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The Adventures of Jimmy Crikey: Jade, the Youngest Witch Ever

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Jade, the Youngest Ever Witch

Chapter 1

Jimmy shouted, “Jade, what are we doing sitting at the bottom of the ocean watching whales the size of houses swim by.”

“Don’t worry. You’re not in any danger. I’ll keep you safe.”

“That’s not the point. The last thing I remember is sitting at the table in Matilda’s kitchen, having a drink. I still have a glass tumbler in my hand.”

“Don’t try drinking it, Jimmy. It’s full of sea water now.”

“And then suddenly I was sat at the bottom of the ocean watching whales, and strange fish swim by.”

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Utterly oblivious to Jimmy's discomfort Jade offered her explanation. "I am on the last leg of my final training, Jimmy. And if I pass Matilda's tests, I will be welcomed into the coven as a fully qualified guardian of one of the realms of Earth."

"That's fine, but what does that have to do with dragging me to the bottom of the sea?"

"I need you to bear witness to Matilda that I have mastered the skills that Elwinn has taught me."

"I thought Matilda was your tutor."

"Matilda is my prime tutor, but she insisted that I learn as much as possible from each of the other three witches: Ira, Elwinn and Floella. Ira gave me flying lessons a week ago after I had spent a few days with Floella. Now I can travel anywhere in the Universe, above and below the surface."

"Are you sure about that, Jade?"

"Well, almost anywhere, at least on Earth. I don't have the

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benefit of a starship like yours, Jimmy.”

“Jade!” Jimmy almost shouted out. “We’re about to be eaten by a great white shark. Get us out of here.”

A gigantic shark that Jimmy was heading straight for them with gaping jaws.

“No need to panic, Jimmy. We’re as safe as houses. It can’t break into our bubble. Enjoy a close-up of its teeth.”

“I have no interest in examining a shark’s teeth. You’ve proved your point. Just get us out of here.”

“You may never get this close to a great white shark again.”

“I won’t be shedding a tear about that. Just take us back to Matilda’s kitchen.”

“Oh. All right then, spoilsport. Here we go.”

Jade flicked her blond mop of hair out of her blue eyes, gave Jimmy a big smile and clicked her fingers. The return journey passed

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in a blur of bubbles and flashes of brightly coloured fishes before the sky's blue blotted all else out.

“Thank goodness for that,” Jimmy heaved a sigh of relief. He would have had a drink from the contents of the glass he held in his hand, still almost full to the brim, had not Jade placed her hand over the top. “It’s still got seawater in it. Here, let me refill it with Matilda’s fruit drink.” She rinsed out the glass and poured Jimmy a drink of Matilda’s nectar. Nothing else in the world tasted as heavenly, but no one except Matilda knew what its ingredients were.

“I needed that. Thanks, Jade. It’s great to be back safely, but how much longer will your testing be? I can’t face many more surprises like that.”

“Perhaps I should have warned you, but I was concentrating so much I completely forgot to say.”

“It did come as a bit of a surprise. Let’s hope it’s the last one.”

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“Matilda hasn’t told me how many tests there are before I become a full witch.”

“Please let it be soon.”

“Be careful what you wish for, Jimmy,” Matilda warned as she joined them at the table, appearing out of nowhere. “Once Jade becomes fully qualified, she will control not only her destiny but also the destiny of the realm she is in control of.”

“But don’t all the realms already have masters,” Jimmy queried.

Matilda responded. “That may appear true, but who knows what other realms may exist that we know nothing about?”

That posed a problem for both Jimmy and Jade. They knew Elwinn watched over the world of water; Floella's duty was to watch over the earth and its rocks and sands and soils; Ira watched over the skies, which included the Sky Islands and their inhabitants high above the clouds.

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Jade was the niece of Gemma, Jimmy's close friend, who Jimmy had rescued from the bottom of the well, and belonged to the tribe of Diamites. They inhabited the underground caverns at the edge of Roombelow. Diamites were two-thirds the size of the people of the upper world, but the size of their hearts more than compensated for their lack of size. There were none braver and few as daring. And among all the Diamites, there was no other who had the inherent skills of Jade.

Matilda had picked up on the hidden traits of magic which identified the youngster as a potential witch. She and Gemma had to work hard to persuade Jade's mother and Gemma's sister, Zeea, that Jade had a great future if she moved to live with Matilda to study witchcraft in her house on the hill in Roombelow. They had to work even harder to convince Max Xander, Jade's father, that she would be safe living in the home of a witch many kilometres away from her homeland.

