



My
Adventures with
Chickenspike

Brian D. McCoy

Other novels by Brian D. McCoy

My Adventures with Warwick Vladislay

Return to the Elves

Red

Dedication

A special thanks to Shauneq Lampkin - Wilson, who help me realize my dream of becoming a published author.

Acknowledgments

To all my students at Helen Lehman Elementary School.

This book is a work of fiction. Places, events, and situations in this story are purely fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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Chapter One

The Bully of Sunny Hill Elementary

I knew that I was in trouble when I heard Caesar Slack's angry voice. "Chase McKay! You pipsqueak. You little fourth grader! Stop! Bow to your King!"

Caesar Slack caught me with his chubby, fat fist

and sent me doubling over into the dirt. I tried to hide my pain, but I couldn't. My stomach felt as if it had just been tied into a triple looping knot. A tear welled up rolling over my lower lash.

Caesar had always hated his name. He thought that it sounded rather sissy. His mother, on the other hand, loved it. Then one day in social studies, Caesar Slack found out about the Roman Emperor with the same name as him. It wasn't long before Caesar had all of the younger boys and girls in our school calling him Caesar the Great, and worshipping him as king - or else!

'Think quickly,' I said to myself. To Caesar I said, "Why Caesar, what a lovely day in your kingdom.

How may I be of service to your majesty?” My voice squeaked a little as my stomach attempted to untangle itself.

Caesar Slack had dirty, brown hair that shot out in all directions from his overly round head, like a loosely wrung mop turned upside down. He was the type of boy who never spoke quietly and right now he was mad - real mad.

Caesar screamed, “I think you was lying to me when you gave me them smartness pills! I still flunked my math test yesterday!”

I looked up from the ground. “Your majesty. May I have permission to speak?”

He kicked dirt into my face with his big, sixth

grade foot. “Speak up, peasant!”

“Well your royal-ness, you’ve only been taking those pills for three weeks. Sometimes they take a while to start working. I’ll bet you will be getting smarter real soon.”

“You know what I think?” Caesar was so mad spit started spraying out from between his chapped lips.

“I think that them ain’t smartness pills at all. I think that they were rabbit pellets!”

You see, I started giving Caesar my rabbit’s dinner about three weeks ago. He had stopped me on the playground and asked me why I was so smart. He said that he would beat me to a pulp every day if I

didn't help him. I knew that I needed to think quickly. I told him that I took smartness pills.

Naturally he just had to have some, so I started giving him my rabbit's food. At the time I thought it would be a great way to get back at him for picking on all my friends. Now it looked like I was going to have to pay.

I stood up, looked Caesar square in the eyes and said, "See, you're getting smarter already. I think those pills are starting to work!"

At first Caesar smiled. For an instant he thought that maybe the pills were working. Perhaps he was getting smarter. Then it hit him. He realized that I

was making fun of him. He realized that I had fed him rabbit food. His mouth dropped open. He couldn't believe that I would ever dare such a stunt. He couldn't believe that I would stand right in front of him, and make jokes about him getting smarter because of rabbit pellets. His chapped lips cracked as he screamed.

I lost no time. My legs moved in a blur, kicking up a cloud of dust five feet high. Out like a shot I flew. Caesar Slack did his best to get his roly-poly body in motion. But it was no use; I was gone.

Caesar screamed, "I'll get you Chase McKay!"

I'm sorry. I haven't even introduced myself. My

name is Chase McKay. I'm in Mrs. O'Mara's fourth grade class at Sunny Hill Elementary School in Santa Rosa, California. Although my parents keep boasting about my IQ, I think I'm an average fourth grader.

I'm about the same height as all my classmates. I have brown hair, brown eyes, and I love to climb trees. But my favorite thing in the world to do is play kick ball.

Well, back to my story.

It was recess and the whole class raced from the room. We left our papers cluttered all over our desks, and our chairs scattered this way and that.

Mrs. O'Mara yelled, "You look like a herd of

wildebeest!” Then she smiled, feeling clever because we had just finished studying the animals of the African Plains. She was always saying funny things to get the class to laugh.

I was laughing, and thinking that everything was just fine, as I headed towards the playground. That’s when Caesar attacked. He came at me like a speeding locomotive. He dove into my stomach and we both went rolling to the ground. We rolled three times before we stopped. Caesar sat heavy upon my chest. Then he stood up, hovering over me like a professional boxer. He was just hoping that I would be stupid enough to get up. I was not that stupid!

The next thing I knew, Caesar Slack, the biggest

bully that Sunny Hill Elementary School had ever seen, looked scared. No. He looked more than scared. He looked plumb horrified. I thought that Mrs. O'Mara must be on her way. I stood up, thinking that my teacher was standing behind me. I waited to hear her familiar voice, but she never spoke.

That's when I met Chickenspike.

I felt a tug at my shoulders and the funny sensation of running without my feet touching the ground. As I rose higher and higher the kids beneath me stopped playing and looked up in awe. The playground looked small. My mind was whirling like the blades of a helicopter. I wondered what was lifting me so high above the ground. I turned my head

and saw bright orange claws with pitch-black tips digging into my jean jacket.

I knew that whatever held me had to be huge, about twelve feet huge. It took me to the roof of the principal's building and lowered me gently down. I spun around and saw Chickenspike for the first time.

He was a bird - sort of - and sort of not. His head had tiny white feathers covering his entire face, except along the top. Across the top of his head there were tall fire red feathers that spiked up into a long mohawk. His eyes were as black as a dark basement closet, and his body hulked out with massive muscles, hidden only by a jean jacket with the sleeves torn off.

The giant bird hovered over me, its long white wings flapping lightly in the warm breeze. A crowd of kids gathered below watching. In the back of my mind I could hear Mrs. O'Mara yelling up at me to stand still. She said that she was coming up. I wondered what she thought she could do.

“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Chase!” The bird grumbled out my name.

I was shocked. I had never heard a bird talk before. I stumbled backwards, tripped over the gutter and began to fall. The crowd below shrieked. The huge bird whipped out its long talons and grabbed me, ripping through my jacket. He pulled me back up onto the roof.

A smile came to the birds beak and its voice sounded like a speeding train, “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Chase, I’ve been looking all over for you. My name is Chickenspike. I’m from the planet Checkmaw. I have come because I need your help. My planet is in trouble and only you can save it. Will you come with me and help save my planet? Bwauk, cluck, cluck.”

Chapter Two

The Poem Tree

My mind was spinning round and round. I had always dreamt of seeing other worlds. But I knew there was no way I was going anywhere with this crazy bird. He was huge and looked mean. A tornado

of pictures whipped through my head. I saw what I imagined was a planet where this creature might live. It was terrifying. All the animals were big with huge teeth and claws. They all hissed and scratched at me. My knees began to shake and wobble.

A long time ago, my father told me to always think logically and remain calm.

I told myself, "*Think logically, remain calm.*" My knees started to feel solid again.

"*Think logically, remain calm. Think logically, remain calm.*" Finally I said it right out loud, "Think logically, remain calm!"

"Bwauk, cluck, cluck. What?" The huge bird sounded puzzled.

I looked right into that big bird's eyes. "There's no way that I am going anywhere with you!"

