



JOSEPH COELHO

Dedicated to every reader with hope in their hearts ... what will you wish for?

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JOSEPH COELHO



The Professor

Full name: Professor Laurence Latimer, but everyone calls him The Professor

Age: 63 (but honestly he doesn't look it)

Wardrobe: Very cool tweed suits

Special skill: He's like a walking encyclopaedia and knows everything about genie history, lore, spells and charms.

Surprising skill: Great cane-sword swisher



Raphaela

Full name: Doctor Raphaela Gillan

Age: 27 (and a half)

Wardrobe: She calls it cyber-punkvintage-chic. I call it AMAZING!

Special skill: She can build literally anything (like, anything!!!).

Surprising skill: Coming up with genie-related acronyms



Rania

Full name: Rania Latimer

Age: 13 and three quarters

Wardrobe: Anything, everything

purple and blue!

Special skill: The youngest doctor ever!

Oh yeah and she's half-genie!

Surprising skill: Classified!!!



Me, Relic

Full name: Relic Hamilton

Age: 12

Wardrobe: I'm still finding my style.

Special skill: Top Secret!

Surprising skill: I know a lot about history, I guess it's kinda my thing.



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PROLOGUE

THE ANONYMOUS GENIE HUNTER

Present Day

Welcome to the YouTube channel of The Anonymous Genie Hunter.

That's me.

Run by my trusted adult team.

Thanks for subscribing.

Follow me as I hunt genies...

Find out all you need to know about evil genies and what to look out for.

If you're new here,

let me tell you how this channel came about.

I was supposed to keep all my genie hunting secret but then things kinda got public,

in a big way.

And so, The Anonymous Genie Hunter channel was born.

Here I will keep you up to date on all the things you need to know about genies.

Genies grant wishes!

That's all anyone ever cares about.

They forget that genies were imprisoned in those lamps for a reason.

People never think about the chaos left behind when a wish is granted.

People never think of the consequences of messing with the fabric of space and time.

People never stop to ponder what a genie has to gain from granting wishes; they never think about the genie's motives.

If they did, they would think twice before wishing for anything...



1 MUDLARKING

One Year Earlier

I'm happiest by the river lost in my thoughts just me, Grandfather and the tide.

We search the Thames foreshore, hunt for new objects whispering with the tide.

Searching for the treasures that history has left behind.

After school I head to the river. The River Thames is old, ancient in fact, and it's been the lifeblood of London since tribes first settled on its banks centuries ago, and then Romans and eventually modern Londoners. Grandfather and

I hunt out that history every day. We search the same stretch of river looking for pottery and coins, bones and trinkets. We have found loads here, anything that is real old or valuable we always take to the Museum of London to add to their collection, but anything else we keep, adding to our understanding of the deep history of London. I look down at my feet and spot a coin ... well a pirate cob – the rough money that pirates would take from ships carrying (or stealing!) gold from South America. We find lots of these. This cob is brass and on one side I can just make out a number 8. I turn it over in my hand and gasp. Someone has scratched letters into the surface, an R and an H. What are the chances?

"Look, Grandfather," I say, "a pirate cob with my initials on."

Grandfather smiles. "No way, Relic! That's got to be good luck." Grandfather rinses the coin in a puddle of Thames water and makes it shine.

"Oi look, Relic's in the mud again!" I hear them before I see them, up on the road alongside the river pointing and shouting, laughing and staring. It's Trevor and his fellow trolls – horrible to everyone

but especially me. Trevor runs his fingers through his wavy strawberry blond hair like he's on a catwalk. A lot of people in class fancy him for some reason. Then there's troll number two, Abigail, she wears her 'fro in a tight bun and is forever staring at her phone, never looking up from it, not even when calling a first-year names! Loads of people fancy her too. It's like no one cares about their personalities. And then there's troll number three, cool, silent Peter ... he's always with them, and rarely joins in ... oh but loads of people fancy him too, so I guess there's that.

"What you doing, Relic ... searching for dinner?" Abigail starts snapping photos and I hide my face.

"You friends with them?" asks Grandfather.

I shake my head as my cheeks and forehead heat up.

"You got somewhere to be?" Grandfather asks them, with that deep Jamaican-teacher voice he sometimes uses.

