



CHAPTER THREE

**TWO INQUISITORS
AND STRANGE
VISITORS**

Rose was still running when she passed the Oldwell Shopping Centre.

Now, if you will permit me, I must just add an aside here. You see, the Oldwell Shopping Centre has a very interesting history relating to our story. Were you to step through its vast electronic sliding doors on to its gleaming marble-effect floor and carry on past the neon signs of Guccio and SportsDirectly, just before Accessorize This, you would find yourself

looking at a fake ornamental garden. This fake ornamental garden has fake flowers, plastic trees and synthetic grass. The only thing that's real about the fake ornamental garden is a very real ...**OLD WELL.**

And if you are thinking, *Aha! I bet it's the old well from Chapter One, the one that mean old Jeremiah Jerabo threw Merdyn the Wild's broken staff, Thundarian, down approximately one thousand five hundred years ago*, then you'd be ... **WRONG.** It was a different old well and—

I'm **JOKING.** Of course you're right. You're obviously very clever and deserve a gold star or a trophy. It was the *exact* same well, but now surrounded not by a forest of trees, but by a forest of gleaming shops. The company which had built the sprawling shopping centre several

years earlier had only got permission from the council on the condition that they preserved the historic well. And so, they had turned it into a feature.

Today, like every day, two security guards, Jim and Alan, stood guard over the ornamental garden. In the olden days the well had been used as a wishing well, and people were invited to throw in coins in exchange for their dreams coming true. However, in more recent times, people had realised that you could also take coins *out* of the well, presumably to make their dreams of having 50p or £1 come true. So the shopping centre management had decided to put a fence around the well and guard it. This is where Jim and Alan came in.

Guarding the ornamental garden was one of

the least demanding jobs in the world, so it was surprising that neither Jim nor Alan noticed when a huge hole opened up in the fake grass behind them and an ethereal green light shot out. A few of the shoppers noticed, but no sooner had the hole opened up than it closed again, so they quickly dismissed it as a publicity stunt and carried on shopping.

But as the light disappeared, it left behind it on the fake grass the crumpled figure of ... sixth-century warlock Merdyn the Wild.

Merdyn opened his eyes. His pupils grew huge as they adjusted to the strip lighting and neon signs of the shops. Remember, in the Dark Ages the only light sources were the sun, fire and the odd candle. Now he had flashing lights, mirror balls and all sorts of other luminescence

assaulting his peepers.

“Heaven forfend!” he exclaimed. “Hell is worse than I thought!”

This statement brought him to the attention of Jim and Alan, who could scarcely believe their eyes when they turned around. Of all the vagabonds and thieves they’d had to turf out of the garden (a whole six in eleven years!), this was the most impudent yet.

“Oi!” said Jim. “What you doin’ in there?”

“Trying to fetch yourself some coins from the well, are you?” said Alan, pleased with his powers of deduction.

“Who do you think you are?” added Jim.

This was the sort of question that didn’t require an answer, but Merdyn sought to give him one anyway.

“I AM MERDYN THE WILD!”

he boomed.

**“THE GREATEST WARLOCK WHO
EVER LIVED! DESTROYER
OF ENEMIES! BOW DOWN
BEFORE ME, DEMONS,
OR FEEL MY WRATH!”**

There was a pause as Jim and Alan looked at each other.

“You what?” said Alan, finally.

The two guards stepped over the little garden fence and moved menacingly towards the sixth-

century warlock.

Merdyn reached instinctively for Thundarian in order to blow them away with a fireball. But he just ended up grasping at thin air, for of course he was without his loyal staff. He would have to use the herbs around his belt to perform magic. Herb spells were primary-school alchemy compared to more advanced staff spells, and much less spectacular, but he had no choice.

“Feel my wrath?” said Jim. “You’ll feel my bloomin’ handcuffs in a minute, mate.” With that, he pulled out his handcuffs and went to make a citizen’s arrest on Merdyn, grabbing hold of his wrists.

“Unhand me, thou fopdoodle¹!” Merdyn cursed and, having no time to mix a herb spell, resorted

to poking Jim in the eye with his finger, an undignified move for a warlock, but an effective one nonetheless. **SQUELCH!**

“Waaahaa! He’s blinded me!” Jim cried.

Now it was Alan’s turn to try. He got a fist in his ear for his troubles. **CRUMP!**

“Ow! He’s broken my earlobe!” Alan wailed as he rolled around on the floor.

BOOT! Merdyn kicked him hard in the backside.

“Right! That’s it!” roared Alan. “NOW you’re in trouble!”

As one, Jim and Alan grabbed Merdyn’s legs and pulled him to the ground.

