

CHAPTER ONE

Morelle



Joshua and Sarah had made their way back through the forest towards Morelle. With the turmoil of the battle against the Goat and His Blood-bats at Jemarrah behind them, and nobody chasing after them anymore, they felt much more relaxed as they walked hand-in-hand.

Joshua was both excited and nervous about introducing Sarah to his mother now that he and his girlfriend were less than a day's travel from his home village.

Sarah gazed into Joshua's eyes and smiled.

"You know you have mud down the side of your nose," she laughed at him. Joshua laughed back. He reached into his keeper bag and took out a small, oval mirror with a short, wooden handle. It was the Mirror of Prophecy he had been given by Fable back at Fable and Florelle's Inn. He stared into it to see what Sarah was talking about. His expression changed. He opened his mouth and his eyes widened. Sarah's smile faded.

"Joshua? What is it?"

He turned and gazed at her. More than anything else, he loved Sarah's deep, blue eyes. He'd do almost anything to catch

a moment admiring them. But this time it was different. This time, Joshua feared for Sarah.

She sensed something was wrong and asked softly, "Joshua, what is it?"

Joshua's jaw dropped. His eyes widened. A look of terror formed across his face. "The Goat. He's still alive!"

Sarah stared back at him with a look of horror. Joshua turned and set off at a brisk pace through the forest as Sarah chased after him.

"Joshua, wait! Slow down! What did you see?"

"Come on!" he said, beckoning her to follow.

They eventually made it to the outer boundary of Morelle, where they had planned to meet up with Andrew. He had travelled back with Galleon a few days earlier.

"That's strange," Joshua said, looking around.

"What's the matter?"

"He's not here. He was supposed to meet us here, right?"

That's what he said?"

"Maybe he just forgot."

"Andrew? That's not like him. No, something is wrong. I can feel it."

"Oh, come on, Joshua, don't you think you're being a little paranoid? There could be a dozen reasons why he's not here."

Joshua's fixed his eyes on the ground, shaking his head.

"No. Something's wrong."

He turned towards Morelle, and they set off again.

As they neared the village, they both sensed something was amiss and approached with caution. An eerie mist hung in the air as they crept into Morelle. There were no people coming or going. The forest was eerily quiet.

Joshua and the Magical Islands

“Can you smell that?” Sarah asked. “It smells like...smoke.”

Joshua nodded at her. A light breeze started to clear the hazy mist that hung in the air. As it did, Joshua froze and what he saw. Chills ran down his spine. His eyes widened and his heart skipped a beat.

A scene of total devastation revealed itself through the acrid smoke. All the buildings in Morelle had been burned to the ground. Joshua’s home village was reduced to ashes.

The roofs were all gone and the few remaining beams were smouldering. Plumes of smoke rose into the drifting air. Sarah gasped and raised her hand to her mouth.

They pushed on through the burned remains, trying to see if they could find anyone. The entire village was deathly quiet with not a soul in sight.

Joshua stopped in front of what was left of the elder’s hut. Atop the remnants of its roof stood a post with a black flag flapping in the wind. Across the face of the flag was the unmistakable mark of The Goat.

“Where is everybody?” Sarah asked in shock as she surveyed the devastation before them. The scene was uncomfortably familiar to that of the Valley of Moross they had encountered when they were looking for the Oracle of Forestium a few days ago. All the people of the valley had been banished to another world by the Goat and the only things left were the burned-out shells of huts.

“He has them,” Joshua said quietly. Sarah looked at him with deep concern.

“What was it, Joshua? What did you see in the Mirror of Prophecy back there?”

Joshua turned and put his hand on Sarah’s shoulder.

“Death,” he replied after a long pause. “I saw someone die in my arms.” Sarah’s jaw dropped.

“Who was it?” she asked with bated breath.

Joshua surveyed the sight of destruction around him. He shook his head slowly.

“I don’t know who it was. The image was hazy and I didn’t see her face clearly.”

Joshua looked mournful as he struggled to figure out who the figure in the mirror could have been.

“It was...a girl...I think. She had a red and blue feather in her hair or something like that. But I couldn’t quite...I...I just don’t know.”

“What happened to everyone here?” Sarah asked.

The realisation what had happened now started to sink in with Joshua. Morelle wasn’t just a village—it was a lifetime of experiences. When he saw his home, he didn’t see a familiar wooden hut made from logs and moss—he saw memories of a happy childhood. Everything that Joshua was; everything that made him the person he is; all his triumphs and failures; all his hopes and dreams—now reduced to ashes. Joshua shook his head, a tear welling in his eye. He wrapped his arms around Sarah, and broke down into tears. The two comforted each other in their moment of despair.



Joshua and Sarah continued through the ruins of Morelle looking for survivors. It was the same at every building; everything was burned but there was no sign of any bodies

Joshua and the Magical Islands

anywhere. It was as if everyone had simply vanished and the village had then been destroyed.

Joshua stopped in front of his mother's hut. The roof was missing and most of the walls were no longer standing. What was left of the furniture, was now a pile of smouldering ash. A black cauldron lay smashed across the floor in what was once the kitchen. Beside it was a scorched wooden doll. Joshua picked it up.

"What's that?" Sarah asked.

Joshua caught her eye. He tried to force a smile as he brushed soot from the toy. It wasn't just a doll. The tattered toy represented much more than that. A flood of happy memories surfaced. In his mind's eye, Joshua watched wood shavings drop to the ground as his mother carved it from the branch of an Ashfer tree he had brought home with him one day. She had spent weeks carving, shaping, bringing the toy to life. He remembered being so pleased when it was finished and he was allowed to play with it.

"Mum made it for me when I was small," he explained, a slight smile forming. "She was clutching it when I told her I was leaving Morelle."

Sarah reached over and gently put her hand on his shoulder.

"How could the Goat have done this?" Sarah asked.

"I don't know," Joshua said turning to look at her. There was despair in his tone. He pursed his lips and breathed a heavy sigh.

"He has them all," he said looking around. Anger welled inside. Joshua felt a sickening sensation in the pit of his stomach. After all he had been through; after defeating the

Christopher D. Morgan

Goat's dark forces; after losing his father, and now this? *It mustn't be in vain*, he thought to himself. *I have to do something.*

"We have to find them," he proclaimed. "We have to find them and bring them back." Joshua's breathing quickened. Emotions he had ever tapped into surfaced like an erupting volcano inside him. "And when I do," he declared, "I'm going to make him pay for what he's done. I'm going to kill him."