

THE KEYS  TO  
THE  
KINGDOM

Lord Sunday

GARTH NIX

  
ALLEN & UNWIN

# One

ARTHUR FELL.

The air rushed past him, stinging his eyes and ripping at his hair and clothes. He had already fallen through the hole made by Saturday's assault ram, past the grasping roots and tendrils of the underside of the Incomparable Gardens. Now he was plummeting through the clouds, and a small part of him knew that if he didn't do something really soon he was going to smash into Saturday's tower and in all likelihood be so badly broken that even with his newly reshaped Denizen body he would die – or wish he was dead.

But Arthur didn't do anything, at least not in those first few, vital seconds. He knew it was an illusion, but it felt like the wind was holding him up, rather than rushing past. In his left hand he held the small mirror that was the Fifth Key, and in his right he clutched the quill pen that was the Sixth Key, which he had wrested from Saturday and taken with him over the edge. Because of this, Arthur felt powerful, triumphant, and not at all afraid.



He looked down at the tower below him and laughed – a deep, sarcastic laugh that was not at all like his normal laughter. He was about to laugh again when Part Six of the Will, in its raven form, caught up with him, its claws latching on to his hair and digging into his scalp.

‘Wings!’ croaked the raven urgently. It hung on to his head for a second, then lost its grip and spun off, calling out, ‘Fly! Fly!’ as it tried desperately to keep up.

Instantly, Arthur lost his sense of euphoric invincibility and came back to his senses. He properly took in the speed of his descent for the first time and saw that he was going to hit the tower very, very soon.

*This is all wrong, he thought. Where are my wings?!*

He frantically searched his coat, even as he remembered that his grease monkey wings were still in the rain mantle that he’d exchanged for his current disguise as a Sorcerous Supernumerary – the disguise he’d used to infiltrate the assault ram . . . too successfully, perhaps, for he’d gone with the ram when it broke through into the Incomparable Gardens. While he had then got close enough to Superior Saturday to claim the Sixth Key, he’d fallen back through the hole in the ceiling of the Upper House.

Now he was falling a very, very long way down.

Even starting from such a height, Arthur had fallen far faster than he’d thought possible. He was going to miss the actual peak, he saw, and crash into the main part, some fifteen levels below.



*No wings*, thought Arthur. *No wings!*

His mind halted in panic, and all he could do was stare at the tower, tears streaming from his eyes because the wind was rushing by so fast. He found himself flapping his arms as if somehow that might help, and he was screaming, and then—

He crashed into a flying Internal Auditor, who screamed as well. Together they tumbled through the air, the Denizen's wings thrashing wildly. Arthur tried to rip the wings from the Auditor, but he didn't want to let go of the Fifth and Sixth Keys, so he couldn't get a proper grip. He tried to transfer the Sixth Key so as to hold both Keys in his left hand, but in that vital moment, the Denizen kicked free and dove away, his wings folded back.

Arthur fell again, but the collision had checked his speed. He had a few seconds to take action, and his brain finally got back to work on problem-solving, instead of gloating over the Sixth Key or cowering in fear. He knew there was no way to avoid colliding with the tower – unless he never actually arrived there . . .

A hundred feet from impact, Arthur somersaulted into a swan dive. Stretching his arms out below his body, he drew several steps in the air with the Sixth Key. The pen left glowing trails of light, which instantly took on the appearance of solid, white marble steps.

Arthur hit hard, immediately tucking himself into a ball to roll down the Improbable Stair. As he bounced



and tumbled over each step, he knew he had to get his speed under control. Even when he stuck out his leg, he only tumbled sideways – and kept falling. Climbing up the Improbable Stair was bad enough, with the chance of coming out on some random Landing anywhere in time or space. Falling down it – completely out of control – was even worse.

Arthur remembered the Old One's caution, the words now echoing inside his head, in between thuds, bangs, and the jangling pain of new bruises.

*It is possible to end up somewhere you particularly do not wish to be, the Old One had said. It is even likely, for that is part of the Stair's nature.*

He tried again to stop, but since he was still clutching the Keys, he couldn't even grab on to the edge of a step. It was more like falling down a slide than a staircase, much more so than could be normal or natural. The Stair itself was working against him, accelerating his fall, leading him somewhere he doubted he'd want to be.

