

The Story Weavers of Bacalen

The Picture Pinchers

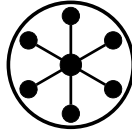


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“Everything you can imagine is real.”

(Pablo Picasso, Dyslexic Artist)



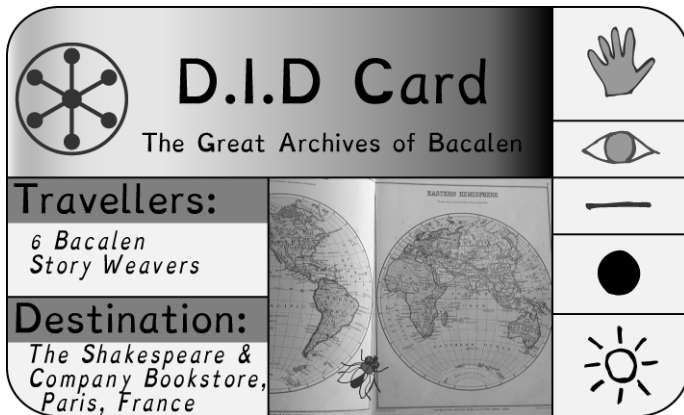
Chapter 1:

How can Story Weavers just vanish?

WHOOSH!

BANG!

We were off.



Meg had carefully written the travel information on the D.I.D. card and thrown it into the book return chute.

The Bacalen chute system was a novel way to travel. It speedily slid us towards our

destination. The **Great Archives of Bacalen**, hidden deep within **Earth**, was far behind us. Another adventure was fast approaching.

The magical blue bookmark that we had discovered at **The National Library in Australia**, had contained an image map. This map would help us locate the traitor, **Cetus** and his steals of **Story Snatchers** who were reweaving and changing stolen stories. The image map had appeared in **Caitlin's** thoughts and shown her a bookstore in **Paris**. A city that I had never visited. Before I could blink twice, the book return chute would deliver the six of us to the bookstore.

Would we find **The Archetypes** in **Paris**? These six ancient story-threads had to be returned to **The Great Storytelling Library**. Harnessing their power was the only way to stop the world's stories from being lost forever!

SMASH! CRASH!

The air became thick with dust or dirt. *Yuck!* It was hard to breathe. I closed my eyes tightly and tried to cover my nose.

AH-CHOO! AH-CHOO!

Blah! What was happening? Why was the

book chute filling with dust? We needed to get out of here! *Can't breathe!*

THUD! BANG!

The journey was over. A rush of cool air hit my face. I gasped for breath. *Fresh air!* I gulped it in. Where were we? I stumbled forward. I felt a hand grab my arm tightly.

“No!” I yelled, pulling away.

“Steady Samuel, it’s me!” a familiar voice whispered.

Leo! I hadn’t been snared by a Snatcher.

“I think we may have stumbled into a bit of a problem.” Leo’s voice sounded grim.

I took off my coloured lenses. I rubbed my eyes and blinked the dust away. Then everything came into focus. Leo was standing beside me, using his sleeve to wipe coloured dust from his face and cleaning his orange glasses with a soft cloth that he had pulled from his satchel.

I looked at the dust on my hands and rubbed them briskly on my sleeves. Dust coated my glasses too. I found a cleaning cloth in my leather satchel and gently wiped the smears from my yellow lenses.

“What is this stuff Leo?” I asked.

Leo didn't answer. He was looking around the room. Paintings covered the walls. Was he looking for something? I suddenly realised he was looking for **SOMEONE**. There was nobody else here. It was quiet. Where were the other Story Weavers? Had **WE** made it to Paris without them?

I noticed a sign on a wall behind Leo's head.

'WELCUM TO THE AMERICAN WING OF THE METRAPOLITIN MUSIUM OF ART'.

Welcum? White rivers began to flow through the letters. *Glasses!* I quickly put them back on and looked at the words again through the yellow lenses. The rivers had gone but the spelling mistakes remained. *Weird!* I nudged Leo and pointed at the sign.

Leo turned to look and gave a low whistle. "Quite a few spelling mistakes there and it's definitely not written in French!" he said.

"Guess we're not in the Parisian bookshop that was in the image map," I replied.

"No," said Leo. "Not a book or a bookshelf in sight!"

I tried to make a joke by saying in my best American accent, "Toto, I have a feeling we're

not in Kansas anymore!”

“Definitely not,” said Leo, “but we are in the USA.” Leo leant closer and whispered in my ear, “And I think we can be quite sure that The Story Snatchers are here too.”

“Where?” I asked, desperately trying to open the saga pouch that hung around my neck. “Quick Leo, use your saga pods. It’ll only take a moment to minimise a stray Snatcher and send them to The Shredding Basement!” I looked frantically around the room, tiny, colourful saga pods in each hand. Where were The Snatchers?

“I can’t see any,” I said confused. “Where did you see them?”

“They’re not here NOW but they’ve BEEN here,” said Leo.

“How do you know?” I asked.

Leo pointed to the spelling mistakes on the Metropolitan Museum sign. I slid the magical pods back into their pouch. I walked closer to the sign as I hid the saga pouch beneath my shirt. I squinted to read the smaller printing that was underneath the museum name.

‘NEW YORK CITY–Capital of the United States of America’.

Leo shook his head. “We might have travelled to a museum in New York but Washington D.C. is the capital of the USA!”

Something had gone terribly wrong riding the book chute. Why had we ended up in New York and not at ‘The Shakespeare and Company Bookstore’ in Paris? Why were we in an ART MUSEUM and not a BOOKSHOP? It did look like The Story Snatchers had been here!

“Snatchers!” said Leo, “They’re having lots of fun working with Cetus. They’re poaching stories, creating spelling chaos AND changing information everywhere.”

