

THE
JODECHI
CHRONICLES

BY

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THE JODECHI CHRONICLES

BOOK 1

- 1: PAGE 3: IN THE BEGINNING**
- 2: PAGE 11: THE FLYING DRAGON**
- 3: PAGE 22: THE SNOW**
- 4: PAGE 39: THE DAY OF THE DUCKS**
- 5: PAGE 52: THE CIRCUS**
- 6: PAGE 71: THE FLYING DRAGON RETURNS**
- 7: PAGE 83: DAY TRIP TO BUTTERCUP**
- 8: PAGE 96: CHRISTMAS FOR THE JODECHIANS**
- 9: PAGE 123: THE WAY HOME**
- 10: PAGE 132: THE ENTERTAINERS**
- 11: PAGE 141: POTTYPEARS INVESTIGATES**
- 12: PAGE 156: THE QUEEN OF JODECHI**

THE JODECHI CHRONICLES

1: IN THE BEGINNING

The land of Jodechi was never far away, infact it was just yonder, over the hills but just beyond the eye's reach.

Jodechi was a beautiful place, with meadows and hills, rolling away from the village. The folk of Jodechi were not like the people who lived yonder away from them, but they did have one or two differences, chiefly on the whole they were smaller, much smaller and apart from the menfolk sporting huge beards they all had small little horns on the top of the forehead. The womenfolk had the small little horns but also had pointed ears, something the menfolk lacked. It was never a problem to spot a manfolk from a womanfolk.

The folk of Jodechi never met the people from the other world, and indeed like the people from the other world, they were complete unaware of each other.

The folk of Jodechi worked hard, they toiled the land, and everything harvested was collected and distributed fairly, for although they on the whole everyone worked differently, they worked for one and another. The blacksmith would work on the Shethorse, a creature bred purely to pull the plough and cart. The cart, been the only form of transport throughout Jodechi. The same went to the animal farmers, the eggs of the poultry were collected, cattle went to the markets and bartered for other goods, livestock and feed.

The community lived and worked for each other. This was the way of life for eons and would continue to do for many to come.

In the village, which was called Buttercup, families lived in huge cottages. They had to be large as the family unit never really moved away. Each cottage had members of the same family going back generations. When a Jodechian got married, the wife was expected to move into the groom's family home.

For it was so, and was always the case. As one sibling moved out to her new marital home, a newly married wife moved in.

The cottages were large, some four and five floors high. Because of this way, there were never any new cottages built, just existing cottages made larger when required.

Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns were no exception. Although they were best friends, they had not yet reached the age of maturity when they were expected to have a wife and therefore become a bonafida member of the working community. Their beards were small and neatly groomed; Cosmicblasto's beard was jet black in colour whilst Catwhisker's beard was the brightest orange. Even so they were still considered to be in their early years.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were always to be found together, and always upto mischief but they were by and large good Jodechians. Always polite and respectful to their elders, helped mother with their chores and father in the garden, but they were given a free rein.

Both Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were friendly with Lardyme Cootiepants and Popsie Rhinohunks. It was always thought that these would marry each other, but one was never quite sure who to whom, one would have to wait to find out. But they were all good friends to one another. Like the rest of the village, Lardyme and Popsie, lived with their families in the large cottages.

Outside Jodechi, yonder as far as the eye could see was the other world. This world was as different as could be to Jodechi.

The people here lived fast lives, never really working for one another but for themselves. The communities were larger and spread out more, not so much of the hills and meadows, but great big cities and small cramped living conditions. If a Jodechian was ever able to venture yonder beyond the eye could see they would never want to go there.

On the whole, the people in this other world, were taller, only the young being small. They certainly didn't have horns or pointed ears, but otherwise seem the same. Some of these people were old, but not as old as the oldfolk in Jodechi, but on the other hand you knew that they were in the latter years of life.

Joe Spratt and Fred Jackson were no different from each other.

Having spent all their working life underground in the coalmines, apart from 2 years National Service in the 50's they were now in retirement, they spent their lives in the sunshine, or in the rain, or in the snow. All their years working in the pits underground had toughened their skin, making them strong to the elements.

Joe and Fred enjoyed wandering around the countryside, when not visiting the local Inn, frequently getting discharged from the same Inn after having one or two too many drinks.

It was on this occasion, again having being removed, that they found themselves climbing the hill to Churchup. At the summit of the hill they rested on the bench. The villagers of Churchup had put the bench there some years earlier. The view from there was beautiful. Meadows, that seem to roll down and hills in the background.

Joe and Fred were sat on the bench, looking over to the distance. There was a blinding blue flash and laid down before them were two of the littlest people they had ever seen. The old men stared at the little men and then at each other then back to the little men. There was a silence.

“Joe” said Fred, “What do you see.”

“I don't know” came the reply “Why don't you ask them?”

“Who are you?” asked Cosmicblasto.

“I am Fred” came the reply, “and my friend here, is called Joe.”

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers looked at each other and howled out with laughter. They certainly lost control of themselves as they fell about on the floor howling. Tears were rolling down their faces and at the same time talking to each other.

“Fred” said one of them. “Joe” said the other then they just changed the names around and continued to laugh.

“Oi” said Joe, “Settle down now, nothing funny in that, now what are your names” he asked.

It took another minute for the Jodechians to settle down, but it was Catwhiskers who spoke first.

“I am Catwhiskers and my friend here is called Cosmicblasto.”

Joe and Fred turned to face one another.

“Catwhiskers” said Joe.

“Cosmicblasto” said Fred.

The old men continued to look at each other, then they too howled out with laughter, and as like before, the laughter was intense, much to the annoyance of Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers.

“Alright, alright, you had your little joke. There’s absolutely nothing funny at all about our names. They go back generations” said Cosmicblasto.

The two Jodechians looked at each other; the tears of laughter were long gone. Joe and Fred seemed to settle down at last.

“Ok” said Joe, “So where do you come from? I haven’t seen you around here before.”

“Ah well, there’s a story. It all began when this stranger appeared, just the biggest person we ever did see. He wandered around a bit. He was quite friendly,” said Cosmicblasto.

“And when he found out of our secret desire to invent a machine that would take us faster around our village he helped us” ventured Catwhiskers.

“Yeah but we wish he hadn’t” said Cosmicblasto.

“Why not?” asked Joe.

“Well, he said all you had to do was reverse the polarity of the neutron flow, but only to do it for 20 seconds” said Cosmicblasto.

“And we don’t even know what a second is” said Catwhiskers.

“Never mind having 20 of them, I mean why would you want 20 seconds when you only need one” Cosmicblasto looked at Catwhiskers and shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh deary me” said Fred.

“Anyway, the stranger was most aplexed, he went completely barming. Saying things like he’s never worked with such gormless nincompoops.”

“Whatever that means” said Cosmicblasto.

“And he was never coming here again” continued Catwhiskers.

“So he went into his red box and just disappeared,” said Catwhiskers.

“And wasn’t that a sight. It just shimmied and whooped out of” Cosmicblasto paused, not sure of what to say next.

“Jodechi” answered Catwhiskers.

“Well, what happened?” asked Joe, “What happened after 20 seconds?”

“Well, there was this blue flash. Catwhiskers went so high in the sky; I know that because I was following him. And the stranger went flying over in the barnyard”.

“Yeah, he came back smelling of something he wasn’t before”. Grinned Catwhiskers.

“So, what happened after that?” asked Joe.

“And how did you get to come here?” asked Fred.

“Well, after the stranger had left, we found this.” Catwhiskers showed Joe and Fred a small unit akin to a remote control.

“We thought it was something to do with being able to get around the village quicker, but it seems we can go yonder then the eye can see. We can go beyond the confines of our world into your world.”

“This blue button lets us go out and this red button returns us back to our home, Jodechi” said Catwhiskers.

“Time to go” said Cosmicblasto. Catwhiskers pressed the red button. And they promptly left in a blue flash.

Joe turned around to Fred and said, “How many beers did we have in the Blacksmiths Arms.”

2: THE FLYING DRAGON

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers arrived back in the same barn they had left previously. Again, they landed in the most indignified manner, and as before, the same blue flash.

“We are going to have practice a landing technique” said Catwhiskers to his lifelong friend.

“I swear my britches are getting worn out” said Cosmicblasto.

The clothes on the Jodechians were simple affair. Black boots that came up to the knee, britches that went half way up the abdominal and a shirt that fastened all the way up to the collar.

The shirt on Cosmicblasto was red and Catwhiskers’ was blue and white check. They both wore brown britches and black boots.

“How are we to practice when we arrive back at the same time as we depart? It’s quite for sure, that it will happen everytime,” said Catwhiskers.

“Well, I hope you come up with something good then.” Said Cosmicblasto, “Because it’s clear to me that we are not going to get a chance to set up anything.”

“Anyway, I am hungry, time to head off home I think,” said Catwhiskers.

Both Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers said their farewells and heading in opposite directions to their home. Catwhiskers keeping hold of the travel device. A name they both decided was suitable.

On the way home, Catwhiskers met Poopsie Rhinochunks. She was heading home in the same direction, but lived further down the lane.

“Hello Catwhiskers” asked Poopsie. “What have you been upto today.”

“Nothing, honest” came the reply.

“Oh, defending yourself already, that’s a sure sign of you being guilty. C’mon what have you been upto.”

“Nothing, really, just Cosmicblasto and myself being our usual. You know, knocking on people’s doors and running away” he said sheepishly.

“When will you ever grow out of that impish behaviour, One day” she said. “One day, you will have to work with the blacksmith, and you will get married to Lardyme and have a couple of birthfolk, and if they turn out worse than you have that’ll be the end of life as we know it in Buttercup.”

“Awe, anyone would think my life is already pre-ordained. I am not going to get married to Lardyme. I mean, she has you know.”

“What’s up with Lardyme, there’s nothing wrong with her nose. I think she has a beautiful nose.”

“Yeah but who wants to marry a girl with 3 nostrils” protested Catwhiskers.

Whilst it was true that Lardyme was afflicted with an extra nostril, no one in Buttercup or for that matter in the whole of Jodechi thought anything ill of it. Indeed it was thought to bring good fortune. To be able to smell the roses better.

“Well, here I am, home” said Catwhiskers. “See you around tomorrow then.”

“Ok, then, bye.”

“Bye”. Catwhiskers opened the garden gate and closing it behind him waved to Poopsie and went down the garden path.

The next morning Catwhiskers was up early, he wanted to get his chores done and out of the way as soon as possible, he was careful with the travel device. Not wanting to get it either dirty or wet. He placed it in the inside pocket of his shirt. The travelling device was a small unit. With just two buttons, a blue one and a red one. That all there was to the device, a small unit that fits into the palm of the hand and therefore fitted well in his shirt pocket.

It was just before the noontime that Cosmicblasto came running upto the gate that led into the garden of Catwhiskers' home. He thoughtfully secured the gate and ran around the back into the garden. This was where he found Catwhiskers at work.

“Hello Catwhiskers, haven't you finished yet?”

“Yeah just about,” came the reply “Just need to rake up these leaves. Here, you can do that” he said passing a raking tool to Cosmicblasto.

“Listen, I have had a good idea,” Cosmicblasto said whilst raking up the leaves, but inbetween words he was just resting on the rake.

“Oh, go on than, I am all ears.”

“Why don't we go to the caves on the side of Frinkstone Hill?”

“Isn't that where the Dragon lives? That would be a bit dangerous, even for us.”

“Oh for sure, but if we get into trouble, you just press the blue button.”

“And then what” came Catwhiskers' reply.

“Well, we leave it for a small time then press the red button, back where we started from. The dragon will have gone, because we are no there. It will be safe to back.”

“You are assuming the dragon will be gone, but when we get back it will be exactly the same time as when we left, meaning the dragon will still be there.”

“Ah, yes, didn't think of that Catwhiskers. Well, let's go anyway.”

“Ok, but I have a feeling about this.”

The journey to Frinkstone Hill was quite arduous. The two companions walked out of Buttercup, down the lane past the home of Poopsie Rhinochunks. They carried on over the hill and down into the valley before coming to another hill.

This time they only climbed halfway up before walking on a small barely used pathway. This led directly to the caves. The path was no longer in use because of the dragon. The folk knew the dragon lived there, but it had never bothered them and therefore they chose not to bother the dragon.

Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns stood on the path directly in front of the largest cave. There were 3 caves in total. But everyfolk knew the dragon lived in the largest cave.

“So now what” asked Catwhiskers, “This is your idea, so what do we do?”

“Well, we go inside the cave and see the dragon. Nobody has ever seen the dragon up close. We will be the first folk to see it.”

“Well, you don’t sound very excited about it,” said Catwhiskers
“Infact, I think you are suggesting that I go in first.”

“Well, you have the travel device. It would only be safer if you went in first and I followed, at a distance.”

“We walk into it together” said Catwhiskers, “Better to be nearer the device then away from it.”

They took a few steps forward towards the cave, but before they got any further than that the dragon appeared at the front of the cave.

“Hello there” said the dragon.

“Whoa there, a talking dragon” said Cosmicblasto.

“Well of course I can talk,” said the Dragon “What did you expect.”

“Hello I am Catwhiskers and this is Cosmicblasto. Sorry, we have never met a talking dragon before.”

“Well, now you come to mention it, we have never met a dragon before” said Cosmicblasto.

“So we didn’t know that dragons could talk.”

“Dragons have been talking since for ever, I suppose. It’s just that folk never give us a chance to talk to them. They always think we are nasty violent creatures. Nothing could be further from the truth. We just like to live in peace.”

“Well, in Buttercup, folk always say if you are not careful the dragon over the hill will come and gobble you up” said Cosmicblasto.

“Well, one night I was bored so I came over to Buttercup, but I was seen by somebody. I never went back. But it is such a lovely place that I really wanted to go and live there, but all I have is this cave. Would you like to come in and have a cup of tead? I have a fresh pot brewing.”

“Well, that would be lovely that would be. Come on Cosmicblasto, we have been invited for a cup of tead.”

“Oh do come in, and my name is Ethereead.”

“Well, thank you gladly Ethereead” said Cosmicblasto.

“It is cosy enough, but I was so used to better, back in my old homeland.”

“Well, you haven’t done too badly, nice fire in the corner, bed of straw in the other corner and simple seating arrangements. Do you have many guests” asked Catwhiskers.

“No, you two are the first. I don’t know why folk won’t come, it’s not I have harmed them. I know dragons have a fierce reputation, but I am a vegetarian. I only eat leaves and scrubs. Anyway tead up.”

Both Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers drank their hot tead, the flavour was familiar to them from their own tead they drank back home, just a little stronger then what they were used to.

“So” said Ethereead “What brings you up to see me anyway.”

Catwhiskers nudged Cosmicblasto.

“Well, I, we, well I thought it was about time we met you. Oh for sure, we thought you were a fierce dragon, but now we know you are nice and kind. Why don’t we play a game?”

“Oh goody, I haven’t played games for a long time, I know, why don’t we go for a flight. Have you ever flown on a dragon? No I suppose not. Ok then everyfolk outside.”

Ethereead urged the two outside.

“Right, climb onto my back. You will find handgrips on my scales up by the neck then every 6th row heading down towards my tail. I can carry upto 12 folk.”

“12 Folk, you could do a roaring trade as a flying bus in Buttercup” said Cosmicblasto.

They climbed onto the dragons back, and found the handgrips and held on tight.

“Ready, right, I am going to take a short run and then we are up in the air. Hold tight.

The dragon took 5 paces and was soaring off the hillside. The powerful wings outstretched. The dragon soared high and flew down low. High in the clouds and low down over the top of the hill, and even lower into the meadows.

The Jodechians were holding on tight, but were clearly having a good time. The dragon climbed high and higher still until it reached a crescendo and then dived down into a steep dive.

The Jodechians were screaming and shouting and whooping for joy. This was fun, and they never had such good fun in all their lives.

As the dragon had reached the peak before going into its dive, the momentum knocked Catwhiskers and against Cosmicblasto. There was a blue flash. The dragon was still diving. The Jodechians were still holding on, but now they had travelled out of their own world into a world that was yonder beyond the eye can see.

The dragon continued its dive, completely unaware of what had happened, it had seen the blue flash and for a moment was alarmed, but it was still in control of its flight and therefore not worried any further about it.

But Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were worried about it. They knew what had happened. Catwhiskers was desperately trying to reach for the control pad. To press the red button that would return them back to Jodechi. But whilst the dragon was in its steep dive it was a hard job to hold on.

The dragon continued to dive down; the dive was taking longer than usual, as it was diving down into a valley, but still close enough to the ground. If you had ever seen a dragon with two folk riding on the back of it, it would probably have frightened you, but on this occasion, the only two people in sight, were a couple of elderly gentlemen.

They saw the dragon swoop down took cover by diving down onto the grass, but when they saw who was on the back of the dragon, they got up.

“Look Cosmicblasto, its Joe and Fred. At least we know where we are now.”

“Ethereead, can you put us down next to those two folk. We know them.”

“Ok” said, “Hope you know what you are doing.”

Ethereead swooped up out of its dive and flew alongside the valley. The dragon lowered its feet from underside of its body and gently touched down.

“Hello Fred and Joe” said Catwhiskers.

“Hello Joe and Fred” said Cosmicblasto.

“Might have known it was you two. Do you always travel by dragon in Jodechi” asked Joe Spratt.

“Yeah, frightening the live out of people” said Fred Jackson.

“Yeah sorry, I pressed the blue button by mistake.”

“This is Ethereead, the dragon” said Cosmicblasto.

“Say Hello” said Catwhiskers.

“Hello” said the dragon.

“Blow Me” said Joe, “A talking dragon.”

“Well, of course dragons talk,” said Catwhiskers “What did you expect.”

“Can I stroke it” asked Joe.

“Ask it yourself” said Cosmicblasto.

“It’s ok, come closer” said Ethereead.

Both Joe and Fred approached the dragon and patted the scale skin on the face.

“I never thought I would see you two again,” said Fred, “and I never thought I would ever see a dragon.”

“Yeah you had better be careful; you don’t know who could be watching. If word ever got out, they will probably be pandemonium” said Joe.

“Aye fellas, the newspapers and cinema newsreels will be up here looking for the dragon” said Fred.

“So, Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers, how come you choose to come back here? I was of the impression you could go anywhere you liked.”

“Ah yes, that is something I was also thinking about. Maybe perhaps it is only this part of your world that we can travel into. I wondered if it was only a short-range travel device.” Said Catwhiskers.

“Tell me, when was the last time you saw us” asked Fred.

“Well yesterday” said Cosmicblasto.

“Oh I see, so one day in Jodechi is a week in ours. We saw you last week” said Joe, who was still stroking the dragon.

“Hope you haven’t been upsetting anybody this time” said Fred.

“It wouldn’t be good to get stuck in this world. Not looking the way you do.”

“Nothing wrong with the way we look” said Cosmicblasto.

“Nothing wrong there in Jodechi, but here, I can’t imagine you walking down our village in the dark, and as for a big city in the daylight. It is said if you ever wanted to be lost, away from everybody just walk down a busy main road in a major city. Nobody notices anyone, but you two” said Fred.

“Well, I think it may be time we had to go away anyway,” said Catwhiskers.

“Yeah it will be getting dark soon” said Joe.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers boarded Ethereead. This time Catwhiskers had hold of the travel device.

“Well goodbye Joe and Fred” said Catwhiskers.

“Goodbye Fred and Joe” said Cosmicblasto.

“Goodbye” said Ethereead.

“Bye” said Joe and Fred together. They stood back and watched as the dragon gave a little run and lifted it self towards the sky.

“I would have loved a ride on Ethereead,” said Joe, “never met anything like that at all.”

“Yeah, well knowing them two, we are probably safer here,” said Fred. And as the dragon soared away, they turned and started to walk down the valley.

“Ok” said Catwhiskers “Pressing red now.”

There was a blue flash. But the dragon continued flying on. It passed over Frinkstone Hill, before circling around and coming to a smooth landing outside the caves.

“We have to be going now,” said Catwhiskers, “But thank you for a lovely day.”

“Yes, thank you” said Cosmicblasto.

“Please do come by again soon” said Etheread, “I have had so much fun.”

“Yes we will” said Catwhiskers.

The two Jodechians turned and walked down the worn path that nobody walks on anymore. Catwhiskers put the travel device back inside his shirt pocket. Although that was fun, but he knew he had to be more careful.

3: THE SNOW

It was early February, and as it was the middle of winter, the snow fell steadily. This was the third day of the snow, which had started with the blizzard. To be fair, the weather forecasters had pretty much got it right. And it had seemed, certainly to Fred Jackson and Joe Spratt that Churchup had more than its fair share of the snow.

Again, for the third day running, the children of Churchup had taken to sledging down the fields surrounding the village. The only field not been sled down was where the Ewes and their new-born lambs were in. The farmer and his hands were struggling against the elements providing feed for the flock.

And as per the norm, Joe and Fred had taken themselves to the local hostelry. Business wasn't too good in the Blacksmith Arms. The landlord, Jack Warner wasn't too happy that the locals were not coming to the restaurant side. People were coming in for a wee dram before heading off home, and he hadn't even seen the farmers for a week. If it wasn't for Fred and Joe, he would have shut shop for the winter.

Snow always came to Churchup, every winter without fail. The price of living high in the hills, but this year was the worse weather for 5 years.

Fred and Joe enjoyed coming to the Blacksmith Arms, the beer was to their liking, and there was always an open fire in the centre of the bar. The tables and chairs were placed in a position where it seemed that nowhere in the Inn was without warmth radiated from the hearth. And these elderly gentlemen had pretty much their own space. No one seemed to sit where they sat and it was always said that when they both passed on, the landlord would place a plaque on the bench. They sat at the same place, even when there was nobody else in the Inn.

Joe and Fred were sat there, alone in the bar, enjoying their opening pint. The landlord whilst busying himself was keeping an eye on them, knowing at some point he would have to, as usual, chuck them out.

"I wonder when we will see our little friends again?" said Joe.

“Who, Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto?” said Fred.

“Hush, not too loudly, wouldn’t do for this to get out”.

“Yeah, we don’t need that sort of hassle.”

“Wonder if they have snow in, where did they say they came from?” asked Fred.

“A little village called Buttercup, in a place called Jodechi.”

“Oh yeah, I remember now.”

It had been last summer that Fred and Joe last saw the Jodechians, when they flew in on the dragon.

“I went on my grand-daughters’ computer” said Joe.

“She took a risk.”

“She showed me how to switch it on, use the spreadsheets, and write letters, she even set me up an e-mail account.”

“Oh, very technical, I must say.”

“Anyway, I put in Jodechi into the search engine.”

“Search engine” said Fred, “What’s that then?”

“Oh, just a bit where you ask the computer a question and it gives you an answer, sort of anyway.”

“Ok, then. Go on. What did the computer say about Jodechi?”

“It didn’t. Never heard of it. The same when I put in Buttercup. Well, other than the yellow weed and nick-names to sports clubs and other bits and pieces. But nothing that suggested what I was looking for” said Joe.

“Did you ask it about their names, you know Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto?”

“Oh sure, but nothing came up. I tried other websites but nothing to suggest that anything was there. So I set myself up a little website.”

“You did what?” asked Fred.

“OK, I did have a little help from my grand-daughter, ok, she did a big help.”

“Ok, yeah I understand, sorry go on”.

“Well Fred, we set up a Jodechi Website, entitled “Has anybody heard of anybody from Jodechi”. Well I figured that Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto may be seeing other people as well as us. We haven’t seen them since last summer.”

“Yes, Joe I was wondering what they are upto, probably snowed in.”

A short while later, the phone behind the bar rang. The landlord answered, spoke for a few minutes before putting down the receiver.

The landlord left the bar and approached the only people in the bar.

“Hello Jack” said Fred “Everything ok.”

“No Fred. That was Bill Smythe up at the farm. He’s having a problem. He thinks there are two wolves up on the top meadow.”

“Wolves, up here, during the day. Well I suppose they are there for the lambs. Easy picking” said Joe.

“Well, he says that one of them is orange in colour, but smaller than a full-size wolf. He thinks that they may be just young ones out on the prowl” said Jack.

“Oh, really, em, Fred, I think we should go and help Farmer Smythe.”

“I thought you didn’t get along with Farmer Smythe” said Fred.

“Fred” said Joe, “Remember what we were discussing a few minutes before hand”.

“Oh right, I get you, orange wolf. And you think?”

“Exactly, eh Jack, you did say that there two of them?”

“Eh yeah, that’s right.”

“Ok Joe, let’s go and help Farmer Smythe. We have two wolves to catch before somebody else does.”