I squint, waiting for them to shout back, but they don't, and I can see why. I look up at Grandfather. I forget how big he is, how, despite his health, he's

still got the body of a strong man. Even with wellies on, you know not to mess with my grandfather. I feel a jolt of pride swell up in me as the trolls cat-walk off down the road. Then Grandfather bends down so his face is level with mine. His locks are neatly tied together and hang in a long heavy rope down his back, all but one that has worked loose. He pokes this back in with the others and fixes me with that stare adults give when they want you to know that everything will be alright.

"There will always be bullies, Relic, but they bully you because they see everything that you are, and everything you can become, and it scares them, so don't you ever ... ever pay them no mind." I nod, and he pats my shoulder. "Now let's get back to the shop and I'll rustle us up something warm."

But as he stands he starts coughing and I have to help him up, and that sinking feeling spreads over me again. That feeling of loss and despair.





2 ANANSI ANTIQUES

We wind away from the river to our home above Anansi Antiques.

You can feel the whisperings of generations of Hamiltons in our home above
Anansi Antiques.

As grandfather cooks
I sit in my nest in the basement
breathing in the history of
Anansi Antiques.

We live above our shop, Anansi Antiques, in Soho, London on Air Street. Just me and Grandfather. Grandfather says that one day he will find that trinket or antique that will make our

fortune, but it hasn't happened yet.

Every day after school, I help out in the shop. Grandfather gets me to sort through the mountain of old stuff we have in the basement, looking for things to display in the shop's window. Grandfather has been collecting this stuff for years from his journeys all over the world. But he doesn't travel so much now his health is bad and, besides, we have no room for any more things.

"There's always room for more treasures, Relic," he'll say.

He always says my name with a flourish, like he's announcing me to a room full of people. I know my name is weird, Grandfather says Mum and Dad named me Relic because I was their greatest treasure. Cheesy, right? But I like it. It's my name and mine alone.

Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah, Grandfather's treasures.

I'm always saying that maybe we should have a clear-out, sell up shop and move, if it would help Grandfather now that his health is suffering, but Grandfather won't do it, and to be honest I'm relieved. The shop belonged to my great-great-grandmother and has always dealt in treasures. I'm not sure who we are without our little shop.

Grandfather always says, "I cannot leave. This is my home. It is our home. It was your mother's home. And I hope it will remain in our family for generations to come."

The idea of the shop one day being mine feels unreal, but I know what he means – there are so many memories here, happy and sad memories, but all ours. There's no way we could ever leave.

Today I'm down in the basement polishing the metal treasures collected over the years and preparing our best treasures for sale. Tourists don't always see the value in what we have. I once had to spend a whole afternoon proving that what one tourist was calling junk was actually an original 'pieces-of-eight' coin like the one I found this morning, one that was likely used by real pirates! But they weren't having it, and they left without buying a thing... Their loss.

When things do sell, it's normally the shiny things that are our best sellers, and boxes of silverplated cutlery are really popular too. Grandfather gets me to make up complete sets from the tons of incomplete boxes of knives and forks we have lying around. It's hard work, like doing a puzzle without ever knowing if you have all the pieces. Often the handles don't match, or the knives and forks are different sizes. But I know what I'm looking for and can often recreate complete sets from the individual pieces we have found over the years, it feels great putting together an original set and giving all these separate pieces a home again. Grandfather often says, "You have a good eye for this, Relic."

I know he says these things to make me work harder. But to be honest, I like doing it and I want to help him as much as I can. He's getting old and he does too much already. Mrs Chen next door always comes in and checks on him. She often brings us something hot and steaming to eat. I think she feels sorry for us. She always looks at me with sad eyes. I know she's just being kind, but sometimes I just don't want to be looked at with sad eyes.

Over the last few weeks I have found lots of brass oil lamps in the shop and, today, I thought

that if I could find some more and polish them up a bit, we could make a great display for the window. Something to catch the eye of the London tourists and maybe even sell as a collection. Many of the lamps are old Moroccan tourist gifts, bought by Victorians on their travels, but some even I can't identify.

