

Chapter 13

New Delta

Pierre had arranged for Slim, an alligator who lived near the camp, to accompany Susan and Babu to New Delta. Lightfoot and Gorga went too, with the bat sleeping in an upside down basket.

The whole crew of them paddled now that they were so near the town, and the first light of the new day mixed with the fog hanging low over the river banks, giving the air a steamy, spooky, holy feeling. Slim swam ahead of them, his snout and eyes even lower in the water than usual, so that someone spying him from shore would think it a rat swimming, or a submerged log floating along. Unbeknownst to any of them, a slithering creature on the junk strewn banks slipped into the water. It was dragging some sort of blue bottle along with it under the water.

The water was murky and cloudy (as it had been ever since Stone City), and Slim could sense the approaching creature and called the flotilla to a halt, but lay quiet in the water, his reptilian eyes scanning the water for clues of what was approaching. Suddenly the paddle that Gorga was holding was snatched out of his hands, quickly tugged underwater by some unseen force. Slim hurried over to the commotion to find nothing in the water in that vicinity, then the next paddle was plucked out of Susan's hands, then Gorga's hand's, and something leaped out of the water to grab the handle end of Lightfoot's oar, with such speed Lightfoot could not make out what it was.

During all this Slim swam around in a fever, trying to catch whatever was menacing his friends, but growing confused over what could be swimming in the river with him, something he was sure he hadn't encountered before. For a second it was quiet, and the ripples on the water started to float away.

"Burrp. Aaaah, fresh air. After a while that bottled air doesn't taste so good. How's it going, Cuz?" All this came from the back end of the boat, and the four of them stared at Slim in the front of the boat, a little unsure of what they would see if and when they turned around.

"Sly, you old slimy overgrown salamander, is that you?" called out Slim, as he swam around the boat to get a better view of the newcomer.

"Who else, Cuz? You come to New Delta for some other reason?"

They all met at the pre-arranged time, when the old-fashioned streetlights were just getting lit in the bawdy side of town. Slim and Sly slipped along the darkened canals, hissing out directions to them as they ran first along the edge of the canal, then over brick bridges, then follow them down dank alleyways, or follow their directions to go around a building when they slip underneath in unseen passageways. Finally they came to a

place near the docks where the big sea-going vessels lay anchored, and huge piles of crates lined the dock, with netting hanging off and over some of the piles, and various ship gear strewn about. Sly gave them directions to go between two large stacks way off in a corner of the dock, and said they'd get there another way.

As Susan, Gorga, Babu, and Lightfoot made their way through the stacks, they could hear some sort of commotion ahead of them, scraping and pounding sounds, even though the docks seemed to be abandoned for the night, everybody having gone home except for the watchdog. As they rounded bales of cotton, they were amazed at the sight that greeted them. Swarms of alligators covered the ground in front of them, some sitting on bales of cotton, others lounging on crates and each other. And to one side, on a wooden platform built up above the rest of the ground, was the largest trolls any of them had ever seen, since the only troll they'd ever seen was Babu.

It appeared to be a group of trolls getting ready to play music. And as their eyes grew adjusted to the dim space between buildings where they were, they saw other troll sitting in corners, under tables, and generally fitting into the various recesses to be found in an auditorium of alligators on the docks of New Delta.

Gorga, with Angel perched on his shoulder, started to wade through the crowd, stepping around or moving tables and chairs as he needed. He had seen something or someone near the stage. All of a sudden two trolls ran to the front of the stage, carrying a small baby troll. They peered out over the crowd, looking for the Indian, girl, and troll. In moments the tearful reunion was had just before Babu's mom and dad had to go on stage to play music. Which was fine for the little troll with newfound brother. He wanted to make music too.

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