



**WRITE  
AROUND  
THE 2024  
MURRAY**

*Barry Young River of Stories*

*2024*

*Primary Short Story*



## **Years 3 - 4 Joint Winner**

Name: Eloise Rogers

School: The Scots School Albury

Story: The Magic of Walnut Street

The Magic of Walnut Street.

“Come closer, so you can hear me”, Grandma said to her two grandchildren, Sarah and Hamish, as she was getting settled on her colourful patchwork lounge chair near the open fire. Sarah and Hamish were 10-year-old twins, who knew that this meant that Grandma was about to tell a story. They loved her stories! They pushed their chairs closer, to hear their grandmother’s sweet voice. The fire was crackling and providing both warmth and a cosy feel that would make the story even better.

“Have I told you about my favourite street?” Grandma asked as she sipped hot chamomile tea from her favourite teacup.

“Aren’t all streets the same?” Sarah replied. “Absolutely not- there is no other street in the world like Walnut Street!” she said with a teacher-like voice. The children sat up. Hamish started laughing “What a silly name for a street!” he snorted. Grandma took a deep breath and started her story.

“Walnut Street was the first street that your grandfather and I moved into when we were first married. It was a street like no other- it had magic powers. During the day, it looked like a regular street that was lined with Walnut trees that weaved between small weatherboard houses. At sunset, a warm glow from the sun would slowly reach the street and then the magic began”. Grandma took another sip of her tea as she paused.

“Well, what happened at sunset?” Sarah asked impatiently. “Did

ghosts appear?” Hamish asked with wide eyes. Grandma shook her head and sighed, she continued.

“The first magic was the beautiful sight of the street at this time- the houses would shine and shimmer. When there was a breeze, the trees would sing a soothing song. The real magic happened when you stood in the middle of the street at the exact moment the sun disappeared. The street would grant wishes! All you had to do was whisper one thing your heart truly desired.” Grandma put another log on the fire. The children were silent, their faces were locked onto Grandma’s eyes.

“I remember a kind young man, who was looking for true love. He whispered this wish at the right time, then within a week he met his future wife whilst walking home from work. A neighbour wished for success and was offered her dream job the next day. Generation after generation, we saw the street grant wishes. People came from everywhere! The best magic of all was that the Walnut Street brought people together- we shared our hopes and dreams. Walnut Street had the power to create magic”. Grandma, looked deeply at the fire as though she was back there, reliving her past.

“Oh Grandma, can we go to Walnut Street?” Hamish asked optimistically. Grandma said lovingly “Of course, one day at sunset”. At that moment, both Sarah and Hamish fell asleep. Grandma smiled to herself and thought, ' well perhaps magic isn't just at Walnut Street after all'.

## **Years 3 - 4 Joint Winner**

Name: Aurora Pike

School: Trinity Anglican College

Story: My Magic Poppa

Magic isn't puffs of smoke or pulling rabbits out of hats. Well, it is. Magic is a lot of things. It's as big as a plane flying in the sky or as small as turning on a light switch. When I think of magic I think of my Poppa. He's not your usual type of grandpa. He's normally very grumpy. I know he loves me but I didn't know how much until something happened to him. One afternoon I had just finished Girl Guides when my mum told me we had to go visit my grandpa in hospital. I was confused, scared and worried all at the same time. When we got there he was in Emergency so now I was extra worried. Straight away I could tell that something was wrong because he was actually so.... happy. I had no idea what was going on. Apparently he didn't either- he was delirious. He was happy to see me but I heard him asking my mum who I was. That felt yuck but I suppose I'd prefer him to find out than to just think I'm some weird chatty stranger. His memories of me started coming back then he started telling me how important I was to him and how much he loved me. That felt pretty good. You might even say it felt like magic. The next day he went into intensive care. We started visiting him daily. He was getting better and better each day. It turned out he had an infection in his brain. The magic of medicine was working. He was moved from intensive care to a normal ward. Until... one morning Mum and Dad were in such a rush. They said we had to stay at a friend's house. My Poppa had had a stroke and I was super worried. After a few hours which seemed like forever, Dad

came to pick us up. We drove straight to the hospital where I saw my Auntie in tears, my Mum in shock and my Poppa unconscious. At this point all he could do was breathe. All I could do was hold his hand. Two days later he woke up. He was forgetting his words and how to say sentences. He was confused and so was I. But I was so glad he was awake. Soon he moved into his own room where I could take him outside for a walk in the courtyard. He kept asking me where the gate was. I think he was planning his escape. Talk about 'Gangster Grandpa'! It was nice to see how many friends my Poppa had. Over the next six weeks, with the nurses help and heaps of visits from his friends and family, my Poppa started getting better. It was magic. Poppa is much better today. He knows who I am (aka The Chatty NOT Stranger.) He sometimes forgets stuff but he's my Poppa and I wouldn't have him any other way. So back to my point, magic is puffs of smoke and pulling rabbits out of hats but I prefer to think of it as a feeling. The little spark of hope that gets you through the bad times. That's the magic. So when I think of magic I think of my Poppa.