I take the brass polish off the shelf and sit down on top of the suitcases in the corner of the basement. This is my nest. I've covered the suitcases in some comfy rugs I found lying around and have everything I need at my fingertips. I sometimes even do my homework here. I do have my own room upstairs but I like sitting amongst all the old stuff. I love the smell down here; I sink into it like it's a well-loved beanbag, musty and mysterious. My friend David isn't a huge fan, he thinks it's haunted and whenever he comes round he is only happy when we go to my room to play computer. It's kind of cool knowing that Mum sat here too when she was my age, polishing and sorting. There are generations of treasures down here in the basement, and

every now and then I find something that even Grandfather hasn't seen before – something put here by my mum or perhaps even Grandfather's mum or Grandfather's mum's mum!

I start my search in a corner of the basement that has unearthed some treasures in the past. I'm making a dent in the amount of stuff in this corner and, after moving some old books and some massive brass serving dishes, I reach the floor. This is a big achievement – there is not much floor on show in the basement of Anansi Antiques. The floorboards here are loose and there are two wooden boards that shift and creak when I press them; they're not nailed down like the others. I lift them up and find a space underneath. I make a gasp that is somewhere between a woah and a wow.

"Wow-woah!"

In that space is a beautiful, carved wooden box a bit smaller than a shoe box. The metalwork on its edges looks like wisps of smoke coming together to form a clasp on the top. There are clear wear patterns on the bottom, this box definitely has some age to it. I've hit the jackpot!

There is a strange lock keeping the box closed, gears inside gears, levers and ball-bearings all surrounding a keyhole. To my luck, the key is still in the box. I turn it, and the mechanism clunks into place. It reminds me of those old fairground machines with dummies behind glass that move and speak when you feed them a coin. Grey ash and sand fall from the box and cover my trousers, my new school trousers. Grandfather is going to be well annoyed. Underneath the ash and sand are six small brass oil lamps surrounding a much larger one in the middle. These will be ideal to add to my window display.



I take the largest one out. It's heavy and really nicely designed. The spout of the lamp and its handle look like arms – thick, muscled arms. The brass is etched and I can just make out some sort of pattern underneath. I get hold of the polish and start to rub...

It's gleaming. I will need to ask Grandfather about the age, could be three, four hundred years old ... no, older for sure. Strange writing covers the body of the lamp. I'm not good with languages but maybe Hindi or perhaps Tamil? I bet Grandfather would know. I'm rubbing the lamp and I'm starting to feel cold, which is weird because it's been boiling all day. It always takes ages for the heating to be turned off in school, so I was sweating in every class. But man, it feels really cold now, *bbbbrrrrr*! And I don't know if it's the light in here but it's getting harder to see what I'm doing...

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WHAT HAPPENED? I think I had a blackout. I am freezing, my teeth are chattering and my eyesight is all wonky, like I'm staring down a long tunnel. My fingertips feel numb with cold... Something isn't right. The lamp in my handfeels much lighter than it did before. And I can hear breathing!

A deep, heavy breathing, almost a growl, is coming from the opposite corner of the basement, the dark corner that Grandfather says was the old coal store. I'm scared to look that way. Don't be silly, Relic. It's just a basement. But what if David is right ... maybe the basement is haunted! Probably just the wind...

But it's not the wind. OMG ... there is a huge man, and he is ripped like a body builder! Sitting there in the corner, on top of all our stuff. He's dressed in rags, his bulging muscles showing underneath, his skin bone white. He has his back to me but his head is slowly turning. Lank, greasy hair falls over his face and down his massive muscly back. Through his curtain of black hair his ice-white eyes pierce through me. I want to run and scream but it feels like all hope has left me. It feels like I've got no choice but to just sit here and be swallowed by his gaze. His eyes are glowing now, whiter, spearing

into my head. I can feel him in there rooting around. Searching. GET OUT! I can feel him rattling through all my hopes and dreams and desires, inspecting them like Grandfather looks at over-ripe fruit in the market. There is a voice, deep and thick in my head:

"What do you wish for, Relic Hamilton?"





He knows my name, saying every syllable like it hurts! And he knows what I want. He has caught hold of my deepest wish. But I don't want him near it, so I'm pulling it back. I'm burying it deep...

"I can make it so."

NO. My head is hurting, all my dreams and desires jostling around, but he's pulling at one in particular, making my dream, my wish, fill up my entire mind. I can feel it bubbling up inside me, getting brighter and richer. I can feel every part of me wanting it more and more. He's making me hunger for it like I have never hungered for anything before. And I don't like it, it feels wrong ... I WANT MY WISH ... but not like this, everything inside me is telling me to run but I can't. He's smiling. I can feel him smiling in my head with a mouth that is too big, with teeth that are too fat for any smile...