Thoughts of really terrible places in history began to flash through Arthur's mind, thoughts made more awful because he knew that if he focused on any one place for too long, the Stair would take him there.

He tried to turn on his stomach and stop the endless slide with his elbows, but this didn't work either, though it hurt a lot. Arthur grimaced as his funny bones were repeatedly jarred. Before his transformation from a mortal



boy into a Denizen or whatever he had become, he would have been screaming with pain, and his arms would have broken like sticks. But the Keys, and his use of them, had changed his bones, skin, and blood beyond anything a doctor would recognise as human.

Arthur was afraid there were other changes too, changes inside him that removed him even further away from humanity, things that went beyond his new size, strength, and durability. But this was a distant, nagging fear that was overwhelmed by his current panic.

*I have to stop, he thought. I have to get off the Stair!*

He rolled onto his back, gasping as the front edge of each step smacked him in the backbone. He put the Sixth Key in his mouth, so he would have a hand free. Then he raised the mirror of the Fifth Key, held it in front of his face, and tried to focus on it as he continued his juddering descent.

The mirror had been blocked by Saturday's sorcerers inside the Upper House and it might not work inside the Stair either, but Arthur had to take any chance he could to get out. First, though, he had to find a way to hold the mirror steady and he had to keep the picture of Sir Thursday's bedroom in his head. This was very hard to do. He tried to visualise it, but he kept thinking of places he didn't want to go, like the plague-ridden London of Suzy Turquoise Blue's time, or the island in the middle of a sun where he'd found Part Two of the Will. Even as a Denizen,



Arthur knew he couldn't survive if he came out of the Stair into the heart of a star.

He also wouldn't survive an emergence into Nothing. Which meant he also had to stop thinking about Doorstop Hill, or any parts of the House that he knew had already been consumed by Nothing. So much of it was gone already, as the Void spread into the House, destroying everything in its path. Arthur shivered inside as he remembered the great wave of Nothing that he had fled a moment before it destroyed Monday's Dayroom—

*No! Arthur yelled to himself. Think of somewhere safe. Somewhere easy. Home. But even home might not be safe – I've got to just stop and think—*

But he couldn't steady the mirror, or get his mind to focus on somewhere safe. Instead, he rolled over again and grabbed at the next step with his free hand, his fingernails raking across the marble, down one . . . two . . . three steps. His arm almost came out of its shoulder socket as his slide was arrested, and he nearly dropped the Sixth Key when he couldn't help but groan at this new and sudden pain.

But he stopped.

Arthur sighed and dropped the Sixth Key from his mouth to his bloodied hand. He slowly stood and set his foot on the next step up. It was time to start climbing back up, while thinking hard about where to come out.

He was just about to start doing this when the Stair disappeared in a flash of bright, white light. Arthur's

foot met no resistance. He fell forward into a hole full of evil-smelling mud. The Stair, as it always tried to do, had thrown him out onto some random Landing, which could be anywhere in the Secondary Realms, and could also be at any time in the past.

Arthur almost went face-first into the mud, but he recovered his balance in just enough time to stagger forward and crash into a sandbagged earth wall instead. He bounced off that, went back into the hole, and windmilled his arms desperately for a second, before ending up planted backside-first in about a foot of yellow, stinking mud.

He sat there long enough to make a face, then slowly got back to his feet, the mud making a popping sound as he rose. There were other, stranger noises too, distant high-pitched electronic squeals that hurt his ears.

Arthur looked around. For a moment he thought he'd come out in a World War One trench, back in the history of his own Earth. But that thought only lasted for a moment. He was in a trench all right, but the mud was a lurid, unearthly yellow and stank of sulfur. The sandbags, now that he looked at them properly, were pale blue. He tapped one, and his knuckles sank in a little bit and then bounced back.