## Years 3 - 4 Runners Up

Name: Emelia Erickson

School: Trinity Anglican College

Story: The Magical Door

### The Magical Door

Bang, crash, boom pots and pans fell out of the kitchen drawers. Ellie woke up shaken by the loud noise, she stumbled down the stairs and went to see what had caused the loud booming noise.

But as she walked downstairs, she saw a glistening, shiny, pink door. Ellie carefully opened the door. She looked through it and saw a forest covered with flowers and creatures everywhere. She carefully stepped through the door and began her adventure. She fell into a mystical world. She stood up and started looking around, seeing trees with pink leaves, with birds nesting in them and butterflies flying all over. Ellie saw something glimmering in the distance and went back to check it out. When she finally made it there, Ellie saw a gigantic pink and gold tree. Ellie noticed a little ruby-like heart in the middle of the tree but as she reached out to grab it, the heart vanished into the tree.

The ground suddenly started shaking and Ellie tumbled to the ground. Volcanic like cracks started erupting. Ellie knew she had to do something to save this mystical land! She sprinted before the cracks could reach her, then she saw the problem. A fairy had stolen the heart of the forest. Ellie sprinted after the fairy. It was easy to see the fairy from the glistening ruby red heart it was holding.

Ellie jumped as high as she could to reach the heart, but she missed. She tried jumping again. But before the fairy had completely flown away into the bright blue sky, she yanked the heart out of fairy's arms and put it back in the tree. But it was too late. The cracks had fully surrounded the tree, and it started to sink down rapidly. But Ellie did not give up, she threw the heart of the forest as far as she could and then she collapsed to the ground. The heart had only made it into the gigantic, pink, golden, tree! Ellie was amazed at what she had accomplished and that she had saved land! The cracks started to disappear back into land, and everything went back to normal. The butterflies were flying high, the birds were nesting, and the pinks trees were as vibrant as ever!

Ellie ran back to the door as fast as she could and hoped it still worked and she was able to escape back to her reality. She carefully twisted the doorknob to see that the glistening portal was still there. She jumped into the portal and landed back in her kitchen where she sat and wondered to herself what would happen if the fairy took the heart again? Or what would happen if things were not restored? Ellie wished she knew but she did not. The mystical door had disappeared, and Ellie wondered if she could ever go back again.

## Years 3 - 4 Runners Up

Name: Nirvana Rai Lohani

School: The Scots School Albury

Story: Portal Problems Part 1

“Lilly!” Mrs Robertson’s voice echoed, calling out to her daughter. “Dinners ready!” There was no reply...

Lilly Robertson was watching the stars. As Lilly gazed into the endless illusions made by twinkling balls of flame, she sighed. “I wish I could talk to the stars,” she whispered. Suddenly, a faint pink and white light appeared before her growing bigger and bigger until Lilly started to get sucked into the glowing orb of light. “HELP!” she cried but it was too late. The forest creatures stared as Lilly disappeared into the orb.

By this time, Mrs Robertson had begun a frantic search for her missing daughter but couldn’t find her. Mrs Robertson broke down with grief and worry. When she calmed down, she was staring at the moon. A bitter tear dropped from her eyes as she muttered an old Greek prayer for Lilly, “Please protect my daughter”. The moon only seemed to grow brighter as if smiling. Mrs Robertson’s head dropped as she slipped into deep sleep.

Lilly awoke and found herself in a cave. It was almost dawn and she could see flares of golden beams hitting earth. Lilly tried to sit up but found out she couldn’t get up! Something heavy lay on top of her. Finally she managed to get up and nearly fainted when she got a glimpse of “it” or rather “him”. “Potato” was the first thing Lilly thought as she fought her mind to stay conscious. The potato woke up and as soon as it saw Lilly it sprang off as if it were made of rubber. It let out a ginormous “AAAGGGGHHHHH!” “You can talk!?” said Lilly in awe. Then she went out cold.