With that the huge bird knelt down on one knee, his wings still beating lightly in the gray air. He started to speak in a soft voice, "Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Owalla, the wise one of my planet, she told me to remind you of the day you saved that little cat. She said that five wild dogs were about to rip that cat to pieces, Bwauk, cluck, cluck. She said that you saved that cat. You can save my planet!"

I looked up at the big bird and said, "How did you know about that cat?"

"Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Owalla knows many things. I live on a magical planet."

Suddenly I remembered everything. “I got bit by four dogs that day! I got seven stitches! It really hurt!”

“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Yes. But you saved the cat.”

“I can’t do it. The creatures on your planet are way more dangerous than dogs! Aren’t they?”

“Yes. Bwauk, cluck. But I will protect you.”

“No. I won’t go! It’s too dangerous!”

The huge bird turned, his winged shoulders dropped low. He looked truly sad. With a shrug of his shoulders he prepared to take to the air and return home. I felt so nervous, I had to I reminded myself to think logically and remain calm. I looked up at the

big, sad bird, and thought how he looked like that tiny kitty. They both looked like they had lost all hope. Like they had simply given up.

I told myself, “*Think logically, remain calm. That bird might die without my help.*” Then I screamed right out loud, “Wait!”

I looked down at the crowd, even the teachers had come from out of the teachers’ lounge. They were all staring up in disbelief. All except Mrs. O’Mara. She was climbing up the drainpipe in an attempt to rescue me. I wondered again what she thought she could do. I looked back at Chickenspike. I gulped down the knot in my throat, and said, “I’ll go with you.”

The giant bird tossed me onto his back and we

took off into the air. I looked back and watched my school shrink in the distance. My hometown of Santa Rosa became so small that all the houses looked like toy blocks.

Chickenspike said, “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Put your head under feathers. My feathers will hold a pocket of your Earth’s air. That way you can breathe when we leave the atmosphere.”

“What about you?” I asked.

“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Oh, don’t you worry ‘bout me!” Chickenspike said with a giggle.

I looked through the blanket of feathers at my planet. Earth was the size of a blue and white marble. We flew a long time before I asked what was

happening on the planet of Checkmaw. I wondered how I could be of any help.

Chickenspike told how life on Checkmaw used to be. The days were always sunny and hot while the nights were warm and breezy. The creatures of Checkmaw used to get together to play macklie. He said macklie was similar to my game of kick ball.

Chickenspike said that his planet was heavenly until things started to change. Checkmaw's once soft, green ground turned dry and sandy. The sweet plants produced only sour fruits, and the once friendly creatures of Checkmaw turned hateful to one another.

Then the big bird sounded hopeful, "Bwauk, cluck, cluck. That's when the great Owalla sent for

me. She told me to go get the Earth-boy. The Earth-boy named Chase McKay! Owalla says that you are the only one who can save our planet!”

“How far is Checkmaw?” I asked.

“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. We must fly seven universes past the moon, plus a thousand miles beyond that. It’s a long journey.”

I laid my head deep within the soft white feathers of Chickenspike’s neck and fell into a dreamless sleep. The big bird landed on a tree branch, making it bend low. His voice woke me when he said, “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. This is Checkmaw! What do you think?”

I lifted my head to see the strange surroundings.

We were perched atop a tree with a rainbow of different colored leaves, each one more brilliant than the last. Lifeless sand spread out below us for as far as the eye could see. A few trees sat here and there. Even the trees looked lonely. I looked up and saw billions of tiny green stars in a pitch-black sky. It was beautiful, yet terrifying. The stars looked as if they wanted nothing do with the planet of Checkmaw. They did not twinkle or even wink at the forlorn planet.

“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. It’s always night time here now.” There was a small pause then Chickenspike continued, “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Even our green suns don’t want to get too close to this angry planet.

We should get going to Owalla's house. She will be expecting us. I just wanted to show you the one and only plant that still grows here. It's called a Poem Tree."

Once again I gazed upon the brilliantly colored tree. For an instant, it seemed as if the tree longed for me to pluck one of its leaves. I reached forward and picked a yellow leaf that was the color of our sun. Chickenspike motioned to rip the leaf. I tore it slowly. I was not quite sure what to expect.

The leaf hissed quietly, then a teeny high voice recited:

"You've made a long journey.

To a land of friend learning.

Go home on the moon blurry.

Or you may not be returning.”

Chickenspike whispered in a rumbling voice,
“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Always remember what the
Poem Tree says. It might seem like nonsense, but
there will come a time when the leaf’s poem is
understood!”

Chapter Three

The Forest Squichats

I climbed up on Chickenspike's back and we took to the air in search of Owalla. We flew for miles and

miles until we came to a forest of dead trees. The trees were huge and leafless. They were as wide as a house and as tall as a skyscraper. We landed at the foot of a huge tree with bark twisting this way and that. I looked into the forest's darkness as it hovered over us. The forest seemed to be in a deep coma, dead to the world around it. I dreaded the thought of entering such a forbidding place, yet I knew I must if I were to help this dying planet.

We had walked no more than fifty feet when the trees seemed to gather closer and closer, closing out the little bit of light that the green stars offered.

That's when the chattering began. It started as a small, timid clicking, but quickly grew into a loud,

ringing, cracking sound that echoed from tree to tree.

Chickenspike moved me protectively under his massive wing.

The attack came with no warning. Hundreds of small, dark brown, leathery creatures threw themselves at Chickenspike. They squealed as they clawed and ripped at his feathers. Chickenspike brushed the small creatures back with his huge wings, all the while keeping me guarded from the attackers. I was so scared I thought I might start to cry. It felt as if I had a big balloon in my stomach that was filling with more and more fear.

I said to myself, “*Think logically, remain calm.*”

The little creatures kept bombarding themselves

into Chickenspike's belly.

Finally, my balloon of fear popped and I stepped out from underneath Chickenspike's wing and screamed, "Stop!"

All about, it was pitch black and although I could not see, I could feel everyone freeze. They were all looking at me. Then a tiny torch was lit, and a cute little creature, no taller than my knee, walked up to me on thin brown, knobby knee legs. A small, golden crown sat comfortably on his head between three long pointed ears. His eyes sat like big, blue marbles between a pushed-in nose with large nostrils.

The creature started laughing so hard that he was hardly able to stand, "You are the ugliest thing I have

ever seen! I think we shall hang your head on our trophy wall!”

He turned to his people and they all squealed.

Chickenspike seemed infuriated. The dead tree limbs shook as he screamed, “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. You will all pay dearly for...”

I held up my hand and Chickenspike stopped screaming. Although I trembled with fear, somehow my words came out calm and controlled. “I am not from this land. Although you all look very different to me, I find your looks strangely intriguing. It shows me the vast diversity that our God has created. Not only is God able to create literally millions of unique creatures in one particular style on my Earth, but he

is also able to create an entirely different style of life-form here on Checkmaw. It makes me amazed at the wonder of our God.”

“I am Gottumia, King of the Forest Squchats. And I can tell you that we are God’s most divine creatures. You, on the other hand, are not only the ugliest thing I have ever seen, but you smell so foul that I no longer want your head on my trophy wall!”