In the space of a year, the young Jade matured into a confident, if an impatient, young student of witchcraft. Her one

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failing was impetuosity, which led to many a magic spell error. Usually, the errors were insignificant, but not at other times. And it was usually Jimmy who got caught in the resulting chaos. Jimmy would never forget being chased by a python in the Congo jungle in Africa.

As the months of tuition rolled by, the mistakes became fewer, but they were still a liability that surrounded Jade's otherwise undoubted skills.

"I think you are almost ready for the final trials, Jade. There's not much more I can teach you, and you have absorbed the abilities of our three sister witches like a magnet gathering spilt tacks. And if you are in doubt, you can always refer to my library of ancient scrolls. They will always be available to help you."

"But surely, you'll always be available to help me?"

"Perhaps not. I need the black mushroom brew much more often these days."

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Jimmy piped up, "You just must tell me when you need more, Matilda. It's no trouble."

"Thank you, Jimmy. I know I can rely on you, but there will come a time when the elixir won't work as well as it used to. When that happens, I will simply move into the next realm and continue my work among new sisters in a different setting."

"Well, I hope that day is years and years away," Jade said while hugging Matilda like the second mother she had become.

"What you can be sure of, Jade, is that I will be around long enough to see you graduate to the coven."

"How do I graduate, Matilda? Is there a final exam?"

"You could say that. There is a final examination of the skills I have taught you, but it is not a written exam. There will be several tasks to complete. You could say there are seven trials to face. None of them will be beyond your capabilities, but that may not always be obvious at the time."

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“When will I start the trials?”

“You have just completed the first trial. You have shown that you can use the powers of Elwinn to descend to the deepest depths and safely take another with you.”

“When can I start the next trial?”

“In another week or two, Jade. I need to check when all members of our coven will be available.”

Jimmy smiled. “So, there’s no need to panic, Jade.”

“I’m not panicking, but I appreciate every moment more that I have to practice.”

“Just be sure I’m nowhere near when you start practising.” Jimmy hid behind Matilda to avoid the playful swipe aimed in his direction.

“Now, now, children!” Matilda admonished the pair. “Stop fooling around. Are you staying for dinner, Jimmy?”

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“Thank you, Matilda, but Amanda is expecting me back to eat with Mr McDonald when he finishes work in the shop.”

“That’s fine. I’ll just cut back on the potatoes. Jade is cooking this evening.”

“Am I?”

“Nothing too complicated. New potatoes boiled in their scrubbed skins, the sweetest garden peas and a few baby carrots.”

“No meat?” Jimmy asked.

“We are trying out a vegetarian option that Jade suggested.”

“I don’t know if I like the idea of eating dead animals anymore,” Jade explained.

“Please don’t mention vegetarian diets in front of Mr McDonald,” Jimmy pleaded. “He would probably have a heart attack. After all, he does own the butcher’s shop. Besides, I am rather partial to bacon and eggs myself.”

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"I am rather surprised at that, seeing as you come from a technologically advanced civilisation on Attalia," Jade observed.

"Attalians believe in eating a balanced diet. If food is plentiful, in abundance, they utilise it."

"We'll just have to agree to differ, Jimmy, but once I've seen an animal living a free and happy life, I cannot possibly think about eating it."

"Well, that's not a problem tonight, Jade. And once you've retrieved the butter dish from the cold stream, we'll be ready to enjoy our dinner. Sorry you are not staying for dinner, Jimmy, but we'll see you tomorrow."

"Goodnight, friends," Jimmy shouted over his shoulder as he left Matilda's house on the hill and made his way down to the well, which stood in the centre of the town square in Roombelow. Out of habit, he looked into the depths of the well, half expecting to see Gemma. But Gemma had returned to her family in Lithnia, where she now lived in a cave next door to her sister Zeea.

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There was only one other friend in all the world that Jimmy missed more than Gemma. That was the teenage mermaid whose home was in the Emerald Lake, in the watery world below Roombelow. But Annison could not stray far from water.

The scales that covered her tail and body needed water to keep them moisturised. If the scales dried, they flaked off and lost their glossy luminescence. If the scales flaked off completely, it took ages and ages for them to regrow, and if they were out of water for more than twenty or so minutes, they dried out so much that they never would regrow. So the Aquamites rarely ventured far from the Emerald Lake. Even their ventures into the great ocean, which linked to the Emerald Lake, was a hazard because the sea's salt water sucked the moisture out of Annison's skin. They knew they could never have a life together, but that did not detract from their enthusiasm for their friendship. And dreams allowed Jimmy to enjoy an imaginary life with an Annison on two legs.

