



PROLOGUE

Book One, *Magic Teacher's Son*, took place in the Kingdom of Eldor on the world of Rados, where civilization has reached the level of early 1800s America (except guns were never invented), magic is commonplace, and most people believe Earth is only a legend.

Magicians in Eldor use white magic, and the more powerful spells require gold, which turns to lead as the spell is cast. Silver works for lesser spells, but spells cast using silver wear off quickly, and the silver turns to iron as the spell is cast.

The Kingdom of Eldor is under attack by Marakna, a kingdom whose magic users, called sorcerers, use black magic, or sorcery. Most black magic spells are cast using bones, which turn to dust as the spell is cast. Spells cast using human bones are more powerful than those cast using animal bones.

The ancient wizards possessed magic far more powerful than today's magicians or sorcerers, but they all killed each other off in the War of the Wizards nearly two thousand years ago, or at least, that's what most of Eldor's historians believe. Others, however, speculate that a few wizards may have survived by escaping to another world.

Few artifacts survived from the Age of Wizards except the Wizard Towers—tall, cylindrical structures that are magically impregnable to

attack.

Most towns in Eldor were built around a Wizard Tower, some cities have more than one, and its capital, Eldorado, has five. Near the top of each Wizard Tower is a battle room, which Eldor's magicians and archers use to defend their town.

Sixteen-year-old Pran was a magic student in the one-room magic school run by his father in the town of White River Junction. One night Pran snuck out of his house to join other teens secretly experimenting with sorcery (black magic), including several of his classmates. During his furtive trip to the circle of sorcery, Pran was befriended by a mysterious little boy named Jelal, a Novice (first-year student) in the town's other magic school.

The next day Pran's father somehow knew all about the black magic experiments, expelled the leader of the circle of sorcery (Pran's classmate Sekar), and warned another classmate, Samir, that if he used sorcery again, he'd be expelled too. All of Pran's classmates, even his friends, assumed that he snitched on them for his father.

Before Pran could convince his classmates he wasn't the one who snitched on them, a Truthseeker prophecy warned that the gold Eldor's magicians needed to repel the current invasion would vanish from their world. The kingdom will be doomed unless Pran and three unnamed companions travel to the "legendary" land of Earth to obtain gold. The Truthseeker cleric who told Pran about the prophecy also revealed that Pran has the gift known as truthsense, which lets Pran discern truth without needing a lie detector spell.

Pran's father called an emergency meeting of the Magicians Council to alert them to the prophecy and its threat to Eldor. On the way to the Wizard Tower for the meeting, Pran talked to his new friend, Jelal, accusing him of being the one who snitched on Pran's classmates about the circle of sorcery.

Jelal admitted it, then revealed his secret identity as a spy, code-named Mouse, working for the Eldorean Intelligence Agency (EIA). His childlike appearance, Jelal explained, was due to an eternal youth spell backfiring

on him over a century ago, at age twelve. He longs for a counter-spell to the eternal youth “curse” so that he can finally grow up, because he’s small, even for a twelve-year-old, and tired of being treated like a little child.

Pran realized Jelal fit the prophecy as one of his companions for the quest, so he brought Jelal with him to the Magicians Council to warn them about the threat to Eldor’s gold supply. During the meeting, the town’s Loremaster revealed the existence of a secret portal to Earth, which could be accessed using a pendant made of the rarest metal on Rados, an Earth metal called *aluminum*.

The Loremaster warned that Earth was a strange, perilous, and machine-infested world so shockingly different from Rados that visiting it would drive any adult insane. Despite this warning, the Magicians Council insisted on adding an unwanted companion, the arrogant and abrasive Lieutenant Hakon, a Magic Officer in the Eldorean Army Archery Corps. Pran later learned, to his astonishment, that the council didn’t trust Jelal without “adult supervision,” considering him “unstable” and prone to mood swings, but Pran thought the council’s fears were silly. Sure, his friend Jelal got *emotional* sometimes, but Pran couldn’t blame him, considering the life he’d been forced to live: carrying out adult missions as an assassin and spy while trapped forever in a child’s body, unable to share his secret with anyone without a “need to know.”