“I truly wish that my smell was not offensive to you. However, you know that I am a stranger in your world. When you speak that way to me I feel very bad. As for the Forest Squchats being God’s most divine creature, I agree. For God has created everything right down to the lifeless sand that we are

standing on, and I am sure that in God's eyes we are all the most divine creatures in the universe. I guess that it is similar to the way a mother feels about all her children. A mother feels that each of her children, in their own way, are the very most divine."

The little king was astounded. "You sound like a sissy!"

I shrugged my shoulders, "Yeah, I guess I do, don't I?"

Everyone started to laugh. I stood there laughing with all the strange creatures in the forest. Then I stopped laughing and spoke up again. "It's true that we should try to enjoy our neighbors. It's a lot more fun to play a game of macklie with your neighbor

than it is to fight him. Isn't it?"

The little leathery king paused in thought. He knew that the words I spoke were the truth, yet his life training had hardened him. We stood in a stilled silence for long moments before the king walked over to me and held out his hand.

As he shook my hand the little king said, "You don't smell all that bad. I would like to have a friend who speaks so truthfully. Welcome to Checkmaw."

Chapter Four

Spector

We walked towards Owalla's home, which was located near the center of this dead forest.

Chickenspike led the way while King Gottumia and his people questioned me about life on Earth. I told

them about our bright, white sun. They were amazed.

I told them about our stars that twinkle around our beautiful moon. I think they all hoped that I truly could save their planet.

Before long we reached Owalla's home. She lived in the trunk of a huge tree. I hopped on Chickenspike's back and we flew up to a large entrance in the center of the tree. It was high above the ground, and I have to admit that I was a little afraid. The Forest Squchats waited at the base of the tree.

We entered through a huge hole, but Chickenspike lost a few feathers squeezing through. The center of the tree looked like the inside a large

cave. There were gigantic knots that shot out from the floor and ceiling like stalactites. Inside the tree everything was dark and gloomy, with thick cobwebs trailing this way and that. Suddenly, a spider, three times bigger than my dog Rex, dropped down from a large knot. The giant spider just hovered upside down in front of us. He had sixteen eyes that glared first at me then at Chickenspike and then back at me.

“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Out of way, Spector!”

Chickenspike seemed angry. “You do recall the last time you tried to stand in my way? Or do I need to remind you that you couldn’t spin webs for a month!”

Spector’s voice scratched like fingernails on a chalkboard, “You are a fool, Chickenspike. You’re

nothing but a yolk brain. Your little, yolk brain was undercooked, but your big, feathery body was overbaked. You are too big for your brain, that's your problem."

Spector bounced up and down just hoping for a fight.

Just then a soft voice sang past the spider, "Let them pass and stop causing trouble, Spector. This is the boy I have told you about. He is Checkmaw's last hope for survival."

She stepped forward and Spector crawled back up his web. Owalla stood on two thick, brown talons. She was a good two feet taller than my dad, yet small in comparison to Chickenspike. Her

body was full, with light brown feathers puffing out around her stomach. Her head also had the puffy brown feathers except around her green eyes, where the feathers were black.

Owalla's tan beak opened and a melody of words tumbled out. "Thank you for coming, Chase. Believe it or not, you are our last hope."

I stood holding Chickenspike's feathers, just hoping that I wouldn't faint. This was all so bizarre. It was scary to be around all of these huge creatures. Yet, at the same time it was very exciting. Owalla's words made my head feel cloudy. I thought about how dead this planet was. Then I wondered how she thought I could save her planet.

Owalla began singing the story of Checkmaw.

Her melody was a beautiful mix of high and low notes.

“Checkmaw used to be.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

A land of green. A land of fun.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

Mackie was the game we used to play.

We loved our land. We loved everyone.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

Then one-day things began to change.

The land dried, then died.

The tribes love for one another also dried, then died.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

I do not know how you are to save our planet.

The magic stones only tell me that you are our
last hope.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

If you fail, our planet is doomed.

Best of luck.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.”

With her speech completed she turned and
waddled into the dark depth of her tree cave.

Spector lowered himself down his webbing,
stopping only a foot from Chickenspike’s face. He
said in his scratchy voice, “I will come with you, Egg
Brain. The Earth-boy will need my help on this

journey.”

“Chase. My name is Chase McKay!”

The huge spider lowered himself so that we were looking eye to eye. He extended a leg and said,

“Hello, my name is Spector. Pleased to meet you, Chase.”

Spector’s leg had thick hairs sticking out everywhere. It felt a little like shaking my father’s mustache. I giggled to myself at the thought.

The cobwebs shook as Chickenspike yelled, “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. You’ll have to keep up. I’m going to be flying fast! Tell all tribes to meet at Blue Lake.”

Chickenspike hoisted me atop his back, squeezed

through the small opening, and flew from the tree.

His words to the Forest Squichats were brief. He told them that time was of the essence. He asked them to get the Saber Kangs and meet at Blue Lake. King Gottumia signaled eagerly from far below.

Chapter Five

The Turtusians

Chickenspike and I flew to a small, shriveled tree. It was twisted and knotted with tiny dried fruit on its fat branches. The huge bird bent down and tore off a small purple fruit with his black talon. After handing

it to me, he helped himself to another. We both bit into the fruit at the same time. Our faces mirrored one another. We both looked as if we were trying to swallow peanut butter, but we had no milk to wash it down. While I licked and picked at the fruit sticking to my teeth and gums, I looked about the lifeless surroundings of Checkmaw. The trees were dying and the sand seemed to be swallowing everything.

Chickenspike saw me looking at the landscape and said, “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Wastelands! The wastelands are taking over more and more of Checkmaw. This is Turtusians’ territory.”

The big bird paused. He scanned the skies

above. “They are fierce fighters. They won’t like our intrusion into their territory. We’ll just take a short rest. Just long enough to eat this meal.”

Meal? I thought to myself, this is the worst meal that I have ever had. The fruit was tasteless and sticky, but we needed nourishment, so we ate until our stomachs were full.

We had just finished eating when I first noticed a hulking, green figure hovering over us in the dark skies. It looked like a flying saucer with wings. It was, in fact, a giant, flying turtle. Another zipped into view and then a third. The three figures drew closer and closer with lightning speed.

I sat up straight. I was shocked. I couldn’t move

or even scream out to warn Chickenspike. The attack boomed like thunder in my ears. One of the attackers grabbed me in its front claws and took to the air. I looked down, concerned for Chickenspike. The other two warriors pummeled into the big bird's back. Chickenspike was sent tumbling across the hard sandy ground.

I looked up at the creature that held me, and I knew in an instant that it had to be one of the Turtusians. His shell was as big as my mom's big, round kitchen table. His head looked just like a turtle's and his four clawed feet held me just below a soft underbelly. We took off, flying this way and that, as the giant turtle shot across the sky. The Turtusian circled round and

round, while his friends beat on Chickenspike.

However, Chickenspike was not named protector of Checkmaw for no reason. He was as tough as tough. He battled like a champion. The struggle waged back and forth. One moment it looked as if the Turtusians were about to win. Just when it seemed impossible for Chickenspike to recover, he ducked his head, spun around, and grabbed the backs of both Turtusians' shells with his massive black talons. He flapped his wings hard and yanked at their turtle shells, pulling them onto their backs. They both laid there, kicking their stubby legs and flapping their wings with fury.

Chickenspike let out a roaring laugh, "Bwauk,

cluck, cluck. Don't go away. I'll be back!"