Chapter 2

The morning sunshine flickered over Jimmy's eyes and brought him back from the land of dreams to the real world. Even as he washed and dressed, he could not shake the dreams of things that might one day be real.

"One or two eggs?" asked Amanda.

"Just one this morning, thank you. Has Mr McDonald already had breakfast and left for work."

"He's at an early meeting at the Council offices. They must discuss with the builders how many homes they can fit into the new development and where to site them, so they don't interfere with existing homes. They will also discuss where to find the funds to pay for the building, materials and labour.

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“Our population continues to grow yearly, and it’s not just new homes to be built. We will also need new schools. And it all has to be paid for. Everyone realises the need to expand, but no one wants to pay for it. I suppose the Council will have to increase taxation to share the cost among all our citizens. It won’t be popular, but at least the cost gets shared across the community.”

“Even in the short time I have lived with you, I have noticed how crowded the square becomes when Mr McDonald has an announcement to make, and all the townsfolk gather in the square.”

“Well, we can’t make the square any bigger. Houses and shops surround it.”

“There must be somewhere close by where the townsfolk can gather whenever you have a special announcement. Perhaps we can build a terrace on the side of the hill that leads up to Matilda’s house.”

“I don’t think Matilda would be very pleased to have a few hundred townsfolk gather on the side of her hill.”

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"You are probably right. We'll just have to find a new site.

"I am going up the hill after breakfast, so I might test the waters while I'm there."

"Better you than me." Amanda laughed at Jimmy's proposal. "I wouldn't dare to suggest any such thing to Matilda. We will never forget the sleeping spell she threw over the town when she forgot how to laugh. Without your bravery, Jimmy, we might still be slumbering our lives away."

"I don't think she would ever do that again."

"Well, I, for one, would not want to risk it. So please approach it diplomatically, Jimmy."

"Don't worry. I'll be careful."

"See you later for dinner?"

"I'll certainly be back for dinner, Amanda. Jade is trying vegetarianism, and I don't fancy a seagrass salad tonight."

Amanda chuckled. "Perhaps it's just a passing phase."

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“I do hope so,” Jimmy said as he set off for Matilda’s house.

As was usual in Roombelow, the morning sunshine warmed everything to a comfortable temperature. Never too hot and rarely cold, even though there was no actual sun in the skies above Roommbelow. Lord Oron, the Weatherman, patrolled the skies in his Cloud and controlled the weather so that, in general, the rain only fell during the night. Despite Jimmy’s advanced education provided by XRU, his electronic computer at the heart of his starship, he could not work out how Lord Oron controlled the light, heat, wind, and rain. And XRU had given up seeking a scientific explanation.

“Good morning.” Jimmy cheerfully announced his arrival to the witches, sitting at the kitchen table. Matilda and Jade had long since finished breakfast and were studying the mighty tomes of spells handwritten in a gothic script into the red leather-bound books of spells. Matilda recorded many of the ancient spells on rolled-up parchments that tended to roll back even as Jade tried to read them. The only option was to weigh each end with a heavy

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stone chosen from the stream behind Matilda's house.

Neither of them acknowledged Jimmy's arrival, so deeply were they engrossed in the contents of one of the red books. "What are you working on today, Jade?" Jimmy asked.

Jade's eyes never left the page she and Matilda were studying.

"Shush! We have to concentrate," Matilda commanded.

Jimmy would never disobey a direct order from the most powerful witch on Earth. So, he sat in the armchair beside the fireplace, and Beatrix immediately jumped up to join him. She rubbed her head against Jimmy's chest. "I suppose it's just you and me," he said to the cat, scratching behind her ears. "I might as well have a drink while we wait for the witches to come back to Earth."

He reached into the fug that hung from Matilda's rafters and brought a goblet down filled to the brim with the witch's blend of nectar, the sweetest drink Jimmy had ever tasted. The flickering flames attracted his attention, and his eyes glazed over. Beatrix was content, as was confirmed by her loud purring. It needed no

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guesswork to figure out where Jimmy's thoughts had turned.

Jimmy knew that a life together with Annison was a pipedream that could never happen, but that did not stop his dreams. Nor did it affect the extraordinary friendship between the two very different beings.