The ungainly scuffle in the garden was now gathering the attention of shoppers, who

stopped and stared at the strange sight. As the men tumbled around on the fake grass, Jim's security-guard hat fell off and Alan's wig was dislodged, revealing his shiny bald head. This just added to the anger they felt towards this intruder, and they tried even harder to cuff him.

Then, just as it looked as though Jim and Alan were besting him, Merdyn pulled a fake tree out of the ground and expertly cracked Jim's knees with a branch and knocked Alan out cold with a root. BISH BOSH. The great warlock didn't like to be reminded of his time as a soldier in the King's army, but here was an occasion where his training came in useful.

His antics had by now attracted the attention of a local police officer, Sergeant Murray. Sergeant Murray came from a long line of police

officers. He took the job so seriously that he'd grown a moustache, simply so he could look like a stereotypical policeman. When he spotted the strange man in a pointy hat fighting with the shopping centre security guards, Sergeant Murray felt his moustache bristle. It was like a radar for trouble, that moustache, and here was trouble with a capital 'T'. He immediately called for back-up through his police radio.

Merdyn heard the crackle of the radio as the sergeant's back-up answered: **“ROGER ROGER. WE'RE ON YOUR TAIL!”** But having never heard a police radio before, Merdyn assumed instead that this was the call of the Giant Ravens rumoured to patrol the burning skies of Hell looking for prey. He definitely didn't

want to be giant bird food, so he set off running as fast as he could. Thinking he had spotted an exit, he bolted for it ... and ran smack bang into the glass window of Accessorize This.

DOINK.

Remember, there wasn't any clear glass in the Dark Ages either, so to Merdyn, he'd just run into a wall of hard air.

“What sorcery be this?” he wondered aloud. But he had no time to sit and think. He pulled himself up off the ground, rubbed his sore nose and took up his search for the exit again. This time, he ran straight into a Donuts-R-Us stand. Dozens of sticky circles shot up into the air and scattered across the floor.

The doughnut-stand worker assumed Merdyn

was trying to steal his doughnuts. He picked up a broom and bonked Merdyn on the head with it.

BONK! BONK!

“AARGH! What demon art thou?” screamed Merdyn as the blows rained down upon him.

Somewhere, a whistle blew. Merdyn looked up to see a whole gang of black-and-white Giant Raven-people (or police!) headed his way. He picked up the closest weapon to him, a doughnut, and pelted it. **POOF!** The doughnut hit Sergeant Murray straight in the moustache, stopping him in his tracks and allowing Merdyn to escape once more, shocked shoppers scattering as he ran.



Finally, the befuddled warlock found the vast electric sliding doors of the exit, but to him, they were like the giant snapping jaws of a dragon. Bravely, Merdyn ran at the crunching mouth. But each time he misjudged his charge, so that he smacked into the doors –

WHACK! CRUNCH! CRACK! On his final attempt, he nearly made it, only to be caught in the jaws of the door like a sausage in a pair of pincers. Eventually he managed to throw

himself clear, and finally he was OUTSIDE.

But his horrors weren't ending there. They were just beginning.

For he had run straight into a busy main road.

Imagine seeing a car, bus or lorry for the first time EVER. Imagine the fastest, loudest transport you'd ever experienced up to that moment was a horse. Then imagine a wall of vehicles coming towards you, screeching their brakes and beeping their horns all at once.



BEEEEEEEEP BEEEEEEEP!!!

SCREEEEECH!

HOOOONK!!! HONK

Merdyn stood, frozen in fear. Then he heard an ear-piercing noise from the *sky*.

SHHHWEEEEEEYAAAAAAGH!

He looked up. His eyes could not believe what they were seeing.

“Gadsbudlikins²! ‘Tis a metal eagle!”

It was, of course, an aeroplane. But Merdyn had seen nothing flying through the air but birds and butterflies his whole life. And now a Boeing 747 was shrieking past like a giant silver bird.

At this moment, Sergeant Murray popped out of the shopping-centre doors like a champagne cork, a spray of officers behind him. Merdyn

looked desperately around and spotted a wood in the distance. Real trees! *Something* he recognised! He hitched up his cloak and ran straight for them, before diving into the undergrowth and disappearing from sight.

To all he passed,

I must confess,

he was just a bloke

in fancy dress.

Notes

¹ Meaning a limp dawdler. Not the most devastating insult but a great word in my opinion. As a further note of interest, there are many people who think that *fopdoodle* slowly morphed over time into the Americanism *dude*, meaning an extremely carefree

person.

2 *Gadsbudlikins* literally means *God's little body*. The closest translation for today would be oh my god or, if you really must, OMG. But isn't *Gadsbudlikins* so much better?