

ELISA PURICELLI GUERRA



*Minerva
e Mint*



THE CITY OF LIZARDS

ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN,
YOU JUST HAVE TO BELIEVE!



*Minerva
Mint*

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Editorial project by Atlantyca Dreamfarm S.r.l.

Text by Elisa Puricelli Guerra; Translated by Marco Zeni

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Original edition published by Edizioni Piemme S.p.A., Italy

Original title: La città delle lucertole

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A full catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 4747 0439 7

19 18 17 16 15

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Designer: Rick Korab

Printed and bound in China.



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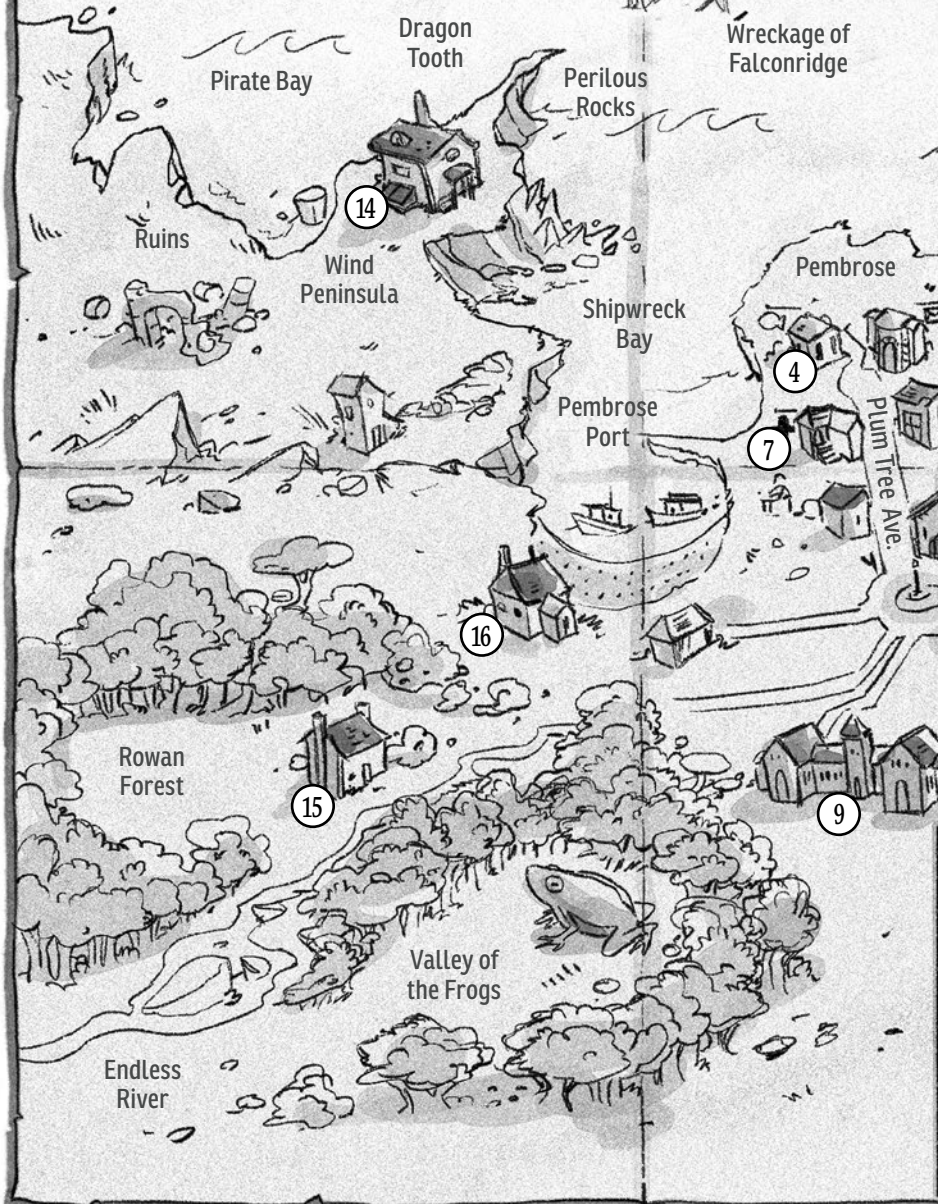