*Foam, thought Arthur. The sandbags are filled with something like packing foam.*

The zinging noises were getting closer. Arthur didn't know what was making them, and he had no intention



of hanging around to find out. The only question was whether the Fifth Key would work if the Improbable Stair had dumped him off somewhere back in time, as well as into the Secondary Realms. If he couldn't use the mirror, he'd have to use the Stair, and that meant getting back onto it as quickly as possible. Theoretically, as he had two Keys, he could enter the Improbable Stair pretty much anywhere, but he knew in practice it was bound to be more difficult, and there was a very good chance that his next trip on the Stair would take him somewhere worse than this.

Quickly, he put the quill pen inside his silver bag, along with his yellow elephant and the medallion he'd been given by the Mariner. Then he replaced the bag safely inside the pouch of his utility belt. He kept the Sorcerous Supernumerary's large coat on, over the top of his coveralls. Even though the yellow mud looked like it was boiling, it felt cold – and if Arthur felt it, that meant it was very cold indeed.

This was confirmed by his breath, which wasn't just fogging out, it was freezing in the air. In only a few minutes, he developed a long, thin beard of ice crystals that sparkled from his chin down to his chest. The sunlight, though very bright, was more red than yellow, and he could feel no noticeable heat from it on his face or hands.

Wherever he was, it wasn't Earth, and Arthur suspected it wasn't somewhere a normal human could survive



for a second. He was thankful that he could, but it also sent a pang through him, another reminder of what he had become, and what he no longer was.

He raised the mirror and was about to visualise Sir Thursday's chamber when he glimpsed a reflection from behind him. He spun around just as something jumped down from above the trench. It was a flash of movement, and it took a moment for Arthur to process that at its heart was a seven-foot-tall, armoured stick insect, holding a tube in its first lot of spiked forearms and pointing it at Arthur. Before he could react, he heard the squealing noise up close for the first time, and felt a savage pain as golden blood suddenly boiled out of a hole that went straight through the bicep of his left arm.

Arthur turned the mirror and directed his will. The Fifth Key caught the red sunlight, gathered it up and concentrated it a millionfold before projecting it at Arthur's enemy in a tightly focused beam.

The insect was cut cleanly in two. But the top half continued to scabble towards Arthur, and the forearms tried to aim the tube again. Arthur, furious and in pain, directed his anger through the mirror. This time the Fifth Key conjured up a roaring column of fire that stretched from the ground up into the stratosphere, and completely incinerated everything in the trench in front of Arthur for at least a hundred yards.

As the fiery column slowly sank back to the ground,



Arthur spun around again, checking behind him. He listened for the squealing noises, and though he couldn't hear them, he heard something else: a clicking noise, getting louder and closer. Arthur knew what it was – the sound the insect soldier's limbs had made when it had moved, but magnified a thousand times.

He jumped up on the trench's firing step and looked out onto the yellow mud no-man's-land of this alien war. Thousands of stick-insect soldiers were marching towards him, all perfectly in step, all holding those squealing tubes.

*I could kill them all from here*, thought Arthur. He felt a feral grin begin to spread across his face, before he pushed it away. He had the power, it was true, but he knew he didn't have the right. They weren't even really enemies; they knew nothing of the struggles in the House. They might look like giant stick insects, but obviously they were sentient beings, as technologically advanced as humans, perhaps even more so.

*So what?* thought Arthur. *I'm no longer human. I am Lord Arthur, Rightful Heir to the Architect. I could kill ten thousand humans as easily as ten thousand alien insects.*

He began to raise the mirror, visualising an even bigger, more awesome column of fire, one that stretched from horizon to horizon, saving only him from the inferno.

'No,' whispered Arthur. He forced his self-righteous pride and anger back. 'I am *me* . . . I'm not *Lord Arthur*, and this is wrong. All I have to do is leave.'



He swung the mirror around and looked into it, trying to think of Sir Thursday's chamber and not all the destructive things he could do to anyone or anything that opposed him.

But he couldn't focus – it was all he could do to keep his rage in check. He really wanted to destroy the insect soldiers, and every time he almost had a mental picture of Thursday's room, it was replaced by images of fire and destruction.

As Arthur struggled with his thoughts, the mirror remained constant. He saw only his reflection, the now all-too-perfect face, so handsome that even a beard of frost could not lessen his unearthly beauty.