Lilly awoke a second time to absolute horror for a giant warty face stared down at her. Strangely, this time Lilly felt her face hot with rage instead of cold with fear. She scrambled to her feet and squared her shoulders at the potato who was watching her with interest and some doubt. "What do you think you were doing scaring the jeezers out of me!" Lilly raged at the potato. "Jeez mate, you were the one scaring the Jeezers out of me," replied the potato in a mildly offended tone. Lilly rolled her eyes and marched outside to find... a huge beautiful forest.

As the trees gently rustled in the wind, butterflies flapped around in the meadow. A river of clear blue flowed calmly and Lilly felt she was in fairyland as she smelt the sweet scent of blossoming flowers. Lilly walked forwards in wonder and gently placed her hand on what looked like a red maple tree. To her surprise, the rough bark on the tree felt warm to touch. As Lilly inhaled in surprise, she could almost taste the fresh morning air. She turned to see a ginourmous, gigantic, huge tree. Its branches twisted all around the trunk like the world's biggest hug. When Lilly looked up, it seemed like all the birds in the forest had settled on its branches. "Amazing isn't it?" said a voice behind Lilly. Lilly snapped out of wonder and now worriedly turned to the potato. "How do I get back home?" asked Lilly in a clueless voice. "Blue hamburger" said the potato. "Excuse me?" exclaimed Lilly.

## **Years 5 - 6 Joint Winner**

Name: Michael Dwyer

School: St Patrick's Parish School

Story: The Bane of the Blight

As the sun set, the forest was peaceful. Trees swayed and leaves rustled in the late summer breeze. Suddenly, a cry pierced through the air. Tony walked up to the offending bird, remembering the great hawks and the mighty eagles that had once lived in Old City. He put away his bow, picked up the bird and removed his arrow from its chest. Although he could have used magic, he had decided to use the new hunting skills he had learnt after escaping to the forest several years before.

When Tony returned to his sandy dusty cave, he made a fire and cooked the bird. Memories of Old City and the blaze that engulfed it the day the Great Terror came, flooded his mind. The city, the centre of the magical world, had been destroyed by a monstrous black beast that hailed from lands across the sea killing his mentor and many others. In his anger, Tony had sworn an oath to one day reclaim the city. As he devoured his meal, he knew he was nearly ready.

It was early morning when Tony woke, the sun kindly smiling down on him. He dressed, ate the remainder of his meagre dinner and went to the clearing behind the cave. With his bow ready and his sword at his hip, he nocked an arrow, whispered "fuego" a spell and fired. The arrow burst into flames upon hitting the target. He repeated this three more times with different spells. Then he drew his diamond sword, feeling the

leaves under foot and smelling the scent of the forest pines, he conjured opponents, and let his instincts take over. He fought until the last opponent disappeared. Then a dragon apparition appeared. Tony put away his sword and fired arrows at the beast's wings and when it landed, he struck the final blow and the magic disappeared.

As Tony stood there startled and panting he knew he was ready. He went back into the cave and gathered up his tattered blanket and weapons. He then went to the other side of the cave and called his horse, Freedom. Tony had named his horse this after the freedom it had given him. His thick black coat was shining and he was wearing an expression as if to ask "Where are we going?" "Back to the city," Tony whispered. "Finally," Freedom seemed to say, Tony mounted and they were off.

Crack! He woke up with a start and realised that it was just Freedom standing on a stick. They had stopped beside a ford the night before and as it was late Tony did not go hunting. He was so hungry he could eat a horse, but NEVER Freedom, he caught a lizard instead. As they hit the track again Tony was revising his battle plan, He would enter through a small hole beside the western gate and slowly work towards the middle of the city ,where he guessed the dragon would be guarding its mountain of stolen gold and jewels. Tony and freedom were about a day away from the city when the trouble came. They were slowly walking along the road when the singing started.

Suddenly five men came around the narrow corner, "thieves" Tony muttered, for they were carrying crossbows and knives. They fell silent when they saw him. "Move out of our way," Tony said calmly. "Who is it that commands us?" one shouted. "I am a wizard of Old City. They looked at each other and grinned. As they started to approach, their knives drawn Tony unsheathed his diamond sword though kill them he would not he murmured aturdir a beam of light flashed from the sword stunning the thieves, leaving them collapsed unconscious on the ground. He rode away leaving the thieves tied and gagged on the path behind. After a few hours of riding the trees started to turn black...this was the domain of the Great Terror.

Even though they were blackened by fire, the gates to the once great city were still standing majestically. Tony dismounted and crept slowly around the city's perimeter until he reached the western gates. He had not seen this entrance in years, yet he still found the small hole in the wall he had climbed through so many times in his youth. As he emerged from the sooty dusty opening he froze for there were two young scruffy looking children staring up at him with the same emerald green eyes that had guided and mentored him as a young boy.

