

'A funny, captivating story ...'
Guardian on The Land of Roar



RETURN to ROAR

JENNY
MCLACHLAN

Illustrated by Ben Mantle



RETURN *to* ROAR



JENNY
MCLACHLAN

EGMONT



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For wild and wonderful Mara

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ROAR

the END →

MITCH

ARCHE PLAYGO

TANGLED Forest

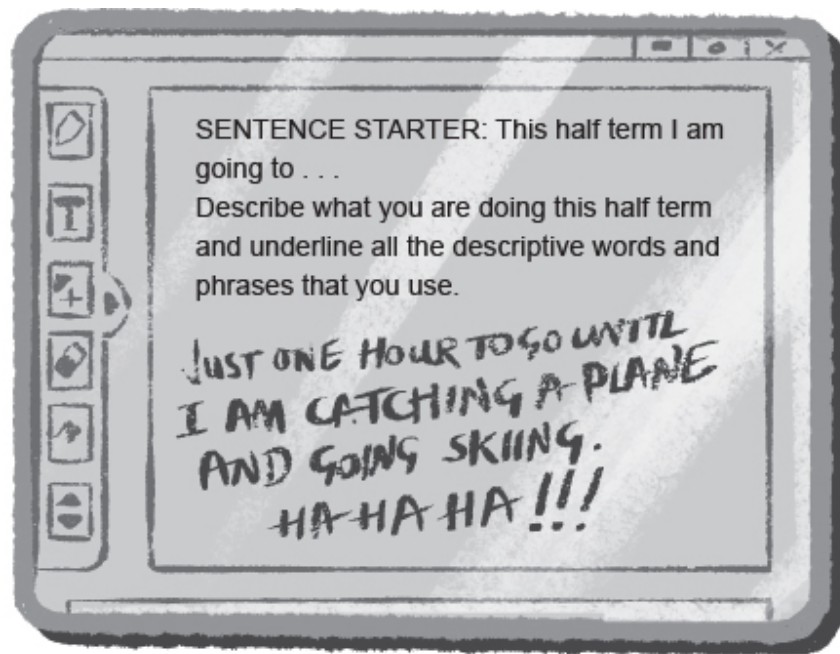
the CROW'S Nest

The BAD side

DUNGUN

by ROSE
and ARTHUR

CHAPTER 1



The work on the interactive whiteboard suggests Miss Kimble isn't taking this lesson very seriously. Who can blame her? We're about to break up for half-term and there's a very relaxed atmosphere in the room.

Music is playing, pens and rubbers are flying around, and everyone is chatting. Miss Kimble is frantically tidying her desk because - as she keeps telling us - she has a plane to catch, and my sister is plaiting Harriet Scott's hair. No one is doing any work.

Except me.

I pick up my pen and start to write. Miss Kimble isn't the only one going somewhere exciting this holiday.

This half-term I am going to visit the Land of Roar with my twin sister, Rose. We're not sure exactly where Roar is, but to get there we have to crawl through an ancient, rusty, folding camp bed in our grandad's attic. The camp bed isn't a glamorous portal to a fantasy world, but it works and that's what matters.

Once we've arrived in Roar we'll hang out with my best friend: Wininja. Win is as stealthy as a fox, as flexible as a rubber band and as magical as a wand because he is half ninja and half wizard.

After we've explored Roar we will fly a dragon. Flying a dragon is cooler than a slushy although their bodies feel as hot as an oven. At some point we will visit the Crow's Nest which is this terrifying castle in the middle of the sea. A gang of wild girls live there, but it used to belong to our nemesis, Crowky.

Crowky is a total villain. He is also as clever as a crow and as creepy as a scarecrow. This is because he's a scarecrow with crow wings (although his wings might not be working right now because last time we were in Roar a dragon set fire to them - long story).

I'm also looking forward to swimming with some heavily-tattooed merfolk. The only reason I'm doing this work is to distract me because I'm DESPERATE for the bell to ring. When it does I'm going to zoom round to Grandad's (as fast as a cheetah) and then the adventure will begin!

'Arthur, what are you doing?' I look up to see my sister standing over to me.

'What?' I say, covering my work. 'Miss Kimble's never going to mark it, is she? She's going skiing.'

Rose slips into the seat next to me and puts a cake tin on the desk. 'Yes, but what if someone else reads it? They'll think you're crazy!'

I grin. 'But I'm not, am I, Rose? We're actually going back to Roar. Today!'