On the way home Pran was ambushed by three classmates, including Sekar and Samir, who accused him of snitching on them. Pran couldn’t reveal who the *real* snitch was without betraying Jelal, but his classmates took his silence as guilt. After beating him up, they threw him off a bridge, thinking Pran had a spell to protect himself from the fall, but when it turned out he didn’t, they left him for dead.

Pran was rescued by Vitina, a beautiful, exotic, seventeen-year-old enchantress who fit the prophecy for the quest. Pran fell in love with Vitina at first sight, but Vitina believed his feelings were merely side effects of the powerful healing spells she’d cast on him. He’d been amazed to find out she’d healed him with magic, because everyone in Eldor “knew” girls couldn’t do magic, but Vitina was from an island where girls were unaware

of that alleged limitation. After escaping from slavery in Marakna and immigrating to Eldor, she'd kept her magic skills a secret from most townsfolk (as well as her status as an escaped slave).

The next day, Samir was so happy to see Pran alive, and so remorseful for attacking him, that Pran forgave him, his truthsense telling him that Samir's contrition was genuine.

In a meeting to plan for the quest, Pran voted for Jelal to be quest leader rather than himself, because of Jelal's experience and qualifications. Consequently, over the strident objections of Lieutenant Hakon, Jelal was elected leader.

Two other Eldorean Army officers came to Pran's magic school the next day, swore the entire class to secrecy with a magic oath, then asked them to join the Resistance in case the enemy conquered the town of White River Junction. The entire class agreed to form a Resistance cell called the Groundhogs.

The next day during school, all the gold turned to lead, fulfilling the prophecy. Just as Pran and Jelal were about to head for the portal to Earth without their final companion, Samir volunteered to go on the quest, which was now code-named Operation Bird Dog. Pran hesitated, until Samir revealed the family secret that he's Pran's cousin, the illegitimate son of Pran's uncle. At that point, Pran realized Samir fit the prophecy as his final companion for the quest and allowed him to come along.

Enemy forces launched an attack while Pran and his companions crossed their besieged town to reach the Wizard Tower, where Vitina would meet them to go through the portal to Earth. On the way, they and their Army escort were ambushed by an enemy sorcerer, some traitors, and a sorcerer's apprentice who turned out to be Sekar, their expelled classmate. Lieutenant Hakon died bravely while defending Pran and his companions. Sekar bragged that he was the one who helped the enemy sorcerer cast a spell destroying all of Eldor's gold. Jelal killed the enemy sorcerer, and Eldorean soldiers took Sekar prisoner.

When Pran, Jelal, Vitina, and Samir arrived at the Wizard Tower, they met sixteen-year-old Prince Taryn, third in line to the Eldorean throne.

The young prince offered Pran and his friends their choice of reward for successful completion of the quest. Pran, Samir, and Vitina asked for full scholarships to the Royal Academy of Magic. In addition, Pran asked for his father to be made a professor at the Royal Academy, Samir asked for a magnificent stallion, and Vitina asked for her brother to be given Eldorean citizenship and allowed to join the Resistance. All Jelal asked for was a counterspell to eternal youth so he could finally grow up.

The Loremaster revealed that the wall of the Wizard Tower is the portal to Earth, but only a magic user wearing a pendant of the Earth metal called aluminum can activate it. He told them this portal led to the richest and most powerful nation on Earth, and after passing through it, they'd emerge outside a tower on Earth that resembled a Wizard Tower.

Jelal and Samir stepped through the portal first, and then it was Pran's turn.



1: THE PORTAL

KINGDOM OF ELDOR, WORLD OF RADOS

Inside the besieged Wizard Tower, it was Pran's turn to pass through the portal to the mythical world called Earth, but he hesitated, fearing the unknown. Who knew what horrors lay on the other side, or even within the portal itself?

Vitina offered, "What if you and I walk through the portal together, Pran, hand in hand?"

Pran looked at the beautiful young enchantress with gratitude and longing, feeling his heartbeat quicken. All he could think of in reply was, "Yes, I'd like that," but to his relief, nobody laughed. He reached out to Vitina and took one of her warm, soft, brown hands in his own for the second time that day. Hand in hand, they stepped through the portal together towards the legendary land of Earth, that strange and perilous place of fearsome machines.