“Sir,” muttered the smaller child, “you kill the big beast? ”, The older child, a girl, then whispered, “Hush, sorry sir he is not good with manners, Tony now more determined than ever to slay the dragon and free his beloved city instructed the children to “Hide, the battle will be long and dangerous.” At this, they ran and as he approached the centre of the ruined decade city he saw the evil black beast with tattered wings. The ancient monster lay there upon mounds of gold and the beast was smirking at him.

Slowly it pushed itself up, the ground shaking under its weight. Tony felt terrified but focused. He unslung his bow and nocked an arrow to the string. The dragon sniggered the glimmer of murder in its eyes. Opening its jaws, fire streamed out, as Tony shouted, “Blindaje!” As the fire struck, it skirted around him, the beast rose and flew up. Arrow after arrow he shot, shouting “fuego!” As the arrows hit, even the magic did not harm the beast's scaled body, only making it more enraged as it dived down. Tony jumped to the left as a stream of fire rushed down beside him. He shot the beast's left-wing membrane. As it soared up, the arrow started to freeze the wing, causing the dragon to scream in pain. The wing snapped off in ice splinters and the beast fell to the ground. He drew his sword and charged, as the beast staggered up. Tony scampered under the right front leg and slashed at the claw, but it was too smart and flicked him to the closest wall. With a crack, Tony's arm broke. With a roar the beast charged and with one last desperate action Tony sent an arrow into the beast's mouth and there was silence. The beast collapsed.

## **Years 5 - 6 Joint Winner**

Name: Patrick Clancy

School: St Patrick's Parish School

Story: The Crown of Time

My name is Lucas Bramwell. I am thirteen years old, living in London with my father. We lived a humble life for my whole life. That was, until today.

I jogged down the street in my ragged stained school uniform as the clock struck eight o'clock. I stumbled onto the plaza, out of breath, when I noticed how silent the plaza was. There was no birdsong, haggling of customers or cars bustling down the street. The world stood still.

Everything had stopped, people stood like fleshy statues. In cars, on bicycles, bawling babies in prams. All lifeless, frozen in time. I cautiously wandered through the desolate plaza of London, taking in the outlandish sight. The only noise I could hear was the tick tick tick of my watch.

My watch had never been wound up properly, for it had a missing crown. It was a steel watch, painted yellow to look like gold and was forever showing 8:07. It was the only gift I had ever been given, though I could never remember who from. All I remember was that the person who gave it to me had said, in a gentle voice, "Never lose this gift Lucas, it will keep you safe." So subsequently I had never let it out of my sight.

I was abruptly shaken from my reminiscing by a metallic clattering down an alleyway. I scampered throughout the plaza towards the sound. Was there someone else not frozen?

I wondered, my heart leaping with excitement at the thought of not being alone in this eerie place. I skidded into the alleyway, but no one was down there. But I was quick enough to see a brightly coloured sneaker disappear on top of the rooftops.

I clambered onto the red-tiled rooftop, bounding from roof to roof after the mysterious figure. I had a clearer look at them now. They were about the same height as me, with brown hair tied into messy braids, a light blue shirt, grease-stained tracksuits and shoes with such bright colours I had to shield my eyes.

I felt like I was back at school, running the cross country, blood pounding in my ears, my legs screaming at me to stop running. And just like then, I kept going. Pursuing the girl, I sprinted over the rooftops when they leapt over a metre-long gap. I gritted my teeth and capered over the gap. The world seemed to slow down while I was in midair. This must have been what it felt like for the rest of the world, I thought. I reached for the roof's edge on the other side and my fingers snatched at the corrugated tiles, but to no avail.

I tumbled into an alleyway, my hand still reaching upwards. I closed my eyes, bracing for the impact but I didn't feel it. Instead, I felt a warm hand grasping mine, hauling me up before dumping me onto the tiles.

I opened my eyes, squinting in the sunlight as a friendly face gazed down at me. They had messy braids, a blue shirt and wore grease-stained tracksuits. It was the girl I had been dogging! She yanked me up to a standing position and smiled mysteriously.

"My name's Leonie." she said, "What's yours?"  
I garbled my answer: "I-I-I'm L-L-Lucas."

Leonie led me to her apartment. It was a run-down dwelling, and we had to trek up 18 flights of stairs to get to the door, which was a rotting mahogany frame and a brass doorknob that had been turned so much it was on the verge of falling off the door.