Joe and Fred got up, leaving their unfinished drinks. Took their hats, coats and walking sticks. They didn’t need walking sticks for disability purposes, but found them useful when hiking the hills. As they left the Blacksmith Arms the landlord was scratching his head. He had never known these two fellows to leave drinks behind before.

As they walked up the lane towards the meadow, facing the biting wind blowing down with the snow still falling.

“So you think its Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto?” asked Fred.

“Well, your guess is as good as mine, but he give a pretty good description of Catwhiskers, and if that is he then the other has to be Cosmicblasto.

“Better get a move on then. It’s at least 20 minutes to the meadow where the sheep are” said Fred.

Fred and Joe struggles against the elements, but got to the meadow in good time. Against the back drop of white and the foreground of white, it was difficult to see anything. The enclosure wall was visible, showing a line that seemed to separate the background from the foreground. Towards the top of the field was where the barn was situated. Farmer Smythe was up there with his colleagues tendering the lambs.

“Now” said Fred. “Where would you be if you were a wolf?”

“Up there” said Joe.

“So if you were Catwhiskers” Fred let the question hang in the air.

“Down there I suppose, completely opposite from where the barn and the other people are, I suppose.”

“Right, just as I figured they would go too.”

“Ok then.”

They both moved off towards the right of the meadow towards the enclosure wall, the snow was knee deep and both men struggled against the snow drifts.

They reached the wall, a tradition dry stone wall built with solid stone. They leaned against it. The stones began to move.

“Hey, steady on Fred. It looks like a few loose stones on this wall. Smythe taking short cuts again.”

“I don’t think so Joe. If you were as small as those two, this would probably be just as good a hiding place as the barn would be. See if you can move a few stones out of the way, without affecting the foundations then. Yes, look Joe.”

Joe pointed to the other side of the wall, where the deep indentations of the stones that had been removed from the wall were thrown into the snow. Fred used his walking stick to shake away the fresh snow from the wall. There was a large piece of stone covering an opening in the wall. Fred looked inside and was startled by what he saw. A face looked back at him. Fred regained his composure. The face looked solemn, thoroughly looking downhearted, but it was unmistakable.

“Hello Catwhiskers. What’s happened, when did you get here? Where’s Cosmicblasto, why are you here?” asked Fred.

Catwhiskers looked into Fred’s face. There was a struggle on the inside of the wall, and Cosmicblasto looked out. He saw that it was Fred and Joe.

“Please Joe, please Fred. We don’t like it here. What is happening?” said Cosmicblasto.

It’s ok now” said Joe. “We got you. What happened to you? How come you are here?”

“We had to hide somewhere. We went upto the barn. We only wanted shelter. It’s so cold. We haven’t known anything like this in Jodechi ever” said Cosmicblasto.

“There was this man” said Catwhiskers “He shouted at us and pointed a stick at us.”

“But this stick had a magical effect. A magical effect I did not like. It had a fire at the end of it, and a loud boom” said Cosmicblasto.

“Shotgun, Joe.”

“Sounds like it to me Fred.”

“Anyway, Catwhiskers stood in shock; it was all I could do to drag him away. It was a struggle against all this white stuff. But we managed to get to this wall.”

“We realised that this wall could hide us. At least until all this white stuff goes away. Sometimes it melts on my nose and fingers, but when it is on my clothes it stays. We are hoping it melts on the ground too” said Catwhiskers.

“It has to melt. We lost the Travel Devise in it” said Cosmicblasto.

“Lost it, lost it where?” asked Fred.

“In this field, where we landed” said Catwhiskers.

“Well it will be hard to find in all this snow” said Joe.

“Where about did you arrive?” asked Fred.

“How did you managed to lose it anyway?” asked Joe.

“Near that fence where those animals are” said Cosmicblasto.

“We just stumbled into all this stuff. As I was picking myself up, I realised that I didn’t have it. I tried to find it but just couldn’t” said Catwhiskers.

“Well, that gives us a starting point in this snow” said Fred.

“Snow is this what you call it?” said Catwhiskers.

“Yes, don’t you have snow where you come from?” asked Joe.

“No, never seen it before. It comes from the sky. We have rain, just like everywhere else, but we never have this snow, and I for one am glad of it.”

“Doesn’t it get cold in Jodechi?” asked Fred.

“Oh, sure, but never like this” said Cosmicblasto.

“If I had the Travel Devise, I would say, it would put me off from using it ever again” said Catwhiskers.

“Well, let’s try and find it” said Joe. “Over there by the sheep-pen.”

“We had better go and talk to Farmer Smythe. Let him know we are looking for the wolves” said Fred.

“Yes, I suppose so” said Joe. “You two, stay here. It’s not the warmest of places, but for the while it will be shelter. It will be dark in 3 hours. If we haven’t found your device in that time. Well we will have to come up with something, somewhere to keep you safe.”

Fred put the slab of stone back against the wall. The two Jodechians were once again in the dark, but their spirits were lifted. Fred and Joe were going to help them.

They picked up their walking sticks and once again trudged against the elements. This time heading up towards the barn, where they knew Farmer Smythe was, as his tractor was still there.

As Fred and Joe approached the barn, Farmer Smythe eyed them suspiciously. He too, didn’t like those two trouble makers, he reckoned.

“Hello Bill” said Joe

“Hi Bill, heard you had a little trouble with a couple of wolves so we popped up to see if we could help” said Fred.

“You two, help me with wolves.”

“Well, you know Bill, you got your hands full with the lambs, and I know we haven’t always seen eye to eye, but I figured you would need a hand” said Joe.

“Yeah, well, ok, then. Here take the shotgun” Bill handed the shotgun to Joe. Who handed it over to Fred. “It’s loaded; just pull back these two levers and fire. In the direction of whatever you want to shoot at.”

“It’s ok, I was in the Army you know” said Fred.

“So Fred, let’s start over there, near the corner and work down towards the pen.”

“Try the other corner from the pen” said Bill Smythe. “I fired a shot over the heads of the wolves when they were near the pen. They ran off in that direction.”

“You didn’t aim to kill then?” asked Joe.

“Don’t have time to pick up the dead body. I supposed I thought if I gave it a warning shot they might not come back” said Bill.

“Good idea” said Fred.

“Yeah, but lets start at the pen then head down” said Joe.

Once again they collected themselves and headed off into the elements. Bill Smythe watched them depart, still suspicious. Maybe they were for once being serious. But Smythe continued to lay down foodstuff for the sheep.

“Let’s hope we don’t have to spend too long find this device” said Joe.

“Yeah, tell me about it, it is cold.”

They reached the pen; Joe took a backward look towards the barn. Smythe wasn’t looking out at them. He started to work his walking stick through the snow. More in hope than expectation. The travel device could have landed anywhere.

Fred put the shotgun against the fence. He took great care in ensuring the leavers were not cocked and the safety catches were applied. It wouldn't do for it to go off. He then started to go through the snow.

It wasn't long before Joe's walking stick struck an object. He put his gloved hand down into the snow.

"Bingo. Well, that's a relief off my mind." He held up the Travel Device for Fred to see.

"Well, that's that sorted. Now for plan B."

"Plan B Fred."

"Well, we have to give Smythe his shotgun back, and then go back down towards the wall to take them two and get out of here. And I don't want them going back to Buttercup with a cold."

"I see, Fred. And obviously they need to stay in your cottage. At least they'll not be seen by anyone else."

"Yes Joe, you have your grand-daughter staying with you. It would be best for them to stay at my place for a day or two. Just to make sure they have a clean bill of health."

"Right then, off we go."

Fred picked up the shotgun, still keeping it in a safe mode. They both turned and headed back towards the barn. The Travel Device safe in the deep pockets of Joes' long coat.

Once again, Bill Smythe eye them suspiciously, strangely-strange he thought. They didn't stay too long, looking for the wolves indeed. He knew they would get bored before too long.

"Hello" Bill Smythe said. "You're back."

"Yes" said Joe. "Just remembered, I have to be somewhere, I have to pick up my grand-daughter."

"Yes I have a computer lesson with his grand-daughter too" said Fred. He passed over the shotgun.

“Oh, I see. Well thanks for offering anyway.”

“See you in the Blacksmiths Arms” said Fred.

They both turned away from Smythe and headed away from the barn down towards the wall where the Jodechians were hiding.

“Oh, you have a computer lesson with my grand-daughter.”

“First thing that came into my head.”

Bill Smythe once again eyed the two men as they trudged against the elements, and once again cursing them for being trouble-makers, turned away and continued his work.

As Joe and Fred reached the wall, they once again took a look behind themselves and seeing that the way was clear, moved the stone slab to one side and looked inside.

“Ok, Catwhiskers, Cosmicblasto, you can come out. We found your little device” said Joe.

“Oh relief and blessings to you” said Cosmicblasto.

“Come on. You need to come with me. You are staying in my cottage for a couple of days. To get warmer and hope that your device doesn’t need too much drying out too” said Fred.

“Stay on our left hand side, that way we have you between the wall and us. The gate is over there” said Joe.

“And stay quiet, especially when you are on the main road. Fortunately, my cottage isn’t too far down the lane. They shouldn’t be any traffic on these lanes today” said Fred.

They all reached the gate, securely tying it to the post. After checking to see if the lane was clear of traffic and proceeded to walk down the lane.

The snow was a good disguise. With nobody outside on the lane, they trudged through. Both Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto struggled as the snow lay just above their knees. It took them 15 minutes to reach the cottage where Fred lived. Joe reached the

garden gate first, opened it and looked behind the path they had taken.

He was quite relieved to see that the falling snow was covering the tracks of the Jodechians. The little footprints looking really odd against the footprints of normal sized feet. Joe closed the gate after everyone had passed through.

“I suggest that you two walk in our footprints. Best not to have anything other than our tracks on display” said Joe.

Fred unlocked the front door to the cottage. After taking off their coats and hung them on the hooks, removed the wellingtons. Fred was as ever, grateful for the central heating. Everyone moved into the kitchen. Fred switched on the kettle and emptied the tea-pot.

“There’s enough hot water for you guys to get in the bath” said Fred.

“Bath. What’s a bath” asked Catwhiskers.

“You know, wash yourselves, soak in a nice relaxing, I don’t know, do you guys at home use a tub or something.”

“Oh yes we understand, but do we have to get in together.” said Cosmicblasto.

“Yes, the bath is big enough for you both. Get yourselves sorted and warm. There are some things in the bottom drawer in the room on the left upstairs.”

“What do you have that would fit them” asked Joe.

“Them, just shorts and tee-shirts for the while” replied Fred.

“Just as long as we don’t look daft” said Catwhiskers.

“Bring down your clothes and I will put them in the wash.”

Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto both went upstairs.

“So Fred, what’s the plan then.”

“Well, I suppose a few days here, keep them amused and who knows, and find out more about Jodechi I suppose”.

“Well, you have enough room at the back of the garden to keep them amused without drawing attention to yourself” said Joe.

“I think they have had enough of snow to last a lifetime.”

Fred poured the boiled water into the tea-pot. Opened two cans of soup, poured them into a large saucepan.

“Hope they are ok up there” said Joe.

“Yeah it is a bit quiet.”

“After what they have been through, it would subdue the mightiest man” said Joe.

Sure enough, Catwhiskers came down first, wearing shorts and two tee-shirts, but looking much happier then when he went up.

“Cup of tea?” asked Joe.

“Yes please.”

“So what do you think of our lovely snow?” asked Fred.

“Never ever want to see it again” came the reply.

Cosmicblasto came into the kitchen, he too looked happier.

“Ah cup of tead” he said.

“Tead, ah you mean tea” said Fred.

“We call it tead in Jodechi” said Catwhiskers “But it is pretty much the same thing, brewed from leaves.”

“Just going to put some soup on the stove” said Fred, “that and some bread will make you all warm on the inside.”

Joe took the Travel Device out of his pocket and handed it over the Catwhiskers.

“Will it still work?” he asked Catwhiskers.

“It’s a sealed unit. Nothing can get inside it.”

“What about the power source?”

“Never needed to do anything with it, other than press the buttons.”

“Well, I think you should stay here for a day or two, just to make sure you haven’t picked up a chill or a bug” said Fred.

“It’s ok; when we use the Travel Device we always end up at the same point in time when we left. We could stay here forever” said Cosmicblasto.

“What about aging?” asked Joe

“Well, I suppose its best not to stay too long. Wouldn’t want to go back an old Jodechian” said Cosmicblasto.

Everybody laughed.

After everybody had soup and great chunks of bread. Joe got up and put on his hat and coat.

“It will be dark soon. I will be around again tomorrow, usual time. No, on second thoughts make it an hour earlier” said Joe.

“Ok mate” said Fred.

“You will be warm and cosy here, so I will be back tomorrow” Joe said to the Jodechians.

Joe picked up his walking stick and headed towards the front door and opened it. Fred followed his friend.

“Ok then, see you all later” and left to go home.

Fred watched his life-long friend walk down the path, Joe carefully shutting the gate behind him with a final wave. Fred shut and double bolted the door.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers clothes had been washed and were hanging on the radiators. But as everyone had a long day, it was early night all round.

Fred took the Jodechians upstairs and showed them the spare room. Although it was just one bed, more than large enough for the two of them.

Cosmicblasto eyes shut almost immediately, grateful for the warm and safety of a good friend he slept soundly. On the other hand Catwhiskers was deep in thought. This was the first time they had ever been away from Buttercup for the night. He was hoping that the Travel Device would take them back to where they left. He was thinking of Poopsie Rhinochunks and Lardyme Cootiepants. Catwhiskers drifted into sleep.

In the morning, Catwhiskers Picklebuns and Cosmicblasto Monkeynose were, it seemed back to their usual selves. They were dressed in their own clothes. The effects of the snow and the cold not seemed to have ailed them.

The snow had stopped and a sun shone over the village of Churchup. The village seemed brighter. There was a knock on the door of the cottage.

“Hey, you guys in there” said Fred. He ushered them into the utility room at the back of the kitchen.

Fred walked towards the front door and opened it. It was Joe.

“Is everything ok?” Joe asked.

“Yeah, they are fine, which is a relief.”

“Ok, you can come on out” said Fred as he closed the door.

“When did it stop snowing?” asked Joe.

“Early hours I guess. It was an early night all round.”

“Yeah me too. I am getting too old to be running around.”

“Hello Joe” said Catwhiskers.

“Hello Joe” said Cosmicblasto.

“Well, I see you are better for your experience.”

“Yes, but we won’t be coming back again when it snows” said Cosmicblasto.

“We need to find out the weather next time” said Catwhiskers.

“It’s not too bad you know. Sure it can be a real hassle, but the children of the village play, snowball fight, sledge down the meadow and in general have loads of fun” said Joe.

“Yeah, well count me out. It comes up to my britches, but thank you for helping us” said Cosmicblasto.

“I don’t know what we would have done. We thought we would die stuck in that wall” said Catwhiskers.

“Well, next time come during the summer time” said Fred.

“Come anytime you want to, but don’t stay if it isn’t to your liking. Remember, we are the only people who know you, and try to avoid areas where there are other people” said Joe.

“Ready to go Cosmicblasto” asked Catwhiskers.

“Sure, let’s go.”

Fred handed the Travel Device to Catwhiskers.

“Thank you Fred, thank you Joe” said Cosmicblasto.

“Your welcome” said Joe.

“Yes, thank you so much” said Catwhiskers.

Catwhiskers pressed the red button on the Travel Device. There was a blue flash and the Jodechians disappeared.

“Well Fred, until the next time.”

“Wonder when that will be Joe.”

“Ah, nearly opening time. We got to make up for only having less than one pint yesterday” said Joe.

“Ah yes. It’s nice to get back to normal” said Fred.

Meanwhile, back in Buttercup. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers re-appeared in a blue flash. In the same place as they had left. The day was sunny and everything was sweet smelling. They knew for sure this was the way things should be. They will be no more snow for them.

4: THE DAY OF THE DUCKS

It had been several months since Catwhiskers Picklebuns put the Travel Device in the bottom drawer of his room at home. He was certain that he would get it out again, but after their last experience, Cosmicblasto Monkeynose suggested that maybe they should put the activity behind them for a while. Although they both suffered no ill-effect from their last adventure in the snow, they didn't want to rush back into anything too soon.

So Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto settled into a daily routine of work. They spent their free time with their friends Lardyme Cootiepants and Poopsie Rhinochunks. The four of them had walked up to the hills. Poopsie had organised a small picnic basket.

She had laid out a tablecloth on the luscious green grass. Placed plates of sandwiches and buns. A large urn of iced sweet tead with 4 tumblers was carefully placed down. Lardyme was sat down on the grass next to her whilst Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were sat talking out of hearing of the womenfolk.

Whilst Poopsie had made prepared the picnic, Lardyme called them over. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers got up and strolled over to where the picnic was set. Days like this would end soon. After the picnic Catwhiskers laid back and closed his eyes. Lardyme laid next to him, but not too close. Cosmicblasto was sat talking to Poopsie. Yes, days like this would end soon.

It was soon time for Catwhiskers to start an apprenticeship with the Blacksmith. Cosmicblasto had decided to work with the baker. Both were looking forward to starting careers.

The roles for the womenfolk were different, although the baker's wife usually worked along side her husband, it was normally the role of the womenfolk to stay at home and look after the family.

In Buttercup, there was a pond on the village green. A road surrounded the green and then branched out into four directions. The road leading north of the green lead up to the hills.

The road that leads south went down into the meadow. The road that leads east was an industrious area. This was where the blacksmith had his workshop.

There was also a hardware shop just over on the other side of the road. The road leading west was where the church, the bakers and the greengrocer located.

The population of Buttercup was small, but the occupants all lived in houses that lead off from the north and south roads. Although some of the luckier folk lived in the houses that were adjacent to the village green, everyfolk had a home that was considered to be well cared for and copious amounts of garden space.

The habitants of Buttercup considered themselves fortunate to live in such a beautiful village.

The only folk who lived facing the village green were the Alderfolk of the village. The Alderfolk was an elderly wise Jodechian. He had been elected for the 27th time to govern Buttercup, the last 25 times, he was elected unopposed. He was the magistrate, the village planner, and he did pretty much everything that needed a decision to settle disputes that ordinary folk could not decide for themselves. The folk of Buttercup made his life easy. Although he was the magistrate, he hadn't found the need to trial anyone for the past 6 years. Yes the Alderfolk, Situppy Pottypears considered himself a luckyfolk.

The village green pond was a beautiful haven for small fish, newts and frogs and all sorts of wildlife scuttled around the banks.

One day, just as the weather got warmer, there was a hive of activity around the pond. There were many folk on the green all looking out into the pond. Hidden amongst the reeds in the centre of the pond was a bird of which the folk of Buttercup or even all of Jodechi had never seen before.

The folk had seen birds before plenty of times, but these were all landed based birds, they had never seen a bird that had settled down on the water of the pond before.

Situppy Pottypears had heard of the commotion from his office and decided to investigate. Although he tolerated a lot of what happened in Buttercup, a strange disturbance was going on. He wanted to find out what it was.

He opened his chamber doors and strolled across the road towards the centre of the village green. As he got there, the folk moved aside to let him through.

He stood there on the bank of the pond. Splendid in his regalia of office. His boots had a buckle over the foot and at the top of the garment. His britches were black, with a purple stripe down the sides. The shirt he wore was purple with red trim. He completed the attire with a gold sash he wore over the left shoulder, secured at the waist by a golden belt. The alderfolk's beard was long, black in colour, was brushed neatly down the front of his shirt. The villages quieten as he began to speak.

“Now then, now then, what's going on here? What is all this commotion? We can't be having all this commotion.”

“It's the pond” said one.

“It's a strange bird” said another.

The Alderfolk stood on the bank and looked across. Sure enough, there was a strange bird sitting on the water, but moving gracefully.

“Ah, I see” said the Alderfolk, he pulled out a glass lens on a chain and held it to his left eye and looked through then he allowed the lens to drop.

“Ah yes, just as I thought. This needs more investigating.”

He turned around and headed back to his chambers. So did everyfolk else. They all followed the Alderfolk. This did not seem to bother the Alderfolk, Infact he welcomed it. He loved a captive audience and when he had something to tell the villagers, they all listened; they hung on to his every word.

The villagers all respected the Alderfolk. They knew he was wise and just. But one day he knew he would have to stop being the Alderfolk. Although it was a labour of love, he knew that one day, the villagers would want a new Alderfolk, but not just yet.

Alderfolk Pottypears stood on the threshold of the chambers and turned to face the everyfolk. They stopped, everyfolk waiting for the Alderfolk to return.

The Alderfolk went into his chambers and a short while later returned with a book. A large thickset book. He took his eyeglass and placed over his left eye. He turned to the back of the book and appeared to run his finger down a listing. He turned over a page and continued to run down a finger. He repeated the process and suddenly stopped.

“Ah, page 174.”

The villagers murmured, but continued to stand and wait whilst the Alderfolk moved to page 174.

“Ah, em, I see.”

The Alderfolk allowed the eyeglass to drop again and stood facing his audience.

“We have a special kind of bird. A bird that requires our protection and our love as we would give love to one another. The bird is a duck. It was on a migration for the wet season, but stopped over our beautiful village”

The Alderfolk looked over and after the murmurs died down again he carried on speaking.

“If our little friend is nesting in the reeds, and indeed it looks like it is, then she has eggs in the nest.”

Everyfolk all clapped with approval and joy. Yes the Alderfolk was right. They would love and look after the duck and everyone would very soon be looking at some birthducks.

Alderfolk Pottypears looked around, yes everyfolk was still here.

“The duck will want a special feed. A mixture of wild corn and vegetables. But we must not over feed the duck. Just the right balance of nutrients so the duck can feed her birthducks, when the time comes.”

The Alderfolk turned and proceeded to walk back to his office. Once again, everyfolk allowed the Alderfolk passage through and only began to walk after he passed through completely. The Alderfolk stopped on the steps of his chambers and turned to face everyfolk.

“I must warn you. I will not tolerate any foul deeds whether intentional or not against the wellbeing of the duck and her eggs.”

A few of the folk sniggered at the use of the foul word. They thought the Alderfolk was making a joke of the threat. But the sniggers died down very quickly when the Alderfolk face turned stern.

“I will punish severely anyfolk disobeying my explicit instruction regarding the duck. We all have a responsibility to behave in a civilised folkner.”

The Alderfolk entered the chambers and closed the door behind him. Everyfolk drifted off, chatting to friends and colleagues.

The only folk to stay behind, standing on the pond’s edge were Catwhiskers Picklebuns and Cosmicblasto Monkeynose. They stood looking at the duck.

“So where did the duck come from?” asked Catwhiskers.

“The Alderfolk didn’t say” replied Cosmicblasto.

“Must be somewhere important” said a voice behind.

“Hello Popsie” said Catwhiskers.

“Yes, must be somewhere important for the Alderfolk to have to resort to the great book to find out about it” said Popsie.

Popsie stood on the pond bank with her friend Lardyme Cootiepants.

“I would love to read that great book” said Lardyme.

“Yes, Lardyme, read the great book and become the Alderfolk too” said Cosmicblasto.

“Hey! You take that back” said Lardyme.

“Yes, do it now” said Popsie, “or I will take your arm and bend it back”

“You stay off my arm” said Cosmicblasto taking a step back.

Poopsie took a forward step.

“Ok, I take it back Lardyme”.

“Good” she said.

“Come on Lardyme. Let’s leave these two. They are always in trouble anyway” said Poopsie.

They proceeded to walk back towards the east road.

“Why do you always have to upset Lardyme?” asked Catwhiskers.

Cosmicblasto just shrugged his shoulders.

“Anyway, I want to look at this duck even closer” said Cosmicblasto.

“You can’t, you will upset Alderfolk Pottypears” said Catwhiskers.

“He won’t know, anyway, it’s not like I am going to hurt the duck. I just want to see her close up.”

“It’s not a good idea.”

Cosmicblasto started to walk around the edge of the pond.

“Are you coming?” he called.

Catwhiskers shrugged his shoulders and followed his friend.

They reached to the part of the pond that was shallow.

Cosmicblasto looked around him. Everyfolk had gone away and it was only them on the village green. He took step into the pond. Then the other foot. The water came upto halfway on his boots. He began to wade into the pond.

“Are you coming” he called over to Catwhiskers.

“I am seriously going to regret this.”

“It’s ok we just wade to the reeds and have a little look.”

“Ok then, but we touch nothing.”

“Catwhiskers I swear.”

Catwhiskers clambered into the pond and began to wade to the reeds, only a few steps behind Cosmicblasto.

“Look here. There are six eggs” said Catwhiskers.

“Wow! I have never seen eggs that size before.”