The huge bird's speed was incredible as he soared to my rescue. He flew like a jet, cocking his wings back for a speed dive. He balled his talons into iron fists and crashed into the Turtusian's protective bony plate. The Turtusian tumbled across the skies with me still clutched in his claws. But this huge turtle was not hurt in the least. His hard shell protected him. I was thrashed about, with the green stars whirling about me.

Before we completed our rolling across the night sky, Chickenspike circled, then drove his beak into the soft underbelly of the Turtusian. The huge turtle let out a wincing howl of pain. He let go of me and

Chickenspike gently grabbed me. He placed me safely upon his back.

The Turtusian's wings and clawed feet clutched about his injured stomach, sending him plunging toward a certain death.

I screamed to Chickenspike, "Don't let that turtle die!"

Once again Chickenspike hit breakneck speed, plunging towards the overgrown turtle. At the last possible instant the giant bird clutched the Turtusian's shell and set him gently on the sandy ground. I hopped off the bird's back and climbed atop the huge turtle's tummy.

"Hang in there, big guy." I said as I gently rubbed

his now black and blue underbelly.

“Why are you helping me!” The Turtusian grumbled, his eyes still holding much anger.

“I’m helping you because I feel sorry for you. Boy, that must have really hurt.” I was still a little afraid of the massive turtle, yet I felt a strong need to help him.

Strangely enough, the Turtusian started laughing, “You’re telling me it must hurt! Let me tell you...Wow, IT HURTS!” He continued to laugh, “Oh it hurts worse when I laugh, but I can’t stop.”

He went on laughing in small little bursts.

“Try not to laugh!” I suggested, but it was no use, the laughter was contagious. I started laughing too.

Chickenspike returned the other two Turtusians to their feet and the three of them walked over towards us.

“Why are you laughing, Painted Shell?” The first Turtusian snapped out.

“I don’t know, Boxer Girl,” confessed Painted Shell. “But I can’t stop.” The big turtle continued laughing.

“Well, stop it! You look stupid!” Boxer Girl yelled.

The third Turtusian was the meanest of all. “In case you didn’t notice, we just got our tails whapped by this soft-feathered bird!”

Painted Shell continued to laugh. “I’m sorry, King

Snapperhead, but the more I'm told to stop laughing the more I have to laugh."

Boxer Girl started to giggle, "That is the biggest...giggle, giggle, giggle...the most blackest and bluest bruise that I have ever seen. Boy, I bet that hurts." Boxer Girl burst out in uncontrolled laughter.

"Oh no, not you too!" King Snapperhead was disgusted.

A small snicker escaped Chickenspike's beak, "Bwauk, cluck, cluck. A soft-feathered bird? I have never been called a soft-feathered bird before. Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Boy, that sounds funny. A soft-feathered b..."

Chickenspike burst into laughter, unable to

complete his sentence.

“No! No! Not you too!” Then giggles, “A soft-feathered bird.” More giggles. “No! No! Not me too.”

The next ten minutes we all laughed till our stomachs hurt. When we were able to stop laughing King Snapperhead placed his paw on my shoulder, “I haven’t laughed in years. There is something special about you, Earth-boy. Thanks for getting me to laugh again!”

“My name is Chase. Chase McKay! Pleased to meet you all!”

Painted Shell said, “Pleased to meet you. You are a funny Earth-boy. Are all Earth-boys so funny?”

“What about Earth-girls? Are they funny like

you?” Boxer Girl asked.

Before I could say a word, King Snapperhead stepped up. He shook my hand and spoke in his sharp Turtusian way, “Pleased to meet you Chase McKay. You are funny, but all this laughing has made me tired.”

Chickenspike’s eyes were half closed as he spoke, “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Yes. Let’s take a quick nap, then we’ll tell the rest of the tribes about the rendezvous at Blue Lake.”

Boxer Girl was still giggling a little, “I saw some soft sand just behind those bushes. It looked comfortable.”

In no time at all, our entire small troop was fast

asleep on the soft sand. At the time it seemed funny to me that the ground should be so comfortable and soft. Everything here in the Wastelands was so hard and uncomfortable.

Chapter Six

The Saber Kangs

Meanwhile, the forest Squchats had gotten themselves in big trouble. The Saber Kangs were giants compared to the tiny Squchats. They stood equal in size to Chickenspike, with the head like a

saber – toothed tiger and the body of a kangaroo.

They had long powerful legs and strong leathery wings. The Saber Kangs were truly most vicious of all the tribes on Checkmaw.

The small leathery Squchats were almost to the city towers when the Saber Kangs attacked with leaps the size of buses. King Saber Kang thought that the Forest Squchats were invading his city. He quickly had his army surround them. The Saber Kang army bounced angrily as they drew into a circle around the tiny Squchats.

King Gottumia wisely ordered his troops to kneel down on one knee and bow their heads. His people obeyed immediately. The giant tiger faces were

dumbfounded. They could not understand why the Squchats were kneeling in submission. After all, it was the Squchats who had invaded their city. Why should they now submit? This truly puzzled the vicious tiger people. Time stood still for endless minutes.

Finally, King Gottumia stood upright, once again retaining his proud status. Although he was nervous he held his tone evenly. “We come in peace! I would be a fool to enter your city any other way.”

The Saber Kangs began to part making way for an awesome tiger king. His two saber teeth glistened with deadly sharpness and his fierce face twitched with anger. He was not the sort of king you just

dropped in on for a visit.

“How dare you...! You are...!” The tiger king was so enraged he could not complete a sentence. Saliva was spitting out his mouth as he roared, “If not for your terrible aftertaste...! I can’t believe...! This is my city, who... **ROAR!**”

The Squchat king spoke softly, “I am glad indeed that you find my people so awful tasting, King Saber Kang. I should like to tell you why we have come. Our planet...”

King Saber Kang cut him short, “We’ll eat them, bad taste and all! Attack on my signal!”

Gray drool began to form at the corners of all the tigers’ mouths. It slid down along their sharp, saber

teeth. Their kangaroo hands clutched nervously and their powerful, back, legs bounced with anticipation.

King Gottumia commanded the Squchats to break into a circular formation. Their tiny-leathered bodies crouched down and they hissed, showing their tiny, sharp, teeth, sharp, claws.

A dark shadow crossed the dim skies blotting out tiny green stars. No one moved. All were ready to pounce. King Saber Kang looked up with an angry jerk. He ordered his army to halt. Ever so gracefully Owalla circled twice around the battlefield, then slowly landed between the two kings.

“Hello, King Saber Kang!” Owalla bowed in respect, then continued in her musical melody, “What

you are about to do will bring in the doom.

“I sent the Forest Squachats.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

The magical stones foretell of an Earth- boy.

An Earth-boy named Chase McKay.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

He is here on Checkmaw now.

We must rendezvous at Blue Lake.

Tweedy dee, dee, dittly dee, dee dee.”

King Saber Kang’s frustration grew to a new height. “As usual Owalla, you...! I don’t care about any boy from Earth! Roar! Tweedy dee dee this!”

King Saber Kang snapped his jaws shut just in front of Owalla’s beak.

Owalla's song was a sad melody. "Oh great King
Saber Kang.

You care for your people.

You must learn to care for all of Checkmaw.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

Remember to days long past.

You and I were but a cub and a fledgling.

