



ATTACK - OF THE - SEADOGS

M. G. L E O N A R D

Illustrated by Manuel Šumberac

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Hey Diary,

Remember when Sim told me he could open doors in time and I didn't believe him? Well, it's true! He's a time key. I've seen it with my own eyes. Can you believe it? My best friend is an actual time traveller!

Sim says that when something important happens in a place, the doors pick up a special sound — 'a unique resonant frequency' — that turns them into time doors. When a time key plays music that harmonizes with the time door's sound, it opens back to that time.

Not everyone can do it — worse luck. You have to be good at music. Only time keys can hear the sound a time door makes. Most time keys are kids because your hearing gets worse as you grow older. Mrs L — Sim's mum — used to be a time key, but she can't hear the doors any more. Time keys travel in pairs for safety, because if something happens to your hearing while you are in the past you can't get back.

Sim time-travels with his cousin Jeopardy, who is nice as long as you agree with her. The three of us are becoming a time team. It's awesome. They practise music and we all do fight training — because the past is a dangerous place! My speciality is research and investigating.

What needs investigating? A secret society called the Council of Keys is what. They are seriously shady. The Council controls the time doors and it has loads of rules about who can go through and when. Sim and his family broke the Council's rules a long time ago and live in hiding as renegade keys, but I think there is something dark behind the Council, and I intend to find out what it is.

So, you see, history just got interesting!

Nelson

(A time traveller's best friend)

Doublet and Hose



Emmett buttoned the rust-red jerkin, then puffed up his chest as he looked at his reflection in the full-length mirror. There was a curious smile on his lips. Sim watched his uncle with interest. In his opinion, the fancy leather waistcoat and old-fashioned breeches looked silly, but there was something routine in the way Emmett had fastened the white lace ruff round his neck and belted the sword on his hip. His fingers secured the ties and fastenings without needing his eyes to guide them. It was as if he wore sixteenth-century clothes every day.

‘Argh!’ Nelson exclaimed in frustration, holding up his fawn wool breeches, to stop them from dropping round his ankles. ‘How are these supposed to work?’ He waved a lace with his free hand.

‘Come here,’ Jeopardy said, taking the lace from him. ‘Stand still.’ She threaded the fraying string through a series of holes and tied it in a bow. ‘It helps if you have two hands.’

Nelson wriggled. ‘Man, these pantaloons are itchy!’

‘Tuck your shirt in,’ Uncle Emmett suggested, sitting

down on the edge of his bed to pull on his knee-high boots.

Jeopardy opened a deep drawer in her dad's Chinese marriage bed and rummaged around in it.

'What are you looking for?' Sim asked.

'A hat.' Jeopardy lifted a round black velvet cap from the drawer and tucked her auburn ponytail into it, then pulled it over her head. 'Elizabethan boys don't have long red hair.'

'Wouldn't it be easier to dress as a girl?'

'Girls' clothes weren't designed for investigating mysteries and having adventures,' Jeopardy scoffed. Mischief sparked in her hazel eyes, and for a split second she looked like her dad. 'Although *you* could probably handle the skirts and petticoats.'

'Me?' Sim squeaked.

'Yes. Nelson –' she turned, unable to suppress her smile – 'don't you think Sim would look great in a bodice and bloomers? We don't want anyone recognizing him, and they never would if he was disguised as a girl.'

Nelson snorted with laughter.

'OK, OK. I'm sorry.' Sim held his hands up in surrender. 'It was a bad idea.'

Jeopardy grinned. She lifted the cloth sling bag that contained the solid gold Viking horn that never left her side over her head and arranged it so the instrument curved round her right hip. 'I'm ready,' she said to her dad.

'And me,' Nelson added, pulling on his hat.

'Me too,' Sim said, sliding his silver tuning fork into the empty dagger sheath on his belt.



‘You all look marvellously Tudor,’ Emmett said approvingly.

‘Did they have Black people in Elizabethan England?’ Nelson asked. ‘I’m worried I might stand out.’

‘Course they did.’ Emmett waved Nelson’s concern away. ‘There were people of colour in the UK long before Tudor times. There were fewer than there are now, but if anyone gets curious tell them you’re a member of Sir Francis Drake’s crew. He circumnavigated the globe, visiting all sorts of new places and people. To be honest, I don’t think anyone will be that interested.’ He raised a finger. ‘What they *will* care about, however, is that you are a devout *Protestant* Christian. If anyone mentions religion, be very careful what you say. Try to say nothing, but, whatever you do, don’t mention Catholicism. OK?’

Nelson, Sim and Jeopardy nodded.

‘Good. Now, come on.’ He opened the door. ‘I’ve laid out four mackintoshes on the sofa in the library. We’ll wear them over our doublets and hose on the journey to Plymouth to save us having to get changed.’

The enormous library-cum-sitting room was the heart of their secret, windowless, underground apartment. It had two bedrooms and a bathroom but no kitchen, and was hidden beneath Liberty department store in central London. Named the Lasenby Rooms after its original owner, the apartment had two entrances. The first was a set of deserted-looking cellar steps choked with litter in the narrow lane behind the building. They led to a locked door and a hidden staircase. The second required a special key that unlocked a brass panel in the department store lift. Beneath it was a button marked L.