“I wonder when they will hatchbirth.”

“Look Catwhiskers, there’s one egg, its cracking; look there’s a duck being hatchbirthed.

But whilst the egg was being hatched the duck herself was frantic, she needed to get to the eggs to be there for the hatching but was afraid. She could see that there was folk standing over the eggs. She approached, quacked and pecked at the boots of Cosmicblasto.

“We had better go, I think the duck wants to be alone” said Catwhiskers.

“I suppose so” replied Cosmicblasto.

They both turned and just as they started to wade back to the bank. They saw Alderfolk Pottypears, and he was raging.

“I GAVE EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION NOT TO DISTURB THE DUCK OR THE EGGS” the Alderfolk bellowed.

“COME HERE AT ONCE.”

Both Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers stood to the spot; nobody had ever heard the Alderfolk speak like that before. It was Catwhiskers who moved first, Cosmicblasto finding his feet a moment later. They both stood at the edge of the pond, still in the water.

“The court room in the Chambers. NOW.”

The Alderfolk turned and proceeded to go to the Chambers. He was followed closely by the miscreants. Once in the chambers, the Alderfolk ushered Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto into the stall where the bad folk went.

“You will wait there until I am ready to deal with you.”

The Alderfolk left them and locked the door of the courtroom.

“I told you we would get into trouble” said Catwhiskers.

“Hey, you didn’t say it loud enough. Why not tell the whole of Jodechi.”

“I am so going to knock your head off.”

There was a loud bell ringing sound. Both Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers knew what it meant. The folk of Buttercup were been summoned. Everyfolk would be there. Momfolk and dadfolk, Poopsie and Lardyme. Everyfolk.

Soon enough, the doors were unlocked and everyfolk were ushered in. Some sat on the pews to the left of the courtroom; some were sat on the pews in between the chairfolk and the stall where the accused were. The seats to the right, where usually the juryfolk sat where also filled. This was a strange move, but the villagers continued to fill the courtroom and so every available space was filled.

The villagers were looking at the stall where Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were being held.

“I always knew them two folk would end up in there” said one folk.

“Yes, me too” said another folk.

“Their poor parentfolk” said a third folk.

Meanwhile Lardyme and Poopsie sat on the right side of the courtroom, their heads bowed in shame.

“ALL RISE” boomed a voice from the usherfolk of the court.

Everybody rose and stood and bowed as Alderfolk Pottypears came into the courtroom. He acknowledged the usherfolk.

“ALL BE SITTED. Not you two” said the usherfolk.

“Good day to you folk” started Alderfolk Pottypears.

“Good day Alderfolk” the everyfolk in the room responded together. A greeting that was well practised when meetings were held.

“We are all together today. I am most upset you see. We, I spoke to you all today outside about the duck. I stressed so much the importance of looking after the duck. The duck has chosen our village, Buttercup to hatchbirth her eggs. This is a most important honour for our village. We do not see this sort of thing. Ducks do not come from this world; they come from a neighbouring world, yonder where the eye can see.”

The villagers in the courtroom, murmured, they did not know what the Alderfolk was talking about.

But Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto did. Did the Alderfolk know about the Travel Device?

The Alderfolk continued to speak to the courtroom.

“The great book contains a wealth of information, a great encyclopaedia. This great book was delivered to me many many years ago. It was given to me by a great gentleman who travelled in a red box”

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers looked at each other, surely not the same fellow who they saw.

“I understand that he recently came to our village again. Unfortunately I was not able to see him. It would have been good to talk to him again”

The two folk in the stalls were still looking at each other puzzled looks on their faces, but they were too respectful of the wizen Alderfolk to interrupt.

“And now, despite my advice to you all not to disturb the duck, Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns were both caught, BY MYSELF, in the pond”

The courtroom erupted. Everyfolk was talking. “SILENCE” called the usherfolk.

The courtroom quietened down.

“Monkeynose and Picklebuns, I will not hear your excuses. Nothing you can say will alter the verdict. In all my time as Alderfolk, I have allowed folk to plead their case. I have listened to the many excuses of the guiltyfolk and listened to the passion plea of the innocentfolk. I have decided judgement purely on the evidence I have heard on a fair basis. But today, to my shame I have no choice to find you both guilty as charge.”

The Alderfolk stood, and with his hands leaning on his desk, looked at the two folk in the stall.

“Monkeynose and Picklebuns, today you will both be locked up in the big cage that hangs in the courtyard. You will both stay there until the duck and her hatchbirths have left Buttercup.”

Alderfolk Pottypears sat down, and with his gavel struck the desk. He had passed judgement.

Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto looked at one another. The usherfolk and two of his colleagues took the convicted folk out into the yard. The courtroom was emptied in an orderly fashion and they all stood in the courtyard.

The great cage was lowered and Cosmicblasto was pushed into the cage first. Catwhiskers followed his friend.

The cage was fastened and then hoisted. The rope was secured to the post. The cage suspended.

It was then that a folk started to throw rotten fruit at the cage. This was followed by another folk throwing fruit, followed by a third folk.

“Make good use of the fruit” said the usherfolk. It’s all you are getting to eat for a week or two.

Meanwhile across the village green, Lardyme and Poopsie had decided it was better to be at the pond. They did not like their friends being treated like this. Even if they did deserve their punishment.

A sight met their eyes that had them shouting, louder than the noise made by everyfolk.

Everyfolk stopped shouting; they turned towards the pond and looked directly at Poopsie.

“Look” she shouted over.

Everyfolk moved from the courtyard towards the pond. When they got there. They had instantly forgotten all about Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto. For in the pond was the beautiful sight of a motherduck and six little birthducks.

Everyfolk oohed and aahed as the duck watched over the little birthducks. Everybody made way as Alderfolk Pottypears passed through. He was most pleased by the sight.

“Usherfolk, please bring Monkeynose and Picklebuns to me here” said the Alderfolk.

The usherfolk and his colleagues moved off and presently arrived with back with Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers. They stood before him on the edge of the bank.

“Look, at the marvel before you” said the Alderfolk.

Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto looked at the family of ducks. They were still hurting at the punishment given to them, but they were pleased to have had the opportunity to see the ducks.

“Today is a wonderful day for the folk of Buttercup. And, as Alderfolk, I will rescind the punishment given to Monkeynose and Picklebuns.”

Everyfolk were most happy at this and showed their appreciations by clapping and cheering. Even Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto broke into a smile.

“However,” said the Alderfolk, “However, if you two ever come in front of me on the bench again, I will remember this.”

“Oh I promise I will be good” said Cosmicblasto.

“Yeah, well it was your entire fault anyway” said Catwhiskers. Lardyme and Poopsie went over to their friends and stood next to them. Lardyme gently kissed Catwhiskers on the cheek.

This surprised Catwhiskers. It surprised him so much he woke up from his dreamy sleep. He sat bolt upright.

Lardyme was still lying next to him. Cosmicblasto was still sat talking to Poopsie.

“What’s up with you?” asked Poopsie.

“I just had a bad dream” said Catwhiskers.

5: THE CIRCUS

There were strange happenings in the village of Churchup. Mysterious figures were lurking around. These figures were pinning up notices. There was a notice pinned up on the Church notice board. There were notices given to the mistresses in the Post Office and the Greengrocers. There were even notices given to the public house, the Blacksmith Arms. They were giving out notices to everybody who wanted one. Even Joe Spratt was given a notice, he read it. All these notices said one thing and one thing only. For one night only, the Circus was coming to the village.

It had been a few months since Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns had last used the Travel Device. Both Jodechians had started their apprentices and were always working or studying. Cosmicblasto had indeed started to work for the baker. He had thought it would be an easy job, but he had not reckoned on getting up in the middle of the night. This wasn't what he thought being a baker was about. His friend Catwhiskers on the other hand usually stirred 3 hours later, and although he thought it was hard, enjoyed his work with the Blacksmith.

Their friends, Poopsie Rhinochunks had started to work in the Tavern and Lardyme Cootiepants was working with Situppy Pottypears in the Alderman's Chambers. She was to be taught all the aspects of recording information, the daily going-ons in the village of Buttercup. Whilst Poopsie was being taught the skills of barmaid in the only tavern in the village.

The only free time they all had together was on the day of the Church gathering. On this day, the Blacksmith, the Alderman's Chambers, the Baker and even the Tavern are closed. This was truly a day of rest and reflections.

After the Church gathering, it was usual for these friends to spend the rest of the day together. Their parentfolk knew that to be good Jodechians they needed to play as well as work. To learn how to be a good worker for the benefit of the village, they needed to learn how to be good to themselves.

However, on this particular day, Poopsie has come down with a bad cold. She was sneezing and shivering throughout the Church gathering.

Lardyme had passed all her tissues to Poopsie, but she still sneezed into them.

“I am ever so sorry” whispered Poopsie, “I won’t be able to come out with you today.” She pointed to her nose.

“That’s ok” Lardyme whispered back, “I will come home with you and keep you company.”

“Oh you shouldn’t. I don’t want you to get my cold.”

“Oh, you know me, I got 3 nostrils. I have never had a cold in my life” said Lardyme. “Anyway, I think I would rather spend time with you then those two.”

“Yes I know what you mean.” Poopsie sneezed again when really she wanted to laugh.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers just looked at each other. Each one knew exactly what the other was thinking. It was time to see Joe and Fred again.

Catwhiskers, being sat next to Poopsie, was showing concern for his friend.

“It’s ok; we will all go back to your home and keep you company.”

“Oh no you won’t.” whispered Lardyme over Poopsie. “You will just catch her cold and then it will be me who has to look after you all. Just go and enjoy yourself.

“Oh we will” whispered Cosmicblasto.

After the Church gathering was over, everyfolk gave thanks to the speakerfolk and then they left to enjoy the rest of their day. Outside, the four friends stood together.

“Well, Poopsie,” said Catwhiskers, “hope you get over your cold soon.”

“Yes, it will be strange to not spend all day with you” said Cosmicblasto.

“Yes well, don’t get into mischief” said Lardyme.

“We won’t” said Cosmicblasto. And before anyone said anything more, they were both gone.

“Charming” said Popsie, “They couldn’t wait to get off. It’s only a cold.”

“Yes, exactly” said Lardyme. She took Popsie arm and linked it with hers and they went off in the opposite direction.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers walked until they were out of sight and then run all the way to Cosmicblasto’s home. He wanted to get the Travel Device before his parentfolk came back from the Church gathering.

Cosmicblasto raced up the stairs, reach his room and tried to barge in without opening the door. The door made of strong oak did not move. Cosmicblasto picked himself off the floor and this time turned the handle. The door opened easily and he strode to the drawers where he kept the Travel Device. He opened the bottom drawer and rummaged through to the back. He touched the object and pulled it out, forgetting to put the clothes he had pulled out back, he raced down the stairs and out into the back garden where Catwhiskers was waiting.

“You took your time”.

“Hey, I didn’t see you run up three flights of stairs”.

“Right, are we ready?”

“Yes” said Cosmicblasto, “let’s go.”

Cosmicblasto touched the blue button. As usual in this event, there was a blue flash and the Jodechians vanished.

In the village of Churchup, there was talk like never before. The Circus was coming to the village. There had never being a circus here before. You usually had to go into the main town to see such attractions. Even the small cinema would have to be closed.

The circus was to take place on Saturday night, which was 2 days away.

Joe Spratt took the notice with him into the Blacksmiths Arms. Fred Jackson was sat near the fire, although the fire was not lit. It never was in the summertime, even in the evenings. But Fred and Joe still sat there. Joe approached.

“Afternoon Fred. Have you seen this?”

“Oh yes, the circus is coming to town. I saw the notice near the bar.” He pointed back, “Oh and there’s one in the tap for you.”

“Cheers mate. Hey Jack.”

“Coming Joe” said Jack Warner. Joe sat himself down and passed the notice to Fred anyway.

“Why are they coming to us?”

“Well, I suppose it’s on their way to wherever they are going to next.”

“Yeah but the town’s only 20 miles away, most of us have our own transport. We need it being so isolated.”

“Well, maybe they are doing us a favour. I mean I wouldn’t go to the town just to watch the circus. So they have come to us instead.”

“Here you are Joe” said Jack, and gave him a full pint of bitter.

“Thanks Jack. I suppose you will be closing on Saturday night, whilst the circus is in town.”

“Well, may as well, I mean everybody is going to be at Bill Smythe’s farm. I suppose I could do last orders.”

Jack left them to their beer and went back to the bar, collecting empty glasses on the way.

“Last orders eh, and you know who the only people in the bar will be” said Joe

“Aye Fred, mostly likely us”.

They both chuckled, and Jack looked on from the bar, wondering what tickled them.

“Hello” said Fred, “Wonder what all the noise is.”

They both got up and looked out of the window. Indeed the circus had come to the village. For it was passing, in a convoy through the village. Villagers were waving and cheering. Truly they were looking forward to be entertained.

The convoy continued all the way to Smythe’s farm, where they would set up their big top.

The owner of the circus got out of the leading truck. He surveyed the meadow. Farmer Smythe had moved all the sheep into the meadow behind the farm. He was happy with the meadow; it was just the right size for his circus.

Another circus man got out of the cab of the truck. He stood next to the owner.

“Well, Mr Marshall, where do you want everything. It’s a good job there is no rain forecasted, wouldn’t like to get bogged down in this field.

“Yes, Didiera, no rain, good.”

Marshall continued to survey the meadow.

“Yes, put the bigtop over there, towards the central but a little towards the left. Put the caravans over there, against the back wall, and the animal cages over there, yes, it would be perfect there. The people will come in from this side so they won’t see the cages.

“Yes Mr Marshall. See to it right away.

Didiera walked away, to carry out the instructions given to him.

It was at this point that Marshall got the fright of his life, for in front of his very own eyes, there was a blue flash and two of the most extraordinary creatures ever appeared before him.

The creatures stood there transfixed. However, it was Marshall who reacted first.

“Hello, what do we have here” he said whilst he grabbed both of them on their shoulders. “Didiera, quickly, here man quickly.”

Didiera looked around and saw Marshall, wrestling with something on the ground. He ran back.

“What is it Mr Marshall.”

“Quick grab him.”

Didiera did as he was told and grabbed hold of one of the creatures.

“Quickly, into my caravan.”

Both men took the creatures into the caravan. Marshall shut the door behind him and locked it.

“What are they Mr Marshall?”

“I don’t know Didiera, but they have come to the right place. I wonder if they can do tricks. Go and get Trixy and Pixy the clowns.”

“Yes Mr Marshall. Will you be ok?”

“Yes, yes be quick.”

Didiera left and Marshall locked the door again.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers sat on the floor, both stayed silent. This wasn’t good.

“Well, well, well, you two are going to make me millions.”

There was a knock on the door. Marshall looked out of the window and then opened the door.

“Quickly in” he ushered in Trixy, Pixy and Didiera.

“What are they?”

“Don’t know, don’t care Trixy, but you are going to teach them some tricks. The new star attraction of the Marshall Circus”.

“What are you going to call them”?

“Leave that to me Pixy. Just teach them a few tricks to get the crowds excited. We can teach them the more sophisticated tricks later.”

“What if we can’t teach them” asked Didiera.

“Then Didiera, we use the cattle prod. Just like we use it on the lions.”

“Very good Mr Marshall. I will cover up the elephant cage.”

“Yes, the elephant cage will be ideal.”

Marshall looked at the two creatures; the four eyes all met his two.

“Now, you be good little fellows and your time here will be good and enjoyable. Good food for good entertainment. Bad food for bad entertainment.” Cosmicblasto turned and looked at Catwhiskers. “Ah, I see we understand each other.” said Marshall “That will make things so much easier. Take them.”

Trixy and Pixy each took the Jodechians and held them firmly by their elbows. They took them out of the caravan and took them towards elephant’s cage. Whilst being taken the circus people had stopped working and were staring at them.

Didiera had taken the elephant out of the cage. Trixy and Pixy had stopped whilst the elephant was taken out. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers had never seen anything like that at all in their life. They were then pushed into the cage and the gate locked behind them. The cage was strongly built. The two Jodechians stood in the cage unsure of what to do next.

“Now then you two,” said Trixy, “help us to help you. You can be treated well if you want to be.”

“But if you don’t” said Pixy

“We can’t be responsible, we are clowns, and we like to make people laugh.”

Trixy and Pixy turned and left the cage.

“What was that” asked Cosmicblasto.

“It’s an elephant’s cage” said Catwhiskers. So that must be an elephant.” He had remembered in his dream about being locked in a cage.

Cosmicblasto walked over the side of the cage and held the bars.

“I wish Joe and Fred were here”.

“Why do we always end up in trouble?”

“Well, Catwhiskers, we are really in trouble now, I haven’t got the Travel Device.”

“You haven’t got it, where is it?” asked Catwhiskers

“I dropped it when that man grabbed us.”

“Only Fred and Joe can help us now.”

“So what are we going to do now? I don’t like the idea of the cattle prod. Whatever that is, but it doesn’t sound pleasant” said Cosmicblasto.

“Right, let’s sit and think this out”.

“Well take your pick, there’s no where else to go.”

“Ok, Cosmicblasto, I am open to all ideas.”

“Right, they want us to learn tricks.”

“Yes, in order to eat good food”.

“If we learn the tricks, then we will be on show to all the people, and just maybe that way Joe and Fred might find us”.

“Ok, sounds good to me.”

“Ok then, we will do that.” said Cosmicblasto.

They both got up and went to the edge of the cage and Catwhiskers called out.

“Hey, Trixy and Pixy.”

“Hello everyfolk”. Called out Cosmicblasto

“Hey come on you folks.”

People had stopped doing their tasks. They turned and looked towards the elephant cage. One man ushered someone to go and get the clowns. The same man ushered someone else to get the circus master.

Trixy and Pixy came running out their caravan and stood in front of the cage and stared at Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers.

“Ok” said Catwhiskers, “We have decided to learn some of your tricks,”

“My name is Cosmicblasto, and my friend here is called Catwhiskers.”

Before the surprised clowns could reply, Marshall and Didiera came in

“So, you speak good English, where do you come from.”

“That would be too complicated to tell you, but my friend and I have agreed to learn some tricks and be part of the show. But we want you to promise not to hurt us”.

“Yes” said Cosmicblasto “we are very sensitive and respond better to better treatment”.

“We do realize that we are imprisoned here, and we are at your mercy. So we will be good and try to adapt into your show”.

“Well, I am surprised but deeply honoured. You see I knew you were special when you came out of the blue like the way you did, and in good faith, I would like to apologize for the way I have treated you so far” said Marshall.

“We understand, it was a shock to us too” said Catwhiskers.

“Didiera let them out of the cage. Trixy, I am putting these two dear chaps into your care. Teach them well and we will all profit.”

“Is that wise Mr Marshall? Can we trust them” asked Didiera.

“Oh yes, Didiera, we can trust them. They can’t go anywhere. Even if they were sighted, the villagers would think that they were part of the circus and just bring them back to me for free tickets.”

Marshall turned and faced Trixy and Pixy “Look after them, eh, Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers. Teach them well.”

“Yes we will” replied Trixy.

“Ok guys, come with us, we will teach you some juggling tricks” said Pixy.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were taken into an area behind the elephant’s cage. They were glad to be out of there, but didn’t know what their next move was to be. Other than to be good Jodechians and wait for Joe and Fred to come along. They were shown some simple tricks, which surprisingly, they picked up rather quickly.

Joe and Fred were still in the Blacksmith’s Arms. Although people were still talking about the circus, they were not too interested. They were talking about the last time they had seen their little friends in the snow.

The talking stopped when a stranger came into the Blacksmith’s Arms. Clearly being a member of the circus.

“Hello everybody! My name is Marshall and I am the ringmaster of the Marshall circus.”

He knew he had everybody’s attention. He continued.

“This Saturday, for one night only, marvel at the lion tamer; Stare into the sky with the trapeze. Wonder at the bearded lady. Watch in amazement as the chimps’ tea party and finally, our stars of the show, the clowns Trixy and Pixy with Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers.”

He let the words hang in the air.

“Tickets are only £5 each. £10 for a ringside seat.”

“Here I have 2 for the ringside please” said Joe

“£20 please my good man. You will enjoy the show.

Joe gave Marshall £20 and took his tickets. He returned to his seat whilst Marshall continued to sell tickets.

“Well Fred, at least we know where Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers are, but why.”

“I can guess. They appeared out of nowhere with their little remote control, the Travel Device, and somehow got captured and are being held against their will.”

“Yep my thoughts exactly. So what do we do?”

“What you mean go and get them out.”

“Can’t really go tonight, but maybe there is something we can do.”

“Ok I am all ears Joe”.

“The circus is up in Smythe’s meadow. You know where we found them in the snow.”

“So you think they may have appeared there.” said Fred

“Yes, I think they may have lost the Travel Device. I don’t think our ringmaster has it. He wouldn’t be here. It only has 2 buttons. He would be in Buttercup by now.”

“Ok, so we go and find the device and then keep it safe for Saturday night, and then give it back to them in the ring.”

“It may be the only way, I would imagine they would be under lock and key.” said Joe

“So what excuse do you think we can use to get up to the meadow?” asked Fred.

“We buy 2 more tickets. I am sure he will grateful for the extra money”.

“Best make it just before darkness falls. Give us a bit of cover.”

“Not too dark, we want to be able to see it Fred”.

“Better make this the last beer. Need a clear head later on.”

They said their farewells, much to Jack annoyance. He hated it when they left early. Marshall also said his farewells. He had made good business, but wished that everybody had bought tickets.

Joe went to Fred’s home. They sat watching a movie, Fred prepared a simple meal. All too soon the time came to go on their mission.

They took their walking sticks and went off upto Smythe’s Meadow. As they approached they could see the bigtop had being erected. To be fair, they thought the set up look good, but that wasn’t what they were there for.

They went into the meadow, people were staring at them. Joe asked for the directions to the ringmasters’ caravan. They were pointed towards his caravan.

“Ok Joe, you go and buy the extra tickets whilst I take a wander around.”

Fred wandered down to where Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers had landed in the snow. Although the meadow was snow free, the area was surrounded by straw and piles of what appeared to be elephant dung.

Joe knocked on the door to the caravan. A face appeared at the window. A face Joe did not recognise. The door opened.

“Ah hello, I was looking for Marshall the circus master. I wanted to buy 2 more tickets.”

“Oh I am Didiera, I am sorry Mr Marshall is not available at the moment. He is busy with the clowns.”

“Oh I see, perhaps you could take me to see him with the clowns.”

“Oh no, that will not be possible. It wouldn't do to view the show before we were ready.”

“Yes, of course, as I say I wanted to buy 2 more ringside tickets for the show.”

“Yes, ok. I will pass a message to Mr Marshall. One moment please.” Didiera left the caravan and looked around. He called out to a colleague to fetch Mr Marshall.

“Won't be long sir.”

Meanwhile, Jack wandered amongst the dung. He was sure that this was where they landed before, and sure enough, amongst the elephant droppings there was a small silver coloured object. Jack used his stick to move some of the dung. Yes this was definitely it. He took out his handkerchief and picked it up. Wrapped it delicately and put it into his pocket.

Jack returned back the way he had entered the area and went up to his friend at the caravan. Just as Marshall had come around from the other side.

“Hello, so you wish to buy some more tickets.”

“Yes” said Joe, “2 more please.”

“Oh, no need Joe, just remembered that my daughter won't be able to come after all. She mentioned about working late shift.”

“Oh you sure, you could buy them for some friends in the village” said Marshall.

“Oh no, it's ok. Sorry to have wasted your time.” said Joe.

Fred and Joe turned and walked down to the gate at the bottom of the meadow.

“Didiera, how long were those two here for.”

“Two Mr Marshall, no, there was only one man.”

“Only one you say, em, and clear this muck. Wait a minute; you said there was only one.”

“Yes Mr Marshall, just the old fella”

“Didiera they were both old fellas, but one of them came trailing with elephant muck.”

Joe and Fred made it back and were sat in the kitchen. Joe was cleaning the Travel Device.

“I wonder how Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were doing” asked Fred.

“I think they will be ready for us on Saturday.”

“What makes you say that Joe.”

“If they want us to find them, we have to know where to look, and they have already realized this and have made themselves part of the circus”.

“Which is why you brought ringside tickets.”

Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto were having a good time learning the new tricks that Trixy and Pixy were teaching them. They had learnt everything they had shown them from juggling the balls to riding bikes. Something they had not done in Jodechi. They were even riding the bikes without using the handlebars and juggling the balls to each other. Trixy and Pixy were impressed and told Marshall. Marshall rubbed his hands warmly, he was indeed going to be a millionaire, and it was all down to those two.