Remember to days long past.

The green suns shone so brightly.

Remember to days long past.

Our land was sweet with fruits that grew
everywhere.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee."

"Of course I remember those... It does

no good to think... Those days are dead and gone.
Just like these Forest Squichats are going to be. Only
remembered by their terrible aftertaste.”

Owalla’s melody turned desperate. “King
Saber Kang!

I promise the Earth-boy will bring back the days
of old.

I promise the days of the green suns return.

I promise the sweet fruits will soon grow.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

What if I would bet my life on it?

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.”

King Saber Kang roared with laughter. “Then I
would say that you have just put your life in my

jaws.”

Owalla sang confidently, “So be it. Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.”

There were no guarantees given by the stone, only possibilities. Owalla had truly put her life into fate’s hands.

King Saber Kang seemed to regain his composure, “I will need one hour to prepare my army for the trip. We will follow you and these pitiful Squchats.” There was a short sarcastic laugh, then the king continued, “It has been a long time since I have had the pleasure of tasting fowl for dinner. I wonder what a boy from Earth might taste like?”

Chapter Seven

Quicksand

We had slept only a short time before I heard Boxer Girl screaming. I fought the sleepiness that tried to hold my eyelids shut. Boxer Girl was swimming in a sea of sand - quicksand. Her huge tortoise shell was all that remained above the sand.

Her neck stretched up, but only her nostrils were able to break the sand's deadly grip. The great Turtusian was fighting a life and death battle for air.

Painted Shell was just to my left. She looked like a boulder struggling to stay afloat in an ocean of heavy sand. King Snapperhead was sinking fast. It was easy to see that they were tiring. Their short, little, forepaws were not built for swimming. They would not last much longer.

Chickenspike was nowhere to be seen. I scanned the surface of the sand, yet his massive form was simply not here. My mind whirled with the possibilities. He could have escaped the quicksand. No. Chickenspike would never leave us. The only

other possibility terrified me.

Chickenspike had drowned. He must have sunk before he even realized that he had fallen asleep within a pool of quicksand. I told myself, “*Think logically, remain calm.*” My heart ached with the fear of losing my new friend.

Suddenly, I heard the familiar sound of scratching nails on a chalkboard. Spector screamed, “I knew that yolk brain would blow it. Hang tight! I’ll have you out in a minute.”

A thick rope of webbing flew from the spider with a high-pitched whistling sound. The webbing soared past me and splattered against Boxer Girl’s hard shell. A second webbing splattered against King

Snapperhead's shell. An idea popped into my head just before the third line of webbing reached me. I dove deep into the quicksand.

Chickenspike had been lying just to my left. If he sunk he should be just below me and slightly to my side. If I was wrong I could drown. But, if I was right I could save Chickenspike. It never occurred to me that even if I was right both Chickenspike and I could still end up drowning.

The sand was so dark that I could not even see my own hand. I could almost feel the touch of death, as the tiny grains of sand rubbed against my skin. The tiny grains seemed to be pulling me down, deeper and deeper into the depths. I reached and searched for

Chickenspike. But I could not find him. He was lost. Somehow I knew that Chickenspike was down here. I searched frantically, actually digging through the sand towards the bottom.

My mind began screaming at me. *“I need air! I need air! Swim for the surface!”* I lost all rational thought and turned back towards the surface trying to swim up. But the heavy sands only pushed harder against me, forcing me further down. The blackness stretched out before me and my mind screamed at me once again. *“Chase, Breathe in! Breathe in! Breathe anything, just breathe in!”*

I took a deep, hard, breath, hoping for just a little air. All I got was a mouthful of sand. My arms

thrashed about in anger, and once again I began to yell at myself, “*Chase! How could you have been so stupid? You should never have thought that you could swim down into quicksand and then simply swim back up again whenever you pleased! How could you have been so stupid. You can’t... Wait! What was that? Could it be? Chickenspike!*”

I knew that it had to be Chickenspike. I had done the impossible. I had found him! But how was I going to get us out of the quicksand?

Chickenspike did not move. I hung tightly to him. But by now I was tired, so very tired. My lungs stopped fighting for air. I felt very sleepy. Everything began to go blurry.

I began to have a wonderful dream. I dreamed that Spector's huge legs encircled Chickenspike and myself. The huge spider had come down into the quicksand, suspended from a thick webbing of his own. The climb to the surface was slow and tedious for Spector. He pulled and struggled; all eight legs working and pulling - pulling and struggling in order to drag us to the surface.

With a cough and a spitting spray of sand I came awake. I awoke to find that my dream of Spector's heroism was real.

Chickenspike and I were brought up from the depths of our quicksand grave.

The three Turtusians were doing CPR on

Chickenspike. I sat up and watched as they pushed on his chest again and again. Then, with a cough and a spitting spray of sand Chickenspike came awake. He was a little dazed, and didn't know where he was at first.

I realized something about Spector. He was just like a lot of humans. Sometimes when people are afraid of showing their feelings, they act all big and bad. They act like they don't like you, when really they like you a whole lot. I think that people act this way because they are afraid that the other person won't like them. It must be the same with Spector. That must be why he is so mean to Chickenspike.

I told Chickenspike how we had fallen asleep on quicksand, how Spector had risked his own life for me, a person he had hardly known, and a bird he referred to as Yolk Brain. I felt very proud of Spector; he was a valiant and noble spider.

Chickenspike approached Spector. He held out his winged hand and said, “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Thanks! I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for you. Neither would Chase! You are a true friend and a mighty warrior! Thanks again Bwauk, cluck, cluck!”

Spector’s voice scratched like nails on a chalkboard. “I too am impressed with your battle skills. I watched you fight with the Turtusians from

atop that hill over there. I am glad we are on the same team.”

“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Spector...” The big bird paused for a moment, then continued, “If I’m hurt, you must become Chase’s protector. Would you do that for me?”

Spector wrapped one of his legs about Chickenspike, “Right now, I shall be your protector, so you don’t have to worry about anything.”

We had a brief meal of some dry tasteless fruit. I looked around at the landscape and suddenly missed home. Everything was so dead here. I missed my mom and dad. It was decided that Spector, Chickenspike and I would head for the Blue Lake.

Painted Shell, Boxer Girl and King Snapperhead
would return to their village in order to gather their
tribe. We would all meet at the Blue Lake.

Chapter Eight

The Blue Lake

The Turtusians flew out of sight. They simply became shadows in the dark skies. The green stars twinkled as if they somehow knew our fate. Once again I felt small and insignificant in this dangerous

world of Checkmaw.

Chickenspike's protective wing wrapped about me. "Bwauk, cluck, cluck. It's a long journey. We'd better move on."

"Let me carry the little lad. You're still out of breath from your swim." Spector's eight legs clicked like drumsticks on a snare drum as he sidestepped over to me.

I climbed up his bony leg and found his hairy back rather comfortable. I laid my head down for a brief rest and quickly fell asleep. I dreamed of my home. I dreamed of having a picnic with my mother and father. I suddenly realized that I missed them a lot, a whole lot. When I woke I found myself just

wanting to go home.