'*Shhh!*' She looks around, to make sure no one's listening.

My sister hates talking about Roar at school, but right now I'm too excited to follow her rules. 'Rose, this evening we could be flying a dragon!'

She can't help herself. She has to smile. 'I know. I just wish we could be there right now!'

She says these words with such passion that I'm surprised. Like me Rose loves Roar, but she also loves it here at Langton Academy. We've only just started, but she's already got this massive gang of friends who she hangs out with all day, and then all night via her phone. By contrast, I've made one friend, Adam Zeng. He's great, but right now he's having his tonsils out, which is why I'm sitting on my own.

'When we get to Roar what do you want to do first?' I say.

Rose looks at me like I'm stupid. 'Go and see Mitch of course.'

If Win is my best friend in Roar, then Mitch is Rose's. She's a merwitch who lives on her very own island, but the last time we were there we discovered she'd gone missing. Just before we left we saw something swimming in the sea and Rose was convinced it was Mitch, but really it could have been anything. So I say, 'Rose, you know Mitch might not be back yet?'

She hugs the cake tin to her. 'She has to be! Mitch disappeared because I forgot about her, but I can remember her so clearly now: her webbed fingers, her tattoos, her hair. It was bright blue.'

'The colour of bubble-gum ice cream,' I say.

She smiles. 'Exactly!'

'But, Rose, if Mitch isn't back, there are loads of other amazing things we can do.'

She shakes her head stubbornly. 'No. I only want to see Mitch. I've got so much to tell her.' Then she glances across the room at her new friends. They're gathered round Harriet Scott – the loudest of the group – who is saying something so shocking the other girls' mouths are hanging open.

Rose's gang look identical, and not just because of their gaping mouths. They're all wearing their ties short and chubby and their socks pulled up high, and every one of them, including Rose, has their hair in one long plait. Rose says they do all this matching stuff to show what good friends they are. Rose's fingers drum on the cake tin. That's another way they show what good friends they are: by baking.

'Can I have a cake?' I say.

Rose opens the tin, revealing rows of perfect cupcakes. Each one has a different emoji face iced on it. 'Sorry, I've not got enough.'

Suddenly Harriet's voice rings out across the classroom. 'Rose, come here! We want to show you something!'

Rose hesitates. I guess she doesn't want to leave me on my own. 'I'm fine,' I say, and she gives me a grateful smile before shooting off.

I look at my watch. Just six minutes to go. My heart squeezes with excitement. I'm not sure how much more of this I can take. In front of me, Tariq bends over his bag and shoves half an egg sandwich in his mouth. We're breaking up at lunchtime, but obviously he can't wait.

The eggy smell drifts over me, and I shut my eyes and breathe it in. *Dragons*, I think, and in a flash I'm back in Roar, flying high over the Bottomless Ocean on Vlad. Waves crash below us and Vlad sends a jet of fire rolling towards me along with the smell of sulphur.

Something hits my head and I open my eyes to see a rubber sitting on the desk. From across the room Harriet calls out, 'Sorry, Arthur. I was aiming for Tariq!'

Miss Kimble looks up and realises that her classroom has descended into chaos. 'Right,' she says, clapping her hands. 'Who'd like to share one of their descriptive sentences with the class?' Everyone falls quiet, even Harriet. Then, like a dragon sighting its prey, Miss Kimble's eyes lock on to me. 'Arthur Trout, let's hear one of yours.'

'Umm . . .' I swallow and desperately try to find a sentence that doesn't involve anything magical. '*I'm also looking forward to swimming,*' I read, skipping the bit about heavily-tattooed merfolk.

Miss Kimble frowns. 'Well it's a sentence, but I wouldn't exactly call it *descriptive*. Let's have another one.'

Rose turns and shoots massive evils in my direction. I'm seconds away from the end of term and I'm about to get into trouble. 'Ahh . . .' I say.

And then, quite literally, I'm saved by the bell.

The classroom erupts with noise as chairs are scraped back, books are stuffed into bags and coats are pulled on. 'Take your work home with you!' shouts Miss Kimble, as she rushes towards the door. 'You can finish it during half-term WHILE I'M SKIING!'

I crumple up my piece of paper and stuff it in my pocket. I don't need to write about Roar, because finally, after weeks of planning and waiting and dreaming, I'm going back.



CHAPTER 2

While Rose gives out her cakes, I join the crush of students heading out of school.