“Do you think we ARE at the Metropolitan Museum of Art?” I asked. “What if ALL of the words on the sign have been changed? How will we know? Can we ask a museum guide?” I looked around. The rooms and corridors were deserted. “I don’t think the museum is even open yet. There’s nobody here.”

Leo’s face wore a slight frown. “Well,” he said slowly, “this sign might have been snatched just before we arrived, BUT if nobody notices the mistakes on it today, then I think we can say that the museum staff have also started to be transformed by The Snatchers.”

“How awful to be slowly turning into a Snatcher and not even know it!” I replied sadly. “Cetus and The Story Snatchers are moving very quickly. And they’re spending more time altering internet information. That will change what people believe all over the world.”

Leo’s frown deepened. “Everyone will believe **EVERYTHING** that they read on their screens. We have to stop Cetus! The Shredding Basement at The Great Archives would take ages to transform a world full of Story Snatchers!”

I nodded.

“Imagine the piles of saga pods we’d need to shrink all those Snatchers!” I exclaimed. “I don’t even want to think how long it would take **SIX Story Weavers** to send a **WORLD** full of Snatchers, via transporter bag, to The Shredding Basement for life–plug replacement.”

Leo’s face broke out in a grin. “Yep, throwing saga pod powder at 7.5 billion Story Snatchers might be a little tricky. I think it will be easier to find Cetus and the stolen Archetypes.”

I laughed. “Right. Let’s focus on doing that! So how do we know that we’re **REALLY**

at The Metropolitan Museum of Art?”

“Think we’ll just have to take a look around, check out some paintings and work it out. Facts and information are my thing. I do know a bit about the museum. We might need to go outside and **SEE** if we’re in the right building. I’ve studied plenty of pictures of this museum in books.”

“**Good idea,**” I agreed. “It’s weird that we can’t believe what’s written on the signs.”

Leo took off his favourite orange jacket.

“Just keep your eyes open—we’ll start by looking for clues to make sure it’s the right museum.” Leo stared at his dusty jacket.

“What a mess. Wish I knew why the chute is filled with this coloured dust.” He shook his jacket wildly up and down. “It’s all over my *Van Persie* jacket.”

The Dutch football fan was definitely annoyed about the dust. It flew in clouds from the jacket and settled across the floor.

I sneezed. “There was a crash or smash in the chute just before it filled with dust.”

Leo nodded. “It was strange. Everyone at The Great Archives knows how Bookworms hate dust and like to keep the chutes clean.”

“Even before I discovered that Miss Paige was a Bookworm from Bacalen, I knew she didn’t like dust in our school library. She dusts the shelves every morning.”

Leo shook his head. “I don’t know what’s going on Samuel but we took a wrong turn in the book return chute.”

“It **MUST** have something to do with Cetus and the stolen story-threads,” I suggested.

“Definitely,” said Leo grimly. “He is very determined to get rid of the world’s stories.”

Could Cetus be destroying story-vessels and hiding the story-thread dust in the chutes?

“Leo,” I gasped, “Could this coloured dust be all that is left of some poached and unravelled story-vessels that have been stolen by Cetus and The Story Snatchers? Cetus told us at Multi-Story and The National Library in Canberra that he wanted to turn all the world’s stories to dust!”

Leo slowly put his jacket back on and looked at me.

“You’re right Samuel. He did say that.”

Leo bent down and picked up some dust from the floor. He looked at it closely and rubbed it slowly between his fingers.

“But this isn’t story–thread dust,” mused Leo. “It’s much finer and more colourful.”

“Phew!” I replied. “Glad we’re not covered in stolen stories!”

“Miss Paige and the other Bookworms will know what it is,” said Leo.

“And hopefully she and Spinner will be able to find the others too,” I said.

“Better send a message to Spinner and Miss Paige,” suggested Leo. “They need to know what’s happened. If the other Weavers aren’t here, they’ll know where they are.”

I nodded and started pulling out a pencil, notebook and transporter bag from my satchel.

“Hope we get some answers.”

“Caitlin will be worried,” said Leo, thinking about his cousin. “Let’s hope the four of them are together and safe.”

I knew my friends, Meg, Caitlin, Bella and her cousin, Anna would be wondering about where we were too. I quickly wrote a message to Spinner. This was the first Story Weaver message I had posted in my yellow transporter bag.

ZAP! It was on its way.

ZIP! The Great Storyteller’s reply

appeared the instant my message disappeared. I scanned the words on the paper.

“The girls **ARE** in Paris. They’re **OK** Leo!”

Leo smiled with relief.

“Did the dust cause us to get separated?”

I kept reading Spinner’s note.

“Miss Paige is still investigating that.

She’s sure it has **SOMETHING** to do with the dust. She did tell me when I first arrived at The Great Archives that a dusty book chute is never a reliable way to travel.”

“Will Miss Paige be sending a clean-up crew to extract it from the chutes?” asked Leo. “We don’t want to risk riding the chutes until the dust has been removed—never know where we might end up! The Bookworms in The Yarn Room will want to analyse it.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “and Spinner wants us to look for Snatchers.”

“Does he think Cetus could be hiding an Archetype here?” asked Leo.

I looked at the note and shrugged my shoulders.

“He didn’t say **THAT** but something made us come here. Spinner wants us to check things out here before we go to Paris.”

I folded the message and placed it and the yellow transporter bag into my satchel with its Star of Bacalen symbol. We'd better get started! This museum is a VERY big place.

We needed to concentrate and wear our coloured glasses.

What would we find?

Magical bookmarks?

Reweaving Rooms?

Or clues that would help locate the stolen Archetypes?