I looked around. The landscape was even more forbidding than before. There was no sand. Now there were only jagged rocks sticking their sharp noses out, as if to make sure that nothing above ground was happy. We were climbing a mountain range. The trees stood like thousands of scarecrows that had lost their stuffing. When we came to the highest peak within the mountain range, I saw a spectacular view. The sky above was glossy black with green stars shining like brilliant tiny emeralds. Below sat the most beautiful lake I had ever seen. It was a crystal clear, blue lake.

“Wow!” I said. “That’s awesome.”

“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Well, well. He wakes,”

Chickenspike joked.

Spector’s shrieking laughter bounced off the hard rocky ground. The giant spider’s laughter tickled deep within my ears. I thought how nice it was to hear the two laughing like old friends.

“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Blue Lake. This isn’t going to be easy.”

The lake glimmered with a magical, blue, glow, reflecting the green stars of a cloudless, black, sky. The land about the lake was rocky and forbidding. At the opposite side of the lake stood the entire population of Checkmaw.

The Saber Kangs and the Turtusians stood less

than a hundred feet apart. Only Owalla and the Forest Squchats stood between these two enemies. The two tribes had battled for years and years. No one even remembered why they first started hating one another. The Turtusians stood with their backs to the still waters of Blue Lake, a massive gathering of hard-shelled creatures with equally hard looks on their faces. The Saber Kangs stood bouncing angrily on their hind legs, their wings flapping nervously. The Saber Kangs were backed against the great mountain wall that encircled the lake. It looked as if at any moment both groups might lunge into battle, smothering the tiny Squchats. Their vicious threats echoed across the lake to the rise where I stood with

Chickenspike and Spector. Owalla's presence was the only thing keeping the two tribes at bay.

Without a word, I climbed on Chickenspike's back, and as he nodded to Spector, the two of us took to the air. The huge bird soared effortlessly, landing beside the quiet waters. A hush came over the tribes at the sight of Checkmaw's Protector. I stood up atop my friend's back and looked over the awesome sight. There were thousands of creatures spread out in front of me, every one of them fierce and angry looking.

Owalla made her way through the gathering with the three tribal kings in tow. Directly behind her king Gottumia of the Forest Squchats darted back and forth. To one side of her waddled King Snapperhead

of the Turtusians. On the other side, hopping like a kangaroo, was a strange and fierce creature indeed. He looked more ferocious than any other I had ever seen. He was built solid with strong wings that beat in anticipation. His body was that of a kangaroo but his head was terrifying. It was the head of a saber-tooth tiger. As this tiger approached me, a string of drool dripped from its lower lip.

Chickenspike whispered, “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. You know King Gottumia and King Snapperhead. The ugly one is King Saber Kang.”

I wanted to run, as fast as I could but there was nowhere to go. I began to sink down, but Chickenspike’s icy words gripped me like cold iron

and held me high. “Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Don’t show fear. I’ll protect you, Chase.”

I dug down deep within myself. I was shaking so hard, I thought my skin might start to jiggle like one of those wrinkly dogs. Whatever happened I would not allow myself to make a stupid mistake just because I was terrified. I told myself, “*Think logically. Remain calm at all costs. Keep a level head.*”

“I am King Saber Kang, ruler of the fiercest tribe in all of Checkmaw. ROAR! Owalla tells me that you can save our planet. She says you will make everything green and growing again. Personally, I don’t believe her, but that’s okay. I’m mighty hungry

and you do look mighty juicy.”

My mind screamed out, “*Think logically. Remain calm at all costs. Keep a level head.*”

Owalla’s soft melody soothed me. “Stop trying to intimidate.

You said you would meet the Earth-boy!

“Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.”

“I said I would meet him, then I would eat him! I think I shall feast on roast fowl and a juicy Earth-boy!” The sharp, saber-tooth, jaws snapped shut inches from my face.

I was shaking so hard that my teeth began to chatter. I thought, “*Think logically. Remain calm at all costs. Keep a level head.*”

The giant Saber Kang's breath smelled rotten. His saliva gathered on his lower lip and began to spill over the edge. I just knew he was dying for a taste of me.

“Back off man!” The heavily armored Turtusian king stepped in front of King Saber Kang. King Snapperhead pushed his green turtle face into the Saber Kang's. He said very sarcastically, “You Saber Kangs all think that you're so bad. Ah, you really scare me. See that! My paw is shaking. You're nothing more than an overgrown rat. Everyone knows that rats have always been stupid, so why don't you just shut up, sit down and listen to what Chase has to say.”

King Saber Kang's anger seemed to grow with each twitch of his upper lip until finally a deafening roar came screaming out of his throat.

“RRRROOOOOOOAAAAAARRRRRRRR! My jaws are so powerful, I could rip right through that shell of yours and tear you limb from limb.”

I could feel every beat of my heart pounding in my ears. *Think logically. Remain calm at all costs. Keep a level head.*

King Snapperhead teased, “Why don't you just try it!”

The crowd squeezed back. I began shaking with fear, repeating over and over, *Think logically. Remain calm at all costs. Keep a level head. Think*

logically. Remain calm at all costs. Keep a level head.

The next thing I knew, I had scrambled up Chickenspike's back leaping off his head. My next step sent me landing right in between the two enraged creatures. They stopped screaming at one another and looked down at me in disbelief. I found myself as furious as they were. I began speaking at them as if they were small children.

“You both need to chill out! Your screaming is even making me mad. I can't stand even being around the two of you when you act so mean. It's as if you think you have to threaten people in order to feel big and powerful. Why don't you just go look

into a mirror? Then you could see that you are very big, powerful and scary! Why don't you just tell one another that you both look powerful? You creatures on this planet are so concerned with yourselves, and what you want, that you have forgotten how to help your neighbors. You forgot how to take care of your land. Just look at your planet. It's dying and it's all your fault. It's your fault, because you're all so darn selfish!"

My thoughts were racing so fast that for an instant I could not decide what to say. I turned to King Saber Kang and slapped him in his belly, just to get his attention. "If you're really strong, why don't you tell your Turtusian friend here why you are really angry

at him?”

There was a long pause while King Saber Kang stared down at me. I could see him struggling within himself. Then, with a flick of his head, his eyes turned towards the Turtusian.

“King Snapperhead. Ya know I’m really angry with you, because you always walk around with your chest sticking out. You act like you’re bigger and tougher than anyone else. It makes me feel like knocking you down to size.”

King Saber Kang was still very angry. His eyes moved back to me. “There, I said it. Tough enough?”

I replied most sincerely, “Yes, very tough!” Next I turned to the Turtusian King and slapped him in his

belly. “Now it’s your turn, King Snapperhead.”

The Turtusian started laughing and I thought that my plan might backfire. King Saber Kang looked as if he might blow up at any moment. Then King Snapperhead began to speak. “Ya know what’s so funny?”

“What!” Roared King Saber Kang.

“I’ve been angry at you for the exact same reason that you’ve been angry at me. Your sharp teeth and powerful jaws are very scary looking. I’m not kidding this time. Don’t you see what is so funny? Chase McKay is right. We’re thinking only of ourselves. Our pride is making us forget about what is good for all our people. We have been selfish and

it has cost us our land.”

King Saber Kang thought for a moment and then slowly nodded his head. The two huge creatures reached out their forepaws and gave one another a wholehearted handshake. The tension throughout the crowd relaxed.