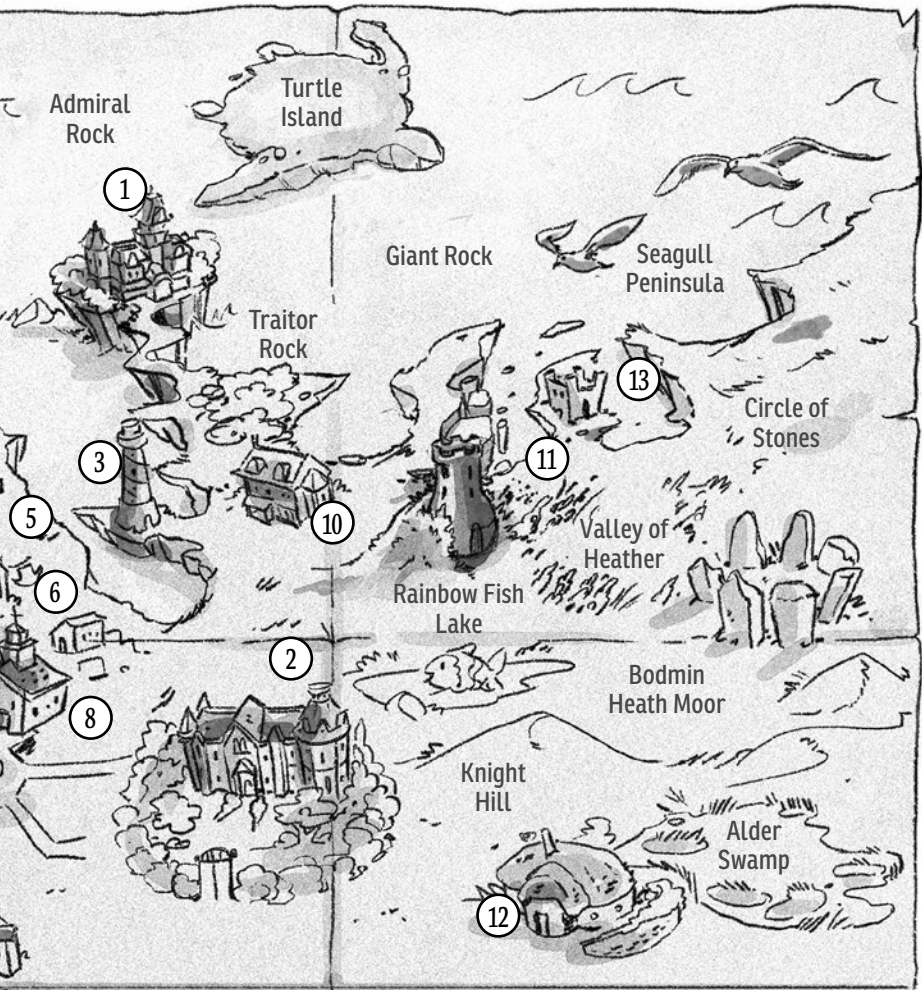
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Pembrose and its Surroundings





1. Lizard Manor

2. Crowley Hall

3. Smuggler's Den

4. Fishbone Inn

5. Post Office

6. Bon Ton Clothing Shop

7. Dr Gerald's Clinic

8. Church

9. School

10. Gilbert O'Sullivan's House

11. Owl Tower

12. Agatha's Cottage

13. Tintagel Castle

14. The Lone Pirate Inn

15. Old House of Sighs

16. Fisherman Circle



WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR...

Minerva Mint is a nine-year-old girl living in Lizard Manor, atop Admiral Rock, in Cornwall, England. She lives with fourteen snowy owls, six foxes and a badger called Hugo. She also shares her home with old Mrs Flopps, the kind woman who found her in a bag at Victoria station in London when she was just a few months old.

Minerva is determined to find out what happened to her parents, but she only has a few clues to go on. The following items were left alongside her in the bag: a volume from the Universal Encyclopedia with a puzzle written on the first page ("Count the letters of Blue Tiger"); an envelope addressed to someone called Septimus Hodge, who actually does not exist; and the deed to the manor in Cornwall. For nine years, Minerva tried to unravel the mystery by herself, but now she finally has help: her friends Ravi and Thomasina.

The three friends have found a mysterious box containing a small flute. When the flute is played, dozens of snowy owls gather together. The words Ordo Noctuae are engraved on the box's lid. This translates to The Order of the Owl, which has become the name of their secret club. They even have a secret headquarters, Owl Tower, and an important mission: to solve the mystery of Minerva's origins.

The Order of the Owls have already discovered something very important: Minerva's ancestor was a member of the Ravagers of the Sea, a gang of ruthless pirates that used to wreak havoc on the coasts of Cornwall centuries ago. That means that she is entitled to part of their enormous treasure!

If only they could find it...



CHAPTER 1



TERROR OF THE SEAS

I can't miss a chance like this! Minerva thought. It's much too good!

