeers!" corrected Amy.

"Me included!" announced Rosie. "*That's* three!" She narrowed her eyes at Amy.

"What if you're all wrong?" questioned the other girl. "I mean, I do wanna help Maisie. She's my best friend. But jumping into the river? Stevie ... they said you and she were nearly dead when Ross fished you out last year."

"That's the point! Our bodies got fished out but Maisie and

I were somewhere else. Together in ancient China at the other end of the dragon noodle. Don't you see?"

"Oodles of noodles in China!" observed Andy. He was the only one who laughed.

"Not sure I'll come if *he's* gonna be with us!" snorted Amy. Rosie stamped her foot.

"Don't be so *horrid* to Andy!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, guys, pull together! This is life or death for Maisie. One false move by anyone and she's stuck there forever! Monkey King's prisoner! Amy, trust me. Our bodies stay protected by dragon sparkle, and the 'us' parts are at the other end in ancient China. Like there's already a Chinese us there, but we've gotta travel the dragon noodle to bring it to life. In a parallel world, see!"

"Will I jabber away in Mandarin, then?" asked Andy, lost by his friend's complicated explanation.

"God, that'd be even worse than him jabbering in English!" said Amy. "Anyway, what happens to our clothes? You found Maisie's here. Mum'll kill me if I get my jeans wet ... and I'm not taking anything off in front of *him!*"

She glared at Andy before he could say anything.

"Dunno about clothes," replied Stevie. "Keep 'em on. Maybe they forced Maisie to change back into her red Chinese dance dress before pulling her into the dragon noodle."

Stevie imagined Maisie putting up a fight as she got dragged struggling into the river by a band of monkey warriors. She wasn't one to give in easily.

"I'm going! Come if you want. When I find the dragon sparkle I'll give the thumbs up and dive into the noodle. If I've

not resurfaced by three minutes you know I'm okay. Dead bodies are supposed to float. Anyone who wants to join me, follow. I'll wait a short while at the other end. In China!"

He glanced up on hearing sobs. It was Amy.

"It's okay. I'll find her and bring her back."

"It's not that. I wanna come but I can't swim."

"Can't *swim*?" Andy couldn't hide his disbelief. A year back, Maisie was also unable to swim, but Stevie had given her lessons and she now swam like a fish.

"No need to be so superior. Not my fault! My parents never had me taught."

"I'll teach you," offered Andy.

"Rather be taught by a frog," scoffed the girl.

"Cool it, dudes!" warned Stevie. "Amy comes with me if she wants to, otherwise she can remain here at base camp ... and prepare for our return."

"I really do want to be with you."

"But *I* wanna look after her!" exclaimed Andy.

"Everyone takes orders from me!" insisted Stevie. "I'll go first, with Amy. We'll travel through the noodle when I've found the dragon's box. Rosie and Andy can follow. Amy ... practice taking a few deep breaths like this ... then hold your breath."

Reassured the girl could at least do that, Stevie put his arm about her waist (her face lit up!) and they waded into the river. Andy glowered at him. After all, he already had a girlfriend.

Stevie soon spotted what he sought ... a large slab. The frogmen had missed it, doubtless looking for the wrong thing –

a body tied to a weight, perhaps? He shuddered to think Maisie could ever end up like that, although somehow her being imprisoned forever in the Monkey King's palace seemed almost worse.

He kicked at the rock, also engraved with the Chinese characters for 'noodle' and 'dragon'. A fleck of dragon sparkle hovered in the water defying the swift current's attempt to shift it seawards ... the only evidence that it belonged to a different dimension. Unable to dislodge the slab with his foot he dived in and wrestled with it, twisting and turning, but the object refused to budge. He returned to the surface, gasping, fearing his lungs would burst ... seeing not dragon sparkle but stars!

"What's wrong?" called Andy.

"Can't shift the flipping thing," replied Stevie on recovering his breath. "It's the Roman box of dragon sparkle okay but it's like a ton weight. Must've been muckle strong, those Romans, ay?"

"Na! Just clever. Use a lever!"

"A what?"

"Lever. Hang on! We'll break a branch off for you."

"Cool!" exclaimed Rosie, only too eager to assist Andy.

She and Andy disappeared up the path. A loud snapping sound was followed by girlish giggles, and they reappeared dragging a branch. Soon all four kids were up to their thighs in the river and leaning on the branch that Andy had wedged under the ancient stone. It began to shift and they eased it up and over. A sudden burst of dazzling white light shot from the space underneath illuminating their faces whilst a slick of



shimmering dragon sparkle fringed with strange rainbow patterns spread out into the surrounding water.

Andy triumphantly punched the air.

“LONG LIVE KING ARTHUR!” he yelled.

“Oh wow!” Rosie exclaimed, her red hair glowing as if on fire. “I’m coming with you, Andy. Remember?”

“Me and Amy first,” advised Stevie, gazing into the depthless white of the large dragon noodle. He grabbed Amy’s hand. “Big breaths, girl!”

She breathed in and out till her head went swimmy.

“NOW!” he shouted.

“Go for it, dudes!” urged Andy as Stevie and Amy disappeared into the noodle. “We’re right behind you!”

Stevie held firmly onto Amy as they were sucked along, twisting and turning, chasing the brightness ahead. He had no idea which way was up and which down, like when he’d dived in to rescue Maisie the previous year. Swimming swiftly towards the brightness, he wished he was pulling Maisie back to Scotland rather than Amy towards China. Finally they broke water, taking in great gulps of air