Mum's parked exactly where she said she'd be and seeing as Rose isn't here I take the front seat.

'Hey, Arthur!' Mum says, giving my hair a vigorous ruffle. 'Looking forward to staying with your grandad?'

'Yeah,' I say, fighting back the enormous grin that's threatening to burst across my face. Mum and Dad are pretty cool, but there's no way they would agree to me and Rose having a mini-break in a fantasy world. They think that while they're walking in Scotland, Rose and I will be having a relaxing week at Grandad's. To keep Mum believing this I start telling her all the things we're planning to do. 'Grandad's promised to take us fishing,' I say, 'and out on our bikes, oh, and he's finished the den in the attic so Rose and I don't have to share a room any more.'

'Speaking of Rose, where is she?' Mum rubs a circle in the condensation on the window. 'If she doesn't get here soon, your dad and I will miss our train.'

'I'll go and find her,' I say, unclipping my seatbelt and jumping out of the car. I can't believe Rose would rather give out cakes than get to Roar!

I'm running across the playground, when a dark shape flies past my face. I gasp and hold my breath until I realise

that the shape is just a crow swooping down on a half-eaten panini. My heart continues to thud as I walk into school. I have a lot of moments like this: I catch sight of someone wearing a black coat or I hear the flutter of wings, and a flash of fear rushes through me. A few days ago I actually yelled in history when a seagull tapped on the window.

There's a good reason why I'm so jumpy.

The last time I saw Crowky – burnt and broken on the deck of the *Raven* – he was wearing my grandad's 'NO PROB-LLAMA!' T-shirt. Although Crowky doesn't know it, objects from this world let people out of Roar, and that T-shirt is all he needs to escape. The thought of Crowky crawling into the tunnel in Roar wearing the T-shirt and then appearing in Grandad's attic is horrible. What would he do first? Stuff Grandad or come looking for me and Rose?

At first I didn't mention the T-shirt to Rose and Grandad. To be honest, I wanted to forget all about it, but then one Saturday a rook landed on Grandad's bird table and I was so freaked out I dropped my hot chocolate. Rose asked what was wrong, and I blurted out that Crowky still had Grandad's T-shirt. Unlike me, they weren't bothered about it. Rose said it was falling apart when we last saw Crowky, and that it would be at the bottom of the Bottomless Ocean by now, and Grandad agreed with her. But I'm not so sure .

. .

I turn a corner and almost run into Harriet and the rest of Rose's friends. Their arms are linked and Harriet's laughing. 'Where's Rose?' I say.

Harriet's smile disappears. 'Arthur, it's terrible. She's dropped her cakes!'

'I still think we should help tidy up,' says Nisha. I've known Nisha since primary school, and right now I can tell she's worried.



Harriet glances at her phone. 'We haven't got time. If we miss the bus, we miss the film. Fish understands.' Then she walks past me and one by one the others follow. 'Bye, Arthur,' she calls over her shoulder. 'Have a good half-term!'

I find Rose on her hands and knees in the Geography corridor. Her cupcakes are everywhere: mashed into the floor, squished into lockers, and even smeared across a noticeboard.

'What happened?' I say. 'It looks like they exploded!'

Rose shakes her head. She looks totally miserable. 'Some Year Elevens went past and the tin got knocked out of my hands. Then the cakes got chucked around.'

I start to scoop up broken bits of cake, dropping them in the bin. 'The others should have helped you pick them up,' I say.

Rose shrugs. 'They didn't have time. They've got a bus to catch.'

Still, I think, *they should have helped*, but I don't say this out loud because Rose looks like she's about to cry, and if there's one thing Rose hates doing it's crying. So instead I

grab more handfuls of cake, trying to get the job done as quickly as possible.

Soon we're walking out of school and I'm eating an almost complete cupcake that I found resting on a radiator. 'This one tastes great, Rose.'

She gives me a quick smile. 'Thanks, Arthur.'

I crunch down on one of the silver balls. 'How come Harriet calls you Fish?'

She rolls her eyes. 'Because our surname's Trout, you idiot.'

'Oh yeah! So can I call you Fish?'

'No,' she says, giving me a shove.

When we bundle into Mum's car we're out of breath and laughing. We raced for the front seat and Rose won, of course. 'About time,' says Mum. 'Did your friends like their cakes, Rose?'

There's this moment of silence where I know Rose doesn't want to go into the whole cake-dropping business, so I say, 'I had one. It tasted amazing.'