King Gottumia of the forest Squchats stepped forward, but before he could say a word both kings apologized to him. They admitted that they had treated King Gottumia and his people rudely. They assured him that they would be good friends in the future. Both kings asked the leader of the Forest Squchats for his forgiveness. The three kings began shaking hands in friendship. They turned to the

crowd and shouted that there would be a gigantic feast and celebration including a game of mackie.

The huge crowd of creatures began to swirl with movement. They were all becoming friends once again. After so many years of feeling only anger and jealousy towards one another, they began to care for their neighbor. As I sat atop Chickenspike, a warm feeling came over me. I realized that we had succeeded in our quest. The three kings approached Chickenspike, Owalla and myself. They sincerely thanked the three of us for reuniting their tribes.

Owalla looked as if she were still concerned,

“There is still one more thing.

She was the queen of all Checkmaw at one time.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

Before the great drought began.

Before all the tribes had forsaken her.

In return she has forsaken Checkmaw.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.”

Behind the crowd of happy creatures the waters of
Blue Lake began to ripple.

Chapter Nine

The Water Dragon

The ripples on Blue Lake began to change into waves. The waves began crashing like thunderbolts onto the crowded shores. A gigantic whirlpool was created in the center of the

lake. It reached out, grabbing five Turtusians.

The Turtusians looked suddenly small and insignificant compared to the awesome waves. They would have surely drowned if not for the sudden appearance of Spector, his strong webbing quickly slapping against the shelled backs of the doomed Turtusians with a thump. The giant spider dug his pitchfork legs into the sandy shore as the thundering waves crashed all about him. The five exhausted Turtusians were bobbing like apples as Spector struggled to pull them from the violent waters.

Chickenspike waddled over to Spector's side. He knew what was causing the whirlpool. His words were quick, "Bwauk, cluck, cluck. She's coming!"

Hurry!”

“I am hurrying! There’s five of them and they ain’t exactly light! Do you think it would be too much trouble for you to give me a hand?”

“Bwauk, cluck, cluck. Ohsure!” Chickenspike started pulling at the webbing.

“It’s about time! Thank you!” Spector found himself admiring his strong friend. The two smiled at one another as they pulled the five Turtusians from the thrashing waters of Blue Lake.

As the waterlogged Turtusians gasped for air on the shore, the center of the whirlpool erupted with the huge form of a flying dragon. She was as beautiful as she was deadly. Her body glimmered a glistening

green that accented the stars above. Her talons ended in red claws as big as Chickenspike's whole body. Her tail lashed back and forth like a powerful whip. Her head was etched in green with beautiful red markings around her narrowed eyes. As she circled over the crowd of strange creatures, her head reared up, then lashed downward, spitting a shower of flames towards the crowd below.

The Turtusians quickly flew over the others. They used their hard shells to protect everyone from the incinerating flames. When the shower of flame stopped, the Turtusians, and Saber Kangs took to the air. Some of the tiny Forest Squchats rode atop the Saber Kangs, while others rode atop the Turtusians.

The creatures hurled themselves at the beautiful dragon.

The dragon seemed scarcely affected by their attacks. She simply whipped them with her tail, beat them with her wings, and spat fire at them. Her attackers were sent spinning into the waters of the Blue Lake.

Spector was busy sending out lines of webbing. As soon as any victim splashed into the water, Spector would shoot out a line of webbing. Then he would begin the tedious job of hauling the half-drowned victims back to shore. Those who were not hurt quickly took to the skies to reenter the battle above. The whole battle seemed to me a senseless

circle of anger.

Owalla gently wrapped her wings about Chickenspike and myself, restraining us from entering the battle. Her voice was strangely calm amid all the violence.

“Chickenspike.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

Take Chase McKay to the Poem Tree.

Choose a pink leaf Chase.

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.

Tear the leaf so that the Water Dragon can hear.

Now go!

Tweedy dee dee, dittly dee, dee dee.”

I jumped atop Chickenspike and we took to the

air. We flew faster than I thought possible. The wind raced past my face, whipping into my eyes, grabbing my tears and pulling them across my face. Everything was a blur and I stopped trying to see where we were headed, simply trusting in Chickenspike. He slowed and I knew without seeing that we had reached the Poem Tree. I dried my eyes and gazed upon the beautiful tree. It looked even more beautiful than the last time I had seen it. The rainbow-colored leaves were almost glowing. It was as if the tree knew something I did not. Perhaps the Poem Tree did know something. I cleared my thoughts of everything except choosing the right leaf. There were thousands of leaves and hundreds of those were pink. How

would I know which was the right one? What if I chose the wrong one? Everything we had done to save the planet of Checkmaw could backfire. My mind whirled. Then as quickly as my confusion began, it ended. I knew which leaf to choose. It was a bright pink leaf with red veins running through it. The leaf was truly as beautiful as the Water Dragon herself. I grabbed the leaf and Chickenspike sped back to Blue Lake.

By the time we returned only a handful of Turtusians, Forest Squichats and Saber Kangs were still in the air. The others all lay sprawled out across the beaches of the Blue Lake. They were all waterlogged and exhausted. Spector was obviously

tiring, yet he continued to pull his companions from the choppy waters.

Chickenspike flew close to the Water Dragon's head, but a powerful wing lashed out and sent us spinning towards the lake. We spun round and round, I saw black skies, then blue waters, then black, then blue, over and over. The blue waters were getting closer and closer. Just before I thought we would crash into the choppy waters, Chickenspike's wings shot out catching a blanket of air, and, up we went. We flew back to the Water Dragon. This time she whipped her tail viciously at us. Chickenspike reared up to avoid the strike. Her tail slashed open a thin cut along his belly. Then with incredible speed, the

Water Dragon spun around, lifted her head and spit a storm of fire at us. If not for our friends, Boxer Girl, Painted Shell and King Snapperhead, we would have been burnt to a crunchy crisp. The three Turtusians quickly placed themselves between us and the burning flames. The flames danced about their hard shells.

As the firestorm crackled about us a plan popped into my head, “Go high above her!” I screamed.

At the sound of my voice the huge bird soared high into the air. I peered over Chickenspike’s head as we dove towards the dragon. She had no idea where we were.

Just before we hit her I screamed, “Pull up!”

Chickenspike pulled up in an amazing arc. We were only inches from the Water Dragon when I jumped onto her scaly neck. It felt strangely comfortable; soft with ripples that were easy to hold. The Water Dragon whipped her head to and fro, snapping her teeth at me. I held tight to her rippled scales, leaning this way and that in order to avoid her snapping jaws. She slowed for just an instant and I knew that that might be my only chance. I scrambled up her neck to her left ear and tore the leaf. The Water Dragon froze stiff at the sound of the hissing air that escaped from the torn Poem Tree leaf.

The beautiful pink leaf with the red veins spoke to the Water Dragon.

“Oh Beautiful Water Dragon of Checkmaw.

You’ve Seen This Land Flourish.

Times Woven A Hard Lesson.

You’ve seen This Land Perish.

Oh Beautiful Water Dragon of Checkmaw.

You’ve Seen These People Share Their Love.

Times Woven A Hard Lesson.

You’ve Seen These People Give In To Greed.

Oh Beautiful Water Dragon of Checkmaw.

The Land Must Once Again Be Restored.

The People Must Once Again Love their Neighbor.

Time’s Lesson You Must Take Heed.