Arthur groaned and put the mirror back in his pouch. The horde of insect warriors was approaching at a steady pace, and had neither slowed nor speeded its advance. The forward ranks hadn't aimed their weapons either, but he suspected he was probably in range. Arthur looked at the hole in his arm. It was neatly cauterised, but he could see right through from one side to the other. Only his sorcerously altered body allowed him to cope with such a wound. It felt about as painful as a paper cut to him now.

But he knew he could not survive a hundred – or a thousand – such wounds. He also knew that the rage he was barely keeping inside him would come out long before then, and that he would use the Keys to wreak destruction such as even these warring aliens had never imagined.



*I have to get out of here,* thought Arthur. *Before I do something terrible . . .*

He jumped back down and tried to visualise the Improbable Stair. That could be its first step there, the pale blue sandbag that was the firing step of the trench. It just had to turn white and luminous, and that would be the way in.

‘White and luminous,’ said Arthur. ‘The way into the Improbable Stair.’

Ahead of him, the clicking noise suddenly increased in volume and tempo. The soldier insects were beginning their charge.

‘White! Luminous! Stair!’ shouted Arthur.

A squealing zing went over his head, but he didn’t turn or look. All his attention was on that one pale blue sandbag, which was slowly, ever so slowly, beginning to turn white.


# Two

SUZY TURQUOISE BLUE, sometime Ink-Filler Sixth Class, Monday's Tierce, and General of the Army of Lord Arthur, waggled her left foot, just enough to start her spinning in a counterclockwise direction. She'd been slowly turning clockwise for the past hour and she felt like a change. She could introduce that motion with only a slight movement of her foot, which was fortunate, since it was the only part of her that wasn't tightly wrapped in the inch-thick scarlet rope that suspended her from a crane that had been swung out some 16,000 feet up on the eastern side of Superior Saturday's tower.

'Stop that!' called a Sorcerous Supernumerary, who sat at the base of the crane. He was reading a large leather-bound book and dangling his legs over the edge of the tower. 'Prisoners are not to spin counterclockwise!'

'Sez who?' asked Suzy.

'The manual says so,' replied the Supernumerary rather stiffly, tapping the book he held. 'I just read that



bit. “Prisoners are not to spin counterclockwise, for the prevention of sorcerous eddies.”

‘Better wind me in, then,’ said Suzy. ‘Else I’ll keep spinning.’

She had been hanging there for more than six hours, ever since being captured by the Artful Loungers near the Rain Reservoir, where Arthur had gone down the plughole in search of Part Six of the Will. Since being a prisoner was a definite improvement over being dead, which was what she thought was going to happen when the Loungers had attacked, Suzy was quite cheerful.

‘It says here, “Prisoners are to be left dangling in the wind and rain at all times, unless ordered otherwise by Suitable Authority”,’ said the Supernumerary.

‘It’s stopped raining,’ said Suzy. ‘It’s not all that windy either. It’s quite nice, in fact. Besides, aren’t you a Suitable Authority?’

‘Don’t make me laugh,’ grumbled the Supernumerary. ‘You know quite well I wouldn’t be here if everyone else wasn’t up top, fighting Sunday. Or down below, fighting the Piper.’

*And that’s only the half of it, thought Suzy, with a smile that would have annoyed the Supernumerary if he’d seen it. Superior Saturday is fighting Lord Sunday up above in the Incomparable Gardens; the Piper is fighting Superior Saturday’s forces in the lower portions of the Upper House; Dame Primus is trying to hold back the Nothing that is eroding*



*the House, while also preparing to attack Superior Saturday; Arthur hopefully by now has got Part Six of the Will and will be trying to obtain the Sixth Key . . .*

*It's all like a very complicated game, thought Suzy as she spun back towards the Supernumerary. I wonder if anyone really knows what's going on.*

Thinking about games gave her an idea. Artful Loungers were too crazed and dangerous to try to trick, but this Sorcerous Supernumerary was more like a normal Denizen.