"I can grant it for you, Relic Hamilton," he says, and a whoosh is lifting me into the air.

It feels like my brain is on fire with the sugarrush joy of having the thing I always wanted. But it's a sickening feeling. It's too much; it feels fake. He's not granting a wish; he is taking something away.

The man is laughing now, pulling on the weird hungry pleasure I feel when thinking about my wish, like he's feasting on it. It hurts and I want it to stop and I want to scream out. Then, I hear footsteps running down the stairs behind me.

I see the big man's lips curl over his huge teeth and he extends his arm. A ball of electric blue fire shoots towards me but I am pushed to the ground and I hear a shout that sort of sounds like Grandfather... There is a flash of light as the man transforms into a thick cloud of smoke that zaps into the large lamp, kicking it out of my hands, into the air and through the basement window. It all happens so quickly. My head is clouded and it's hard to breathe, like I'm rising up from underwater. And then ... darkness.



I awake for a moment, eyelids heavy. The basement looks like a bomb has hit it, all our stuff scattered everywhere, and blurry people rushing about with flashlights. Grandfather is on the floor and I can hear someone saying his name again and

again: "Carl, Carl can you hear me?". His breathing is ragged, I try to call to him, but my head feels like the school bell. Grandfather's eyes are closed. He doesn't look like himself. The people are rushing over, talking quickly. My head blooms as a deep sickening feeling takes me over. And once again all goes dark.



LOST AND FOUND

Taya

School trips are dumb.

They take us out of school to learn!

But all we end up doing
is sitting on buses for hours,

queuing for hours,

waiting around for hours.

School trips are dumb.

don't want to be on this stupid school trip; no one likes me and I don't like anyone. And to make things worse it's with Spanish exchange students and even though my Spanish is rubbish Mrs Butler has picked me for this "special" trip...

"It'll be good for you, Taya," she says. "And it'll

be good for your Spanish, too."

But I don't see how good it can be when none of us can speak to each other, and besides, everyone is just staring at their phones in front of some of the so-called "best" sights London has to offer.



We spend the morning at Madame Tussauds. It's filled with these waxworks of celebrities and we're supposed to WANT to have our photo taken with them ... eurgh! Well I WANT to see the gruesome bits. Gran told me that she had gone there years back and seen the Chamber of Horrors – full of stories of, like, murderers and executions. It's supposed to be well scary. I WANT to see that! But it's gone. Now it's just royals and superhero films ... not a puddle of blood in sight anywhere!

The Spanish students love it, taking photos with Thor and Iron Man, Dua Lipa and Stormzy.

Now we're tramping around Soho looking for somewhere to eat. Mr Butler (yep, my teachers are married ... yuck!) is manically trying to find the pizza place he booked for us. I actually know where it is from one of the times I lived in London before ...

and know the pizzas are cheap for a reason. If I don't tell him, we might actually have a decent dinner.

"Have you been speaking with our guests, Taya?" Mrs Butler nudges me with her shoulder.

She gives me bare jokes. She's the one teacher that I don't mind so much, even though I know what she's trying to do, always talking about "potential" and crap like that. I know I'm rubbish, but that's OK. School just ain't for me. But somehow, when she does all the teacher chat, I don't get mad like I do with the others.

"I've tried, Miss, but they speak well fast."

"Well, remember what we say..."

"Más despacio por favor."

"Yes, that's it. And they will slow down."

She calls over Maria. Maria is tall and pretty. I hate her already.

"Maria, this is Taya. Taya está aprendiendo español."

I get what Miss is trying to do, but damn it's awkward.

"¿Te gusta Londres?" I say, trying to be nice, but then Christopher starts shouting at one of the Spanish boys and Mr Butler is trying to calm everyone down and a crowd is gathering.

Mrs Butler runs over to help hubby (vom!), meanwhile Maria takes her phone out and starts recording, and I'm standing alone on the street and that's when I hear it. A heavy clunk on the pavement behind me. There's like this brass lamp thingy by a small slot window at the bottom of the wall, one of those windows that lets light into basements. I look up. I'm outside Anansi Antiques. I think about taking the lamp into the shop. Maybe someone dropped it coming out. But I can't stop staring at it, like it's drawing me in or something. Before I realize it, I've put it in my bag, and I'm not a thief or nothing, but I'm clutching my bag tight, like I've found my own secret treasure.