The inside wasn't very appealing either. The musty smell of dust gathered, tickling my nose. There was a matted old couch with a dirty canvas thrown over it, shattered windows held together with tape, an aerial television so old it seemed to have grown fur over the many years, tables and chairs held together by wood fibres and standing up on splintered legs so sharp they could give you tetanus.

Leonie quickly ushered me in, slamming the door behind me so suddenly that I jumped a foot into the air. She thrust a chair in front of me and I cautiously sat down, but as soon as my bottom touched the chair, it shattered into a thousand smithereens and I landed on the ground with a KERTHUMP!

Leonie burst out laughing and soon I was clutching my sides as well. After we regained composure, she cut to the chase.

She leaned forward, teetering on her seat, and she opened her mouth to speak, when a silver object fell out of her pocket, catching the sun's rays and blinding me for a split second, then bouncing around the floor. I caught a quick glimpse of the item while it was tumbling through the air.

It was a tiny knob, badly painted gold and a little screw on the end. I gasped, for it was a crown unscrewed from a watch! Part of me hoped, no, knew, that it was the missing piece from my watch and that I needed it.

I immediately lunged at it, sliding over the table and clasping my hands over the crown, but it popped out of my hands and soared into the air and out the window.

Leonie incredulously gasped and shrieked at me, "What on earth did you do that for!?" but I brushed her words aside as if I was swatting a fly. She tentatively edged closer to me. "Lucas?"

I readied my feet into a stance, took a deep breath and leapt out of the window. I plummeted through the air, my limbs flailing about. I began to realise the consequences of my rash decision.

I landed in a dumpster with a SQUELCH. My legs still felt like they were wobbling through the air like jelly, but I didn't care. I didn't care that my entire torso was submerged in who knows what. All I cared about was getting the crown.

I furtively looked around, searching for the crown, when I spotted it. It was teetering on the edge drain, dangerously on the verge of falling into the depths below. I dived for the crown, skidding across the cobblestones. I blindly snatched it, hoping that I would grab the crown. Hope was rapidly diminishing from my body when I felt something metallic in my fist. I opened my eyes and there was the crown.

I jammed it into my watch and illegible blue text floated around the watch for a second, and then, finally, time flowed again.



## **Years 5 - 6 Joint Winner**

Name: Matilda Sherazee-Plum

School: Thurgoona Public School

Story: The Enchanted Canopy

In a secluded corner of the ancient forest, sunlight filtered through emerald leaves and dew petals glistened, lay the Murmurwood Grove. Its secrets were known only to those who dared to venture beyond the moss-covered stones and twisted roots.

Seraphina, a curious young girl with pitch-black hair and eyes like starlight, stumbled upon the grove one misty morning. She followed the soft murmur of leaves and the distant chime of invisible bells until she stood before an ancient oak. Its bark bore the etchings of forgotten spells and its branches reached toward the heavens with gnarled fingers.

‘Who dares enter’ boomed a voice from within the tree. Seraphina's heart raced as she stepped closer. ‘I am Seraphina’ she whispered her breath catching I seek magic’ The oak shuddered, and its leaves rustled in approval. ‘Magic’ it echoed. ‘What do you desire?’

Seraphina hesitated, her mind racing. She thought of her sick grandmother, the village plagued by drought and her longing for adventure. ‘Heal my grandmother’ she pleaded. ‘Bring rain to our fields. And grant me the courage to face the unknown.’

The oak roots trembled, and a shimmering mist enveloped Seraphina. She felt her body shift, her senses expanding. When the mist dissipated, she stood taller, her skin aglow with the

newfound magic.

From that day on, Seraphina tended Murmurwood Grove. She healed the sick, whispered rain songs to the clouds, and danced with fireflies under moonlit skies. But her greatest gift was the ability to listen. To hear the stories hidden in the wind, the laughter of ancient spirits, and the sorrow of forgotten creatures.

One evening as twilight painted the sky in hues of lavender and gold a wounded phoenix landed at the grove's edge. Its feathers smouldered and its eyes held with centuries of pain.

'Why have you come?' Seraphina asked cradling the mythical bird in her arms.

'I seek renewal 'the phoenix rasps. 'My flames have dimmed and my purpose wanes.'

Seraphina sang to the phoenix, weaving threads of healing magic. She whispered forgotten incantations, and the birds' feathers ignited once more. In gratitude the phoenix gifted her a single feather-a flame-kissed quill that could write destiny itself.