Then Adele comes on the radio, distracting Mum.

As we drive out of town towards the coast, Mum sings along to the radio and Rose rests her head on the window. I lick icing off my fingers, and I try to ignore the scarecrow I've just spotted standing all alone in the middle of a field.



‘Right, lecture time,’ says Mum as we turn into Grandad’s driveway. ‘Do your teeth at least once a day, eat fruit or vegetables twice a day and, Rose, don’t live on your phone.’

Overgrown bushes and trees scrape the sides of the car. As usual, Rose’s phone is in her hand. ‘Actually, Mum,’ she says, ‘I’m going to turn it off for the holiday and have a complete digital detox.’

‘What?’ Mum’s so shocked she almost drives into Grandad’s birdbath. Rose loves her phone. She can get through a whole day without looking at me, but she looks at her phone about a thousand times.

Rose shrugs like it’s no big deal. ‘I watched this thing on YouTube about how bad phones are for your happiness so I thought I’d have a break.’

Mum stops the car and throws her arms round Rose. ‘I am *so* proud of you!’

Over Mum’s shoulder Rose catches my eye and grins. Then she says, ‘Maybe you should do the same, Mum. You and Dad are going to Scotland to get away from it all, so why not turn your phones off too? If there’s a problem Grandad can ring your hotel.’

‘If you can do it, then so can we,’ says Mum, squeezing Rose even tighter. ‘My little girl is so wise!’

Cunning more like, but I have to admire Rose’s quick thinking. We want to stay in Roar for the whole of half-term

and now we don't need to worry about Mum or Dad wanting to speak to us.

A bang makes me jump. Grandad's sneaked out of his house and is now squishing his face against my window.

Mum is horrified. 'Is he actually *licking* the glass?'

He is, and it's hilarious. Rose and I jump out of the car and are immediately pulled into one of Grandad's prickly hugs. Grandad's not a big fan of shaving. Or trousers. Just like every other day of the year, he's wearing shorts and sandals that show off his large gnarly toenails.

'Not long now,' he says, and for a moment the three of us are lost in the excitement of our shared secret.

Mum beeps the car horn. 'Grab your bags, twins!'



We pull them out of the boot. They're full of clothes we won't wear and books we won't read, but we had to pack them so Mum and Dad didn't get suspicious.

After Mum's done an awkward six-point turn, she leans out of the window and fixes us with a stern look. 'Make sure you don't spend the week lounging around.'

I shake my head. 'We're not going to do any lounging, are we Rose?'

'No way. We're going to go swimming -'

'And cycling and . . . jogging!' I say.

For a moment Mum narrows her eyes suspiciously, then she says, 'Fine, just don't watch too much TV.'

Then, with a beep and a final wave, she drives away.

We all let out a sigh of relief.

'Well, she didn't say anything about *not* riding dragons,' says Grandad.

'Or hanging out with ninja wizards,' I say.

'Or jumping off waterfalls,' Rose adds.

Grandad throws his hands up in the air and does a big belly laugh. 'Looks like you're good to go then!'



CHAPTER 4

‘Ta-da!’ Grandad throws open the door to the attic. It’s incredible. He’s transformed the dusty room into the den he promised us. There’s a squishy sofa, beanbags, books and games; there’s even a popcorn machine. Grandad’s put framed photos on the wall of him and Nani in Mauritius, and I spot two china dodos that belonged to Nani. The whole room looks cosy and cool, and a massive improvement on the junk-stuffed attic.

Rose and I run around, bouncing on the sofa and looking in drawers. Rose’s old rocking horse, Prosecco, is sitting in front of the window giving me evils. No change there then. The Prosecco in Roar hates me too, only he’s more of a threat because he’s an actual stallion with large teeth and a boy-stinging tail.

‘Arthur, come and look at this,’ says Rose. She’s found a trunk and it’s full of our old toys. I pull out a ninja costume that looks just like the robes Win wears, a bag of pirate Lego and then a red plastic dragon.

‘I thought you’d taken all this to the charity shop,’ I say to Grandad.

He shrugs. ‘It seemed a shame to throw it out.’

I know what he means. It was playing with these toys that led to Roar appearing inside the camp bed. We don’t know how it happened, or why some games came to life in Roar

while others stayed firmly in the real world, but these toys are where it all began.

Rose carefully folds a mermaid's tail and puts it back in the trunk. She looks round the attic. 'I love it all, Grandad!'