THE ALADDIN

Flying feels like dreaming, unreal, but somehow more real than anything.

For a moment
I'm soaring above the clouds.
I'm winged and taloned.
I'm feathered and limitless.
Then I wake up.

I must have passed out. I'm no longer in the basement. No longer in Anansi Antiques. I'm in the sky!

I'm lying down and there is a small round window to my right and I can see London below, like we're hovering above the oxbow of the Thames curling like a muddy snake (we learnt about those in geography last term – "study points" for me).

An old man is peering down at me with deep brown eyes behind a pair of round glasses, a little white afro crown framing his bald head. Next to him is a woman with a mass of red hair and tattoos of spiders and other animals climbing up her arms. She has a piercing in her nose and several in her ears. She is holding a beeping device over me.

"Where am I?"

"Don't worry. You are safe," says the man. He sounds like a BBC news reader. "I'm Professor Latimer and this is Doctor Gillan."

"Call me Raphaela," says the doctor with an accent that I think is Italian. She smiles, and I immediately think of my mum's smile.

"This must all seem very confusing to you," continues the Professor.

My head is foggy and I'm wondering if I'm in an air ambulance. But this doesn't look like an air ambulance, it looks more like a private jet. There are large monitors along one side of the massive cabin, and a table covered in maps. It's more like being in a building than an aircraft. The box I found is on the table with the lamps gleaming brightly inside. The basement and everything that happened comes crashing back to me...

"Grandfather... Where's my grandfather?"

The Professor and Raphaela go quiet. They part to show me a bed on the other side of the jet. My grandfather is lying on it, breathing through a series of tubes connected to a bunch of machines, his locks fanning out from his head like some king who's been laid to rest.

"Grandfather!" I yell.

"Don't worry," says Raphaela. "We are doing everything we can for him. He is stable now and we'll try to wake him up later, but he has been in a very serious ... erm—"

"Accident," says the Professor, throwing a weird look at Raphaela – that look adults give when they are keeping something from you.

"There was no accident. This man appeared in our basement and he tried to do something to me. He was in my head. I know it sounds unbelievable but he was, and then ... and then ... and then I don't remember."

This time, it's Raphaela that gives a don't-let-thekid-know look to the Professor.

The Professor continues, "I'm sure you thought you saw lots of things, but this was just an accident. A gas leak on your street. It undoubtedly made you think you saw something that wasn't there, that's all. Just the miasma of fumes playing tricks on your mind."

Now, I'm very good at telling when adults aren't being 100 per cent truthful and this was definitely one of those moments.

"Look!" I say, "I know something really strange happened in our basement and I know there was a weird magic man in there and that some proper weird stuff went down. You guys are being really nice looking after me and Grandfather and everything, but don't tell me it was a gas leak when we're on a private jet hovering over London and you've brought that strange box of brass lamps I found. I don't think they have anything to do with a gas leak, do they? You've got my grandfather in a bed hooked up to loads of machines and I don't even know WHO YOU ARE! And I'm just a kid and this is all scary stuff, so you should tell me the truth. OK?"

The Professor and Raphaela move away from me to do their adult whisper-talking where I can't hear them, but I don't care. I'm mad. I have been through a lot, and all after a very hard day at school – I had maths and everything! And now these jokers are trying to lie to me. I look over to Grandfather. I hate seeing him like this. It reminds me of the time he got really sick and I was constantly in and out of the hospital visiting him. That's when Mrs Chen started checking in on me and making sure I was well fed. But at least he is here with me now. Where I can make sure he's OK.

With the adults no longer hovering over me, I get a proper look at the inside of this jet. It is a jet for sure, and it's hovering over London, and I'm wondering how people down below aren't staring up at us in disbelief. I try to see if there is anything that might tell me who these jokers are. They must be from some secret spy agency. They would have to be to have a jet this fancy. I crane my neck to look down towards the cockpit, but there are no controls like you'd expect, just a screen with the words "autopilot engaged" in flashing red letters. Towards the

back of the cabin I spy big leather chairs around a table and I can see other open compartments: one with a proper kitchen, another with a library in it and yet another with what looks like a gym! Who has a gym on a jet? I strain to listen to their secret conversation. It sounds like they're arguing...