As he stepped into the portal, Pran felt himself falling into what seemed to be a bottomless pit. He felt as if he were plummeting so fast that wind should've been whooshing by his face, but other than the eerie sensation of falling, he could hear and feel nothing at all, as if he were falling through a dark, silent, airless void. The descent lasted longer than anyone could possibly hold their breath, yet Pran felt no need to breathe, so either time stood still inside the portal, or time had no meaning there. Just when he

thought he'd be stuck there forever, Pran's feet finally found solid ground again, but not in an abrupt jolt, as he would've expected from a fall, but in a gentle pressure, as if he'd been floating upright in the sea, and a wave had gently drifted him into shallower water where he could stand.



2: THE MYTHICAL WORLD CALLED EARTH

Pran emerged from the portal, which on this world appeared to be a tower made of concrete, blinking in the hazy sunlight of a strange new land. If the spell had worked correctly, they'd arrived in the richest and most powerful country on the legendary world called Earth. It was a place which, until last week, he'd thought to be just a myth from fairy tales told to frighten young children. Pran turned to Vitina and asked, "Are you okay?"

The young enchantress nodded and, as her obsidian-black eyes met Pran's, she flashed a smile that made his heart beat faster. They were still holding hands, and it seemed to Pran that neither of them wanted to be the first to let go. Pran looked around to see if their other two companions had arrived safely, too. Near the portal they'd emerged from, stood his cousin Samir, looking none the worse for wear, except passing through the portal had changed passing through the portal had changed his red hair and blue eyes to brown like Pran's own.

Vitina asked, "*Samir*, is that *you*?"

Samir looked puzzled. "Did the portal affect your eyes?"

"No," Vitina said, "but it seems to have changed the color of *your* eyes, and your hair too."

Samir said, "Oh, well, that's because the portal removes any spells we had on us."

Vitina asked, “Why did you have a spell making your hair red and your eyes blue? Are you that vain?”

Samir laughed. “No, my mother had a spell cast on me at birth to make my hair and eyes match my father’s—I mean stepfather’s—so nobody would guess she cheated on him with Pran’s uncle. That’s one reason Pran and I didn’t know we were cousins until this week.”

“Oh,” Vitina said.

Pran looked around for Jelal and was glad to see his little friend had arrived safely as well. He wasn’t surprised to see Jelal with his back pressed up against the tower wall while his keen, blue-gray eyes scanned their surroundings for danger. Pran remarked, “*You* still look just the same, Jelal. I guess going through a portal doesn’t make eternal youth spells wear off, eh?”

“Unfortunately not,” Jelal said bitterly. “I told you I’d tried it before with no luck, probably because the eternal youth spell was black magic, sorcery. And before anyone says it, I *know* I have nobody to blame but myself for my condition, so there’s no need to rub it in.”

“Okay, okay,” Pran said, shooting a warning glance at Samir not to ask questions.

“Someone *saw* us,” Jelal declared.

Pran looked down at Vitina’s delicate brown hand, still clasped warmly in his own. “Saw us doing what?”

Jelal rolled his eyes. “Coming through the portal, of course, right through this tower wall! I’m sure they *also* saw you and Vitina holding hands, so if I were you, I’d be a little more discreet about *that*, too.”

Vitina suddenly dropped Pran’s hand as if it had burned her.

Jelal continued, “Remember, this is a serious mission, a quest for gold to save our kingdom, not a romantic getaway! When I was elected leader of this quest, I didn’t realize my duties would include chaperoning two love-struck teenagers.”

Pran felt himself blushing. He supposed his friend had a point, but was surprised by the sharpness of his tone, almost as if Jelal were jealous of him and Vitina. He said defensively, “Vitina and I were only holding hands for,

um, safety while going through the portal. It's scary stepping through a solid wall, especially one that's supposed to lead to the mythical world of Earth." He didn't want to admit *he'd* been the one who'd been most scared, so he quickly changed the subject. "Who saw us?"

"A girl about Vitina's age. She was definitely watching us, probably saw us come through the portal. When she saw me look back, she went into the woods."

Pran sighed. "I suppose getting here without anyone noticing was too much to hope for." Wiping the sweat off his brow, he said, "It feels like summer here."