On the first evening, Trixy and Pixy hardly got any sleep. They had to maintain a watchful eye on Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers, who slept soundly. Tired out by their work, but also because they knew they were going to be rescued. They wanted to be fresh and alert for when the big night came.

On the Friday, their work continued, but as a reward for their hard work, they were fed as with the others. They even sat with their food with the other circus people. They all sat boggled eyed at each other. Circus people have a tendency to be reserved because they feel different to normal everyday people.

But they took to Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers like they were part of the family.

The bearded lady even made little clown costumes and gave them to try on. They didn't quite fit right, but it was agreed to wear their own clothes as everyone would know them better.

On Saturday, the big day came. The villagers were making their way up to Smythe's meadow. The show was due to start at 5pm, and finish at 9pm.

Fred and Joe took their ringside seats earlier than most. The seats were not numbered but they wanted to be in a position where a quick getaway may be in order and to get a good view of the entrance to the bigtop for the circus performers.

"This seems a good spot Joe."

"Yes you can see through the gap there, the exit is just a little too far, but once we pass the Travel Device, we should be able to slip out when they use It." said Joe.

They went and sat down, before too long, the seats were being filled. There wasn't that many people in the village, so the bigtop appeared to be only partially full.

The first of the performers were the trapeze artists. They performed gracefully, gliding through the air. The next was the highwire walker; despite a safety net he performed his walk 3 times. The audience applause was welcomed.

After which there was the lion tamer. The lions roared and growled but the lion tamer was untroubled. The audience lapped it up. The elephant was on next doing his routine.

After which was a short interval for refreshments, followed by the amusement side of the evening. The Chimps were on first, they were everywhere, climbing the rigging, crawling over the safety net, and it was fair to say everyone laughed at their antics.

Finally it was the main event. Marshall the ringmaster had announced in fixed adulations the arrival of the clowns.

Trixy and Pixy came on first to great tumbles, falling over their big shoes, but in followed Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers on their bikes. Nobody had ever seen two circus performers looking like that before. People near to Joe thought they must have been chimp hybrids.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were having the time of their lives. They had learnt new tricks and really wanted everybody to see them. They juggled 3 balls, then 4 balls and then 5 balls. Then they juggled the balls to each other. Fred and Joe were alike the rest of the audience. They were enjoying themselves so much they almost forgot the reason they were here for.

But it was when they started to talk to each other, that the audience was even more amazed. Truly they had never seen such animals in the wildlife or in zoos.

Trixy and Pixy were pretty much kept in the background. They were becoming upset that after everything they had taught them, they were doing it without them. Marshall was encouraging them to come into the centre to participate.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers had spotted Fred and Joe from the start and it was fair to say were performing for them only.

The biggest trick was the bucket of water. The idea being that Cosmicblasto would be soaked by Trixy, but there were other plans afoot. Cosmicblasto was too quick and he moved over to where Joe and Fred were sat. This lured out Trixy, who was getting quite annoyed.

“Over here Trixy, come for the bucket of water.”

“Yeah I will get you with more than a bucket of water”

“Have you got it” whispered Catwhiskers to Fred and Joe.

Marshall had seen that they were spending a lot of time near those two old men. Then he realised where he had seen them before.

“Yes, we got it” said Joe.

“Give it to me now please, and thank you. We will come and see you properly soon” said Catwhiskers. Catwhiskers put the balls in his pockets whilst he accepted the Travel Device off Joe.

Cosmicblasto saw the handover, so did Marshall, who came running over. Cosmicblasto didn't throw the bucket of water over Trixy, nor did he over Pixy. It was Marshall who got the full bucket, splashed all over him.

“Ok Catwhiskers, press the red now.” Cosmicblasto turned to see his friends and gave them a wave. There was a blue flash and the Jodechians disappeared.

The audience applaud. That was a brilliant trick. They cheered for more. Marshall stood there soaked. His bright red coat was very wet. He moved towards Joe and Fred, but they stood their ground.

“Make one move and we will report you to the RSPCA” said Joe. “Come on Fred, the shows over. We deserve a beer after this”.

“Curses, I will get those 2 back if it's the last thing I ever do” said Marshall shaking a fist at Joe and Fred.

Joe and Fred left the bigtop and wandered down the meadow.

“Well another result, wonder what it will be next time”.

“Please Fred; I am getting too old for this.”

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers landed back where they set off from. Although they had thoroughly enjoyed themselves, they knew it was close this time. Too many people from the other side had seen them. They had to be really careful the next time they used the Travel Device.

They also realized that performing was something they were good at. It was a shame they had lost the bikes but they had the balls. They would have to keep working on their juggling skills.

Catwhiskers said goodbye to his friend and set off for home whilst Cosmicblasto made the slow climb up the flight of stairs. He opened his room and put the Travel Device back in the bottom drawer. It would be some time before that came out again.

6: THE FLYING DRAGON RETURNS

Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns had both got down to their apprenticeships. Cosmicblasto was becoming very good at baking bread. He could now make the perfect loaf. His favourite was the loaf that was made with a large round base and a smaller loaf on top. The skill was to make it so that it was even all the way round. This way the top did not drop to one side when been baked. Catwhiskers on the other hand was making shoes for the Shethorse. That was the usual object being made at the forge. Though sometimes he made objects for other pulling carts. But Catwhiskers was secretly making plans.

When Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers got back from their last trip into the other world, they knew that they enjoyed themselves, despite the dangers they had put themselves in. They enjoyed the Circus. They enjoyed being clowns and doing tricks. They enjoyed the ball juggling. But what they really enjoyed was riding the bicycles. This was Catwhiskers plan. He wanted to make a bicycle. But he was finding it hard. Nobody in Buttercup or even in Jodechi had a bicycle. So all he had to go on was his own recollection of events in the circus ring.

Catwhiskers hadn't mentioned it to Cosmicblasto what he was doing, even though it was all they ever talked about when they were alone. They did not mention it when other folk were around, even Poopsie Rhinochunks and Lardyme Cootiepants were kept in the dark.

Catwhiskers had once again discarded into the furnace his latest drawings for the bicycles. He knew the basic design he wanted, but found it hard to produce a plan to make the bicycle. Not just the framework, which he thought would have been the easiest part, but the problem, was the wheels. He knew the wheels from the pulling cart were strong and large, but also they were solid, as he was aware everytime the pulling cart went over a stone on the ground or jutting into a hole. But he remembered how smoothly the riding was when he was on the bicycle. But the biggest shame was that he or Cosmicblasto hadn't the time to get the bicycles when they were about to return home.

Cosmicblasto had finished work for the day. The bakerfolk had gone earlier leaving Cosmicblasto to continue tidying the bakery.

The bakerseller, a young Jodechian called Boobie Gorillakisser was responsible for cleaning the shop side. She had started to clean at the same time as Cosmicblasto. But Cosmicblasto was in a rush. He had a good idea and wanted to see Catwhiskers to discuss it with him. He continued to clean the bakery. The bakerfolk had stressed how important it was to maintain a clean bakery. He also knew that the bakerfolk would be very angry if he hadn't done a good job. Although he was in a rush, he knew that Catwhiskers would still be in work for at least 2 more hours before he left for the day. So Cosmicblasto continued to do a good job at the cleaning.

When Cosmicblasto was certain that he had finished he put away the brushes and mops. He opened the door from the bakery into the shop and waved goodbye to Boobie. He went out through the backdoor and walked down towards the Blacksmiths.

Catwhiskers was himself clearing up. The forge was very sooty and needed to have the ashes sacked awaiting to go to the recyclers.

Cosmicblasto entered the blacksmiths and looked around the back into the forge area.

"Hello" said Cosmicblasto.

"Oh hi, Cosmicblasto. How is the bakery today?"

"Oh just the usual. Up early, spend all the time upto my elbows in dough."

"You want to try spending up to your elbows in soot."

"Yeah I suppose I shouldn't complain."

"So what brings you here?"

"I have a great idea."

"Oh yeah, better then the last one."

"Yeah, why don't we go up to see Ethereead at the caves on Frinkstone Hill? We could give a display of our ball juggling."

“Ok Cosmicblasto. Give me a few minutes to sort myself out.”

Cosmicblasto went back outside into the afternoon sunshine. He saw approaching his friends Poopsie Rhinochunks and Lardyme Cootiepants.

“Hello” said Cosmicblasto.

“Hello” they said in unison.

“Just waiting for Catwhiskers. We are going up the hills for a little hike. Get some fresh air into the lungs.”

“Well, I am sure you both need it,” said Lardyme.

“Yes, with all that flour and soot in your lungs it will do you good to get some fresh air.” said Poopsie.

“Yes, I wish they told us about the downside as well as the benefits of these careers.” said Cosmicblasto.

“We are going to Lardyme’s home.” said Poopsie.

“Yes, we have to do some sewing on cushions.”

“We don’t have time to go rambling after our work.”

“Well, don’t let me stop you.” said Cosmicblasto.

“Humph, well let’s go Poopsie.”

“Yes Lardyme, let’s not stay where we are not welcome.”

“Bye then.” said Cosmicblasto.

He waved as the girlfolk walked off. Catwhiskers came out of the blacksmiths and after making sure the door was secured turned and joined Cosmicblasto on the main road.

“Ready. What’s up with those two.” asked Catwhiskers.

“Oh nothing. They got some sewing to do.”

“Ok then, let’s go. Have you got the balls?”

“Oh yes and I have got the Travel Device too.”

“Why do you want to bring that?” asked Catwhiskers

“Well, it’s been a while since we last saw Fred and Joe and we do have tomorrow off.”

“Yes, but we have to be in church tomorrow. And you know that everytime we use the Travel Device something always goes wrong.”

“Yes but Catwhiskers me old mocker, we always come back to the point we left, so we don’t actually lose time.”

“You are beginning to sound like Fred and Joe.”

“Well, at least we have to be thankful to them. I couldn’t begin to think of where we would be if it wasn’t for our friends.”

“Yes they have been good to us.”

“I think it is about time we gave them something to thank them.”

“You thinking of giving them a ride on Ethereead.”

“Now that you mention it that would be a good idea.” said Cosmicblasto.

“We need the Travel Device.”

“It’s already in my pocket.”

“Right then, let’s go, yonder” Catwhiskers pointed up the lane that led away from the village upto Frinkstone Hill.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers walked steadily up the lane to the top of the hill and then down into the valley and then up another hill. Although it was still a hard journey, it was made easier as they knew the Ethereead the Dragon would be pleased to see them. They turned into the barely used path that led down to the caves. Ethereead lived in the largest of three caves. Catwhiskers led the way, walking steadily to the entrance of the cave.

“Ethereead, are you home.” Catwhiskers called out. There was no answer so Catwhiskers walked into the cave.

“Maybe Ethereead is out flying” said Cosmicblasto.

“Or maybe just sleeping” said Catwhiskers pointing in the corner of the cave.

Indeed Ethereead was sleeping, but was aroused by the noise that the visitors were making.

“Whoa burglarfolks” said Ethereead.

“It’s ok, it’s us Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers.” said Catwhiskers.

“Sorry to disturb you Ethereead. We just wanted to come and see you again.”

“Oh, right, well next time don’t wake me up with a start. I thought I was been burgled.”

“Burgled, what’s that” asked Catwhiskers.

“It’s when folk take things from other folk without permission.”

“We wouldn’t do that” said Cosmicblasto.

“No you wouldn’t coming from Buttercup” said Ethereead.

Ethereead got up from the bed of straw and went over the fire that was blazing away in the corner.

“Well, now you are here, put the pot on the angle. We will have a pot of Tead.”

Cosmicblasto took the pot and checked that there was enough water in it before putting it on the angle which was jutting out over the fire. It would take just a few minutes to become hot enough to make Tead.

“What brings you over here today?”

“We wanted to show you our tricks” Catwhiskers and took the balls out of the pockets in his britches. He started to juggle the balls in the air.

“Whoa. That’s very good. How did you learn to do that?”

Whilst Catwhiskers was juggling, Cosmicblasto started to tell Ethereead their last adventure at the Circus, including Fred and Joe’s assistance in their rescue. Cosmicblasto poured the Tead whilst he was telling the story.

“Joe and Fred must have been very brave to rescue you There must be very good friends.”

“Yes, everytime we go over we always end up in some form of trouble. If we were ever in trouble in Buttercup then Alderfolk Pottypears would be very angry indeed.” said Catwhiskers, who had stopped juggling and started to drink his Tead.

“After Tead would you like to go for a trip”?

“Yes please” said Cosmicblasto.

“Yes, we would love that”,

“Right then, drink up.”

Ethereead took the empty cups and took them to one side of the cave where a small trickle of water came pouring down from the rocks into a pool which then led away down a channel out of the caves.

Everyone left the cave and stood outside.

“Right, all aboard.”

The Jodechians climbed onto the dragon’s back and held onto the handgrips. Having already flown on Ethereead before they knew what to expect but still held on tightly.

The dragon extended the wings and took a few steps and was airborne. Ethereead climbed higher, taking in the thermals in the sky.

Ethereead soared and dived, banking left and right. The dragon was certainly at its happiest when flying, but even more so when taking folk for a flight.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were enjoying themselves too, but nearly forgot what it was they were there for.

“Are you ready to use the Travel Device” asked Catwhiskers.

“Yes, just let me get it out of my pocket.”

“Well don’t drop it. I don’t think we could ever find it if we lost it whilst we were flying.”

“Right, here it is, ok ready.”

“Ready, do it now.”

Cosmicblasto pressed the blue button on the Travel Device. There was, as usual now in these cases, a blue flash, and as before Ethereead was startled and started to go freefall.

“What’s going on back there.” the dragon shouted.

Ethereead regained normal flight and started to fly level.

“What is happening now with you two?”

“Sorry Ethereead. We just wanted to see Fred and Joe.”

“Yes, we wanted to show you again as we know they liked you when you came last time.” said Catwhiskers.

“Well, to be honest, we wanted to pick them up so that they could fly with us.” said Cosmicblasto.

“Yes, so if you could just keep flying until we see them. They will probably be on the hilltop”

“Well, you should have said something before we took off. What if I was busy doing something else.” said Ethereead.

Ethereead kept on flying straight, no more acrobatics for the while. The dragon stayed steady whilst Cosmicblasto was looking on the right side whilst Catwhiskers was looking on the left side.

“Seen anyfolk yet” asked Catwhiskers.

“No, nothing this side.”

“Ethereead could you fly a little lower” asked Catwhiskers

“I can’t go too low; I don’t want anyone to see us.”

“We need to go lower at bit more, it’s difficult to see from this high.”

“Ok, I will go lower, hold on.”

The Jodechians held on whilst the flying dragon swooped downwards towards the hillside.

It was Cosmicblasto who spotted them first. He pointed them out to Catwhiskers.

“Good, just down there please Ethereead.” said Catwhiskers.

Ethereead turned towards the rights and in a controlled movement dropped down and landed next to two startled men. The dragon had been silent, remembering a lesson from flying school about attacking quietly. They hadn’t realized until the dragon was upon them.

Catwhiskers jumped down from Ethereead and Cosmicblasto followed straight after. Ethereead settled down.

“Hello Fred, hello Joe” they both said in unison.

“Hello, you almost gave us a heart attack.” said Joe Spratt.

“Yes, hello, but please let us know when you coming in like that. It brings back memories from our army days.” said Fred Jackson.

Ethereead smiled, still had the talent.

“And a big hello to you” said Joe.

“Yes, we wondered when we would see you again.”

Both Fred and Joe were stroking Ethereead, who was enjoying the attention,

“So what brings you here again.” asked Fred.

“We not in any trouble this time” said Cosmicblasto.

“But I do want to ask you something” said Catwhiskers.

“Oh yes” said Joe

“Yes, do you remember when we were in the Circus, well we still got our balls, but we really want the bicycles too.”

“Oh yes, I really miss the bicycles,” said Cosmicblasto.

“You see, my apprenticeship is with the blacksmith, and whilst I am getting so much better at making things, I just can not make a bike.”

“I see, and you want us to get the bikes, but the circus has long gone. There isn’t a lot we can do there.” said Joe.

“There is a way Joe” said Fred.

“Oh yes”.

Fred pulled Joe to one side, out of earshot of the others.

“Yes, Joe Christmas isn’t too far off.”

“I see Fred, and it just so happens that the family are going away for Christmas.” Joe started to stroke his chin.

“Do you think we could do it? Could we all spend Christmas together at your family’s home?”

“No reason why not. I will be going there to feed the cats and dogs.” said Joe.

“Ok then sorted. We can order the bikes on-line then save them for Christmas.”

Joe and Fred then re-joined the others.

“Now Cosmicblasto, I remember from before that you said that 1 day equals 1 week in our calendar” said Joe.

“So Catwhiskers, after some consideration we want to see you again in 7 days of your time, which is 7 weeks our time” said Fred.

“Ok then, we will be here next time.” said Cosmicblasto.

“Do you want a ride on Ethereead” asked Catwhiskers.

“Can we” said Joe.

“This will really give us heart attacks Joe” said Fred.

Ethereead got up and strolled over to everybody.

“Just climb onto my back and hold on to the handgrips. Folk think that they are scales, but that is a mis-conception.”

Joe climbed up first, then Fred alongside him, followed by the Jodechians. When everyone was settled, Ethereead stood up and took a little run and lifted up. The dragon soared into the air, but both Fred and Joe held on for dear life.

The flying dragon rose steadily over the hills and as soon as a thermal was found the dragon began to let the winds take him.

“Whoa Fred. We are flying. We are flying on a dragon”.

“Must have put something in those beers. Didn’t Farmer Smyth buy us a beer each?”

“No Fred, I don’t think so. This is real. If only they could see us now.”

“Cosmicblasto, is it possible for us to go to your place, you know Buttercup” asked Fred.

“I guess so, but I wouldn’t know how to hide you from our folk. You would look like giantfolk to them.”

“It’s a shame, I would really like to visit Buttercup, wouldn’t we Joe. Just for a short while.”

“Yes it would be good to see your homeland” said Joe.

“Well, Cosmicblasto, they wouldn’t be the first visit Jodechi, remember the stranger in the red box.”

“Ok, then, let’s do it. Cosmicblasto press red.”

Cosmicblasto reached into his shirt pocket and took out the Travel Device. He held it firmly in his hand; with his other hand still on the dragon, and Ethereead was still doing acrobatics. So Catwhiskers reached over and pressed the red button.

There was a blue flash and once again Ethereead lost control. The dragon dived down and it took all the skill of the dragon to level out into a smooth steady flight.

“I really wish you would stop doing that.” said Ethereead.

“Sorry, but it’s the only way. Everytime we press the button we get a blue flash.

“Well, tell me so that I can be prepared for the next time.”

“What’s happened.” said Joe

“We are here Joe.” said Catwhiskers.

“Here, where’s here.” asked Fred.

“In Jodechi. We are in Jodechi, just like you asked for.” said Cosmicblasto.

Joe looked and Fred and gulped.

“Well Joe, let’s hope we don’t regret it mate.”

Ethereead continued to fly around until the dragon came upon its caves. They flew lower and lower until they landed outside the largest cave.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers got off the dragon. Fred and Joe followed straight after.

“Welcome to Jodechi” said Cosmicblasto.

7: DAY TRIP TO BUTTERCUP

Fred Jackson and Joe Spratt stood staring whilst Ethereead waved them goodbye and went into the cave. As much as Ethereead loved to fly, the dragon was feeling weary. Carrying folk was one thing but been caught by the Travel Device twice was too much. The dragon had wished that Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers would give some notice. The shock of the flash was so unexpected that it took the dragon all the skill to re-gain level flight, especially with the responsibility of carrying folk.

Cosmicblasto Monkeynose put the Travel Device inside his shirt and turned to Catwhiskers Picklebuns.

“Best keep that safe, we will need it later.”

“Yes, but we still need to keep Ethereead happy as we will need to fly back at some point” said Catwhiskers.

“So, is this Buttercup” asked Joe.

“No, this is Frinkstone Hill. Buttercup is yonder over the hills” said Cosmicblasto as he pointed down the hill.

“Right then, let’s get started” said Fred.

Both Fred and Joe were using their sticks, which they had tucked inside their overcoats during the flight. Their route down to Buttercup was uneventful.

They reached the outskirts of Buttercup. Catwhiskers turned to Cosmicblasto.

“What do we do now?”

Cosmicblasto shrugged his shoulders

“Well, I suppose we could just take a tour around the village.”

Cosmicblasto shrugged his shoulders.

“Sounds good to me” said Joe

“Ok then Joe. Where do you want to go first?”

“Remembering, that our folk have never seen anyone like you before” said Cosmicblasto.

“Let’s hope we don’t frighten them” said Fred, “After all we are both 6ft.”

“I think we had better find Poopsie and Lardyme.” said Catwhiskers.

“Do we have to” said Cosmicblasto.

“Rather that then get caught by Alderfolk Pottypears.”

“Ok, I suppose it was about time we told them of what we get upto.”

“Well then what’s first” asked Joe.

“Well Poopsie will be in the Tavern.” said Cosmicblasto

“Tavern sounds an ideal place to start” said Fred

“Well then, keep close to the side of the road. We have to pass the Alderfolk chambers. Wouldn’t be good to get caught” said Catwhiskers.

The four walked down towards the village green. Fortunately there were no lights in the Alderfolk’s chambers. Alderfolk Situppy Pottypears was not in residence. Very soon they all reached the door of the Tavern.

“I will go in and see if Poopsie is working tonight. It’s hard to know what her schedule is when we away for so long” said Cosmicblasto.

“Yes, it is a good job we always come back to the time we left.”

Cosmicblasto opened the door and entered the Tavern. It was quiet at the moment, not many folk were inside. He went straight up to Poopsie Rhinochunks, who was behind the bar cleaning mugs.

“Hello Cosmicblasto.” she said.

“Hello Poopsie. Is this a convenient moment to speak?”

“You are a bit serious tonight. What’s the matter?”

“Complicated, but Catwhiskers and I have brought a couple of friends with us.”

“Well, bring them in. It’s about time you had some proper friends. We are all growing up and leading different lives. It will be good to see them.”

“I think you would think differently if you saw them.”

At this point, the small group of folk in the Tavern all got up and proceeded to leave. This caused Cosmicblasto to panic.

“Sorry folk, but unfortunately this door is blocked off. I have stuff outside on the threshold.”

“Ok, we will use the side door”. said one of the departees.

Cosmicblasto sighed, that was close.

“What sort of friends do you have that makes you panic like that.” asked Lardyme Cootiepants.

“Where did you come from” asked Cosmicblasto

“I was behind the bar, putting mugs away.” said Lardyme.

“So, are you going to bring in your friends.” asked Poopsie.

“Ok, but. It will take some explaining.”

Cosmicblasto went to the door and opened it.

“Ok, come on in.”

Catwhiskers came in first, Joe and Fred both had to crouch down to come through the door, once through, they could just about stand upright. Another inch and they would have had to stoop their heads.

Poopsie and Lardyme stood speechless.

Cosmicblasto stood still, unable to summon anything.

“This is Joe and Fred. Joe, Fred this is Poopsie and Lardyme.”
said Catwhiskers.

“They are our friends from over yonder” said Cosmicblasto.

“Hello Poopsie and Lardyme” said Joe.

“Pleased to meet you both” said Fred.

“Hello to you both” said Lardyme

“We have never seen anyfolk like you before.” said Poopsie.

“So what sort of ale do you sell here” said Fred.

“Just ale made from the local supplies. Everything is made for
the locality from the locality.” said Poopsie.

“In that case 2 mugs of ale please, and whatever Cosmicblasto
and Catwhiskers have. Oh and what do you drink” asked Fred.

Poopsie started to pull 4 mugs of ale.

“Thanks, but Lardyme and I don’t drink. It’s mainly for the
manfolk”.

“So how did you get to meet each other” asked Lardyme.

“Well, that’s a story only Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto can
explain. But it has been a while now and it is fair to say that we,
that is Joe and I have been their saviour on a few occasions.”

“Now that I do believe.” said Poopsie.

“Lardyme, where has Alderfolk Pottypears gone. We noticed the
lights were out.” said Cosmicblasto.

“The Alderfolk has gone to the next village. He has gone for the
new arrivalfolk” she said.

“Arrivalfolk” asked Jack.

“It where all the new folk come from.”

“What, where new folk come from other parts of Jodechi.”

“No, nothing like that” said Poopsie.

“New babyfolk.” said Lardyme.

“Babyfolk” asked Joe.

“Yes, when a couple have a babyfolk, Alderfolk Pottypears brings it from the town in the distance and presents it to the parentfolk. It’s recorded in the Chambers Records.” said Lardyme.