"We have to tell him..." says Raphaela a bit too loudly, because I definitely hear that and they both look at me, and I smile my don't-try-and-pull-thewool-over-my-eyes smile.

The Professor walks over to me. He walks with a cane and has a bit of a limp but even so, it's a strong walk that comes with its own tapping. He doesn't seem like spy material ... he seems more like teacher material.

"OK, Relic, you win. We'll come clean."

"That's all I ever wanted," I say, using my youshould-know-better voice.

"We're sorry to have lied to you, but we are members of an incredibly ancient and secret organization. We work globally from right here in London tracking ... people like the man you saw in your basement. It is our task to find them before they hurt anyone, like this man hurt you and your grandfather."

"Let me guess," I say. "You're MI5?"

"No."

"MI6?"

"Er ... no."

"MI7...? I knew it. I always thought it made no sense to stop at six."

"We're not spies, Relic... We're archaeologists." The Professor stands tall as he says this and puffs out his chest.

"And you, Relic, are currently flying in our one-of-akind, super-fast, Mach 6 jet. A plane of my own design, unlike anything else on Earth. We call it the *Aladdin*."

Now it is Raphaela's turn to stand proud. She spins around as she says "Aladdin" with her arms stretched out like a pop star finishing a song and taking in her adoring fans.

Now I'm proper confused.

"But archaeologists dig up old stuff from the past. I watch that programme on TV called *Yonder Wander*. Those archaeologists work in ditches and museums, not on secret high-tech planes."

The Professor and Raphaela laugh and I give them my don't-laugh-at-me-when-I'm-being-serious face.

"You're quite right, Relic. That is what archaeologists normally do. But we are not normal archaeologists."

Raphaela smiles. As she speaks, she presses a button on her watch and a picture pops up on all of the jet's monitors. It's a circle with loads of lines pointing inwards like the spokes of a wheel and, in the middle, there is what looks like a face. It's made up of two large circles for the eyes, a thin line for a nose and two smaller circles at the bottom, a bit like cheeks. I can't help thinking that I've seen it somewhere before.

"This is our symbol. It is older than mankind. We have borrowed the marking of a rather special Chinese animal for our logo."



Raphaela disappears to the back of the plane and returns moments later with something cupped in her hands. She brings her hands right under my nose and opens them.

"A tarantula!" I cry.

"It's OK," says Raphaela. "Sorry, I should have asked. You aren't scared of spiders, are you? He's friendly. This is Kuman, he is a Chinese hourglass spider."

I've never really been scared of spiders but this is a tarantula and it's right in front of me. But I guess he's cute, not as big as the orange-and-black tarantulas you see in movies. His whole body is black and shaped like an hourglass and his bum is flat – like proper flat.

Raphaela turns him around so he is giving me a full-on moonie. The surface of his bum is wrinkled, and the wrinkles make a pattern just like the logo on the screens.

"This particular species has always been the inspiration for the emblem of our organization," says the Professor, smiling fondly at Kuman's back end.

"And what is your organization?" I ask.

"We are the Hermitic Sodality of Genie Hunters."

My eyes narrow as I try to work out whether they are kidding.

"So you guys ... hunt genies?" I say, not quite believing the words that are coming out of my mouth.

"Hunt' is such a violent word, more of a leftover from the Sodality's early pirating days," says Raphaela. "We track their activity using a quantum field detector and trap them in a genie trap."

Raphaela puts on a very proud smile.

"Our order is ancient and our work covert, Relic. It is imperative that no one knows about us or what we do. Do you think you can keep our secret?"

The Professor looks at me dead serious and I'm trying to remember if I ever told them my name.

"Yeah, of course. You can count on me. But I don't know how we're going to explain it to my grandfather when he wakes up. He's quite particular about these things and I'm not even sure he'll believe you."

"Oh, that's not a problem," says the Professor.

"Your grandfather is one of us."



THE INSTITUTE

The Aladdin speeds
to our destination,
halts to a hover,
lands with a whoosh
on a rooftop
near London's Euston station.

I pinch myself
thinking of dreams and magic
as the back opens up
and a metal ramp rolls out
like a rug.

We are met on the roof by a team of people in white coats and wearing strange masks with the Sodality's (spider bum) logo.

"Don't be alarmed, Relic, these people are our staff.