With the quill, Seraphina chronicled tales of love, loss, and wonder. She penned letters to the stars, painted dreams on parchment and etched hope in the hearts of those who read her words. The Murmurwood Grove became a haven for storytellers and its magic flowed through every tale spun beneath its branches

As seasons turned, Seraphina grew older, her hair silver as moonlight. She knew her time in the grove was nearing its end. One final night she climbed the ancient oak, her quill poised.

'Tell me 'She whispered to the wind. 'What is the true magic of this place?'

The leaves rustled and the oak's voice echoed through her bones. 'Child, the magic lies not in healing or rain. It is the stories-the ones you tell and the ones you live. For every word written here becomes a star, illuminating the night sky.

And so, Seraphina authored her own story- a constellation of courage, compassion, and wonder. As she descended from the oak, she heard the grove whisper, complete the quest then return.

As the seasons shifted, so did the Murmurwood Grove. Its ancient roots stirred, seeking new guardians. Seraphina's silver hair caught moonlight like a spider's silk, and she knew her time was ending. Yet, there was one final quest—the most perilous of all.

The Murmurwood grove whispered rumours of a hidden portal, a rift that led to the heart of magic itself. Legends spoke of a celestial library where forgotten spells resided waiting for a seeker with the courage to unravel their secrets. And so, Seraphina embarked on her star bound quest.

Guided by the flame-kissed quill, she followed moonlit paths, through dew-kissed meadows and over ancient stone bridges. The forest murmured encouragement, its leaves rustling maps of constellations. She encountered creatures both whimsical and treacherous—a sprite who traded riddles for moonbeams, a shadowy wisp that whispered forgotten lullabies.

At the edge of the Murmurwood Grove, where the oaks bowed in reverence, Seraphina found the portal. It shimmered like a tear, its edges frayed with cosmic threads. With a breath held, she stepped through.

Seraphina emerged into a realm of starlight—a vast library suspended in the void. Books floated like galaxies; their pages inscribed with shimmering ink. Each time held a fragment of creation—the first spark of fire, the sigh of oceans, the laughter of new-born stars.

The librarian, an ancient being with eyes like supernovae, greeted her. “Welcome, seeker,” he said, his voice echoing through eons. “What knowledge do you seek?”

Seraphina hesitated. “I seek the lost incantations—the ones that mend broken hearts, that turn tears into celestial arrangements.”

The librarian nodded, guiding her to a shelf labelled “Eternal Whispers.” There, she found volumes bound in moonstone and comet dust. She read of spells to heal fractured souls, to bridge worlds, and to weave love into existence.

Armed with newfound magic, Seraphina returned to Murmurwood Grove. The oak awaited her, leaves trembling in anticipation. She touched the quill to the ancient bark, and words flowed—a symphony of syllables, a dance of ink and intention.

The Murmurwood Grove absorbed her story—the one she lived and the one she had written. The ground trembled, roots reaching deep into forgotten realms. Rain fell, not as drops but as memories—an elixir of healing.

And then, Seraphina transformed. Her skin became bark, her hair leaves. She merged with the oak, becoming its guardian, its whispered secret. She had become part of the constellation—the one that spelled courage, compassion, and wonder.

And so, dear reader, when you wander through forests, listen. The wind carries Seraphina's whispers—the ones that heal, that bind hearts, that turn tears into stardust.

May you find your Murmurwood Grove, where magic dances in every rustle, and where courage blooms like moonflowers.

# Years 5 - 6 Runners Up

Name: Yanxi Liu

School: St Patrick's Parish School, Albury

Story: The Apprentice of Magic

Flashback

Zap! The eerie silence was deafening. Amari found herself in a desolate land of burning sand hills, the air shimmering with heat. The endless, flat horizon was abruptly broken by rock pillars, their shadows stretching across the sand. In the distance, a palace glistened under the harsh sunlight, its golden spires piercing the sky.

Amari's head throbbed, and she touched the wound on her forearm. It flaked under her fingers, not the feel of a fresh injury. Disoriented, she scanned her surroundings. This place felt familiar, yet she couldn't pinpoint why. Her eyes burned from the intense light, begging to close. As she searched for clues, her gaze fell on a red scroll lying partially buried in the sand.

Suddenly, memories flooded back. She was in her master's chamber, a place of wonder and learning. Shelves lined with ancient ingredients and mystical artefacts surrounded her as she happily performed magic. Mixing blue, purple, and green vials under his direction, droplets of sweat formed on her forehead and palms. Something was missing from the recipe. "Achoo!" The dust filled her nostrils, every breath an itching torture. Her throat felt like sandpaper. She gulped down some water and resumed work.