"Maybe it is," Jelal said. "A Loremaster told me time doesn't always flow at the same rate on Earth as it does on Rados. It's autumn back home, but it could be summer here if Earth is a season behind Rados now. We'd better take off our coats and stow them in our packs. Hide your pendants under your shirts, while you're at it," Jelal advised, "so nobody knows we're magic users."

The hexagram pendants they'd used to open the portal to Earth were made of the rare and precious Earth metal the Loremaster called aluminum, a metal unknown on Rados, and if they lost the pendant, they'd be unable to return to their home world. After removing his coat, Pran tucked the pendant under his shirt, then looked around at his surroundings. They had indeed stepped out of a tower wall, but the wall behind him was pale cement, not the magically smooth, blue-gray stone of the Wizard Tower wall he'd stepped through back in Eldor. The tower here was over a hundred feet high, an eight-sided structure topped by a round, golden globe.

Looking up at the top of the tower, Pran noticed the sky here wasn't as blue as the sky back home. Instead, the sky had a slight brownish tint to it, and the clouds were also slightly tinged with brown. The air felt heavy and had an acrid smell, like smoke from a faraway forest fire.

There was an ominous noise in the background that Pran couldn't quite place. It reminded him of a distant waterfall, but unlike the steady roar of a waterfall, this noise rose and fell in volume and pitch, giving him an uneasy feeling of foreboding.

Samir asked, "What are we supposed to do next, Pran? I just volunteered for the quest today, so I wasn't in on your secret meetings. All I know is we're supposed to bring back gold from Earth, but you must have plans for how to get it."

Pran said, "You should ask Jelal, not me, since he's quest leader."

Samir shrugged. "Well, I've only known Jelal a few days, but you and I have been friends almost our whole lives, and we just found out we're also cousins!"

Jelal said bitterly, "Some *friend* you showed yourself to be last week, helping Sekar beat up Pran, throw him off a bridge, and leave him for dead!"

Vitina's dark eyes widened, and in her accented Eldorean she said, "Pran, *please* tell me you did not bring one of your attackers on the quest with us!"

Pran sighed. "Samir thought I had a Gravity Shield spell active, so he didn't really mean to hurt me. In fact, he was so sorry about what happened at the bridge that I forgave him. It's a good thing I did, too, because the prophecy said my third and final companion would only seek me out if I displayed 'mercy, forgiveness, and trust.' The prophecy was right about that, like it's been right about everything else. I trust Samir now."

Samir gave Pran a heartfelt look of gratitude, "Thanks! Okay, Jelal, since you're our leader, what do we do next?"

Jelal said, "We need a bilingual spell to communicate with natives in their language, but first we need to find someone speaking the language. Better yet, if we find a sign written in the local language, I can make the bilingual spell do double duty, letting us *read* Earth language as well as speak it."

Samir said, "I think we're in luck. That looks like a sign over there, near the road."

Pran and his companions put their rucksacks back on their backs, then walked cautiously towards the road, looking around at the strange new world. A ring of cement surrounded the tower, and beyond that, a field of grass trimmed unnaturally short.

Pran remembered Loremaster Lokor's bizarre explanation for the uniformly short, even grass. The Loremaster claimed homeowners on Earth were forbidden from using their *own* property to graze cows, horses, goats, or even chickens, and instead were forced to buy noisy, smoky, expensive *machines* to cut their grass. This meant that instead of Earth's grass being turned into useful produce such as eggs, milk, and meat, the machines that cut the grass produced foul-smelling smoke that polluted the air and sickened the population. Pran still found the Loremaster's tale impossible to believe.

A red brick walkway led through the short grass to a wide stretch of smooth, dark gray pavement, obviously a road. On the right side of the walkway, two posts held a wide metal sign facing the road.

On the other side of the brick walkway stood a bare wooden pole about a foot in diameter, like a ship's mast. At the top of the mast was a crosstree, but instead of sails, it held what looked like black ropes—*no, cables*. Pran counted at least seven ugly, black cables leading from this mast to other masts in both directions on their side of the street. Pieces of metal jutted out from the masts, some of them with oblong glass objects attached to them, others with dark blue, glassy, rectangular plates attached at an angle facing the sun. Some of the masts had additional cables leading across the street to other poles on that side, and the mast on their left had cables leading down into a squat, boxy, one-story building with a flat roof.