"I've got it now," shouted Jade with excitement. "The written words are lifting off the page and dancing in front of my eyes. They enter my head and speak to me one by one while circulating inside my head."

"And what are they telling you?"

"They say I am ready to join the elite with a realm of my own to care for."

"I've known you were on the brink of readiness for some time, Jade, but you still need to complete the trials to show the other coven members that you have absorbed the knowledge. The knowledge is swirling around your head, but it is disjointed. It won't become organised until you use it."

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Jimmy picked up on what they were discussing. "It sounds like you must get going on more trials, Jade. Can I help, Matilda?"

"That's a definite no, Jimmy. Jade must succeed because of her skills, without external help."

Jade's shoulders slumped.

"And pouting and self-pity will get you nowhere, Jade. You cannot hurry the final step. You will need to be at your highest level of alertness if you wish to convince the others that you are ready to join us."

"I am so sorry, Matilda. It's just that ..."

"Be patient little one," Matilda gently chided her pupil. "It's a wonder that you have come so far so quickly. You will become the youngest witch in all our history. In a little while. So, put that beautiful smile back on your face and keep believing."

Jimmy gave Jade's shoulders a friendly squeeze of reassurance. "You must be within a hair's breadth of getting there,

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Jade. Look at how easily you took me to the bottom of the ocean and even protected me from a great white shark.”

“But your next trial will be a solo effort,” Matilda explained. “The coven has brought forward our next meeting to the end of this week. After we confer, we’ll have a better idea of what you’ll face.

“Until then, keep studying the books of spells. You can never have too much knowledge. And when the time arrives when you don’t have an answer, you will know which volume of spells might hold the answer you seek.”

“But there is no order in how you and earlier witches have recorded the spells. They are not in alphabetic order, nor are they in date order. How do you find a particular spell when you need it?”

“Don’t worry your head over a little thing like that. Be assured when you need it, you will find it.”

Jimmy recalled a day when Matilda had lost a spell and had to use magic to recover it. He could even remember some of the words: Shevell, Shevell. But Jimmy kept his council. There was no

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way he would point out a Matilda mistake in front of her pupil.

Jade continued studying the spells. Matilda continued her silent secretive communications with the other members of the coven. Jimmy continued dreaming of things that might or might not be. Beatrix continued purring. There was still an hour to wait before they would take a lunch break, but even for Jimmy and his red Attalian boots, there was not enough time to visit Gemma or even Annison.

Jimmy socialised with many of the children in the town. They were his equals in size and age, but intellectually Jimmy was much more advanced because of XRU. Jimmy wished he had brought XRU with him. The starship computer was fully portable since the Attalian workshops had fitted it with batteries that would power the computer for a lifetime. Another reason for not bringing XRU was that Matilda was very suspicious of the talking box with a fantastic store of knowledge. The school was in session so he could talk to no one else.

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Jimmy was mesmerised by the flickering flames of the burning logs in the grate and allowed his mind to roam. It was not surprising that his thoughts turned to the Emerald Lake. One moment he was relaxed by the fire, and the next, he was suspended by the feet above the cliffside that gave entrance to Lithnia. Beneath him was a drop of several hundred feet.

Not usually given to panicking, Jimmy was taken by surprise at the sudden change in his location. But there was no doubt in his mind who had been responsible. "Jade!" Jimmy shouted through clenched teeth. "Get me down. Now! But slowly. It's a long way down."

"Where are you, Jimmy?"

"I'm where you sent me, Jade."

"I didn't send you anywhere."

"Well, here I am, hanging a few hundred feet above the ground outside the entrance to Lithnia."

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“That’s useful. I was wondering how mum was coping with my being away so long.”

“You did more than wonder. Jade. You’ve sent me here to find out.”

“Oh! Now that you’re there, you could pop in to find out how mum is....”

At the top of his voice, Jimmy yelled. “Get me down to the ground. Safely.”

“I’m so sorry, Uncle Jimmy. I wasn’t even practising any spells. I was thinking about mum and Aunt Gemma. It’s ages since I last saw them.”

Slowly Jimmy descended, headfirst towards the ground. Fortunately, a thick sward of grass covered the soil, and his landing was soft. Jimmy squiggled into a sitting position, thoroughly exasperated by another jeopardy the witch in training had brought him to.

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“Jade,” he muttered. “How much longer will your spells get mixed up? That could have been very dangerous for me because you don’t seem able to control your powers fully.”

