



Chapter 6:

Who are The Story Snatchers?

I tried not to look disappointed. Spinner must have a reason for waiting. I hoped the other Story Weavers would arrive soon.

“Would you like to learn more about The Great Archives of Bacalen?” Spinner asked.

He somehow knew I had a thousand questions inside my head. Well if I can’t hear more about the gifts, I have lots of other questions.

“Yes please,” I said. “Where on earth is Bacalen? Is it in Australia or overseas?”

Spinner gave a slight smile. “Bacalen is not on Earth.”

I froze. What? My mind was blank. Then a thought rushed into it. Had our book chute journey taken us to another planet?

“N-n-not on Earth,” I stammered. “So how far away are we from Earth?”

“Don’t be concerned Samuel. You haven’t left Earth.” Spinner’s voice was calm.

Why was he speaking in riddles? We are not on Earth but we haven’t left Earth—that made no sense.

I looked from Spinner, to Meg and then to Miss Paige. They were all looking at me but none of them spoke. They all started to smile.

“So where are we?” I said giving a nervous laugh. “Inside the Earth?”

“Exactly,” said Spinner.

I felt faint. “I have to sit down.”

Meg helped me. I sat on the faded rug, rubbing my hands nervously on my knees and staring up at the enormous bookshelves.

No way! We were **INSIDE** the Earth!

“It’s OK Samuel. You’re safe. I know it must be a shock.” Meg sat beside me.

Shock? I couldn’t speak. Then I finally whispered, “Are you sure we’re safe?” I looked up at Spinner.

“Absolutely safe. Bacalen has been here since the dawn of time. The Great Archives are just a small part of it. There are seven orbs of Bacalen.”

“Just like there are the seven continents

on Earth,” Meg added.

“Yes,” agreed Spinner, “The seven orbs make up the Star of Bacalen. You have seen the symbol on Miss Paige’s satchel and The Book.”

I peered at the satchel that Miss Paige carried over her shoulder. The symbol was a little bit like a star but more like six small moons orbiting a larger planet.

“Which one is The Great Archives?” I asked.

Miss Paige came towards me. She took off her satchel and pointed to one of the full moon shapes at the top of the symbol. I looked closely.

“This is where we are,” she said. “The Great Knowledge Tree is in the middle. The Star of Bacalen is hidden in the centre of Earth.”

Really? A world inside another world? They didn’t teach us this at school.

“And the other circles?” I pointed to the five other dots.

“You will learn more about them one day,” said Spinner. “Perhaps you will visit them.”

Miss Paige pointed to each one. “Here is

The Great Studio Gallery, The Great Music Hall, The Great Bacalen Coliseum, The Great Recreation Retreat and the Great Sport Stadium.”

What were they like? Who lived there? What did they do?

Miss Paige moved back to stand beside Spinner’s chair.

“Now Samuel,” said Spinner, “You must focus your thoughts on Story Snatchers.”

I tried to stop thinking about The Star of Bacalen. “I do want to find out more about The Story Snatchers. I’d like to know what they look like. Are there any on Bacalen?”

“There are no Snatchers here but,” Spinner lent forward in his chair, “they do hide all over the Earth. Story Snatchers are like the pirates of a mighty story sea. They have existed on Earth since the telling of the first great story.”

Spinner looked at a wall of books to his left. His hands created a wave-like motion through the air. He looked like he was conducting a book orchestra.

I stared at the books on the immense shelves. Their coloured spines were slowly merging to create a picture-like hundreds of

coloured pixels on a screen.

The image became clear. It was a person in brightly coloured clothing.

“They can’t be a **Story Snatcher**,” I said.

Miss Paige pointed to the edge of the image. “Ah,” she said, “Look closely **Samuel**. **New Story Snatchers** are a bit smudgy around the edges.”

“They’re not so bad,” I said. “Now I know what to look for. I thought you were going to tell me we were searching for some sort of terrible monsters.”

“**Snatchers** change as they age,” Miss Paige continued in a low voice, “Their skin and clothing turns pale and grey. Their noses get long and pointy and their eyes become big and bulgy. Long fingers like tentacles appear—ready to snatch up story—threads.”

The picture began to move. Gradually the person’s clothing lost its colour and turned grey. The person began to transform into a pale-faced creature. The grey folds of clothing crumpled around its thin, elongated body. It reminded me of one of those bendable toys with extremely twisty, long arms and legs. A short neck supported the round head. The grim face

was far too small for its large, bulbous eyes, tiny mouth and enormous, hooked nose. Perched on its head was a long, dark grey hat, like the stripy nightcaps on characters in nursery rhyme books.

“That is how a person is transformed by a **Story Snatcher**,” explained Spinner.

“Transformed by them? I-I-I don’t understand,” I stammered. “I thought **The Snatchers** stole story-threads, not people.”