The masks help keep everyone's identity secret, which helps us keep the Sodality's clandestine workings secret. They're going to get your grandfather settled."

The staff members walk onto the *Aladdin* and wheel Grandfather's bed out onto the roof before pushing it to a huge lift. One of the staff members starts to attach pads with wires onto Grandfather's head and chest.

"What are they doing?"

"Making sure your grandfather gets the best possible chance to convalesce, Relic. You have my word we will do everything in our power to help him!"

The Professor awkwardly pats me on the back as we descend into the belly of the building. In the lift everyone is silent, the only sound is the rhythmical beeping of the machines the staff have attached to Grandfather, making my worry spiral, so I try to block out the noises.

"So is anyone going to actually explain to me how my grandfather is a member of your ... your ... genie hunters? And how he kept that secret from me, his favourite grandson? And who that man in the basement was? Wait, was that man a genie?!"

"You're very astute, Relic." says the Professor.

The lift doors open onto a long brickwork tunnel, I can't see the end. There are rooms leading off from it at regular intervals and people walking between them, some in white coats, some in mud-splattered wellies, some in long leather coats. I even spot something that looks like a robotic dog!

"Welcome, Relic," says Raphaela, "this is the headquarters of the Hermitic Sodality of Genie Hunters ... well, the headquarters of the London Chapter at least. Right now we are several storeys beneath the Institute of Archaeology, the IOA. Above us are lecture rooms and libraries, hundreds of university students and many lecturers, none of whom know that we are here. This is our secret base and the Professor is in charge of it all, both the secret Sodality and the public Institute."

Raphaela looks giddy with excitement (the way I get when Grandfather agrees to watch a new action film with me) as we walk down the neverending tunnel.

"A select few of the lecturers do know about us, but only those I deem worthy." The Professor puffs out his chest again as he taps with his cane. I don't think he realizes he is doing it.

"Anything you need, Relic, you just ask," continues the Professor. "Your grandfather and I go back a long way, we studied together right here at UCL. I owe him everything, I owe him my life. You will both be staying here with us, at least until we get to the bottom of what happened at your shop."

The Professor holds the box I found with the six remaining bronze lamps inside.

"Do you know what became of the largest lamp, Relic?" the Professor asks.

"This is going to sound crazy, but I think it flew out of the window."

The Professor gives a *humph* at that and I see another secret look pass between him and Raphaela.

We head to a huge room where there are two hospital-style beds. One wall is filled with glass jars containing floating preserved things. They look out of place alongside the kind of high-tech machines you see in hospitals with wires and sucky-pad things that I've seen go on people's chests in movies.

"This is the medical bay, Relic, and this is our

resident doctor," says Raphaela, as Grandfather is lifted up onto the bed by two white-coat-wearing staff. They take a clipboard, fill it with notes and walk straight to the doctor. She is sitting at a large console with her back to us. She has bright blue and purple braids. They are long and almost touch the floor, but more amazing than that, they are glowing! The white coats bend down and whisper to her urgently. She takes the clipboard and whispers something back to them, and they leave.

"What is the diagnosis, Rania?" asks the Professor.

She doesn't turn her head but remains bent over, studying the clipboard. "It doesn't look good, but I will do all I can." Her voice is young, like really young. She swivels round in her chair and I gasp a bit too loudly. She's a girl, about my age, and that's surprising enough. But more than that, her eyes are amazing, they are glowing with a bright purple-blue light, and she has two small blue horns curling from her forehead. I gasp and then just stare like an idiot.

"Relic, meet our resident doctor," continues the Professor. "You may notice she is half-genie, and, I'm proud to say, my daughter."



6 RANIA

"Your, your daughter!"
I stutter and stare.
I want to not be staring
but I can't help it.
Her eyes are amazing,
her face is amazing,
her hair is amazing.
I stand there and stare.

he looks at me sharply, ignoring my dopey shock.

"You saw the genie that did this?" she says, walking over to my grandfather and taking note of the readouts on the equipment he is now hooked up to.

"Erm yeah ... he was big," I say stupidly.

"He was clearly a powerful genie, I can still feel the remnants of his power on your grandfather and on you, but don't worry, we have everything here to solve most medical emergencies be they spiritual, physical or magical."

"Spiritual and magical?" I say, noticing a display cabinet filled with an assortment of differentcoloured crystals.