Oh Beautiful Water Dragon of Checkmaw.

Oh Beautiful Water Dragon of Checkmaw.

Without A Queen Checkmaw Will Die.

I Name You Queen Desire. Ruler of All Checkmaw.”

It was as if all heard the leaf. The crowd below looked quiet and peaceful. Queen Desire floated down and hovered over the once again calm waters. She set me down gently next to my friend Chickenspike. A warm, glowing smile came across her face. Her eyes seemed almost as loving as my mother's as she looked down upon me.

Soft words rolled off her forked tongue, “Chase McKay, you have taught me and my people a very valuable lesson. Many years ago, my people began to live a selfish life. My own selfishness would not allow me to see what was happening to my planet. I

left Checkmaw because of my own vanity.

This has been a hard lesson. But thanks to you, I have learned it. You are as brave as you are wise.

Thank you, Chase McKay.”

There was a slight pause, and then she reached back and pulled one of her scales free with her teeth. She handed it to me and said, “Keep this to remember the people of Checkmaw who love you.”

Queen Desire turned to her people and said, “We will replenish the land! Let’s celebrate.”

In a flash Queen Desire flew off diving back into the waters of Blue Lake. She reappeared a moment later with enough food to feed an army, and there was an army that needed feeding. There were fruits and

vegetables of every shape and size. They all tasted wet and juicy. It was the first decent meal that I had had in days, a grand feast for the people of Checkmaw.

After the Feast there was an enormous game of mackie. I was the official referee. I sat atop Queen Desire calling “Foul ball!” and “Strike three!” and “That’s a home run, boys and girls!”

As the match continued, all around us the planet of Checkmaw began to slowly come back to life. The green stars came closer to the planet, lighting it in a brilliant green glow. There were literally thousands of green suns that twinkled in the sky like bright green moons. Small buds of plants that had been

sleeping for years pushed their way through the hard
ground. Life was returning to Checkmaw.

Chapter Ten

Caesar Slack

Two yellow moons slowly rose above the mountain peaks, appearing blurry in the green skies. I knew it was time for me to leave. Chickenspike stood by my side and all my new friends came to bid me

farewell. First, King Gottumia of the Forest Squchats walked forward. He had the calmest look I had ever seen on his face. I bent down and hugged him. Next came my three Turtusian friends, Painted Shell, Boxer Girl, and King Snapperhead. We laughed thinking about how we came to meet one another. One after the other, they each gave me a bear-like farewell hug. King Saber Kang approached slowly. He bowed his royal head and I returned the gesture. Owalla and Spector were the last to say their good-byes. A tear rolled down Owalla's face as she embraced me and a lump caught in my throat. I would miss her. Spector patted me on the head with one of his forked legs. No words were spoken, but I

knew he'd miss me as much as I'd miss him. He simply handed me a ball of tightly woven webbing,. I knew it would make a great kick-ball.

I climbed aboard Chickenspike's back and we took to the sky. I looked back and waved goodbye to all my new friends. A sudden tightness bound about my stomach as I realized I might never see Chickenspike again. I began missing him already. I leaned forward, burying my head within the feathery pocket of air. I hugged my big friend all the way home.

As we got closer to Earth I realized how much I had missed my mother and father. I was happy to be going home, but for now I was enjoying my last

moments with my new best friend, Chickenspike.

We landed in my back yard. We were both exhausted. My father came running out of the house. He raced right past Chickenspike and hugged me. It felt great to be hugged by my dad. Chickenspike smiled. He knew I was back where I belonged.

I introduced my dad to Chickenspike. He didn't quite know what to make of the huge bird. Neither did my mother. They stood motionless in the long grass of our back yard. At first they both seemed scared of him, like they thought he might bite them or something. I thought that was funny. After a while they felt more comfortable with Chickenspike. My mom said that she would like him to stay for dinner.

As for my dog Rex, he took to Chickenspike right away. Rex jumped up on him and licked at his red mohawk feathers as if he were a long lost friend.

During dinner Chickenspike and I told about how we saved his planet.

The next morning I woke up late for school. Chickenspike was gone and I felt a little empty without my best friend. I looked over at Queen Desire's scale. Its radiance caught the little bit of sun that sneaked through my window. A red mohawk feather stood upright beside the scale. I had pushed the hard stem into a knot on my dresser top. I would always have their memories. Who knows, maybe they would need me again some day.

Later that morning, on my way to school I heard that familiar voice. “Chase! Chase McKay! Down on your knees and bow to your king!” My book bag was torn from my back and thrown to the ground. “You made me eat rabbit pellets!” Caesar Slack was screaming in fury.

I felt strangely calm. Caesar Slack no longer invoked the fear in me that he once had. For now, I knew that all Caesar’s screaming, and all Caesar’s threats, were simply an outcry for friendship. You see, friendship was the one thing that Caesar Slack wanted all his life. It was also the one thing that had always eluded him.

I turned to face the biggest bully in Sunny Hill

Elementary School's history and said, "Caesar. Ya know who I think you are a lot like?"

"Huh?" "King Snapperhead!"

I said proudly. "King Snapperhead?"

Caesar was still angry, but it did spark his curiosity.

"King Snapperhead is a huge Turtusian king. He also just so happens to be the best mackie player that I have ever seen! Besides, did you know that the real Caesar, the one who ruled the Roman Empire, was killed by his royal subjects?" Caesar took two steps backward. His jaw dropped to the sidewalk and he blinked his eyes about a million times.

"He was killed? Wow, I must have slept through

that part of class!” Caesar took a step forward, “Tell me about this King Snapperhead fella.”

“Well, he’s a Turtusian. Like a gigantic turtle, only a lot smarter. He’s got these short powerful legs that can kick a mackie ball into orbit. He is way cooler than Caesar.”

“My legs are short and powerful!” Caesar paused, “Doncha think?”

“Caesar, you’re powerful all right. Why do you think everyone is so scared of you?”

“Chase, I’m sorry that I have been so mean to everyone. It’s a lot more fun talking to you than it is chasing you. Hey! Chasing Chase. That’s kinda funny!”

“Yeah! That’s an old one, Caesar.” “So what is this mackie game?” “It’s a lot like kick ball only they use a ball that is made from a huge spider’s web. Remember that gigantic bird that grabbed me a few days ago?”

“You mean that was real? I thought those smartness pills... I mean that rabbit food you gave me was messing with my mind. Making me see things!” Caesar Slack stopped in his tracks. He looked at me with admiration. He put his hand gently on my shoulder and asked me to sit down.

We found a comfortable spot on the grass and sat for hours talking about Checkmaw. Caesar became a great friend and a great kick ball player. After all, he

did have short powerful legs.

As for me, whenever I am feeling really low I go into my room, sit on my bed, and hold the green scale in one hand and the red mohawk feather in the other.

I balance Spector's ball of web in between my feet and I think. I think about my adventures with Chickenspike.

About the Author

Brian D. McCoy grew up in Waukesha, Wisconsin. As a youth Brian struggled with reading in school, and it was only his love of gymnastics competition that drove him to continue on through college. While attending college, he was diagnosed as having the learning disability of dyslexia. Brian started writing his first book, Return to the Elves, as a testament to himself that no disability could hold him

back. After college he moved to Northern California where he now teaches elementary school.