"Machoo, that's it!" she exclaimed. "That's what I'm missing." She dashed into the potion room, overwhelmed by ingredients—mouse droppings, snake venom, and more. The walls were lined with jars containing mysterious substances, each labelled in her

master's handwriting. She searched high and low through the endless rows of potions and ingredients, finding nothing. Crunch! The potion bottles cracked, shards flying like a tornado. A stream of red liquid gushed down her forearm, soaking the scroll.

#### The Scroll

Her consciousness snapped back to the desert. Touching her forearm, she felt her wounded, dry skin. She slowly moved her arm to the scroll. Picking it up, she unrolled it. 'Stay where the queen eats, sleeps, and drinks for 50 days before you can return to your beloved land.' She clutched the scroll so tightly her knuckles turned white. Determined, she marched toward the glistening palace.

#### Water

Her parched lips and battered body limped across the sand. "Water, water, water," was her only thought. After what felt like an eternity, she saw it glistening beside some cacti—an oasis. Crystal-clear water sparkled in a small pool, surrounded by lush greenery. Running as fast as her legs allowed, she lunged toward the prize.

Seeing her beaten reflection in the water was shocking. Despite the burns, she still looked enchanting. Her hazel green eyes stared back at her. She drank like a wild animal, the cool water soothing her burning throat. Later, she untangled and cleaned her wavy auburn hair, then lay on a soft patch of sand, staring at the star-filled sky.

#### The Arrival

A beautiful sunrise startled her awake. Ding, ding, ding! "Make way for Prince Mabu of Egypt!" hollered a person in armour. She quickly scurried aside, avoiding becoming a pancake. Then it dawned on her, "The prince lives with the Queen of Egypt. I just have to follow the carriage." She took one more sip of water before leaving her campsite.

The village was a cluster of sand-coloured huts. Drawn by an irresistible pull, Amari found herself peering into one. Inside, a young man with sharp blue eyes stirred a bubbling pot. Shelves overflowed with vials and strange trinkets. This was a place of magic. "Can I help you?" the young man asked, his voice laced

with surprise. Hesitantly, Amari stepped forward. "I apologise for intruding. My name is Amari, and I... I know magic." The young man's eyes widened. "Magic? But you speak no Egyptian." Amari pointed at a potion. "Sugarcane first, then bull horn. It amplifies the effect." A smile broke across the young man's face. "You're right! I'm Dedi. You're a fascinating mystery, Amari."

Days passed as they delved into their shared passion. Amari, despite her desert-worn appearance, held a spark of youthful enthusiasm. She learned about Egyptian magic, its focus on manipulating the elements. In return, she shared her knowledge of potions and enchantments. But nights were filled with longing for home.

One starlit evening, Amari confided in Dedi about the scroll. "The Queen's palace," Dedi breathed, his eyes gleaming. "I've been invited to perform there. Perhaps..."

A daring plan hatched. Dedi would use his performance as a distraction, sneaking Amari into the palace. Disguised amongst Dedi's magic props, Amari found herself hurtling towards the Queen's residence in a gilded carriage. Dedi lent her a cloak to disguise her.

### The Palace

Sweat poured down Amari's forehead as she hid in a small, stuffy box with magic supplies. After counting to 840, the box stopped. Daylight seeped in, followed by a face.

She wore a beautiful gown with exquisite jewellery and a crown. Her eyes were kind but sharp. Amari stumbled into a clumsy curtsy, staring at the floor. "It's okay. I know you're not from here; I can tell from your clothes. You can tell me why you're here," a soothing voice said. Amari looked up at the queen's kind eyes and forced out her story. She listened silently, occasionally nodding.

After Amari finished, the queen took a while to process. "Well, since the scroll said you need to stay in the palace for 50 days, I guess we can arrange for you to live here," she suggested.

Amari's smile reached her eyes as she beamed at the queen. "Maybe I'll make it home after all," she hoped.

Days turned into weeks, and Amari felt a deep connection to this place. Yet, the longing for home remained. On the 50th

day, the queen presented her with a gift—a beautifully crafted amulet infused with protective magic. “This will guide you back to your master,” she said, her eyes warm with kindness.

As Amari prepared to leave, she thanked the queen and Dedi for their generosity and friendship. With the amulet in hand, she felt a surge of confidence. The palace gates opened, and she stepped out into the desert, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead.

Maybe, just maybe, she would make it home after all.