“So who names the baby” asked Fred.

“The Alderfolk names the babyfolk.” said Lardyme.

“So the parents don’t name the baby. It is already named when the Alderfolk present the baby to the parents.” said Joe

“Yes, it is the way it has always been done.” said Poopsie.

“Speaking of which, the Alderman will be here soon. You know that he always presents the babyfolk to the parentfolk in front of the villagefolk. said Lardyme.

“Yes, we better put you in this corner over here. You would probably scare everyfolk” said Poopsie

“Yes it wouldn’t be good for anyfolk to get caught.” said Catwhiskers.

“This brew is lovely, best I have ever tasted” said Joe.

“Yes I agree you must give me the recipe. Could put the Blacksmith Arms out of business.”

“2 more mugs please” asked Joe.

“Ok, but you better go into that corner, and stay low.” said Poopsie.

Sure enough, not long after, folk started to come into the Tavern. Couplefolk were arriving, each hoping they will be the lucky ones to take away the babyfolk.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were with Joe and Fred in the corner. Both Joe and Fred had good views despite been in the shadows. Poopsie had blown out the light in the corner to make it harder for anyone to see them there.

“Cosmicblasto, what’s the deal about this arrivalfolk.” asked Joe.

“The Alderfolk brings the new arrivalfolk and gives it to a couplefolk. They then bring it up.”

“Yes, that is the same for everyone.” said Catwhiskers.

“So you don’t actually make a baby for yourselves.” said Fred.

The Jodechians looked at each and began to giggle, but fortunately they stifled the sounds.

“Whatever gave you that idea” said Catwhiskers.

“Make a babyfolk. You say funny things” said Cosmicblasto.

The Tavern began to fill up with couplefolk. However, Poopsie gave very little ale out. The Alderfolk’s ruling was that the couplefolk who all wanted a new arrival could not partake in the consumption of ale.

A folk opened the door and shouted that the Alderfolk was coming down the lane in the cart. The Tavern quietened down. Joe and Fred also stopped talking to each other so that they could enjoy the ceremony. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers had got over their giggles and they too were silent.

The rumbling sound of the cart came to a halt. The door to the Tavern opened and Alderfolk Situppy Pottypears entered. He was carrying a small bundle. Everyfolk were trying to view what was in the bundle.

Alderfolk Pottypears put the bundles, gently on a table that had been cleared and placed in the centre of the room.

Everyfolk were stood attentively. Once the Alderfolk was sure that he had everyfolk's attention. He began

“Today is a very important day for all Jodechians in Buttercup. Today we celebrate the arrival of a new folk.” He paused to take in breath,

“It is good to see so many couplefolk for this arrival. It is important in the progress of our village. Today, our new arrivalfolk is named as Fluffy Girdlejuice and the couplefolk who will take Fluffy into their lives are.” He paused and looked down at this notes that he had retrieved from his pocket. He scanned down the list until he had found the name.

“Ah yes, here we are. Yendidop Lizardhamster and Dandilion Barftush. You are charged with the responsibility of bringing Fluffy Girdlejuice into social activities expected of a Jodechian. Yendidop and Dandilion, please step forward.”

Everyfolk cheered Yendidop and Dandilion. They slapped their backs and shook hands. The couplefolk stepped forward. The Alderfolk embraced them. He enjoyed these ceremonies as much as anyfolk else. He stood back, picked up the new arrival and handed it over to Dandilion.

“Thank you everyfolk for coming. Hopefully there will be another happy couplefolk the next time I travel to Daisyton. And now I must do my tour of the village.”

The Alderfolk left the Tavern. The couplefolk who had not received the arrivalfolk began to order ale. Yendidop and Dandilion took their new arrivalfolk and left the Tavern. They were expected to go straight home, and they did.

Joe and Fred were still in their dark corner; they remained silent but observed everything without anyone noticing they were there. With the help of both Poopsie and Lardyme, who managed to stop other folk from straying into that area of the Tavern.

“Well, that's a turn up for the book.” said Joe

“I wonder where he gets the baby from” asked Fred

“More to the point, how he gets it” said Joe.

“Hey Catwhiskers, so what happens now. How are we going to see the rest of the village, with everyone in here.” asked Joe.

“Well, with the Alderfolk doing his tour of the village, we can’t really go anywhere now.” said Catwhiskers.

“We are going to have to try and get in front of the Alderfolk. And then get you back up to Frinkstone Hill. We need to get you back there so that Etheread can take you back.” said Cosmicblasto.

“Well, it has been interesting” said Joe

“Yes we need to get on, before it gets late. I didn’t see any streetlamps when we were coming through the village.” said Fred.

Cosmicblasto went to the bar where Poopsie was wiping down the surface.

“Poopsie, can we use the back door to leave. The bar is still busy.”

“Yes, through here.” Poopsie pointed back towards the rear door. Tell Joe and Fred to duck under the counter and crawl through to the back.”

“Don’t know if they can get that far down.”

“Well, they will have to Cosmicblasto, that’s the only way out.”

Cosmicblasto went back to the corner where Fred and Joe were stood. Poopsie opened the bottom door on the bar indicated where to go. Fred and Joe got down and passed through. They crawled under the bar towards the rear rooms. Once inside they stood up.

Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto followed them into the back room. They had never been in here before. They were joined by Poopsie and Lardyme.

“Right we need to leave very soon,” said Catwhiskers.

“Yes we need to get up to Frinkstone Hill.” said Cosmicblasto.

“It’s a pity we have to go. I would love to stay here.” said Joe.

“I am sure we would like to have folk like you stay here too” said Poopsie.

“Yes, it would be nice to have goodfolk visit us here.” said Lardyme.

“Thank you both. It has been nice to meet you.” said Fred.

Both Fred and Joe said their goodbyes to Poopsie and Lardyme.

Catwhiskers opened the backdoor and after a quick look, came back in and said it was all clear. Joe and Fred waved as they left the Tavern. Cosmicblasto turned to Poopsie and Lardyme.

“Thank you for your help.”

“You’re very welcome, but we still need to find out how you got to know Fred and Joe. It’s not like they folk from Jodechi.” said Poopsie.

“Yes, we had to keep it secret for so long. That was why we kept on been awkward with you.”

“Well next time tell us. I think Lardyme and I would like to go to their home village too.”

Cosmicblasto didn’t expect this, but knew that in order to keep the peace; he would have to let them come. He was sure that Catwhiskers would think the same way. Just as long as nofolk else have the same idea. He waved to Poopsie and Lardyme and left the Tavern.

Now this was where the fun begins. How to get up the lane towards Frinkstone Hill without been spotted by Alderfolk Pottypears.

The Alderfolk was on the otherside of the village green. He was standing by the edge of the pond. Catwhiskers pointed to Joe and Fred and they moved discreetly amongst the bushes as they made their way towards the lane leading out of the village. They were followed by Cosmicblasto, who felt sure that he had been seen by the Alderfolk. Cosmicblasto knew that the Alderfolk would not be able to cross the pond; he would have to walk around it. That gave them a little bit more time.

They managed to avoid seeing anyfolk and gradually moved away from the village, heading towards Frinkstone Hill.

Alderfolk Pottypears did not appear at the lane, Cosmicblasto was relieved. He hadn't expected to get away with this one.

The trip to Frinkstone Hill went well and they all arrived in good time before the setting sun. They all stood outside the caves. Catwhiskers went inside the cave on his own. After a few minutes, Ethereead came out. He looked refreshed after his rest.

"Hello Fred and Joe" said Ethereead.

"Hello Ethereead." said Joe.

"Hi, Ethereead, how are you now." said Fred.

"Oh, fine. I just got to take you back to the sky, and then I suppose Cosmicblasto is going to shock me again. I nearly fall out of the sky, drop you folk off, and then do it all again coming back. There must be a better way."

"Eh, yes I suppose so." said Joe.

"We will give it some thought" said Fred.

"Blinkers." said Joe

"Ah, yes. I can see those working" said Fred.

"Blinkers". said Catwhiskers.

"What are blinkers." said Cosmicblasto.

"They are a devise which help shields the eyesight from distractions from the sides." said Joe

"They use them on horses, but I can see them working just as well on Ethereead." said Fred.

"Why yes, I can then concentrate on focusing on what is in front of me. That sounds good to me" said Ethereead.

“We will have some ready for you the next time you fly over.” said Joe.

“Yes remember, what I said about coming over in 7 weeks, well we will not be able to see you both until then.” said Fred.

“It’s ok, it gives us a chance to continue our apprenticeships in Buttercup” said Catwhiskers.

“Eh, before we do, Poopsie and Lardyme asked if they could come to your homeland. I think that we have to, be nice to them after they helped us today.” said Cosmicblasto.

“Well I am sure we can handle that, no problem at all” said Joe.

“Yes the more the better, could be a good Christmas.” said Fred.

They all boarded Ethereead, after making themselves steady, Ethereead took a short run and was soon flying over the hills.

Cosmicblasto took the Travel Device out of his shirt pocket and pressed the button. Despite the fact Ethereead was expecting it; the flash still came as a shock. Once again the dragon stooped low but managed to regain normal flight.

The dragon stooped down to land. Joe and Fred got off.

“Yes, Ethereead, you definitely need blinkers. We will have some made ready for you the next time we see you.” said Fred.

“Yes we will, but you had better go now, before it gets dark.” said Joe.

As Ethereead, Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto said their goodbyes. The dragon took a small run and was once again flying.

“Well that was a good trip out” said Joe.

“Yes, Joe, funny old world over there”.

“Time for a beer over at the Blacksmiths Arms.”

“Yes, but it won’t be the same as the brew at the Tavern.”

“Ah, but Poopsie gave me the recipe for that. Just can’t read it.”

“Well, then she will have to make it for us at Christmas.” said Joe

“Yes it could be a good Christmas.” said Fred.

“Certainly be a strange one mate.”

The two old friends took out their walking sticks and proceeded down the hill towards home.

8: CHRISTMAS FOR THE JODECHIANS

THE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS EVE

Joe Spratt was most anxious. It was the day before Christmas Eve and he was waiting on the taxi to arrive that would take his daughter and her family to the airport that would take them to an overseas destination. His Christmas present to them. They were most grateful but wished that Joe would go with them. He kept on saying that he would be spending most of it with his friend Fred Jackson. Everything was arranged with Fred, they would spend Christmas at Fred's home with his children. Joe, despite his age, would be more than happy. The family reluctantly agreed that they would go on their special Christmas holiday.

Now Joe was just waiting for the taxi to come.

There was a peep, everyone started to jump up and down, grabbing bags and suitcases. After everyone had said their goodbyes Joe watched the taxi go down the lane.

Well, stage 1 completed thought Joe. He reached for the telephone and dialled Fred's number. Brrr brrr, brrr brrr, brrr brrr. The phone was picked up.

"Hello "

"Hello Fred, they're gone"

"Ok Joe, on my way round"

Handsets were replaced.

Fred was at the door within 10 minutes. He let himself in, the door been unlocked. Although the home was fitted with an upto date burglar system, the area was relative crime free. No one ever entered other people's home uninvited.

"In the kitchen Fred."

Fred walked in, took off his mac and cap, and sat at the table. Joe had put in front of him a cup of tea.

"Any problems mate"

“No, just kept on asking if I would be alright. Honestly you would think I was a 10 year old”

“Yeah I know what you mean. It is as if you lose all social skills once you retire”

“I would have been more worried if I was leaving them behind”

Fred chuckled.

“Right then, when are the bikes coming” asked Fred

“Well, hopefully this afternoon between 1 and 4 pm”

“Give us enough time to put up the Christmas tree”

Joe gave a chuckle.

“They are away for 10 days, didn’t see the point in putting them up. I couldn’t actually disagree with them. Just need to make sure they are down before they get back. The box is over there, it was in the cupboard under the stairs”

“So that only leaves the problem of the pets”.

“I think the cats will be ok, just make sure the dogs don’t go for them.

“Think they will”

“No, not if we are here”

Fred looked into the box. It contained everything they would need. An artificial tree, streamers, tinsel and lights. A new packet of balloons and pump.

“I think it would have been better if we had a real tree” said Fred

“Yes, but I think the pine needles would fall off”

“I think we can handle that, got a strong hoover.”

“Ok, then. Let’s go down to the farmshop. Pick one up from there”

“Yes, better go down now if we want to get back for the delivery”

“Oh, and one more thing, I think we should put the tv away, put it under the stairs. Least they know about our world the better” said Joe

“Never thought of it that way, good point.”

Both Fred and Joe collected their macs and caps. It was a short walk to the farmshop, but the weather was still chilly despite the mid-morning sun.

They selected a large 6ft tree. They also picked up a mistletoe reef for the door. They were asked if they wanted it delivered, but both Fred and Joe thought they would be able to handle the tree. They left the farmshop and proceeded to go home. They arrived in good time to wait for the delivery of the bikes. They set about decorating the tree.

Meanwhile, over in Buttercup. Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns were hard at work in their apprentices, as were Poopsie Rhinochunks and Lardyme Cootiepants.

Lardyme who worked in the Alderfolk chambers was constantly listening to Alderfolk Pottypears talk about the mysterious giantfolk he thought he had seen a short while ago. If there was one thing Situppy Pottypears did not like, it was strange things happening in his village. Buttercup was a nice village and he wanted it kept that way.

Lardyme kept quiet about the giantfolk. She knew that the Alderfolk was talking about Fred and Joe. Although they had only met once, she had an instant liking to them. Both Poopsie and she had never met more polite gentlefolk. It had taken a while for Poopsie to get all the gossip from Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers. But they told all about the Travel Device and how it worked. They promised that they could go and visit Joe and Fred in their own homeland. Both Poopsie and Lardyme were looking forward to visiting Joe and Fred. For this reason above all other reasons Lardyme kept quiet when Pottypears was talking about seeing the giantfolk.

Poopsie was busy in the Tavern; she was putting away the mugs.

Cosmicblasto walked into the Tavern. He was still wearing his overalls, flour on his nose.

“Hello Popsie. All set for tomorrow.”

“Oh yes, both Lardyme and I are both looking forward to going. Are you sure the Travel Device can cope with the four of us”

“Well, we use it whilst flying on the dragon with Fred, Joe and us two on it.”

“It seems scary to think about it”

“We find it easier to use it whilst flying. We let Etheread do the stabilising. When we use it on our own. You end up crash landing. The only good thing about it, is that you arrive back at the same time as you left”

“So no one will ever miss us”

“No, the only way you know we are going was when we were not pleasant with you”

“Yes I remember”

“Sorry Popsie, but when you go for the first time you will understand why we were like it” said Cosmicblasto.

“So what time tomorrow.”

“After the bakery closes. That way, I can still make the bread and be back in time to make more bread the day after”

“But then when we get back it will be time for me to come to the Tavern. You still get to bed and I have to work.”

“Well, I suppose the best time would be when we are all finish work at the same time. Easier for Lardyme and Catwhiskers, but difficult for us. I start early and you finish late”

“Well I am sure we can fix that at some point” said Popsie.

Cosmicblasto said goodbye to Popsie and left the Tavern. He went down to the Blacksmith where Catwhiskers worked. As he was still wearing his overalls, he called out from outside.

“Catwhiskers”

There was loud hammering noise coming from the forge area. He called again.

“Catwhiskers”

The hammering stopped. Catwhiskers came to the rear double doors.

“Hey, Cosmicblasto, over here.”

Cosmicblasto walked over to the rear doors.

“Hello Cosmicblasto”

“Hello Catwhiskers”

“All set for tomorrow”

“Yeah, not actually working tomorrow got a day off. We have managed to do the wheel ferrings early, so there isn’t anything to do tomorrow, so it’s a day off.”

“Great stuff”

“Well we will meet up after I have finished at the bakery”

“Looking forward to it. I can’t believe that we haven’t used the Travel Device for so long. But I guess it is good to not use it too often. We have had some serious problems over there.”

“Not wrong there Catwhiskers. I wonder what will happen to us over there”

“Well, let’s hope nothing bad happens. Just for once let’s have some fun and games” said Cosmicblasto.

“See you tomorrow then”

“Yes, see you tomorrow. Bye”

With that Cosmicblasto left the Blacksmiths and went back to his bakery. Catwhiskers went back inside and started on his hammering again.

When Cosmicblasto arrived back at the bakery. He opened the ovens. He took out the cake he was making. It looked good. It smelt good. This would be a special cake.

This would make a good present to Fred and Joe.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Joe and Fred surveyed the sitting room. They felt it was now Christmas. They moved the furniture around a little; remember where it was so that they could put it all back in its original spot later. The tree was in the corner, with a little table at the side containing a bowl of assorted nuts and crackers. There were baubles, ribbons and little nikkaks on the tree, with 2 sets of fairy lights. There were streamers running from corner to corner. The balloons were blown and hanging from the ceiling and on the pelmet rail which ran along the walls. Next to the tree were 2 small bikes, both gift-wrapped. These were for Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers. There were also 3 smaller packages. If you had seen them you would have read the names of Poopsie, Lardyme and Ethereead.

Joe and Fred survey the sitting room. They were quite proud of their endeavours.

“Well Fred. Looks like Christmas after all now”

“Yes, looks one to remember. Have you sorted out the sleeping arrangements” asked Fred.

“Well we get to share the big bedroom, Poopsie and Lardyme will be in the girls’ room and Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers can have the bunks in the boys’ room.”

“And what about Ethereead”

“Don’t go there, I haven’t yet.”

“Well the backyard is certainly big enough. We shouldn’t be expecting callers” said Fred.

“So what if we erect that big tent you had for the caravan. Just in case”

“Well, if the dragon comes, it wouldn’t be fair to leave it out on things.”

“How do you entertain a dragon?”

“Dunno mate. How about we go down to the Blacksmith Arms for a beer or 2 before we go and meet them.”

“Well, we are done here. Better put the tent up first though”

“Where is it?”

“In the garage”

Joe and Fred spent the next hour erecting the tent. But it still lacked that homely touch.

But the time was getting on, and they still needed to meet up with their Jodechian friends.

Back in Buttercup, Catwhiskers and Lardyme were in the Tavern. Poopsie was still serving behind the bar, but it was quiet for her. They were all waiting for Cosmicblasto to come in from the bakery.

Very soon, Cosmicblasto came in carrying a cake box.

“Hello everyfolk”

“Hello Cosmicblasto, what is in the box” asked Poopsie.

“It’s a cake I baked for Fred and Joe”

“That’s very thoughtful of you” said Lardyme.

“Yes, having those 2 as friends has certainly made you more responsible” said Poopsie.

“And we still regard it as fun too” said Catwhiskers.

“Which is why you get into so much trouble” said Poopsie.

“Yes especially as Alderfolk Pottypears talks non-stop about the giantfolk he thinks he saw” said Lardyme

“We need to be more careful” said Catwhiskers.

“Well, then are we ready” said Cosmicblasto.

“So where are we going then” said Poopsie

“We are going to Frinkstone Hill, meet up with Ethereead” said Catwhiskers.

“What, fly on the dragon” said Lardyme

“Yes, it’s fun” said Cosmicblasto.

“You will like it” said Catwhiskers.

“Come on; let’s go now before Alderfolk Pottypears goes on his rounds of the village.”

They all left the Tavern and after walking around the village green, walked up the lane.

Alderfolk Pottypears had seen them from his chambers.

They all reached the caves of Frinkstone Hill. They found Ethereead sitting outside the caves.

“Hello Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto. I fill with dread everytime you come here, you known” the dragon said.

“I know” said Cosmicblasto “But I think this could be the last time”

“Oh. What do you mean by that?”

“Well, remember when we were with Fred and Joe and you always had the problem with the flash” said Catwhiskers.

“Yes, it is most annoying. How can a dragon be able to fly truly when I get stunned by the flash?”

“Well, I think Fred and Joe can fix that for you” said Cosmicblasto.

“Oh, and this is Poopsie and Lardyme our friends” said Catwhiskers.

“Hello to you ladies” said Ethereead.

Poopsie and Lardyme had never seen a dragon before, but they felt comfortable in the presence. Certainly Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were very familiar with Ethereead. Which is probably what they were more worried about.

“All aboard then” said Ethereead?

The four Jodechians climbed aboard Ethereead. Catwhiskers showing Poopsie and Lardyme where to hold on. Cosmicblasto gave the cake box to Poopsie. Lardyme and she held it in the middle whilst holding on with their other hand. Cosmicblasto would need to use the Travelling Device.

The dragon enquired if everyfolk was ready, took a small run and was airborne. Both Poopsie and Lardyme gave a whoop of delight. They had for sure never done anything like this before.

Ethereead soared high, the giant wings flapping away. The dragon was getting use to carrying folk. As they flew over the hills Alderfolk Pottypears saw the dragon. He couldn't see who was onboard the dragon. He knew about dragons and although he knew there was one nearby, he was not concerned as the dragon had never come anywhere near Buttercup. But whilst he stood on the ground watching the dragon. He saw a great flash and the dragon disappear.

The dragon, as became routine by now, dropped down. Everyfolk was holding tight, especially Poopsie and Lardyme. They were not used to this as it was the first time they had flown.

Ethereead balanced out and had now settled. The dragon proceeded to fly lower until he approached Churchup and the two people sitting on the bench there. Even from this height, the dragon recognised Fred and Joe before the others did.

The dragon came to a landing spot close by. Everyfolk got off.

“Hello everybody” said Joe

“Hello Poopsie and Lardyme” said Fred.

“Hello Fred and Joe” said Cosmicblasto.

“So everyone here. Jolly good” said Joe.

“Have we got a good time for you lot” said Fred.

“Yes, but we will need to wait until it gets dark” said Joe.

Everybody said down on the bench and Ethereead settled down close by, waiting for the sun to settle down. It would be difficult at normal times to take four very small folk and a dragon, to the village, but as it was Christmas Eve. It might just be a little easier, but still best to wait until darkness crept in.

Joe told everybody of his plan. The idea would be to fly on Ethereead to the village and land in the backyard of the home they would be staying at. The backyard would be surrounded wooded land so it would be hard for anyone to see a dragon there.

Soon enough, the sun fell over the hills of Churchup. Joe and Fred had turned on torches they had thoughtfully brought with them. They all climbed aboard Ethereead. With Joe sitting high up the back of the dragon, to give it directions. Fred sat behind Poopsie and Lardyme. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were at the back. The dragon had never carried six before and was a little worried. But if they didn't use the Travelling Device it felt they should be ok. The dragon took off and soared high up over the hills. Joe gave him a bearing of where to fly and soon enough they were high over Churchup village.

“Ethereead, go low down over the woods, if you fly at treetop level you should be ok.”

“Ok Joe.” The dragon lowered down to the treetops.

“Just take a left, now, then drop down there, see the big tent”

The dragon landed, textbook landing, if a dragon learned to fly by textbook anyway. Everybody got off.

“Welcome to my family’s home” said Joe.

“It’s so big” said Catwhiskers

“Our homes are bigger, but smaller on the inside” said Cosmicblasto.

“Bigger and smaller” said Jack

“We build up higher for an extension. The living area is small for our needs. These windows are so high up” said Cosmicblasto.

“Well, come on inside and take a look around.” said Joe.

“You remember the last time you were here” said Fred.

“Oh we remember it well” said Catwhiskers

“All that snow” said Cosmicblasto

“Ah yes, well that was in my cottage, which is smaller than this house but just as comfortable” said Fred.

“And the snow isn’t due until next month” said Joe

Ethereead was shown into the tent and settled down.

“I am sorry that you have to stop here Ethereead, but there just isn’t the room inside the house” said Joe.

“It’s ok Joe”

“Right everybody inside, but watch out for the dogs” said Joe.

Everybody walked into the house through the kitchen.

“What is that” asked Cosmicblasto

“It’s only the dogs, it’s alright, they quite friendly” said Joe

“Go on stroke them” said Fred

“Oh, look at this range” said Poopsie

“What is that smell” asked Lardyme.

“The meat for tomorrow’s dinner” said Joe

“Ah, Jodechians don’t eat meat” said Lardyme.

“Oh well, then Ethereead can have it then” said Joe.

“Sorry Joe” said Catwhiskers “I suppose we should have said something, and Ethereead is a vegetarian too”

“Yes, as we all had soup the last time. We didn’t think we would be ever coming back again” said Cosmicblasto.

“Not to worry, there are plenty of vegetables” said Joe.

“It’s ok Joe. Poopsie and I will cook dinner tomorrow. We will give you a meal to remember”

“Oh yes, remember that recipe you gave us for the ale” said Jack

“We need you to translate it for us, we couldn’t read it” said Joe

“Yes we got a basic home brew kit, so if you could just help us to make it like yours then that will be good”.