As the four companions neared the metal sign, Pran heard a roaring noise along the road from their left, and saw a rapidly approaching contraption of black metal, chrome, and fat rubber tires. There were no horses pulling it, so Pran yelled, "Runaway carriage, lookout!"

The runaway carriage slowed suddenly at the next intersection, turned left, then accelerated impossibly fast down the side street. Pran's eyes widened. "I thought Earthlings didn't have magic."

Samir laughed with delight. "That's a horseless carriage, just like in the fairy tales! They *look* like magic, but they're really machines of some sort. They run on kerosene, I think."

Pran coughed at the acrid fumes drifting towards them from the road. "It smells worse than kerosene."

"Even worse than coal smoke," Vitina said.

Jelal said, "You'd better get used to the smell," as another carriage drove by in the other direction. "This world's *infested* with those infernal machines!"

While the rest of them wrinkled their noses at the stench, Samir gazed longingly after the vehicle. "I've heard Earth's horseless carriages are even faster than racehorses."

Pran laughed. "Changing your mind about what you want for a reward, Samir?"

Jelal said, "Just concentrate on the mission, guys, okay? Samir was right, that's a sign with writing on it facing the road. Hand me your gold coins, and I'll cast a bilingual spell on each of you."

"But we only have one gold coin each," Samir protested. "Shouldn't we save it for an emergency?"

Jelal shook his head. "The prophecy said, 'After they arrive on Earth, the four members of the quest must seek assistance there from a native family.' We're not going to be able to get help from the natives if we can't speak their language, eh?"

Samir shrugged and said, "Well, okay then," handing Jelal his coin. Pran and Vitina followed suit.

"When I'm done casting the spell," Jelal said, "we'll immediately be able to read the sign. Then as soon as someone comes along speaking the same language as the sign, we'll also be able to speak and understand the spoken language, too. They must talk to us within a half hour of casting the spell, but there should be plenty of people out walking on this nice a day! I'll try the spell on myself first, to make sure it works."

Jelal pinched a gold coin between his thumb and forefinger, then made an elaborate series of gestures with both hands that finished by touching his eyes, ears, and mouth. When he was done, the gold coin had changed to lead. The little spy put the now-worthless lead disc back in his pocket, explaining, "When behind enemy lines, always pocket the gold that your spell turned to lead, or the silver you turned to iron, so you don't leave

evidence behind. I'm not saying Earth's *definitely* enemy territory, but we have no idea how Earthlings will treat us, so better safe than sorry."

They turned to examine the sign, a rectangular slab of metal with a black background and gold lettering that looked like mere hieroglyphics to Pran. Pran saw Jelal smile as he read the sign, so he assumed the bilingual spell had worked. As the little spy read on, his grin got wider and wider, then he turned to the others and said, "You're not going to *believe* what this sign says. It's a historical marker. The sign says this site was a *wizard's laboratory*, so maybe the tower we arrived at really is a Wizard Tower, just like the ones on Rados!"

"Wow," Pran said, "it'll be great if we can find a wizard to bring back with us, as well as the gold."

Jelal said, "You can read the sign for yourselves as soon as I cast the bilingual spell on you. Pran, I'll do you next, since you're second in command now that Hakon is dead." Lieutenant Hakon had died defending them just hours ago, but to Pran it felt like a lifetime ago, because it was a world away.

While Jelal cast the bilingual spell on him, Pran kept his eyes on the sign until what had appeared to be mere hieroglyphics seemed to change into ordinary letters, then words. The translation for each word popped into Pran's head as he scanned it, and he read through the entire sign. He was able to understand most of the lengthy historical marker, but some words remained just a meaningless jumble of letters, without any translation popping into his head.

Pran was about to ask Jelal about the indecipherable words when a girl approached, chasing a gray and white cat. He asked, "Is that the same girl who saw us come through the portal?"

Jelal said, "We'll soon find out. We need someone to speak to us in the native language to activate the last part of the bilingual spell. Pran, you'd better keep quiet because you're too honest, so I'm afraid you'll tell her where we're from or what we're doing here! Cover stories are my specialty, so everyone play along, no matter how big a lie I tell, okay?"

"Alright," Pran said with a shrug, not sure whether to feel *insulted* or *flattered* at being called "too honest."