## Years 5 - 6 Runners Up

Name: Archie Calvert

School: St Patricks Parish School Albury

Story: The Nuclear Aura

I wake up, my eyes blurry, and strangely my ears feel like they are about to explode. But the radio is blaring in the background, who could be up this early? Once I woke up, I stumbled out of bed and walked out into the lounge room. My Dad was sitting there with his hands clasped on his face. "Dad, what is going on and why are you up so early?" "Jake, it is eight thirty in the morning." My Dad said with a soft, worried voice. Whoops, I must have slept in, but how did I not notice the light outside? This day had a strange feeling to it. "But what is going on Dad?" Dad looked up and said, "Jake, something really strange is going on, supposedly a mysterious Aura that is capable of giving any human that consumes it, any superpower that you could think of and a weapon that could destroy the world, has landed in Shanghai, China" I looked at my father, I was confused, curious and honestly, I don't know what I was thinking. I paused, but suddenly I had a moment of realisation, this will destroy the world, every country is going to rage into China, guns blazing, just so they can have the most powerful entity in the world. This isn't just any aura, this is a Nuclear Aura.

By now, my Mum had woken up, Dad filled Mum in on what was going on, she was as surprised as me. I had to talk to Eli, my best friend. Eli lived in foggy Gerogery, just like me. Eli loved magic, so I thought I should talk to him. I quickly rushed into my dishevelled room and got dressed. Next thing I knew I was walking out the door and enjoying the cold breeze brushing

along my fingertips as I rode my bike through the fog. Once I arrived at Eli's house I walked into his room, and we both said what happened at the exact same time! Could this day get any weirder? After a few minutes of discussion, Eli and I came up with something; we were going to save the world.

We rode back over to my house so we could ask my Mum and Dad for their help. You see my Mum is a top secret agent in the Australian Intelligence Agency, and my Dad works in the Australian Military Armoury. I gestured my parents over to the couch so we could beg them for their help. But before we asked them for their help, we needed to make sure we could even try to save the world from pure chaos and destruction. Once I had gotten up from the couch, I stretched my legs and looked at the time. 1:30 Pm! We had spent four hours begging and asking my parents to let us go on our mission but it was all worth it because not only had they agreed, but they were going to help us.

For the next couple of days we researched what countries were trying to take the Aura, and where we needed to go. Mum agreed to figure out a way to put surveillance cameras on the high security room guarding the Aura so we would know the schedule of the guards and how we could breach the room. Eli's job was to figure out how to destroy the Aura, due to how much he loves magic. My job was to plan where we would travel to. Our stops, and our major plan. I felt important, but I also felt butterflies flying around my stomach. This mission basically lies in my hands, if i make one small mistake, the world as we know it could cease to exist. Lastly Dad's job was to supply us with the weapons we needed to complete our mission. By the end of our two day planning, we had come up with a plan, but we needed to be quick, as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia have already declared war on China. We need to destroy this Nuclear Aura and soon before innocent people die.

Brrrrrrr! The sound of the jet pierced the bright blue sky and air like the screech of an eagle. Once we were at cruising altitude

we started to brief each other on the plan. The pilot of the jet distinctly said over the radio,

“We have touched down at exactly 14:30 hours, please be safe. We all gave a small nod. Mum had her colleagues set up a secret base underneath a Chinese restaurant run by two undercover Australian spies. We casually walked into the restaurant and Mum talked to the spies. They led us towards our bunker, and informed us on where everything was. We were equipped with radios and handguns in our pockets. This was it, I thought, time to save the world.

“3,2,1”, Dad whispered, and we silently poured into the facility through the vents, Mum keeping an eye on us using her cameras. The facility was cold and gloomy with stainless steel as walls. I was focused and tried to not think of anything else, I did this by breathing slowly, a bit like meditation. We inaudibly commando crawled through the vents in an orderly fashion, Dad at the front, myself behind him and Eli behind me. Eli looked nervous but still pushed through. All of a sudden gunfire roared out in the background, but something else caught my eye, it was a bright light. Instantaneously Dad radioed in, “I have eyes on the prize!” Mum whispered on the radio, “You are clear, the guards have left for their luncheon. GO! GO!” We rushed into the room, our handguns by our side, Eli with the key to world peace. The aura blinded my eyes and pierced my ears, by the look on their faces, it did the same to Dad and Eli. Dad and I stood on watch whilst Eli armed the bomb. TICK! TICK! The bomb started ticking. We had approximately 1 minute to get out of there before we were all blown into smithereens. Mum yelled on the radio, “Get out, guards incoming!” I let out a chuckle, guards were the least of our problems, we climbed into the vents and quickly crawled out of the facility, making sure no guards were in there. KABOOM! The destruction let out a sound of a nuclear bomb and magical particles poured out over the place. We may be hated by many countries, but we still saved the world.