“No problem, we can do that too” said Poopsie.

“Right, if everybody could go into the sitting room” said Joe

Joe led the Jodechians into the darkened room.

“Everybody ready, Ok Fred, lights please”

Fred turned on the Christmas lights.

Catwhiskers, Cosmicblasto, Poopsie and Lardyme whooped with delight, they had never seen such a display. The lights on the

tree flashed on and off, there were musical chimes coming from underneath the tree. The lights on the window were simulating a snowfall.

There were two cats sat by the fire hearth. However after the musical chimes started, they both got up and went into the kitchen.

“Merry Christmas to you all” said Joe

“Merry Christmas” said Fred as he started to give out drinks.

“Just a fruit punch” said Joe

The Jodechians started to sing and dance. Joe and Fred sat down on the sofa. They both had a drink of a little stronger brew.

“Merry Christmas mate”

“Merry Christmas Joe, but I am missing the tv” as they toasted their drinks.

CHRISTMAS DAY

Joe and Fred were the first to wake up on Christmas morning. They washed and shaved, made themselves feel fresh and good for the day ahead.

Poopsie and Lardyme followed soon after, not having actually a change of clothes didn't seem to bother them. Perhaps they hadn't realized how long they were going to be staying here.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were up a little later. Both Joe and Fred chose not to mention what was going to be happening on Christmas morning.

Soon enough everyone was in the kitchen. Poopsie was preparing breakfast of assorted fruits. However, Joe and Fred were having toasted bread. Joe made the tea, which he poured from the teapot into 6 beakers.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers had remembered having the tea the last time there were here during the snow, but this was new to Poopsie and Lardyme.

“There’s sugar there if it is too strong for you” said Joe.

Poopsie took a taste and flicked her tongue. Fred put in two spoons of sugar and stirred the cup.

“Here, try this now”

“Ah much better” she said.

Jack also put in two spoons of sugar into Lardyme’s cup of tea. She tasted it and was quite agreeable.

After breakfast, Joe took the four Jodechians into the lounge. Jack had put on the Christmas tree lights. The flashing bulbs making the room warm, even with the fire heater that Jack had put on earlier.

“Now then, what has Santa Claus brought you for Christmas then” said Joe

“Yes, let’s see what is under the Christmas tree” said Jack

The four Jodechians were silent; they were not expecting anything like this.

Fred pulled out a large object from besides the tree.

“Let’s see what the label says. Ah here it is, it’s for Catwhiskers. I wonder what it is”

“Well, this one here is labelled for Cosmicblasto. And as they are pretty much the same sized present, why not open them at the same time” said Joe.

Fred had his camera ready. Joe and Fred had discussed the wisdom of taking photographs of the Jodechians. But knowing that they didn’t have to take the film to be processed at a chemist. They agreed it would be ok. Providing they kept them secret, away from normal albums and they should be ok. God bless digital cameras.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers took hold of the presents. They had no idea what they were. They were gaily wrapped in paper that had scenes very much what they were in at the moment.

“Go on fellas, unwrap them” said Joe.

They started to tear into the wrapping paper. As they were doing this Fred was taking photos. Being a digital camera, Fred had the settings on high-speed, so no flash was needed. He didn't want to spook them by mistake.

Both presents were unwrapped and both Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were standing alongside gleaming, shining bicycles.

“Joe, these really ours” said Catwhiskers.

“Sure Catwhiskers, Merry Christmas” said Joe

“Merry Christmas” said Jack.

“Ok Poopsie and Lardyme, your turn now” said Joe

Joe reached down and picked up two parcels, and handed one each to Poopsie and Lardyme.

After seeing Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto unwrap their presents, they knew what to do. They unwrapped the presents to reveal an identical cardigan each.

“Merry Christmas” said Joe and Fred.

“Hope the size is right, difficult to remember” said Jack.

“Oh, they're lovely” said Lardyme

“Yes, they are” said Poopsie.

“But what are they” asked Lardyme.

“And what is Christmas” asked Poopsie.

“Well one thing at a time” said Joe.

Fred took the cardigan from Poopsie, un-done the buttons and wrapped it around her. Poopsie fastened the buttons. Lardyme watching followed suit.

“When these two got caught by the circus, they had learned to ride bicycles. And as we know they don’t have bikes in Jodechi we thought it would be perfect for them” said Joe

“Take them out back and try them out” said Jack.

“Come on, lets do it then” said Catwhiskers.

Joe picked up the last present from underneath the Christmas tree and followed the others outside into the back yard where they had left Ethereead.

Ethereead was nowhere to be seen.

“Ethereead must have gone for a flight” said Joe.

“Don’t like the sound of that, hope everything will be ok”.

Meanwhile Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers had mounted the bikes and were riding hard up and down the paving near the garage. With both dogs chasing them up and down the paving. Both Poopsie and Lardyme were amazed. They had never seen anything like that before.

At this point, Ethereead came swooping down and climbed away.

“Hope nobody sees that” said Fred.

“Hopefully, whoever does, will think they are still drunk from last night.”

“Yeah, just what we would have been Joe”.

The dragon swooped down again but this time landed down besides everybody.

“Hello everyfolk” said Ethereead.

“Good morning Ethereead” said Jack.

“And Merry Christmas” said Joe and gave the dragon a small parcel. The dragon held unsure of what to do. Opening a present isn’t something a dragon does. Joe took the present off Ethereead and opened it. He climbed up the dragon’s back.

“Now then. Let’s hope we got the measurements right” said Joe

The helmet fitted perfectly. It went over the dragon’s head, its ears sticking through the slots, and this lined up the eyeholes. The eyeholes were specially designed so that the dragon would only see ahead. There was also a strap that fitted under the jaws of the dragon.

“Hey, this is really good” said Ethereead.

Yes, now Cosmicblasto can press the Travel Device and not cause you to lose control of your flying” said Joe.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were still riding their bikes and didn’t notice the dragon’s present.

“Hey you two come here, and give Poopsie and Lardyme a ride,” said Jack.

“I don’t think we could do that” said Poopsie.

“Oh am sure you will have a little practice” said Joe.

“To start with try standing at the back” said Jack.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers had stopped and allowed both Poopsie and Lardyme to mount the back of the bikes. Poopsie took hold of Catwhiskers shoulders. Lardyme likewise on the back of Cosmicblasto.

“Now you two, just start slowly, pedalling along the path” said Joe

They did just that, nice and slow, keeping the balance like they had been riding bikes for years.

“Whoa, think I am going to fall” said Poopsie

“Ok, just keep your feet still but let your arms follow Catwhiskers movement. You too Lardyme” said Joe

Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto reached the end of the paving and turned around and proceeded to come back to where Joe and Fred were standing. They reached the end and again turned around. Cosmicblasto took a look at Catwhiskers. Catwhiskers smiled back. He knew what was going to happen next, and soon enough they were racing down the paving. Both Poopsie and Lardyme were holding on tight, but it was Catwhiskers reached the end first. Poopsie jumped off the bike. Lardyme likewise.

“Hey, how come you always spoil it” said Poopsie.

“Ok you guys, you will get used to it after some practice” said Joe

Poopsie and Lardyme walked back towards Joe and Jack whilst Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers continued to ride the bikes.

“So what is Christmas about” asked Lardyme.

“Well, to put it in a nutshell, we celebrate Christmas as the day of the birth of Christ.” Said Jack

“Traditionally, it is an end of year celebration where families exchange presents, have special meals” said Joe.

“We don’t really have anything like this on Jodechi” said Lardyme.

“Different cultures have different celebrations” said Joe

“So what do you usually have for a special meal” asked Poopsie.

“Well, normally, it’s a Turkey, with lamb, beef, and pork, with roasties and vegetables. A Christmas pudding and brandy sauce. Then you have things like nuts and dates” said Joe.

“Yes little things that you don’t have normally during the year” said Jack

“So what are you cooking for the main meal” asked Lardy.

“Well, we know that you don’t eat meat or poultry, so it’s just a vegetable dinner, not really very exciting” admitted Joe.

“Well, we will cook something for you” said Poopsie

“That would be very nice Poopsie, thank you” said Jack.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were still riding down the paving; Ethereead decided to try out his present and took off again. The others went back into the kitchen.

“Well, here’s everything” said Joe pointing out the kitchen to Poopsie and Lardyme.

“Yes, I see, well you go and settle down whilst Lardyme and I do the meal”.

Joe and Fred went into the lounge; they felt like a sore thumb at the moment.

“How long do you think it will take to get the dinner done” said Joe?

“Dunno mate, but I reckon, we could sneak out for a beer or 2 at the Blacksmiths Arms.”

“Think we could. I mean we have two little guys outside on bikes, a flying dragon”

“Yeah you are right, what could possibly go wrong”

“Everything I suppose”

“Oh well, I suppose we could always open a 4pack”.

Poopsie and Lardyme had indeed provided a feast. They had taken the nuts from the bowl, mixed them with cabbage, potatoes and carrots. They then baked it, and then cooked over the vegetables. However, Fred had insisted on still having the stuffing. Poopsie, after tasting the stuffing, created a centre point in the nut bake and sealed the opening.

When the meal was ready, Joe went outside and called in Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers. Even Ethereead has settled down and he was still wearing his helmet.

Joe had set the table for the 6 of them, with paper hats and crackers. There was a centre piece of candles. Poopsie brought in the nut bake. With Lardyme bringing out a tray with the other

vegetables on it. After that, they all tucked into the cake that Cosmicblasto had made at the bakery. Very soon, everyone was settled down.

Fred took out a dog bowl full of the meal to Etheread, and Joe took bowls for the dogs and cats.

Fred took more photographs of the Jodechians all sitting around the table wearing party hats and pulling crackers. When they went off with a bang they were all startled.

The meal passed smoothly, and before too long, everybody was sat in the lounge, feeling bloated and happy. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were so exhausted from their bike riding that they fell asleep. Poopsie and Lardyme were settled down too.

“Come on Joe, washing up time”.

They both went into the kitchen and survey the work surfaces and table.

“This is always the worse part” said Joe.

“Have you noticed anything” asked Jack

“You mean, having 4 strange miniature people, a dragon, on Christmas day with and not forgetting the cats and dogs who have adjusted to having them here”

“Your problem Joe is that you haven’t had any alcohol for two days”

“Not wrong there mate. Ok then, what have I missed”

“They haven’t been to the khazi once”

“Oh, yeah, now that you mention it”

“Well, I am not going to ask”

“Then we will never know.”

“Remember when the Alderfolk gave them a baby, and we asked about making a baby”

“Perhaps they don’t make a baby because they don’t have any of the tackle”

“Which is why they don’t go to the khazi? Imagine Joe, imagine, consuming all but never getting rid of the waste. Digest everything, no waste”.

“It would be a good system, especially in the pub”

“Yes it does sound like a good system” said Fred.

They proceeded to do the washing up.

BOXING DAY

The next morning followed in the same pattern as the previous day. Poopsie and Lardyme again prepared a breakfast of fruits, and this time they did the toast. Catwhiskers was sat watching the toast, waiting for it to pop up. Lardyme was watching the kettle boiling, waiting to make the tea.

Joe and Fred were sat in the sitting room; Fred was toying with the TV remote control.

“Still missing the tv” asked Joe

“Early kick-off on the box” said Fred.

“Wouldn’t be good to have them turn into square eyes”

“I spent the night dreaming of loads of police and TV cameras, all looking for the dragon that had been seen in the sky”

“I know what you mean Fred. I was worried about it. Just goes to show that when you are in the countryside, it does shut down at times.”

“How on earth have we got away with it” asked Fred

“We haven’t yet. Got to get today over with. There will be a few more people around today”

“So when will be the best time to send them back?”

“When it get’s dark I suppose, remember, it’s past the mid-winter point, so it won’t be dark until nearly 4 o’clock”.

“So what do we do in the meantime?”

“Pretty much the same as yesterday I suppose” said Joe

“Well I expect that Poopsie and Lardyme will get bored watching them on the bikes”

“Well, we can hardly do anything else, not like we can go and visiting friends. The least contact with people the better”

“What a poser” said Fred.

Cosmicblasto came into the room.

“Hey Fred, Joe, Poopsie asked me to tell you that tea is up”

“Thanks Cosmicblasto” said Joe

They both got up and followed Cosmicblasto into the kitchen. Poopsie had laid the table with the fruits, toast and the tea.

“Thanks Poopsie, this looks good” said Joe

After breakfast, Poopsie and Lardyme took the plates into the sink and proceeded to wash them. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers went out into the garage and took out the bikes. At once they started to ride them up and down the paving. Joe and Fred were still sat at the table. When Poopsie and Lardyme had finished drying up they also sat at the table.

“So what are we going to be doing today” asked Lardyme

“Don’t know really” said Joe

“Yesterday was fun, and to be honest it was a good day but now you go into the next day, things get a little tricky. Traditionally today is about visiting friends and family” said Fred

“And we don’t know what to do” said Joe

“Yes it can be difficult knowing for the best” said Poopsie.

“There’s even a chance that Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers could even get caught on the bikes” said Joe

“I guess we need to back to Jodechi” said Lardyme.

“Very much our thoughts” said Fred.

“Sadly” said Joe.

They all went outside. Joe was surprised to see that Ethereead was still in the tent. He went up and stroked the dragon on the bridge of his nose. He was still wearing his helmet.

“Surprised to see you here Ethereead”

“I was flying earlier but got spooked by a metal bird. Mind you I think the metal bird got spooked by me, it went dropping down just like what I get when they use the flash”

“Oh dear, well that settles it then. You are going to have to leave soon. Just can’t risk the publicity we will get if we get seen” said Fred.

“How are we going to get there with the bikes” asked Catwhiskers.

“Yes, don’t want to leave them behind” said Cosmicblasto.

“I don’t think that will be a problem. We can get some rope from the garage, we can tie them down” said Joe.

Joe went into the garage and came out with the rope. He went up to Ethereead.

“Ethereead, can we tie these bikes over your back”

“Yes sure Joe”

Ethereead lowered himself down. Joe fastened a bike on one end of the rope. The other end of the rope he passed to Fred who passed it back underneath the dragon’s body. After two more

passes secured the other bike to the dragons other side. A rope was then passed around and secured the bikes to the belly side of the dragon.

“How does that feel” asked Joe

“It seems ok. Not uncomfortable at all” said Ethereead.

“And still plenty of room on top for you lot” said Joe.

Poopsie and Lardyme climbed onto the top of the dragons back. Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto climbed onto the back of the dragon.

Ethereead then climbed up and after flapping the wings, managed to lift up with having to take a short run. Ethereead then lowered down to a landing.

“A move I have been practicing. Knowing there isn’t much room for a conventional running take off” said Ethereead.

“Well at least you can do it ok” said Fred.

“Thanks for a lovely Christmas” said Lardyme

“Yes it was really nice” said Poopsie.

“Sorry you have to go, but it is safer for everyone” said Joe

“It’s ok, we understand” said Catwhiskers.

“We will see you again soon” said Cosmicblasto.

“Sure we will” said Fred

“Hey, fellas, be careful with those bikes, and don’t forget what I told you about what to do if you get a puncture” said Joe

“I won’t, after my work in the blacksmith it would be quite easy to make the repairs” said Catwhiskers.

“And thanks for the cake Cosmicblasto” said Fred.

Above them in the sky, a helicopter could be heard, Joe ushered Ethereead into the tent as it passed over.

“Got to go soon” said Fred.

They waited until the helicopter was out of sight.

“Fortunately it was heading east. You need to proceed west towards the hills then South. When you see the bench, then press the Travel Device” said Joe

“Ok, got that. Let’s hope the helmet works” said Ethereead.

“Right, Joe, bring them out” said Fred.

Joe led the loaded dragon out.

“Good luck going back” said Joe.

The dragon flapped the wings and raised itself up towards tree top level. The Jodechians all waved down to Joe and Jack. Then it was gone, Ethereead flew level with the tree tops then swooped upwards. Both Joe and Fred were watching as the dragon climbed up and heading westward. It was followed a few minutes later by the helicopter. The helicopter had flown over the house but did not hover over the property. It had appeared that the crew in the helicopter had no idea that the dragon was there.

“Well, that went better then expected” said Joe

“Blacksmith Arms” said Jack

“Thought you were never going to ask” said Joe.

The dragon flew as was expected, west towards the hills then south to where the bench on Churchup Hill was. However unbeknown to anyfolk on the dragon they were followed from a distance by the helicopter. The crew of the helicopter were astounded by the sudden flash and the disappearance of the dragon.

Alderfolk Pottypears was astounded aswell. He had seen a flash and the dragon disappear. But moments later, he was more astounded to see another flash and the dragon return. Only this

time the dragon was flying in completely the opposite direction, and although he thought nothing of it he was sure there were something strapped on the side of the dragon. It was getting late and the Alderfolk needed to get back to Buttercup. But this needed to be investigated, but it could be saved for another day. Cosmicblasto had used the Travel Device without telling Ethereead he was going to. Amazingly the dragon was not affected by the flash. Ethereead was pleased by this. The dragon proceeded to fly to the caves at Frinkstone Hill. However nobody was aware that they were seen by Alderfolk Pottypears.

The dragon touched down, lowered down and allowed everyfolk to get off. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers took off the bikes.

“What do we do with this” asked Cosmicblasto.

“Put the rope inside the caves, we may need it another time” said Catwhiskers.

Cosmicblasto went into the caves, where Ethereead was putting on the water pot onto the angle.

“Put the rope over there in the corner” said Ethereead.

Cosmicblasto put it in the corner, without rolling it up.

“Aw come on, roll it up Cosmicblasto.

Cosmicblasto let out a little sigh and rolled up the rope, tying it off in the middle and placed it back in the corner.

They both went back outside and joined the others. Catwhiskers had held both bikes. Cosmicblasto took his and climbed onto it.

“Lardyme stand on the back just as you did yesterday. Poopsie you do the same to Catwhiskers”

“Just be careful when riding then” said Lardyme.

They waved goodbye to Ethereead and proceeded to ride down the hills towards Buttercup.

9: THE WAY HOME

Lardyme Cootiepants screamed as she held on to Cosmicblasto Monkeynose. Cosmicblasto was riding hard down the hill. Catwhiskers Picklebuns, with Poopsie Rhinochunks holding on for dear life wasn't too far behind.

As they all carried on down the hill, Cosmicblasto suddenly stopped; Catwhiskers came to a halt next to his friend.

"What's the matter" asked Catwhiskers.

"I think I have just seen someone go around the next bend."

"Who would be up here, especially as it is getting dark" asked Lardyme.

"Don't know but we may have to be careful from now on"

Lardyme and Poopsie got off the bikes, allowing both Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers to get off to. They proceeded to walk down the hill. They reached the bend where Cosmicblasto had seen what he saw.

"Lardyme, have a quick look around that pile of rocks"

"Ok Catwhiskers".

Lardyme went to the rocks, she came back looking aghast.

"It's Alderfolk Pottypears"

"Can't be, what would he want up here" said Cosmicblasto.

"He must be looking for us" said Catwhiskers.

"But how"

"Never mind that, if the Alderfolk catches us we are all in trouble and I will lose my position in the Alderfolk Chambers" said Lardyme.

"And I should be in the Tavern by now. It is a good job that Zippy Toadkisser is also working tonight" said Poopsie.

“I need to be in the bakery early in the morning too.”

“Well, then I suppose we had better be careful” said Catwhiskers.

“Quick Lardyme, take another look, see if he is still walking down” asked Cosmicblasto.

Lardyme took another look around the pile of rocks. She stayed there for a little while. She signalled for everyfolk to come to her. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers wheeled the bikes over.

“He’s gone further down, but nearly too far to notice us.”

“Right, so we need to stay to the left side, as it gets darker, we will be in the shadow” said Catwhiskers.

“Right then, quietly does it” said Cosmicblasto.

Everyfolk were quiet. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were gently wheeling the bikes. The rubber tubes wheels made very little sound as they rolled over. It was times like this that they were glad they didn’t have the wheels on the carts. They made loads of noise whilst rolling over the gravel on the tracks.

Alderfolk Pottypears was deep in thought. He was getting tired, but was still wondering at what he had seen. He was aware of the dragon on Frinkstone Hill. He was also aware that the dragon had kept itself to itself. The dragon had not made any attempt to fly into Buttercup, so Alderfolk Pottypears had not bothered to investigate it further. But it was clear that somefolk had. Now he wanted to know who that folk were. There were nofolk in Buttercup who would even know of the dragon, nofolk had ever ventured out, the folk who worked the land stayed on the land without travelling out. Folk who had travelled out to the next village usually went the other way. Nofolk would generally travel this way. But somefolk did. The Alderfolk continued his travels and his thoughts.

Meanwhile, despite all attempts to stay in the shadows and hampered by the bicycles, it became apparent that they were catching up with Alderfolk Pottypears.

“We have to stop” said Lardyme.

“It wouldn’t do to get seen this far out of Buttercup” said Poopsie.

“I could do with a rest anyway. We are suppose to ride these bicycles, not walk them” said Cosmicblasto

“He must have followed us up here earlier” said Catwhiskers

“Yes, I was thinking that too” said Cosmicblasto

“I think we have been getting careless with the Travel Device”

“Yes, I have to agree with you there Catwhiskers.”

“I wonder what he saw. Did the Alderfolk actually see us disappear then re-appear”

“With us flying on the dragon.”

“Lardyme, does the Alderfolk know of Etheread” asked Catwhiskers.

“The Alderfolk hasn’t said anything, but I think I may have seen some of the documents in the files regarding a dragon that was on the hill. I will try and find out more”

“Thanks Lardyme” said Cosmicblasto

“You be very careful Lardyme” said Poopsie

“I think we will all be in trouble if he finds out” said Lardyme

“Yes, but don’t get caught sneaking through files that don’t concern you” said Poopsie.

“To be fair, the Alderfolk does give me access to mostly everything. There nothing really secret, just the history of Buttercup mainly”

After a short while, everyfolk got up and started to proceed down the hill, again keeping in the shadows. The Alderfolk had continued down the track, but was now climbing up to the next hill. All the time it was getting darker but every step took him nearer to Buttercup and his chambers.

Catwhiskers, Cosmicblasto, Lardyme and Poopsie had all reached the bottom of the hill. They could see the Alderfolk climbing up the hill.

“This is going to take all night” said Catwhiskers

“I wish I knew if there was an alternative way around this” said Cosmicblasto.

“I think there is” said Lardyme

“There is” said Catwhiskers

“Yes, on the wall in the Alderfolk’s office, there is a local map, chiefly of Buttercup, but it shows the hills in the background”

“Well, go on then” said Cosmicblasto

“Well, if we took the way around the bottom of the hill, we could get in front of Alderfolk Pottypears when he is coming down the otherside”

“Well, we are going faster then he is, despite your bicycles” said Poopsie

“Ok then, Lardyme lead the way” said Cosmicblasto

Lardyme led the way around the base of the hill heading in an eastward direction. The terrain was rugged, much rougher then the track going up the hill. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were both struggling with their bicycles, and again were grateful the wheels were made the way they were.

They stopped dead. There was a strange sound, a screeching sound. Everyfolk looked at each other. The sound came again.

“Doesn’t that sound like a Lottodung” asked Poopsie

“Don’t know, never seen one” said Cosmicblasto

“A Lottodung is a creature of the night” said Lardyme

“What sort of creature” asked Catwhiskers

“Well, according to Alderfolk Pottypears, it’s not a creature you want to meet” said Lardyme.

“What kind of creature is it then?”

“Well, it’s got black fur, got claws for feet, and a beak type mouth. I think that they are horrible but harmless. It’s just the sound of the sqark.”

“Sounds gruesome” said Catwhiskers

“Apparently they are quite tame, just scary because they only come out at night” said Cosmicblasto.

“Well, let’s hope we don’t meet one then” said Poopsie.

Once again the Lottodung screeched. This time it was louder so it must be closer. There was very little daylight left, but there was movement just ahead. The folk stopped. The creature screeched again. Everyfolk stood still, but the creature had seen them and came towards them, still screeching.

The Lottodung was as described, black fur, clawed feet, but with strange like arms with no hands or fingers, but like a flap. If Fred or Joe were here they would have said it was a cross between a cat and a pigeon.

The creature came upto Cosmicblasto first and screeched again, but this time it was a softer sound. The Lottodung began to rub itself up again Cosmicblasto’s leg.

“It wants to be stroked” said Poopsie.

“What?” said Catwhiskers

“It wants to be stroked” repeated Poopsie

“Go on, Cosmicblasto, stroke the Lottodung” said Catwhiskers

Cosmicblasto reached down and stroked the head of the Lottodung. It appeared to be responsive. The Lottodung seemed to like been stroked. Seeing that, both Poopsie and Lardyme bent down and stroked the creature.