Silent as a fox, she laid her bicycle on the ground and crouched near a bush of blossoming honeysuckle. She took her slingshot out of her pocket and poised for action.

The O'Sullivan's' small van was parked in their driveway. The family was about to leave for their summer holiday. They were all in the van, including William the Conqueror, the vicious dog slobbering in the backseat. The only one still missing was...

“GILBERT!” Mrs O’Sullivan yelled. “If you’re not here in one minute, we’re going to leave without you!” she threatened, revving the engine and putting the car in gear.

Minerva pulled back the band of the slingshot and smirked. Gilbert O’Sullivan was the leader of a gang of bullies that terrorized all the children in the area. It was time for some payback.

“Jeez ... I’m coming!” Gilbert snorted, trudging towards the van. He was covered in sweat and was carrying a bunch of tennis rackets. He bent down to put them in the trunk.

“Attaboy! That’s it, don’t move,” Minerva whispered, closing one eye. “A perfect target...” She took aim and... “Bullseye!” she cheered.

An acorn hit Gilbert’s bottom with a dry whacking sound.

“Oww!” the boy yelped.

“Gilbert, get in the car NOW!” his father ordered. “We’re running late.”

“But *Daaaad...*” The boy was rubbing his aching

bottom when a second bullet hit him smack-dab on the nose.

“Ouch!” Gilbert yelled, scowling and searching for his tormentor.

Just then, the van started moving, and he could do nothing but jump in, without knowing who had dared to hit him. He did, however, have a suspect in mind. As a matter of fact...

“Enjoy your trip, Gilbert!” Minerva shouted, bouncing out from behind the bush the exact same moment the van pulled into the main road.

“Minerva Mint!” the boy roared. “I knew it was you!”

Minerva waved with the hand holding the sling-shot. “You know, I was feeling a bit rusty and thought I’d get some practice. Thanks for volunteering as a target!” she said, taking a bow. “Come back soon! I get bored when you’re not around.”

“I’ll get you for this next time ... I ... I...” Gilbert bellowed. But the van disappeared round a curve, and his threats faded in the wind.

With a chuckle, Minerva put the slingshot away. She had made the handy thing herself, and it had never missed a shot so far.

To limber up after her victory, she did a couple of cartwheels and some leaps.

“Now that’s the perfect way to celebrate the beginning of the summer!” she exclaimed, pausing to take a breath. Then she did one last cartwheel, just to round it all off.

Truth be told, there was nothing more exciting than the beginning of the summer break. It made Minerva feel like singing, dancing, doing a million cartwheels ... even if she did not actually go to school. However, her friends Ravi and Thomasina did, and from that day on, she was going to have them all to herself. And that was a good reason to celebrate!

Minerva was supposed to meet them in front of the post office on Plum Tree Avenue. Their plan was to buy a lot of delicious things to eat and spend the whole afternoon at their secret hideout in the moorland.

What a perfect plan! Minerva thought, jumping on her bicycle and zipping along the path that led to Pembrose. Her red curls danced in the wind, and she yelled, “Out of my way!” just in case some unfortunate fellow happened to be standing in her path.

* * *

Pembrose was a tiny village, neatly nestled into a crystal clear bay dotted with toy-sized fishing boats. Smoky grey seals lazed in the sun, while squeaking puffins and seagulls circled the harbour. Charming cottages, so close together that they looked like sardines in a box, lined the steep cobbled streets that rose from the sea.

Tourists swarmed to the sleepy village in July. That year, Merlin’s book of prophecies had been discovered nearby. It was now kept at the little museum by the harbour, and the number of visitors had skyrocketed as a result. Spotting tourists was an easy task: all you had to do was look for the cameras and the noses, which were reddened and a little

burned by the sun that had been shining brightly in the clear blue sky for days.

Because of the large amount of tourists, the mayor had closed the city centre off to cars. Built hundreds of years before, its narrow streets were meant for pack mule transport. If they were carrying heavy bags, the tourists could always ask for a ride from Lola, a laid-back pinto horse that pulled a small wagon driven by Timothy, the shy owner of the Fishbone Inn, the only hotel and restaurant in the village.

“Out of my way!” Minerva yelled, shooting like a bullet down Plum Tree Avenue. She was not very good at slowing down.

Some of the more athletic tourists managed to get out of her way, but in order to avoid a group of people gathered in front of the post office, she had to swerve wildly. Luckily for her, she ended up in a heap of hay bales outside the Fishbone Inn.

I really need to work on my technique, Minerva thought, lying spreadeagled on the hay. “Um, hi Lola,” she said to the horse that was carefully looking at her