"Yes, genie hunting is a risky business," says the Professor. "Genies can wield fantastic magical abilities and so can harm us in a multitude of ways, but Rania is accomplished in all sorts of healing and, being half-genie herself, is most qualified to help your grandfather."

"You're half-genie," I gasp again, still not quite believing it.

"Yes, on my mother's side, obviously."

"But I thought the Sodality of Genie Hunters ... you know ... hunts genies."

"See, I told you dad, we should change the name, it makes everyone think all genies are bad!"

"Yes, darling, I know... I have mentioned it to the other Sodality HQs, but this isn't the time ... we need to be focusing on waking Carl from this coma."

"Well, Relic," says Rania as she starts applying

creams and ointments to my grandfather's face and hands. "I am half-genie and you should know, the Sodality does not hunt ALL genies because not ALL genies are bad."

"So, you're like a good genie? So, can you like grant a wish to make my grandfather wake up?"

She smiles a sad smile as she works and sighs deeply. "Genies don't purely exist to grant wishes to any hapless human who comes along. You think that because the only genies you have ever heard about are those that have been imprisoned in lamps. There are millions of us that exist in our own dimension, not imprisoned in lamps, and not humanwish-granting machines! Besides, I'm only halfgenie, so even if I wanted to grant wishes I couldn't, my powers are ... different. But I'll find a way to help your grandfather better than any mere wish could ... using science and medicine and an understanding of how genie magic actually works." She continues to prod and poke Grandfather.

"I'm sorry," I mumble, "I didn't mean to be rude." I feel hot and want the floor to swallow me up.

"It's OK, Relic, there is a lot about genies and

magic that you will learn, all in good time. But for now we must attend to your grandfather," says the Professor, as he takes a small leather notebook from his back pocket and stands next to Rania. The two of them start mumbling in a strange language over my grandfather whilst spinning a metal ball on a chain spewing a deep heavy scent.



Raphaela leads me off to one side. "We must let the Professor and Rania work now, Relic. Your grandfather took a big hit from that genie in your basement."

"So was it a very powerful genie?!"

"Yes, incredibly powerful with readings much higher than the usual genies we see, and by the looks of it this one is bad, very bad."

Raphaela opens a drawer and takes out an old and dented lamp. I stand back.

"Don't worry, this lamp is empty. The genie escaped from it years ago, it is totally safe. But look here, there is a warning engraved around the edge."

I squint and can just make out a swirling script. It looks like Latin. "Non plus quam tria vota facere.' It means 'make no more than three wishes.' All genie lamps have these warnings inscribed on them, and with good reason. Genies can grant our wishes but there is a cost. When humans are at the point of having a wish come true, when all their hopes and dreams are at the point of being realized, their brain switches into a heightened quantum state. That quantum state is the energy source that the genie uses to grant the wish."

"So, you're saying genies feed on our hope energy to grant our wishes."

"Ha! Yes I suppose they do, exactly that, and with each extra wish the human is stripped of more and more ... hope. The damage barely registers if we only make three wishes, but if a human makes more than three, it can take a toll on the wisher's hope levels. If they keep making wishes, they can lose all hope. It's a terrible state to be in, to have everything you ever wanted but still feel empty inside. If that continues, they can even end up falling into The Sleep of Desperatio – a sleep of complete hopelessness – just like your grandfather here."

Raphaela hands me the dented lamp, it feels light

and ordinary, like something we'd sell in the shop, not at all like something that once held a magical being, capable of granting wishes.

"But, Raphaela, Grandfather didn't make any wishes."

"We know, Relic, that's what makes this all so disturbing. Your grandfather was attacked by a very powerful genie, one capable of feasting on a person's hope energy without them even making a wish."

I think about how the basement genie was rooting around in my head and my skin goes cold.

"For a moment, Raphaela, it was like the genie was in my head and he was tugging on everything I ever wanted all at once, it was horrible. I felt like I couldn't escape, like I would never escape. I still feel like that now," I say, feeling silly and embarrassed and horrible inside. Raphaela removes a jar from one of the shelves. She puts a mask over her face and carefully opens it.

"OK, breathe deep." She wafts the jar under my nose before quickly closing it back up. It smells like strawberries and warm custard, like a freshly baked cake and a summer morning all wrapped up in one,