Emmett pointed to the raincoats draped over the back of the sofa. Sim picked one, pulling it over his Tudor clothes and tying the belt.

Emmett looked at his watch, then unfastened it, laying it on his desk. ‘We’d better get a move on. It’s a three-and-a-half-hour train journey from Paddington to Plymouth and we want to arrive before nightfall. Have you got your instruments?’ He was checking rather than asking, but Sim’s hand went to his tuning fork and Jeopardy’s to her bag. They both nodded.

Nelson picked up a pocket-sized notebook bound in brown leather from the desk, sliding it into his raincoat pocket, along with a pencil.

‘What’s that?’ Jeopardy asked.

‘My case file on the Council of Keys,’ Nelson replied. ‘I know our mission in Tudor times is to find Sim’s dad, but the Council is doing shady things and I don’t like it. I want to help, so I’m puzzling it out in here.’ He waggled the notebook.

‘That’s why Mum is meeting with Matteo Blum,’ Sim said. ‘She wants to know what he found out on his trip to Berlin. The renegade keys in Germany sent out an alert saying the Council is blocking use of the time doors over there.’

‘I wish Matteo could’ve come here,’ Jeopardy said. ‘He’s just the coolest. Imagine being an opera singer who is famous not just in your own time but in three others!’

‘If Matteo came here, we wouldn’t be able to sneak off on a secret adventure to find my dad,’ Sim pointed out.

‘Which reminds me, Callidora will be home soon,’ Emmett rubbed the back of his neck nervously. ‘We don’t want to be here when your mum walks through that door. If she knew what we’re about to do, she’d stop us for sure.’ With a whirl of his wrist, he produced an envelope from his pocket. ‘I have written her a letter . . .’

‘The coward’s signature move,’ Jeopardy muttered wryly. ‘Why aren’t I surprised?’

Emmett ignored her. ‘I’ve said that Jeopardy’s mum has asked me to bring her home for a visit.’ He turned to Sim. ‘I’ve told Callidora that you wanted to come too, to meet your other cousins, and that I was sure she’d agree.’

Sim frowned. He hated lying to his mum, but his pulse was throbbing at the prospect of visiting the time when his

father was still alive. Nothing was more important to him than warning his dad about the plague and saving his life. One little lie was a small price to pay.

‘I sign off by telling Callidora not to worry, and that we’ll be back in a few days.’ Emmett gave a wolfish smile. ‘I’ve purposely kept the details vague.’

‘Mum won’t believe you,’ Sim said.

‘Of course she won’t.’ Emmett shrugged. ‘But there’s nothing she can do about it. She can’t open time doors any more. She’ll have to wait here until we get back.’

‘She might visit Jeopardy’s mum’s house,’ Nelson pointed out.

‘She won’t,’ Emmett replied.

‘You don’t know that,’ Jeopardy said.

‘I do. She’ll read the letter, suspect it’s lies and then she’ll see my watch.’ He pointed to where it lay on his desk.

‘Your watch?’ Jeopardy looked puzzled.

‘Yes. If I’m time travelling, I leave it at home. Passing through a time door would break it.’

‘She’ll know what we’re doing!’ Sim gasped.

‘No,’ Emmett said calmly. ‘She’ll know we’ve gone on a little adventure into the past, but she won’t know which time door we’re using, or when we are travelling to.’

Jeopardy and Nelson exchanged nervous glances with Sim.

‘Will she be angry with us . . . ? Well, yes. Yes, she will. She’ll be furious.’ Emmett turned to Sim. ‘But you want to go to Elizabethan London, don’t you?’

Sim nodded. ‘One hundred per cent.’

‘Then we have no choice. We must lie –’ Emmett leaned the letter against the Anglepoise lamp on the desk – ‘and deal with the consequences of our actions when we return.’ He held out his arms. ‘Unless one of you has a better idea?’

Jeopardy and Nelson shook their heads.

Sim felt a bit sick, but he reminded himself that his mum had her own secrets. Callidora Lockier had not told her son that she’d met his father on the other side of a time door until Sim was twelve and discovered he was a time key, able to open the doors as well.

Sim had always known his dad had died before he was born, but not four hundred years before. Most of his life, he’d thought his dad was like anyone else’s, from the present. Last year, his mum had admitted that she’d met Abe Lockier in 1588 and married him in 1589. Sim learned that Abe had been an apprentice ironmonger at a smithy close to London Bridge, but he had died in 1589 during an outbreak of the plague.

The moment Sim had learned the truth about his dad, he’d wanted to travel back in time and try to save his life. But his mum shut down every attempt he made to talk to her about it. She said it was impossible. Now, guided by his Uncle Emmett’s knowledge of Tudor time doors, he was going to do it. If he had to lie to his mum, then so be it.

‘Let’s go,’ Sim said.