“All those notes in Alderfolk Pottypears files must be wrong. They say that the Lottodung is a harmless but not a docile creature”

“Well this one appears to be quite docile” said Poopsie

“But we must go on” said Lardyme.

Everyfolk left the Lottodung alone and carried on along the side of the hill. The Lottodung continued to screech.

“Are there going to be more creatures” asked Cosmicblasto

“Not that I am aware of” said Lardyme.

“Good, well let’s get on then” said Catwhiskers.

“Do you think we could start to ride the bicycles again?”

“Maybe, when we can get down to that spot there where the rocks stop. Then its smooth run on the grass”

“Ok, you know its times like this I miss Fred and Joe”

“Yes, I bet things would have been much easier with them around” said Catwhiskers.

They continued to struggle around the side of the hill, but reached the spot where the rocks stopped. Cosmicblasto mounted his bike and Lardyme climbed on, as did both Catwhiskers and Poopsie. They started to pedal, but at a slower speed than they would normally have done. The darkness was nearly complete and as they hadn’t got anything to light the way, they were been careful. Even Lardyme enjoyed the journey.

Alderfolk Pottypears had reached the peak of the hill and was now just starting the downward journey. As he was starting he thought he had seen some movements at the bottom of the hill. Although it was too far off, it was another strange event for a strange day, and again it set him off thinking. But nothing he thought off could explain any of the events he had seen this day.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were cycling along the grass in a careful manner, unaware that they were seen by the Alderfolk.

Soon enough they had reached the track at the bottom of the hill. They started to pick up speed and cycled towards Buttercup.

They had managed to reach Buttercup; they cycled down to the village green and past the Alderfolk Chambers. They had noticed that there were no lights on. They had made it. They had got past the Alderfolk. They stopped outside the Tavern.

Poopsie and Lardyme had got off the back of the bicycles.

“Thanks for the ride” said Poopsie

“And the trip to yonder. That was a good time we spent with Fred and Joe” said Lardyme.

“Yes, these Cardigans are really warm” said Poopsie.

“Well, let’s hope we can go back again soon” said Catwhiskers.

“I, don’t think I will” said Lardyme

“Oh, why not” asked Cosmicblasto

“Too risky, everytime you go you nearly get into trouble. We nearly got caught by the Alderfolk. I don’t want to lose my position”

“Well, that’s a shame I suppose” said Catwhiskers.

“Give my regards to Fred and Joe the next time you see them”

“Me too, if Lardyme is not going then I won’t go either” said Poopsie.

“You too” said Cosmicblasto.

“Yeah to be fair, it’s your little game” said Lardyme.

“Too dangerous for us” said Poopsie.

“Well, we need to get back” said Cosmicblasto.

“Yes, we got to get back up the lane before Alderfolk Pottypears reaches the bottom of the hill.”

“Bye then” said Poopsie

“See you tomorrow” said Lardyme.

Both Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers shouted bye back whilst riding off.

Not too long after Alderfolk Pottypears came into view at the top of the village green. He was staring backwards as though he had seen something. This was certainly a strange day.

“Good evening Alderfolk Pottypears”

“Oh, eh, ah Good evening Lardyme. You are out late”

“I was helping out Poopsie in the Tavern. It is good to help folk Alderfolk Pottypears. Good night”

“Yes good night”

Lardyme was a good Jodechian, the Alderfolk was pleased that she was working in the chambers with him. He needed good reliable folk around him, especially on strange days.

10: THE ENTERTAINERS

Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns knew they had a lucky escape. It was apparent that Alderfolk Pottypears had become suspicious of unusual activities. Now they had decided to lie-low for a while. Put the Travel Device away and concentrate on their work. Cosmicblasto had become quite competent at baking, he, naturally took great pride in his cakes aswell as the bread he baked. Catwhiskers had taken to making strange objects from the spare bits of metal in the blacksmith's workshop.

Catwhiskers had the idea of making obstacles to perform tricks whilst riding the bikes. He remembered the tricks he had done whilst with the circus. He had made a see-saw, where the rider would ride up one end and down the other. There was also the hoop on the stand where the rider would ride up a ramp and then through the hoop. He had quite liked that one and was looking forward to trying it out. There were other obstacles that he had worked on, but wasn't sure if they would work in practise.

Both Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers had kept their bicycles in the blacksmith's workshop. They were locked in the rear workshop. The blacksmith, Codwing Gerbiltushie hardly ever went in there. This was due to the workshop been just used as a storage area and the fetching and carrying of items from there was, as far as Codwing cared, Catwhiskers' job. So he never found the bicycles.

Every evening, Cosmicblasto went to the blacksmiths to ride the bicycles with Catwhiskers. However, after the church gathering, they spent all day in the workshop. On this day both Lardyme Cootiepants and Poopsie Rhinochunks joined them with a small picnic hamper.

Catwhiskers had arranged the workshop into a track that allowed different tricks to be performed then move onto another trick. He set up the see-saw trick, the ramp and hoop trick, with a ramp leading down on the otherside of the hoop. There was also a ramp set up with a leap over ale kegs.

Throughout this time, they also practised the juggling balls, but they still found it hard to cycle and juggle at the same time.

But Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers decided that whilst one of them did a trick on the bike the other would be juggling and then swop over. Another trick was where Poopsie and Lardyme would stand on the back of the bicycles. It was scary at first but they got well use to doing the tricks.

What they both really wanted to do was put on a show for the folk of Buttercup, just as they did for the folk of Churchup when they were with the circus. The best chance of that was when Alderfolk Pottypears was away collecting an arrivalfolk. It would be a shame that he would have to miss the show, but it was safer.

“Picnic ready” called out Lardyme

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers rode up the table that had been set up. They dismounted and let the bicycles lay on the ground.

“Looks nice” said Cosmicblasto

“Should be, you baked it” said Poopsie

“The vegetables too”

“Ha, funny ha ha” said Lardyme

“I know what taste better” said Cosmicblasto

“Lardyme When does Alderfolk Pottypears go on his trip” asked Catwhiskers.

“Next church gathering. It’s a special occasion this time”

“Right, well let’s set up the obstacles on the village green”

“Yes, Catwhiskers, that would be a good place to have a little show. Folk can all stand along the edge of the village green” said Cosmicblasto.

“Well, just remember, everything has to be away before the Alderfolk gets back, we will all be in trouble” said Poopsie

“Especially me, I feel so bad working for the Alderfolk then giving you information as to when and where he is. It’s not right.”

“Well, it’s not like we are causing trouble” said Cosmicblasto.

“You jump from place to place, bringing back strange contractions, nearly get caught, and not once. Your luck will run out soon” said Lardyme.

The folk enjoyed their picnic and after clearing away, they collected up the bicycles and after securing the workshop left for home.

The next church gathering, both Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers did not go. They made excuses to their parentfolk about having to work that day as Alderfolk Pottypears was making a special arrivalfolk. Their parentfolk happily accepted their excuse as it was with the approval of Alderfolk Pottypears.

Catwhiskers had used the Shethorse and cart to carry the obstacles. These obstacles were set up in the manner they were set up in the workshop, as the village green was much larger than the workshop. The obstacles were further apart. Catwhiskers had also placed a long rope around the arena. He wanted the space to do his tricks without

When the church gathering had ended and the folk were leaving their attention was caught by the sight on the village green. The sound of a fanfare from a badly played horn by Cosmicblasto also brought folk around the village green.

Catwhiskers was standing in the middle of the green, he was juggling the balls. Folk had seen him and stood near him. They were surprised at the skills been shown.

“Roll up, roll up” shouted Cosmicblasto

He had the attention of all the folk.

“Gather around for the thrill of the day. Watch in amazement as Catwhiskers, and yours truly astound with displays on our bicycles”

Cosmicblasto had remembered the way to say the words from the circus master.

Catwhiskers tossed the balls to Cosmicblasto then climbed onto his bicycle. Cosmicblasto started to juggle the balls as, the bike rider rode around the inside of the roped area. The folk whooped with delight. They had never seen anything like this before. As Catwhiskers rode past, everyfolk clapped and cheered. Although Lardyme and Poopsie were with the folk they cheered the loudest. They were really impressed with their friends.

Catwhiskers rode to the first obstacle, the see-saw. He stopped and looked around before pushing himself off and rode up the see-saw ramp. He paused at the top and allowed the see-saw to lower down on the other side before riding down. The folk like this and showed their approval. Cosmicblasto was wowing the folk too with his juggling skills. He started on juggling 2 balls, then 3 balls and was now using all 4 balls, high into the air. Every ball was caught whilst another ball was sent up; at the same pitch the 2 other balls had reached a peak and were on the way back down. Each ball was caught and sent back up again seamlessly.

Catwhiskers had moved on to the hoop obstacle. The rider rode up the ramp rather fast and flew off the end of the ramp, through the hoop and down onto the ramp at the other end. The folk loved this and were shouting for him to do it again. Catwhiskers loved this and he rode around the green and took a long fast run up the ramp and whoosh through the hoop again, down onto the ramp. Again the folk cheered and clapped. Catwhiskers rode up to Cosmicblasto and after getting off the bike stood by the juggler and seamlessly took over from Cosmicblasto on the juggle. The folk again loved this.

Cosmicblasto took his bicycle and started to ride around.

“Lardyme” Cosmicblasto called out

Lardyme ran into the roped off area and climbed onto the back of the bike. She stood on the rear wheel spindle, holding onto the shoulders of Cosmicblasto. Once happy she was secure, he set off.

He started to ride around the green, having two folk on the bike impressed the folk watching and they cheered their approval.

Cosmicblasto knew how fast to go with Lardyme on the back, and not going too fast rode up the see-saw, The folk watched as the bike stopped at the peak and waited for the see-saw to lower down. Cosmicblasto rode off and turned around to face the hoop

“Ready Lardyme”

“Ready Cosmicblasto”

“Ok here goes”

Cosmicblasto rode fast, pushing the pedals and when he reached the top of the ramp, Lardyme screamed as the cycle went through the hoop and down onto the other ramp. Lardyme held on tight, but she was excited. The folk were excited too, as they cheered and clapped the display. Cosmicblasto rode around to where the juggling Catwhiskers was standing. Lardyme jumped off.

Catwhiskers jumped back on his bicycle, Cosmicblasto and he rode around together, then Cosmicblasto turned and rode the opposite direction. With both bicycles travelling at each other it looked liked they would crash into each other, but having practised the display, they passed each other as close as they could possibly be with colliding with each other. Everytime they passed the folk cheered their approval.

Then they rode around and with what seemed like no time at all, Catwhiskers rode up the ramp and through the hoop, whilst Cosmicblasto was riding up the ramp almost straight away. He too passed through the hoop and down onto the ramp. But what happened after that, the bicycles rode around the green and back on the ramp towards the hoop, this time it was Cosmicblasto in the lead and Catwhiskers was behind him straight away. The folk liked this trick.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers went around the final trick. The ale kegs. Catwhiskers set up the trick with 6 ale kegs, even though they have not jumped over 4 ale kegs. This was due to mainly to the space in the workshop. But they had agreed that 6 ale kegs should be fine as when they landed it was judged to have that limit.

Cosmicblasto went first, he rode around the trick before allowing himself a good run, satisfied that he was ready he rode up to the

ramp, then pedalling faster he leapt over the ale kegs and landed down on the ramp, continuing to ride down over the village green. The folk whooped with delight. It was now Catwhiskers' turn. He, like Cosmicblasto rode around to pick up a little speed and power. He approached the ramp and stormed over the ale kegs. Again the folk liked the trick. They both cycled around and to everyfolk amazement, they both rode up the ramp and leapt the ale kegs together, landing on the ramps and Cosmicblasto turned to the left whilst Catwhiskers turned to the right and both circling the roped area. The folk cheered and clapped. They had never seen such entertainment.

Lardyme looked concerned and she was indicating to the lane heading up the hill. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers knew this meant it was the end of the show. They had to clear everything away before Alderfolk Pottypears returned with the arrivalfolk.

They both dismounted and stood before the cheering folk.

“Thank you, thank you” shouted Cosmicblasto

“Thank you, it was a pleasure to perform tricks for you all today” said Catwhiskers.

“We would like to do more but unfortunately, we need to clear away before the darkness falls” said Cosmicblasto.

Everyfolk started to clear from the village green. They were all talking about what they had just seen and were now going to their homes; some of them would be getting ready for the arrivalfolk celebration with Alderfolk Pottypears.

“Well Cosmicblasto, that was really brilliant”

“Yes, it all went well, I was really surprised we didn't fall off at some point”

“Come on; let's get this cleared away before Alderfolk Pottypears gets back”

“Yes, it was a shame that he couldn't watch. Sometimes I feel that without his approval we are doing a great wrong” said Cosmicblasto

“I know what you mean, but I fear it would jeopardize Lardyme position”

“Yeah, where are they anyway”

“They went off in the direction of the Tavern. I think that it helps not to have them near us when we are doing something that Alderfolk Pottypears would disapprove off” said Catwhiskers

“Well, Catwhiskers, let’s get all this back on the cart”

“I would have liked Fred and Joe to have watched this aswell”

“Well, maybe the next time we go over yonder”

“We can’t take the bicycles”

“Well, maybe they can get us another set of bicycles and keep them on that side”

“Hey Catwhiskers, you know that would be good”

“Good, better then what we have just done”

“Yeah, imagine if we had used the Travel Device whilst riding through the loop, then used it to come back straight away”

“I think that would be a trick to far”

“I suppose to. I will go and get the Shethorse” said Cosmicblasto.

Cosmicblasto pulled over the Shethorse and cart. They loaded the ale kegs first then the ramps and finally the hoop and stand. They then lead the Shethorse away to the rear workshop at the blacksmiths. As they disappeared down the lane towards the workshop, Alderfolk Pottypears was arriving at the Chambers.

The Alderfolk went into the offices before going into the Tavern with the arrivalfolk. He came out a few minutes later with a file cover. He took the bundle from his cart and walked off towards the Tavern. However, as he was walking towards the Tavern he noticed something strange on the village green.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers reached the workshop and emptied the cart.

“Cosmicblasto”

“Yes”

“Where are the bicycles” asked Catwhiskers

“They not on the cart”

“No, they are not here. They must still be on the village green”

“Gosh! I am sure we bring all this on ourselves.

Catwhiskers locked the workshop as Cosmicblasto ran ahead. He didn't get too far before Catwhiskers caught up with him. They ran down the lane, but stopped before they got into the village green. It was better to be discreet than bring attention to oneself.

They walked on to the green and to where they had left the bicycles. They looked around and making sure the area was folk free they climbed onto the cycles and rode off.

As they passed the Tavern, Alderfolk Pottypears noticed them riding passed outside the window. Thinks were becoming clearer.

11: POTTYPEARS INVESTIGATES

Both Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns entered their 2nd year of apprenticeship. This was to be their final year. A year where they both needed to improve their skills and in Catwhisker's chosen vocation as a blacksmith, plenty of practical experience as well. So after a discussion they had decided to have one more trip to see Fred and Joe. They would start to use the Travel Device again next year after completion of their apprenticeship.

They decided to book time off at the same time. They knew that it was difficult to go together when they both worked at difference times of the day. So they decided that they would have the next work cycle off. They would be back to work after the next Church Gathering. Both Poopsie Rhinochunks and Lardyme Cootiepants thought this was a good idea. Have some fun before settling down to the final push.

So it was decided, Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers would go upto Frinkstone Hill and invite Ethereead to come too. They both knew that Ethereead enjoyed flying with them onboard. They decided to go on the first day of their time off.

Alderfolk Pottypears had taken to watching Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers closely without been noticed or mentioning it to anyone. He knew that they were friends with Lardyme, and he did not want anything to get back to them. Alderfolk Pottypears had even moved his chambers around. His excuse to his working folk was he wanted to see the entire village green, with its ring path he had the perfect view from the lane leading down from the blacksmiths and the lane leading up to Frinkstone Hill. So everytime Cosmicblasto left the bakery and met up with Catwhiskers at the Tavern he studied where they went. When they went down the lane that lead to their homes he knew that they were been good Jodechians.

Today was different, today; the applications from both the baker and the blacksmith were received into the Alderfolk chambers. Alderfolk Pottypears knew that they wanted the same time off. He regarded this as his moment. He was going to get to the bottom of what was going on and this was going to be soon. Lardyme

passed over the details not knowing she was unwittingly setting the starting point.

Alderfolk Pottypears had woken up early. He dressed in his finery and chamber symbols. He wanted to catch them in the most officious manner he could be. He sat there looking out of his window in the personal quarters of the chambers.

Cosmicblasto had arranged to meet Catwhiskers by the village green. He had the Travel Device in his shirt pocket. As he stood there waiting for Catwhiskers he was not aware that he had been noticed by somefolk else. Catwhiskers came into view. Like Cosmicblasto he did not bring his bicycle. Although they enjoyed riding their bikes, they did not like the ride up the hills, although the ride downhill was delightful. So the bicycles were still locked in the rear blacksmith workshop. Catwhiskers knew that they may be a chance that Codwing Gerbiltushie could go into the workshop that he had hidden them behind very large cupboard and covered with it hessian.

“Morning Cosmicblasto”

“Morning, how are things”

“Fine, ready for this”

“Yes, looking forward to going yonder again”

“Yes, and we get to fly on Etheread again too”

They started to walk towards the lane that led up to Frinkstone Hill, unaware that the figure at the window had disappeared. The Alderfolk knew where they were going to so he was in no rush to leave straight away. He didn't want to get seen by them. He got together his chamber sash and cap. After satisfying himself that he looked the part, the Alderfolk also checked the courtroom in the chambers. He would need it later. Alderfolk Pottypears left the chambers and proceeded up the lane to Frinkstone Hill.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were making good time up the hills. They had done the walk several times now and were getting quite used to the walk. Alderfolk Pottypears on the otherhand still struggled. He was not used to doing a walk like this. He had the use of the cart and Shethorse, but not this time.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers reached the top of Frinkstone Hill; they both went to the largest cave and walked inside. No more fear anymore.

“Hello Etheread” called Catwhiskers

The dragon was sat down in front of the fire

“Hello Catwhiskers, hello Cosmicblasto. Nice of you to call on me. I suppose you want to go flying”

“Yes please” said Cosmicblasto.

“Hang on whilst I get my flying helmet. I only wear it when you guys come to visit”

“Yes, we know why too” said Catwhiskers.

“But before we go, how about a cup of tead” said Etheread.

Although they were excited about going soon, after a walk like that, a cup of tead would be ideal.

Alderfolk Pottypears reached the top of Frinkstone Hill. He could hear clattering coming from the largest of the caves, so he took refuge behind a large rock that was close to the smallest of the caves.

The Alderfolk was most shocked to see that Cosmicblasto, Catwhiskers and a dragon come out of the largest cave. How could they get close to a dragon? The Alderfolk saw that the dragon has a funny shaped hat on. A strange hat that covered the head and appeared to fasten under the chin. A helmet thought the Alderfolk. Why would a dragon need a helmet?

But what he saw next shocked the Alderfolk even more. He saw the Jodechians climb onto the dragon. He was behind the dragon, so he came out from behind the rock. He was about to shout at Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers but before he could the dragon started to move forward. Alderfolk Pottypears ran toward the dragon and grabbed onto the tail of the dragon. Before he had a chance to get off the dragon was airborne. Alderfolk Pottypears held on for dear life.

Ethereead was wearing his helmet with the blinkers and with Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers both sitting forward, they did not see that they had an extra folk on the dragon.

The dragon flew upwards, flying over Frinkstone Hill and towards the meadow.

“Ready Catwhiskers”

“Ready Cosmicblasto”

“Ready Ethereead” said Cosmicblasto.

“Yes ready, let’s hope it works” said Ethereead.

Cosmicblasto pressed the button on the Travel Device. There was the blue flash. Ethereead did not flinch and continued the flight. Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers although holding on did not flinch either. But Alderfolk Pottypears was not expecting the flash and he very nearly fell off. It took all his wits just to keep his cap on.

Ethereead the Dragon flew on, heading towards Churchup hill.

“Do you think that Fred and Joe will be there” asked Catwhiskers

“No reason why not. They are creatures of habit. Walk up the hill and then the Tavern afterwards”

“What are you going to do Ethereead” asked Catwhiskers

“Well, I suppose it depends on what you are going to do when we land. I would certainly like to see Fred and Joe”

“Look Catwhiskers, there they are” said Ethereead.

Fred Jackson and Joe Spratt were sitting on the bench. They came here everyday. More often then not they left without meeting anyone. No one else ever came up here. However, it had been noticed that there were helicopters regularly flying over. It had occurred to both Fred and Joe that it may not be as innocuous as it may seem. Not for the first time they had wished they had some more of communications device between them.

Fred and Joe stood up as the dragon came into land; they all waved to each other.

When Etheread settled down Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers started to climb down the dragon's back. The Jodechians had the most unsatisfying shock when they saw Alderfolk Pottypears still holding on to the tail of the dragon. The Alderfolk picked himself up and stood looking at Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers

"Right, what's going on here" demanded Pottypears

"Hello, who are you" asked Joe

"Cosmicblasto, I didn't mind having extra people at Christmas but you could have warned us you were bringing someone else" said Fred.

Alderfolk Pottypears stood and looked up at Fred and Joe.

"Fred, Joe, this is Alderfolk Pottypears. I think he must have hitched a ride" said Catwhiskers

"Ah, a stowaway" said Joe

"Who are you, I demand to know" said Pottypears

"I told you, this is Fred and Joe" said Catwhiskers.

"Where in Jodechi are there folk this size"

"We are not in Jodechi" said Cosmicblasto.

"We have the ability to travel from Jodechi to yonder. And these are our friends" said Catwhiskers.

"So how does it happen then" asked Pottypears

"Well we just press this button on the Travel Device" said Cosmicblasto.

"And when we want to go back we press this button"

"Well press it now. I want you back in Buttercup to stand trial"

“Hey settle on, what’s this about a trial” asked Fred.

“They have deserted Jodechi” said Pottypears

“Who are you anyway” asked Joe who had just stopped stroking Ethereead.

“I am Alderfolk Situppy Pottypears. I am the Alderfolk of Buttercup. I am an elected officialfolk”

“Well I am Joe Spratt, and Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers are our friends. And I do not like your attitude towards my friends”

“Attitude to your friends. They are not supposed to be here, I am not suppose to be here, the dragon is not suppose to be here”

“Hey I go where I like” said Ethereead.

“A talking dragon”

“Hush, listen” said Fred

“Helicopter” said Joe

“The last thing we need”

“Ethereead, you have to take off, fly west, stay high until you get to the mountains and stay there for a while, come back tonight when it is dark. Go” said Joe

“You guys had better come with us. It’s everytime with you”

Ethereead took a small run and was airborne. The dragon flew upwards and after circling headed into the direction told.

“Sorry Joe, we just wanted to see you both before we work hard on our apprenticeship” said Cosmicblasto.

“What’s happening” asked Pottypears

“There’s been a helicopter flying over ever since Christmas.”

“Fred’s right. Ever since the dragon was first sighted” said Joe

“Sorry Joe, I guess we get into so much trouble everytime we use the Travel Device” said Cosmicblasto.

“Now that I do believe. All the more evidence I need when we get back” said Pottypears.

“At this rate you won’t be going back” said Fred.

“So you had better start by listening to what we tell you” said Joe

“Right, Joe sit on the bench. You guys get under it”

“What get under the bench with my chamber suit on?”

“Yes, under it, now”

The Alderfolk followed Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers under the bench as Joe and Fred sat down on it. The back of the bench was again the rise of the hill and it did give them some good protection.

The helicopter came up from the meadow, too high to see properly, the biggest fear was that the crew were using heat detection. But as it was a sunny day, they may not have it on. The helicopter flew past.

Alderfolk Pottypears was the first Jodechian to come up from underneath the bench.

“What is that?”

“A helicopter, looking for the unusual” said Joe.

“And in this area, only you are unusual” said Fred.

“I will use it in my statement at their trial” said Pottypears

“If the dragon doesn’t come back, there won’t be a trail” said Joe

“Why not, surely we can just push the button now and go back”

“And leave Etheread here” said Fred

“Ok, but I want us gone back to Jodechi at the soonest”

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were stood by Joe and Fred. They didn't like the way the Alderfolk was speaking. They guessed they were in trouble now.

"I told Etheread to come back later when it gets dark"

"I will not wait all day for that. Press that button now"

"No, we will wait until darkness falls" said Joe

"So what do we do now" asked Fred.