“But I would never let anything hurt you, Uncle Jimmy. It’s just that all those spells were spinning around in my head at the same time. I didn’t choose for you to go to Lithnia. I’m just a forgetful schoolgirl. Aren’t I?”

By this time, Jade was sobbing uncontrollably.

“Jade,” Jimmy said softly. “You are not a scatterbrained schoolgirl. “You are a young and beautiful, scatterbrained, soon-to-be-witch

“Really? Did you say beautiful?”

“You look just like your mother, Zeea and your Aunt Gemma. Good looks run in the family. But appearance is not important. What matters is what is in your heart, and all the Zapheer family have wonderful hearts, which is why I love you all.”

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"Thank you, Uncle Jimmy. That makes me feel much better."

"I'll tell you what, Jade. You start making the sandwiches for lunch, and I'll be back before you have them on the table."

"What's Matilda up to?"

"She's still sorting out the old spell documents."

"I'll be back soon, so let's keep this little episode to ourselves. OK?"

"Thank you, Uncle Jimmy."

"And did you not think I would be monitoring your every step, Jade?" Matilda broke into what they thought was a private conversation through the ether.

"I'm sorry, Matilda," began Jade. Matilda interrupted.

"I partly blame myself. You were concentrating so hard on the spells that were whirling in your subconscious mind that it is not surprising that your brain was on overload. But I followed your thoughts and watched all the time, so Jimmy did not crash to the

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earth but ended up suspended before the cliff.”

“I am so pleased you intervened, Matilda. You probably saved my life.”

“I am always aware of what’s going on with my cherished friends. But, enough of this. We’ll talk more about this over lunch. How long will you be?”

Jade was in the middle of plating the sandwiches when a smiling Jimmy walked into Matilda’s kitchen.

“Those red Attalian boots certainly speeded up your return, Jimmy, and you’re not even out of breath. Let’s have some lunch in peace without worrying about spells or ancient manuscripts.”

“While we’re eating, can I raise another subject, Matilda?”

“Go ahead.”

“Mr McDonald and the council are considering building more homes in Roombelow because the population is growing every year. We are planning twenty more houses on the North side of the

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town.”

“That sounds alright, Jimmy. I don’t think that interferes with anything. Although I suppose they will also need an extra school for when the new babies grow up.”

“I think they have already decided where the school will go, but what they don’t have is a meeting place with space for all the townsfolk plus an increase of another hundred or so new townsfolk.”

“Um! It’s already crowded in the town’s square when the Mayor calls a town meeting.”

“There was a suggestion that they could build an arena on the side of the hill on the East side of town,” Jimmy warily suggested.

“Out of the question, Jimmy. That’s on the side of my hill, and I won’t allow any building there. I need to be able to look over whatever is going on in the town. That would obstruct my clear view. They’ll have to find somewhere else to hold their town meetings.”

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“Perhaps you might think about where the meetings might take place, Matilda?”

“I will think about it. Now pass me a plate for my sandwiches, Jade.”

They ate the rest of lunch in relative silence. Matilda was not impressed with the idea of an arena on the side of “her” hill.

Jimmy’s thinking cap was working overtime. There had to be a solution. He thought Matilda would offer an alternative solution. But Matilda was so concerned about getting Jade to the end of her training that there was little room in her head for other thoughts.

The peace was shattered when Lord Oron came storming into Matilda’s house.

“Matilda! I have been trying to reach you for ages. Where have you been? The Sky Islands are in grave danger.”

“Calm down, Lord Oron. I have been here all morning, and

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Your messages have not reached me. Whatever is going on in the Sky Islands?"

"Surely Madam Coptra has everything under control?" Jimmy said.

"Whatever is wrong?" Matilda demanded.

"The islands have started to rotate, Matilda."

CHAPTER 3

The outer islands have started to rotate around San Bar, the central island, and the walkways between the islands have begun to twist and buckle. It is so bad that hardly anyone dares move between islands

“There is nothing to be seen, Jimmy. It’s as if a whirlwind was stirring up the atmosphere. I cannot get my Weather Cloud anywhere near.”

“Will you be able to reach San Bar, Jade?” Matilda asked

“I’ll certainly try,” Jade responded, “But I have not had much experience moving while out of my body. I had only travelled that far when I was in Jimmy’s starship, SR.”

Jimmy jumped into the discussion. “That’s not a problem, Jade. We’ll go together in SR3.”