'You know, if you wind me in, we could play chess,' said Suzy. She pointed her toe at the chess set that was on top of the closer desk. It looked to be a very fine one, with ivory pieces that had ruby-chip eyes.

'That's one of Noon's sets,' said the Supernumerary. 'We can't touch that! Besides, I failed chess.'

'We could play checkers. We oughter play something until my rescuers show up and chuck you off the building,' said Suzy.

'What?' asked the Supernumerary. He looked around nervously. Unlike most of Saturday's tower, the prison section at level 61620 (that was really floor 1620, which was quite high enough) was a solid buttress attached to the main building, rather like a shelf that was put on as an afterthought. It was not made up of open iron-framed office cubes, but was a broad and elegant verandah of teak decking that ran alongside the tower for a hundred feet.



The outer edge was lined with a dozen cranes that were mounted so that they could pivot and swing their hooks out over the edge, to suspend prisoners some 16,000 feet above the ground.

Currently, only one of the cranes had a dangling prisoner. The Internal Auditors who usually ran the prison level had all left to join Saturday's assault upon the Incomparable Gardens, and had presumably dispatched all their prisoners before their departure. Now only Suzy was there, guarded by two Sorcerous Supernumeraries. One was reading the manual and another was prowling back and forth in front of the single large leather-padded door that led back into the tower proper. As she paced, she muttered to herself about awesome responsibilities and the inevitability of things going wrong. This Supernumerary had not once looked over at Suzy, almost as if she wanted to deny the existence of her prisoner.

'What do you mean, rescuers?' the Supernumerary with the manual asked. 'And why would they chuck me off the tower?'

'I'm a Piper's child, right?' asked Suzy. 'Who's attacking the tower?'

'The Piper,' said the Supernumerary. 'Oh ... I see. But he'll never get this far.'

'Dunno about that,' said Suzy. 'I mean, Saturday's nicked off with all the best fighters, ain't she? I mean, *she's* all right, *she'll* be living it up in the Incomparable Gardens,



with her Artful Loungers and Internal Auditors and all. It's you poor blokes I feel sorry for.'

'We always get the worst jobs,' admitted the Sorcerous Supernumerary. 'You know what the higher-ups call us? *Maggots*, that's what. At least that's what one called me once ...'

'Wot's your actual name, then?' asked Suzy. 'I'm Suzy Turquoise Blue.'

'Giac,' replied the Supernumerary. He looked over the edge and sighed. 'I was enjoying being up this high till you said I might get chucked off.'

'Course you might not get thrown off,' Suzy said thoughtfully.

'I bet I would,' said Giac. 'Bound to be. Just my luck.'

'They might just cut your head off,' said Suzy. 'The Newniths, I mean. The Piper's soldiers. Big, ugly brutes, they are, with charged battle-axes and the like. I'm glad I'm on the same side as them, is all I can say.'

'They'll never get this far,' repeated Giac uneasily.

'Might as well 'ave a bit of fun before whatever happens happens,' said Suzy. 'Tell you what – why don't you bring me in, we'll play checkers, and then when the Newniths show up, I'll get them to just take you prisoner. Instead of cutting your head off.'

'I have to do what the manual says,' replied Giac gloomily. 'Besides, one of the Internal Auditors might come back. They'd do worse than cut my head off.'



‘Worse?’ asked Suzy. ‘Like what?’

‘Encystment,’ said Giac with a shudder. He turned a page in the manual and stared at it, then sighed and shut the book.

‘It’s so nice up here,’ he said. ‘Particularly without the rain. I really do think ten thousand years of rain is a bit much. My socks might even dry if it stays fine.’

‘Be even better with a game of checkers,’ said Suzy. ‘You don’t have to untie me. Just swing me in, and I’ll call out the moves. Then, if one of your lot shows up, you can swing me out again and they’ll be none the wiser.’

‘I suppose I could . . .’ Giac put the book down and peered at the workings of the crane. ‘I wonder if it’s this wheel . . . or perhaps this lever?’

‘No! Not the lever!’ shouted Suzy.

Giac withdrew his hand, which had been just about to pull the lever that would release the hook and send Suzy plummeting down to certain death.