“They can turn people into **Snatchers** just like **THAT!**” Meg snapped her fingers in my face. I jumped.

“Don’t scare him Meg,” Miss Paige said. “**Snatchers** do change stories **Samuel**, but they also change how people **FEEL** about stories and that changes the people. They can slowly become **Snatchers** or it might take no time at all. Only **Storytellers**, **Bookworms** and **Story Weavers** can actually **SEE** if a person has been transformed into a **Snatcher**. On **Earth**, people can’t see that a person is a **Snatcher**—they don’t **LOOK** any different but they certainly **ACT** differently.”

“I think I understand,” I said excitedly. “I do know people who say books are ‘boring’.

Have they become Story Snatchers?”

“Most likely,” replied Miss Paige. “Or they were well on their way to transforming into a dull and unimaginative Snatcher. What The Snatchers are trying to do now is even worse than what they have done in the past.”

“Much worse,” agreed Spinner. “That is why The Book has called all The Story Weavers to The Great Archives. The Snatchers are not just poaching small numbers of story-threads and changing story-vessels. They are quickly destroying large numbers of the world’s stories and their numbers are growing.”

What? The Snatchers now have a plan to do more than just change stories!

“In the beginning The Snatchers were people who thought that they could tell the story better than Storytellers. Some thought they could create a better story than the Bookworms and Story Weavers. They could have learnt how to tell or create a story well but they were too stubborn. Sadly, they often forgot to include the truth in their versions or they made the story dull and uninteresting. Often they just copied parts of other stories and joined them together.”

I looked at Spinner and said, “So instead of learning how to make a good story, they decided to steal stories or bits of them?”

“Absolutely,” nodded Spinner. “We have recently discovered that The Snatchers are now not even interested in people reading the stories they have reweven. They have become cunning. They are magically weaving versions that make people forget the original stories and true information. Their new stories make people stop reading anything from books.”

“So that’s why my friends don’t like reading books anymore!” I said.

“A-ha,” Meg agreed, nodding. “Most of my friends don’t even touch a book.”

“Eventually they will only read from screens,” warned Spinner. “The Snatchers are tipping the balance between what is real and what is not. They are weaving a grey world that will be filled with Story Snatchers. People who don’t enjoy stories or using their imagination are the first ones to be transformed. The change is quicker if they spend a lot of time looking at digital screens. Snatchers are using these screens to change the essence of a person. The more time a person looks at a

screen, the easier it is for The Snatchers to drain the colour, joy, imagination and creativity, from within the person.”

I stared at Spinner. The Snatchers are trying to build a world where everyone relies on digital screens for information and entertainment. They want to transform everyone in the world into a Story Snatcher! Nobody will enjoy a story from a book that can take them to another time or place! Nobody will question what they read or learn. I was horrified by what the world might become.

“I don’t want to live in a world like that!” I exclaimed. “We must stop them. Where could they be hiding the story-threads?”

“There are many places that they could take story-threads.” Spinner paused, tilting his head slightly to one side. Could he hear something?

I listened too but the only sounds in the room came from the rustling of pages. Meg and Miss Paige were looking through some books on a shelf nearby.

Spinner then looked at the bookcase image and his hands created a gentle, wave-like motion in the air. The picture of The Snatcher

faded. He pointed to a large collection of grey books on one of the nearby bookcases.

“This is all the information we have about The Snatchers. Perhaps you may find some clues as to where they are hiding. Meg will show you the books that she and the other Weavers have been recently studying.”

I nodded to Spinner and walked over to Meg who was now tilting her head to one side so she could read the book titles on a shelf labelled, ‘Story Snatchers’.

There were some interesting titles: ‘Plagiarism—a history of The Story Snatcher’; ‘Poaching Recipes: a Story Snatcher’s Guide to Cooking a Good Book’; and ‘Book Bandits: the Pirates of the Pages’.

I chose a title and opened the book. I saw a picture of a Snatcher on the page—it was just like the image Spinner had shown me. They’re very easy to recognise, maybe not so easy to find!

“Hideous, aren’t they?” said Meg, frowning at the picture and pointing at the page. “Small, unimaginative brains in those heads!”

I nodded. I wanted to ask her if she understood how to use all the gifts of a

Story Weaver. How old were the other Story Weavers? Were they new to this too?

Stories would be destroyed if we couldn't find The Snatchers! Worse still, The Snatchers might transform everyone before we could stop them!

I had no time to read a word or ask Meg about The Story Weaver's Gifts. The room filled with a rush of fragrant air—a strange mixture of chocolate, cheese, spices and fish.

Meg spun me around and pointed to the book chute. What was going on? Is Spinner's dinner about to be served? Are the other Story Weavers arriving? Perhaps it's The Story Snatchers coming!