"Cosmicblasto, give me the Travel Device please" asked Joe

"Gladly" said Cosmicblasto and handed over the device.

"What are you going to do with that" asked Pottypears

"Just making sure you don't get your hands on it"

"I demand you give it to me. I will keep it"

"Absolutely not" said Joe

"I will not be treated like this"

"You don't have a choice. Now be quiet" said Fred

"Just you wait, you two are in so much trouble" said Pottypears to Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers

"Hey, quiet" said Joe

"So what do we owe the visit anyway" asked Fred

"Well, knowing we have to work really hard for our apprenticeship we just wanted to see you before we got stuck in. It won't be until next year that we would be back" said Catwhiskers

"Yes, we are both working really well and this is just like time-off period" said Cosmicblasto

"That's how I knew you were upto no good. I got the applications for your time-off" said Pottypears

“Then you followed us” said Cosmicblasto

“Well I saw you on those things”

“Things, what things” asked Fred

“The bicycles” said Catwhiskers.

“Oh, how are those bikes” asked Joe

“Oh really great, we had a circus of our own on the church gathering day” said Cosmicblasto

“Yes, we set up a circus ring with rope, and then we just rode and performed juggling tricks. It was a good day”

“I wasn’t there to watch”

“We didn’t think you would approve, we knew you would be away for the day arranging the arrivalfolk, so it was the perfect opportunity” said Catwhiskers

“How did you know I would be away, Lardyme, ooh, just wait, and I suppose Poopsie knows all about this too”

“You keep Lardyme and Poopsie out of this” said Joe

“You know about Lardyme and Poopsie too. Why am I the last to know about these events?”

“They didn’t know until the last time you had an arrivalfolk. We had no choice, as we had Joe and Fred in Buttercup” said Cosmicblasto

“What, they have been to Buttercup”

“Oi, we are only here you” said Joe

“Yes we have been to Buttercup, and yes it is a very nice village. You should be proud of Buttercup, but like every other leader, you got your head up your bottom” said Fred

“Hey Fred, remember what we said at Christmas about the Khazi”

“Oh, yeah, sorry Pottypears, I retract that last statement”

“We really should find out more about that” said Joe

“So are we going to stay here all day then” asked Pottypears

“You know I think we will” said Fred

“Yeah, you don’t deserve to see our village” said Joe

“Well, it will be dark in about hour anyway”

“Yeah let’s hope that Etheread can find the way back”

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers went and sat down on the side of the hill, not too far away from the others but far enough to talk without anyone listening.

“Well, I suppose it had to happen sooner than later”

“It’s ok Catwhiskers; we had a good time of it. Seen brilliant things, got great bicycles and the juggling balls”

“Got caught out in that really bad snow”

“Yes I remember that. I am glad we met Joe and Fred though; we would be stuck here for ever if it wasn’t for them. I didn’t like hiding in that wall” said Cosmicblasto

“Well, I wonder what will happen tomorrow”

“I expect we will be in the Courtroom in the Chambers”

“Well Cosmicblasto, looks like we will lose the apprenticeship”

“Lose the apprenticeship, how, things is not that bad surely”

“Alderfolk Pottypears seems to thing that we are doomed forever”

“I hope he doesn’t go too hard on Popsie and Lardyme”

“I have just had a thought” said Catwhiskers

“Yeah, go on”

“I think we need to take Joe and Fred back with us. We are going to need some serious folk to speak for us” said Catwhiskers

Alderfolk Pottypears decided to not say anymore. He needed to think about this. He knew that there should be a trial to find out precisely what they had been up to. He went and sat on the hill toward the right of the bench Joe and Fred were sat on.

Joe and Fred were also talking whilst no one else was listening.

“Joe, I have been thinking”

“Yeah, me too. I think we should go back with them”

“Me too, I don’t trust Pottypears”

“Yep, they are going to need all the help they can get”

All of a sudden there was a rumbling noise in the sky.

“Hey, come on under the bench, helicopter” said Joe

The Jodechians all rushed and dived under the bench.

“Wave to the helicopter Joe”

Both the old gentlemen waved as the helicopter flew past.

“Well, they should be going back to their base” said Joe

“Hopefully, Etheread should be here soon”

As the sun was starting to go down over the hill, there was another rumbling sound, slightly different noise.

The dragon was high in the sky, circled around and swooped down onto the hillside by the bench.

“Everything ok” asked Joe

“Yes, I got the direction fine; it’s quite nice up there in the mountains. But the sheep are too woolly to play with”

“We got to stop doing this” said Fred

“Right everyone all aboard” said Joe

“What are you doing” asked Pottypears

“We are coming too” said Fred

“Why”

“We want to see you give Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers a fair trail as possible” said Joe.

“Oh thank you” said Cosmicblasto

“Yes, we feel a lot better now, we were really worried about that”

“Yeah, well I am sure Alderfolk Pottypears will want to ensure that everything is legal and above board” said Joe

Once everyone was all aboard Ethereead, the dragon took a small run and was soon flying.

“Joe, you got the Travel Device” said Cosmicblasto

“Hey, here you are”

“No, you keep it, just press the red button”

Joe pressed the red button. There was a blue flash that as usual covered everyone. Ethereead, wearing the helmet wasn't in any way disrupted.

“So Alderfolk Pottypears, where are we going, Frinkstone Hill or the village green” asked Catwhiskers

“Take us to the village green. I see no mileage going to Frinkstone Hill. We may as well make this as simple as possible” said Pottypears.

Ethereead had never flown over Buttercup. The dragon always kept a respectful distance, not wanting to cause serious disruptions. But the dragon flew over the hills and meadows. Before too long they landed on the village green.

“Right, you two, inside” said Alderfolk Pottypears to the Jodechians.

“And you two, can stay in my personal chambers”

“Oi, a little more respect if you don’t mind” said Joe

“You are in Jodechi now, in my village of Buttercup, you show me respect”.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers started to walk to the chambers, Joe and Fred followed them. They were met by Lardyme at the doors.

“What’s happened, how come you are all here” asked Lardyme

“Hello Lardyme, welcome to Buttercup” said Fred.

“Sorry, Fred, just shocked at you been here. I didn’t know that Alderfolk Pottypears knew anything”

“Sorry, shouldn’t take it out on you” said Fred

“Pottypears followed us, we got careless” said Catwhiskers.

“Pottypears wants them to stand trial, and we are here to ensure that they get a good fair trial” said Joe

“I am going to have to see Popsie, but before I do, I think I am going to contact the Queen of Jodechi”

“The Queen of Jodechi” said Fred

“The Queen is all knowing, every wise and a carer of all things Jodechian. The Queen will ensure that all is fair” said Lardyme.

“Well, the more people who can support Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers the better” said Joe

“Looks like things are looking up” said Jack

“Yes, chin up chaps; we are going to win this. The only thing that Pottypears is upset is that he didn’t know what was going on really” said Joe.

A few moments late, Alderfolk Pottypears arrived at the steps of the chambers. Ethereead had taken off and was flying away from Buttercup.

“Ethereead will be back tomorrow when the trial starts. The dragon will need to give his evidence” said Alderfolk Pottypears

Alderfolk Pottypears went into his offices and collected the keys; he picked out the key to cells.

“Right Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers this way”

“Eh, I don’t think so” said Joe

“Pardon”

“No cells for Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers. They can stay with us. We will guarantee their custody” said Joe

“This is unusual, but ok, it’s not like you can escape anyway. You all go up stairs into the folksuite” said Alderfolk Pottypears

They were all lead into the folksuite. Pottypears left leaving the door locked.

“Well I suppose it’s the floor for us” said Joe

“Well, it’s an improvement. At least we can talk to about formulating a defence for these two” said Fred.

“I wonder if the Queen of Jodechi can get here in time” said Joe

“We will soon find out”

“Ok Cosmicblasto, Catwhiskers, go on, get on the bed and get some rest. You will be fine. Trust us” said Joe

“We do Joe, we do” said Catwhiskers.

12: THE QUEEN OF JODECHI

Alderfolk Pottypears unlocked the door to the folksuite. Fred Jackson and Joe Spratt were allowed out, but Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns had to stay in. The Alderfolk told them that Lardyme Cootiepants would be up shortly to serve them breakfast.

Joe and Fred were lead into the kitchen where Lardyme served a small breakfast of fruits. There were no fresh rolls as the baker hadn't been in work. She had a tray prepared to take upstairs to Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers. As the Alderfolk was there, breakfasting with Joe and Fred she stayed silent.

The Alderfolk, Joe and Fred stayed silent whilst they ate.

The Alderfolk had given Lardyme the key so she could take up the breakfast tray. As she reached the door, she knocked.

“Good morning, hope you are both decent”

She unlocked the door and entered.

“Hello, how are you”

“Fine, Lardyme, well as far as I can be I suppose”

“Joe reckons we will be ok” said Catwhiskers

“Well, I managed to send a message to the Queen of Jodechi. Let's hope she can get here soon” said Lardyme

“We need her and no mistake” said Cosmicblasto

“Here, eat up your breakfast. Joe and Fred are eating with the Alderfolk, but no one is speaking at all”

“I am not surprised there” said Catwhiskers.

“I had better go, don't make a mess, I have to clean this up”

“We won't” said Cosmicblasto

“Thanks” said Catwhiskers.

Lardyme left the room and locked it behind her. There was no mileage to be gained by letting the Alderfolk think she was working against him, just yet anyway. He would get the biggest surprise of his life when the Queen of Jodechi arrived unexpectedly. He would know then that there was only one folk who would have got her. She was expecting to be dismissed from her post come the end of the day.

Outside the Alderfolk Chambers there was a crowd of folk. The word had spread like wildfire and everyfolk wanted to be in the courtroom for the trial. Poopsie Rhinochunks was in the crowd. She wanted to be in there to support her friends. Ethereead was also outside the chambers. Many folk had seen the dragon the day before, so were not frightened of it.

After the breakfast, Alderfolk Pottypears left the kitchen, taking the key with him. His step was silent as he was going up the stairs. He listened outside the door before unlocking it.

“Ok, you two. Downstairs”

Cosmicblasto took the lead and Catwhiskers followed him. When they went down the stairs they waited by the courtroom. The Alderfolk met up with them and unlocked the courtroom. He ushered them into the dock.

“Sit there, and don’t move”

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers just sat there, in silence.

The Alderfolk then went into the kitchen.

“They are in the dock. I suggest you make your way to the courtroom and make yourselves comfortable on the front desk”

“Are we going to be able to state our case” asked Joe

“You will get a chance to speak up for them, for all the good it will do. There will be other witnesses to testify”

“Oh, yes, who then” asked Fred

“You wait”

The Alderfolk left the courtroom and spoke to Lardyme. She responded by opening the main doors. The folk waiting outside calmly walked in and settled themselves in the gallery. Those folk who could not get a seat stood alongside the panelled walls. There was a window opened so that Ethereead could look in.

The next time Joe and Fred saw the Alderfolk, he came into the courtroom wearing a golden sash over his purple shirt. Lardyme was wearing a silver sash over her normal attire. She sat her desk near the door. The dock where Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were sat was in the middle of the floor with the desk of the Alderfolk in the fair corner.

“All rise for the Alderfolk” said Lardyme

Everyfolk stood up, including Joe and Fred who more then ever stood taller.

Alderfolk Pottypears went to his desk, purveyed his surroundings before instruction everyfolk to be seated.

“Today, we are here for a very serious matter”

The Alderfolk stood, and viewed his captive audience

“It has been my mis-fortune to discover that folk from our village have been leaving the confines of Jodechi. Today, the tale can be told of Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns, who have worked against the common Jodechian. Today we seek to find the truth of what these Jodechians have been up to”

“As if prove is needed we have 2 folk, no they are not folk, the correct term is people. Today we have 2 people from outside the confines of Jodechi. They are sitting here in front of me. They seem to believe that they can support the Jodechians in the dock”

Everyfolk was staring at Joe and Fred. Meanwhile they stayed silent, letting the Alderfolk continue.

“These people seem to think that they can support our Jodechians, but I will prove today that they have been nothing but trouble. True they did meet once, but that should have

stayed a one off meeting. They should never have met again and they should never be here, sat in front of the folk of Buttercup. Indeed I will also prove that it is the fault of these 2 people that have put our Jodechian friends in the dock.”

Fred looked at Joe; he had hoped that Joe could talk his way out of this one.

Alderfolk Pottypears sat down and turned his attentions to Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers.

“Monkeynose and Picklebuns, I implore you to be as truthful as proud Jodechians. I will be asking some serious questions and I want you to be forthright in your answers”

“We will be truthful” said Catwhiskers.

“Good, good, ok Catwhiskers, how did you get to have the ability to do what you do”

“There was this rumbling sound coming from the barn”

“Yes, there was this tall folk, we had never seen before, he had a red box that was not there before” said Cosmicblasto

“Tall folk” asked the Alderfolk

“Yes. We had never seen him before, or since” said Catwhiskers

“What happened then?”

“Well, he disappeared back into his red box and left” said Cosmicblasto

“Disappeared”

“Yes Alderfolk, I suppose in the same manner that Cosmicblasto and I do”

“I see. How do you manage to do it?”

“Well we found in the barn a small unit with 2 buttons on it. One is a blue button and the other button is red. We call it a Travel Device” said Catwhiskers.

“Is this the same unit that you gave to Joe?”

“Yes” came the reply

“Can we see this unit?”

Joe looked at Fred. Who just shrugged his shoulders.

“May as well” said Fred

Joe got up and passed the Travel Device to Alderfolk Pottypears.

“Is this the unit, what you call the Travel Device” he held it up for everyfolk to see

“Yes it is” said Cosmicblasto

“Please note everyfolk, that the person called Joe passed this Travel Device to me. He was clearly the one holding it”

“How many times have you used the Travel Device?”

“Not sure to be honest, probably about 8 or 9 times” said Cosmicblasto.

“And what happens each time”

“There is a flash and we end up somewhere else.”

“And when we come back, we end up at the same point and time we left” added Cosmicblasto

“So you could be gone for days on end and no one would know the difference”

“Ok Joe Spratt I believe at this point you may ask your questions”

“Thank you Alderfolk Pottypears” said Joe

“Hello Cosmicblasto, Catwhiskers. How are things?”

“Fine Joe, though we are a bit worried” said Catwhiskers”

“Can you remember the first time we met?”

“Oh yes, we just materialised in front of you” said Catwhiskers

“We were not used to travelling in this manner, we fell over at first” said Cosmicblasto

“Yes, you shocked us too” said Joe

“So what happened there” Joe continued

“Well we told each other our names, we talked about how we got here and then we went home. We never did expect to see you again, it was our first time though” said Cosmicblasto

“What happened the next time” asked Joe

“Well, we were flying on Ethereead the dragon” said Catwhiskers

The room murmured. The Alderfolk was quickly with his gavel hammer. The room quietened down.

“How did you get to fly on a dragon” asked Joe

“Well, we knew that there was a dragon up on Frinkstone Hill, we just went up there to see, but didn’t expect to fly”

“That must have been fun Catwhiskers, how did you get to fly”

“Ethereead offered, we didn’t know the dragon was lonely. We didn’t even know the dragon could talk. Ethereead has become a very good friend”

“How did the dragon manage when you used the Travel Device?”

“It was an accident, we didn’t mean to use it, and it just got caught in my shirt. When the flash came it frightened the dragon and it took all the skill to fly properly” said Catwhiskers.

Ethereead nodded in agreement.

“The next time you saw Fred and myself, where were you”

“Flying Joe. We saw you and coming to settle next to you”

“And the next time after that”

“You mean in the snow”

“Yes Catwhiskers, in the snow”

“You saved our lives, you protected us”

“And the time after that”

“We got caught by the circus and forced to learn tricks”

“You rescued us” said Cosmicblasto.

“We rescued you”

“Yes, sorry Fred, you both rescued us” said Catwhiskers

“And we always be grateful” said Cosmicblasto.

“Thank you Cosmicblasto, thank you Catwhiskers”

Joe turned to Alderfolk Pottypears

“Well, I guess that’s all from us. In the time we have known our friends Catwhiskers and Cosmicblasto, it has been fun, and serious. But we have treated them like they have always been our friends”

“Thank you. That will be all then” said Pottypears.

At this point, there was a loud knock on the door of the courtroom. Everyfolk watched as Lardyme got up from her desk and opened the door.

Everyfolk were even more shocked to find stood there a beautiful woman, taller then the average Jodechian, not as tall as Fred and Joe, but near enough.

Alderfolk Pottypears sat there gaping.

“Alderfolk Pottypears are you not going to invite me in”

“Yes, of course, please your Royal Folkness, please come in”
The Alderfolk stood up and ushered everyfolk else to stand up.
The lady came into the courtroom, looking around herself.

“Where can I sit Alderfolk Pottypears?”

“Please” said Fred, “have the seat here”

“Thank you” she said and sat down in the seat where Fred was sat.

“Alderfolk Pottypears”

The Alderfolk had got his sense of decorum back.

“Everyfolk, this is the Queen of Jodechi, many of you would go through a lifetime without seeing the Royal Folkness. We are honoured” he said bowing.

The queen nodded.

“Please continue with your trial”

“Thank you. Everyfolk be seated.

“Good, now Alderfolk, as I understand it, these two have themselves a Travel Device”

“Yes, how did you know?”

“I keep abreast of all information regarding my subjects in Jodechi”

“Ah I see”

“Alderfolk, would it surprised you if I told you that I also have a Travel Device”

The courtroom murmured to themselves. The queen continued.

“And would it surprise you to find out that I am not a natural Jodechian. I do not have pointed ears or a pair of horns”

Joe looked at her.

“Are you from the otherside” he whispered

The queen looked at Joe and winked

“Well I be” said Fred.

Alderfolk Pottypears turned to the docks and started to ask some more questions.

“Where did you get those objects you were displaying on the church gathering day?”

“The bicycles. When we were captured by the circus we were taught to ride them by the circus master, well it was Pixy really” said Catwhiskers

“Yes, we were quite good at riding them”

“But when Joe and Fred rescued us, we had to leave them behind, although we managed to keep hold of the juggling balls” said Catwhiskers

“I see” said Pottypears

“So how did you get them?” Pottypears continued

“Fred and Joe gave us them on our last visit. It was on Christmas day” said Cosmicblasto

“Aw, that’s really thoughtful of you” said the Queen of Jodechi

“That’s beside the point” said Pottypears

“The point is, Alderfolk Pottypears that Fred and Joe here have so much respect for Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers that they have displayed a trust that can not come from mere normal people from that side”

“Yes quite my point, it should never have happened”

“I have asked enough questions for these two. I now call Poopsie Rhinochunks for question” said Pottypears

Everyfolk in the courtroom turned and looked at Poopsie. She herself looked nervous. She got up from her seat and sat on a chair that Pottypears had taken from behind his desk and put it in front of the dock.

“Once again I must ask that you speak truthfully Poopsie”

“I will Alderfolk Pottypears”

“How long have you known about the Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers activities”

“Not very long, just when Joe and Fred came to Buttercup for the first time”

“And how did you come to find out”

“They came into the Tavern”

“I see, and what was your reaction”

“Normal. I was pleased to see their friends”

“So seeing people like this, especially the size of them, didn’t frighten you Poopsie”

“No Alderfolk Pottypears. They seem quite gentlefolk. I was pleased to speak to them and to serve them”

“Wasn’t that the day when I came back with an arrivalfolk”

“Yes Alderfolk”

“So you deliberately hid these two people whilst I did the ceremony”

“It was important that you didn’t see them. I was protecting both these gentlefolk and Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers”

“Mis-guided protection. No more questions”

Joe got up and started to ask questions.

“Good day Poopsie. Both Fred and I would like to thank you for helping and been friends with us”

“It is my pleasure Joe”

“I have no questions to ask Poopsie. I have absolute faith that she was acting in good honour” said Joe to the court.

“I see, well in that case it gives me no pleasure to announce that I find Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns guilty”

“Will there be an appeal” asked the Queen

“Yes” said Joe

“Well, that is their right” said Alderfolk Pottypears

“Good well in that case let’s have the appeal now”

“This is most unusual” said Pottypears

“For why Alderfolk Pottypears”

“The appeal needs to be directed to the Royal Courts of Jodechi”

“And” the Queen replied

“Well, the Royal Folkness is” his words faltering as he realised his dilemma.

“Well, the Royal Folkness is here, and I see no reason not to hold the appeal here and now”

Alderfolk Pottypears stood still now.

“As Queen I have decided to uphold the appeal. These two gentlefolk have done everything to preserve the life of Jodechi. As far as I can see, although Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers have made such fools of themselves that without Fred and Joe, they would have never have come back to Buttercup. Cosmicblasto Monkeynose and Catwhiskers Picklebuns you are free to go”

Everyfolk, including Joe and Fred cheered; Pottypears was banging his gavel on the desk. The Alderfolk stood with his mouth gaped. This was not supposed to happen.

“I really must protest”

“Noted. But I believe the problem Alderfolk Pottypears is that you have been in the job too long unopposed. I believe it is near time for you retirement. I suggest you teach Lardyme all you know about your position. It is time for fresh ideas and thinking”

“Also, I grant Joe Spratt and Fred Jackson as honoury freemen of Jodechi” the Queen continued.

The Alderfolk sat down in his seat.

“Yes your Royal Folkness. I will do everything I can as a proud Jodechian to pass all my experiences to Lardyme”

“Right, well, let’s leave the courtroom” said the Queen.

Everyfolk left the courtroom and outside onto the village green. Before Joe left he picked up the Travel Device from Pottypears desk.

Joe, Fred, Cosmicblasto, Catwhiskers, Poopsie and the Queen were standing with Etheread the dragon.

Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were still pretty excited at been freed from the dock.

“So how did you manage to get your own Travel Device?” asked Fred?

“The chap in the red box is my father”

“Ah, I see”

“I don’t” said Joe

“What you mean” said Fred

“How come you are Queen if your father is alive?”

“Ah, in Jodechi, only the female can be monarch. There never has been a King. Only Queens”

“How come you live here, why not on the other side” asked Joe

“I live mostly on the otherside, but not only do I have the ability to travel between the two; I have all the communications so I am always in touch with Lardyme.

“So how come they got a Travel Device anyway” asked Fred

“Apparently he dropped his portable Travel Device when he first met Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers”

“So you will want it back” asked Joe

“No, it’s ok, they can keep it” the Queen replied.

“Speaking of back, I suppose we should be going back ourselves”

“Yes, I think so too” said Joe

“How will you be going back” asked the Queen

“On the back of the dragon, hopefully” said Fred.

“I would love to travel on the dragon” said the Queen.

“My pleasure” said Ethereead.

The dragon lowered down and they all climbed on.

“Not you too. Cosmicblasto you have bread to bake” the Queen told him.

“And you will be required in the blacksmith”

“Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers were saddened but realised that they really had a lucky escape.

“Goodbye Fred and Joe. See you again soon” said Catwhiskers

“Bye Fred, Thank you so much Joe”

The dragon took a small run and Ethereead took off. The dragon circled Buttercup so that Joe, Fred and the Queen could all wave to the villagers. The dragon then flew off and the Queen reached for her own Travel Device and pressed the button. There was a blue flash and the skies of Jodechi were once again clear.

The dragon carried on flying without effects. Fred explained about the helmet they had made for Ethereead. The Queen was equally impressed.

The dragon flew down towards Churchup. The dragon settled down next to the bench. Lowered and everyone climbed down.

“Well, I hope we can see you again” said Joe

“Yes, we should stay in touch” said Fred

“Well, I am not sure about that to be honest, I am always in demand in Jodechi, but it would be nice to see you again”

“In the meantime, here have this Travel Device” the Queen gave Joe a device.

“You can both come to Buttercup whenever you want now. Just as I did all those years ago. Also there is a little pulse light. When it flashes come straight away”

“We will” said Fred.

“Just make sure we don’t lose it” said Joe

“And have Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers rescue us” said Fred

Everybody found this funny and laughed.

“Right I need to go now, I believe there are agencies out there looking for Ethereead” the Queen said

“Yes, we have had a close call a few times” said Fred.

“If they get Ethereead then it will affect the whole of Jodechi”

The Queen mounted the dragon.

“Good bye Fred and Joe, see you soon”

The dragon took off and when high, a blue flash illuminated the sky. This was just as well as the sound of a helicopter approached.

“Well, Joe, I suppose that’s that for a while, may aswell go to the Blacksmith Arms for a couple of beers”

“Yes Fred, and you are right, I don’t think we will be seeing Cosmicblasto and Catwhiskers for a while”

The two friends turned and walked down the hill into Churchup village.

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