‘Must be the wheel, then,’ he said. He started to turn it, and the crane responded, rotating on its pivot until Suzy was brought back to dangle above the floor of the verandah.

‘Good work,’ said Suzy. ‘I s’pose you still don’t want to touch Noon’s set?’

Giac nodded.

‘Well, get a piece of paper and draw us up a checkerboard.’

As Giac got some paper and a quill pen out of the closer desk, Suzy spun herself slightly away from the Denizen so that he couldn't see her as she wriggled two fingers under the rope around her waist, feeling inside one of the pockets of her utility belt. She could only reach one pocket, and she knew there was nothing as useful as a knife in there. Still, ever optimistic, she thought there might be something. It was an effort, but she did manage to get a grip on a cake of best-quality waterless soap. Slowly she drew it up into her hand.

*Bloomin' soap*, she thought. *What am I going to do with that?*

'This will serve,' said Giac. He set out a sheet of thick paper on the floor near Suzy's feet and quickly drew up the board. 'I'll rip up some more paper to make the checkers. Do you want to be blue or white?'

'Blue,' said Suzy. As she rotated around again she manoeuvred her hand so that she could push the soap between two strands of rope. Being waterless soap, it was quite slippery, and she thought she might be able to make it shoot out, if she could just get a good grip and snap her fingers in the right way. 'What's your friend doing?'

'Hmmm? Aranj?' asked Giac. He looked around at the other Sorcerous Supernumerary, who had stopped pacing by the door and was now sitting down with her legs pulled up and her face on her knees, appearing rather like a crushed black spider. 'She's gone into a slough of despond.



It couldn't have helped to have you talking about our heads getting cut off.'

'What's a sluff of despond?' asked Suzy.

'Acute misery,' replied Giac as he tore up a blue sheet of paper, 'resulting in withdrawal from the world. Happens to a lot of us Sorcerous Supernumeraries. Had a bout of it myself, a thousand years ago. Not too serious, mind – it only lasted twenty or thirty years. I suppose I should be suffering now, but you were right about the checkers. I'm looking forward to our—'

At that moment, Suzy forced her fingers together with a snap and the soap shot out. It struck Giac in the side of the head, but with very little force.

'Ow!' he said. He looked around wildly, but Suzy was still all tied up and slowly spinning in place. 'Who did that?'

'Dunno,' said Suzy. 'It just came out of nowhere.'

Giac picked up the soap and looked at it.

'Grease monkey soap,' he said. 'Probably thought it was funny to drop this over the side, somewhere up top. Oh, well. Let's get started.'

'You can go first,' said Suzy.

Giac nodded and set out the paper checkers on the makeshift board. He'd only just laid them all down when a breeze blew in, picked them up, and lofted them over the edge of the verandah to spin and twinkle away.

'We'd better use Noon's board and the pawns for



checkers,' said Suzy. 'Tell you what – if you don't want to touch it, how about you cut me down and I'll do all the moves? That way you can say you never went near it.'

'I don't know ...' said Giac. He looked longingly at the board. 'I would so love to play a game. It's been such a long time since I played anything.'

'You get me down and we'll play checkers until someone shows up. If it's your lot, you just say I escaped a minute ago. If it's the Piper's Newniths, you can change sides.'

'Change sides?' asked Giac. 'Um, how could I do that?'

'Well, you just stop obeying Superior Saturday and start obeying the Piper ... or someone else. Lord Arthur, for example.'

'Just like that?' asked Giac wonderingly. 'And it would work?'

'Well, I s'pose it would,' said Suzy. 'As long as you didn't run into Saturday herself. Or one of her superior Denizens, like Noon.'

'But they've gone up top,' said Giac, pointing. 'Invading the Incomparable Gardens. I could change sides *now*.'

'First things first,' said Suzy. 'It's one thing to change sides; it's something else to have the other side accept you.'

The half smile that had begun to form on Giac's face crumpled. 'I knew it couldn't be easy as that.'

'Course you *will* get accepted if you let me go,' said Suzy. 'That's the first thing. So it's still pretty easy.'