'You've not seen the best bit yet,' he says, then he bends down and flicks a switch. A string of fairy lights starts to flash over one of the eaves, and I see that tucked inside, covered in Nani's silky sari, is the folding camp bed. Its boxy shape makes a shiver run through me.

Grandad smiles proudly. 'I thought a magical portal deserved a special place to live,' he says, and then, like a magician, he whips off the sari.

I stare at the camp bed's familiar flowery mattress and rusty springs. The plastic headboard reflects the twinkling fairy lights. I run my hands over the words I scratched into the headboard years ago -

ENTUR HEER FOR THE LANED OF ROAR!!!

- and my stomach knots with excitement. Soon we'll be crawling into the mattress. Soon we'll be in Roar!

'I polished the headboard and oiled the wheels,' says Grandad, pulling the bed into the middle of the room.

'But you haven't opened it, have you?' asks Rose. She's always believed that opening the bed will make everything inside disappear. We don't know if this is true, but it's not something we ever want to test out.

'I've not opened it, or even put my head in there,' he says. 'I'm only crawling into that camp bed if you two don't come back next Sunday.'

I don't blame Grandad for not wanting to go inside the bed. It was only a few months ago that Crowky dragged him out of my hands, through the bed and into Roar. Crowky took Grandad to the Crow's Nest where he stuffed him by pressing his twiggy fingers down on his body and

squeezing the life out of him. Grandad would have stayed like that forever – a lifeless scarecrow – if Rose and I hadn't got to him in time.

Just thinking about Crowky makes the excited tingle in my stomach turn into a knot of worry. I take a step back from the bed as if I'm expecting Crowky's hand to appear and grab hold of me, or worse, grab hold of Grandad.

'You all right, Arthur?' says Grandad.

I force myself to smile. 'Yeah . . . just excited.'

'No he's not,' says Rose. 'He's worried about the T-shirt.' My sister can read my mind. It's a twin thing. She knows when I'm happy, sad, worried or lying. It's really annoying.

Grandad pats my shoulder. 'You don't need to worry about that old thing, Arthur. It was falling to bits before Crowky got his hands on it. It was my painting T-shirt, remember?'

'Plus Crowky hasn't got a clue what it can do,' adds Rose. 'As far as he's concerned it's just an old T-shirt, not some key that will magically let him out of Roar and into this world!'

Her words don't reassure me. If anything, they make me feel worse. 'But there's still a chance that Crowky could crawl into the tunnel wearing it, isn't there?'

'Arthur, it's a tiny chance,' says Grandad. 'It's not worth worrying about.'

'Great!' says Rose. 'In that case, can we get going?'

Grandad laughs. 'No way. You two aren't going anywhere until I've given you a bit of advice.'

'Seriously?' says Rose, but he's already pulling out an old blackboard and waving us towards the sofa.

Once we're sitting down, he finds a yellow chalk and writes 'Grandad's Top Tips' along the top of the blackboard. 'Don't worry,' he says. 'This won't take long.'

He's right. It doesn't take long, because he only has three top tips to share:

1) No running on the dragons. Ride them SENSIBLY.

*2) Be home by 3pm Sunday or I'll come looking for you.
(Seeing as Mum and Dad are supposed to be picking us up
at four this is pretty relaxed.)*

3) Don't do anything I wouldn't do!!

Number three seems to be giving us permission to do absolutely anything we want because Grandad is a man with very poor risk-assessment skills. He once actively encouraged me to jump out of the cherry tree on to the trampoline, and he believes no hill is too steep to cycle down 'if you've got the right attitude'.

'Grandad, are you saying we can climb tall trees?' I ask.

'Yes,' he says, nodding seriously.

'Have bonfires?'

'Of course! Have as many as you like.' (Grandad loves bonfires.)

Rose sees where I'm going with this. 'Can I gallop fast on Prosecco, swim in the mermaid lagoon and go to bed whenever I like, and possibly not at all?'

'Yes, yes and YES!' Grandad laughs. 'Just don't run on the dragons. That's dangerous. Oh, there is one last rule.' Grandad selects a new red chalk and writes:

4) Avoid all unnecessary winding up of Crowky - he's unstable.

'Well obviously,' says Rose. 'Now can we go to Roar?'

'Yes!' says Grandad, and Rose is so happy that she does something totally unexpected: she throws her arms round me and gives me a hug.