‘You mentioned Lord Arthur,’ said Giac. ‘How many sides are there again? I mean, besides Saturday’s?’

‘It’s a bit complicated,’ said Suzy quickly. ‘I’ll explain when you get me down. I can draw a diagram.’

‘I like diagrams,’ said Giac.

‘Good!’ said Suzy. ‘Get me down and I’ll draw one. Quickly!’

‘All right,’ replied Giac, and something like a small smile flitted across his face. It was the first time Suzy had ever seen a Sorcerous Supernumerary look even remotely happy.

Giac pulled the lever, and Suzy dropped to the floor of the verandah. The Denizen strode over and began to undo the knots.

‘I’m a rebel,’ Giac said happily. ‘Do you think I’ll get a uniform? Something brightly coloured? I rather fancy a red—’

Before he could say anything further, something large and black streaked in from the open air and struck him in the back of the head, sending him sprawling across Suzy. As Giac hadn’t properly undone any knots, Suzy was still trapped. All she could do was wriggle out from under his unconscious form.

‘Suzy Turquoise Blue?’ asked the black object, which was reforming itself from a kind of bowling ball made of tiny swirling letters into a raven made up of tiny swirling letters.



‘Yes,’ said Suzy. ‘Let me guess – Part Six of the Will, right?’

‘At your service,’ said the raven. ‘In a manner of speaking. I’ve come to rescue you, as Lord Arthur instructed.’

Suzy sniffed. ‘I don’t need no rescuing,’ she said. ‘Had it all organised, didn’t I?’ ‘Cept you’ve just knocked out the Denizen wot was untying me. Where’s Arthur?’

‘Mmm . . . not entirely . . . mmm . . . sure,’ said the raven as it pulled at a knot with its beak. ‘There – slither out.’

Suzy slithered out of the loosened bonds and checked Giac. He was unconscious, but the faint smile was still on his face, suggesting that he might be dreaming of a colourful uniform. She looked over at Aranj too, but the other Denizen hadn’t even looked up and was still crouched down, totally rejecting the world around her.

‘Ow do you knock out a Denizen?’ asked Suzy. ‘I tried it myself once or twice, but just hitting them never works.’

‘It is not the force of the blow, but the authority with which it is delivered,’ quoth the raven.

‘Hmmp,’ said Suzy. She sidled over to the chess set and looked back at Part Six of the Will over her shoulder. ‘Now, what’s Arthur up to?’

‘After releasing me and securing the Sixth Key, Lord Arthur went into the Improbable Stair, to a destination or



destinations unknown,' reported the raven. 'Which means that until he returns, it is up to us to secure his position here.'

'So he got the Key, then,' said Suzy with satisfaction. 'I told 'im he would. 'Ow do we go about securing the position, then?'

As she talked, she picked up the solid-gold queen from Noon's chess set and idly slipped it into one of the pockets of her utility belt.

'We must open an elevator shaft to the Great Maze,' said the raven, 'make contact with my other parts, and bring in troops to secure this tower and the entry into the Incomparable Gardens.'

'Right,' said Suzy. 'That can't be too difficult. Where do we go to open an elevator shaft?'

'The sorcerers assigned to blocking the elevators are on Levels 6860 to 6879. We merely need to access a desk on one of those levels.'

'What if they're still full of sorcerers? Or been taken over by the Piper's lot?'

'The Piper's forces have not advanced beyond the lower levels,' said the raven. 'Or at least they hadn't when I last looked. There are still a great number of Saturday's lesser troops down there.'

'Right, then,' said Suzy. She walked back over to Giac, sat him up, and lightly slapped him on the cheek. 'Come on, Giac! Ups-a-daisy!'



‘What are you doing?’ asked the raven. ‘You’ll wake him up.’

‘I know,’ said Suzy. ‘He might come in handy, and he’s on our side now. Ain’t you, Giac?’

Giac looked at her woozily.

‘Yes,’ he mumbled. ‘I think so. Which side was that again? Did you draw me a diagram?’

‘I’ll draw you up one later,’ said Suzy. ‘Now, where’s an elevator at? Or the Big Chain? Lead on, Giac!’