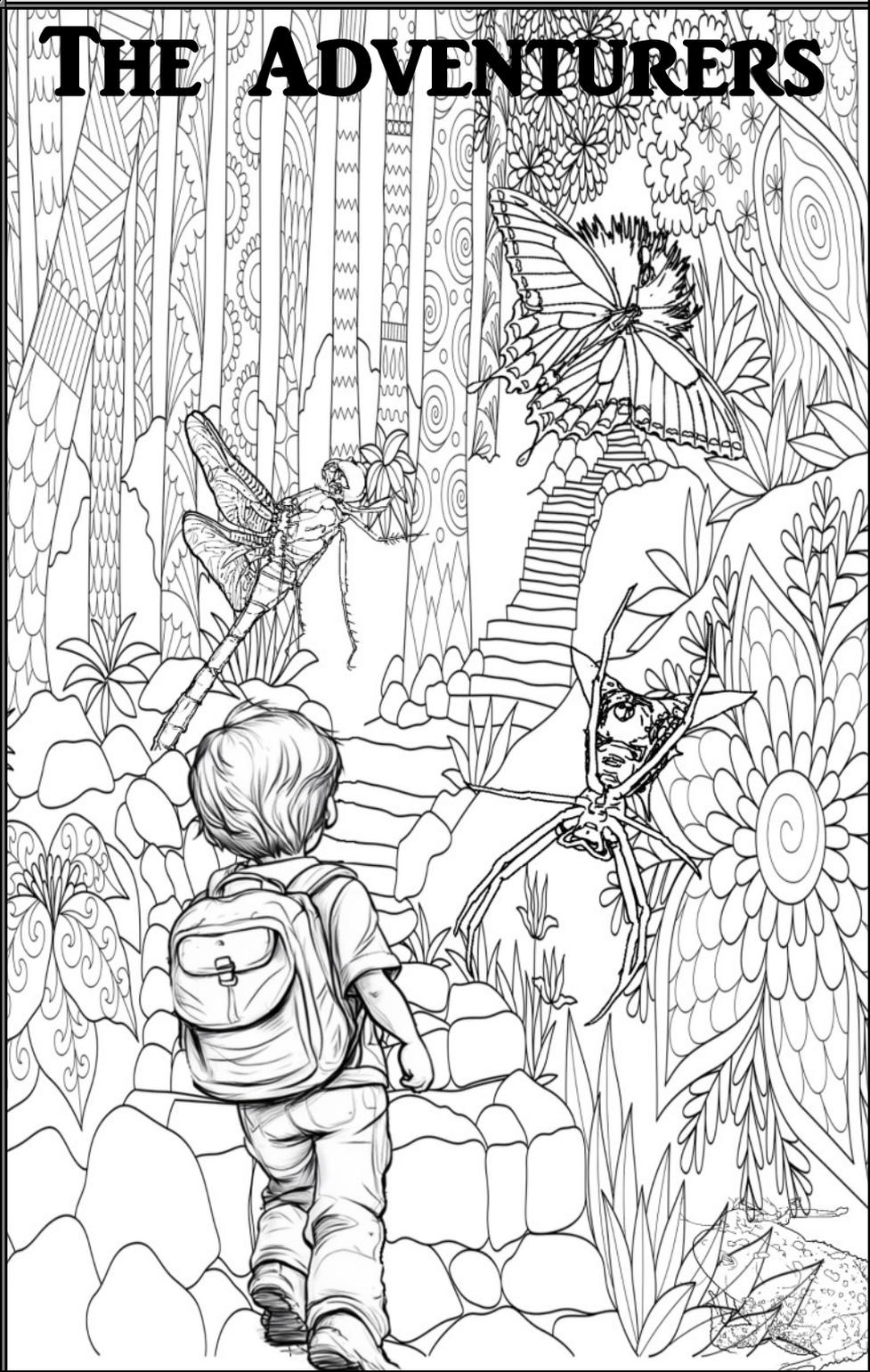


THE ADVENTURERS



You don't have to believe in magic. After all, what we call magic is really just an illusion we don't understand.

This story is a little bit of science and a whole lot of imagination. I hope you enjoy it.

YOUR ADVENTURE AWAITS

It all started the day the students went on their trip to explore the park. Little did they know that this was to become **their** mission to save the entire forest. It wasn't just an ordinary "walk in the park."

The sun was shining - not a cloud in the sky - when, suddenly, the shelter began to shake. The sky darkened and the wind blew cold.

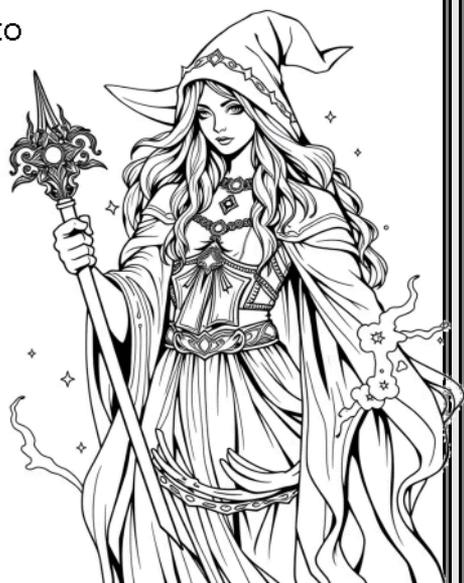
With a clap of thunder, she came out of nowhere.

The students clung to each other in fear, not understanding what had just happened.

"I am Storm!" she bellowed. I've come to take control of everything here - and that includes you whimpering children."

One parent stepped forward to demand she leave, but, before they could get out a single word, Storm pointed her staff in his direction and he froze in place.

"Do NOT try to defy me!" shouted Storm.



No one knew what to do, but just as quickly as Storm appeared, another figure burst into the shelter and the skies cleared .

"Not today, Storm!" the figure shouted back at her.

"I am Nikoless, the Wizard of the Woods, protector of the forest and all that lives here. Be gone, and leave these people alone!"

With a wave of his hand, the parent sat down as if nothing had happened, and Storm disappeared.

"I'm not finished here!" were her parting words. "Just you wait. This forest WILL be mine! And - if you stay, YOU will all be mine, too!"

Everyone looked at each other. Rings? What rings?

Before Nikoless could speak, from off in the distance, Storm could be heard shouting to the wind, "I WANT those rings!"

And that is how the adventure began. One the children would never forget.

After the tears stopped and thanked Nikoless, they all wondered what was next.



Nikonesse began handing a ring to each child - explaining as he went, "Do not worry," said Nikonesse. "In the hands of smart, kind, and caring children, these rings are special because they have their own kind of magic and will allow you to speak with the Dwellers, too. That's what all the things that live here are called.



"Storm is a greedy, nasty wizard, jealous of the Dwellers, and, with these rings she can turn them against each other, keeping them too busy fighting with each other to see that Storm has taken control of the woods for herself."

"She knows the Dwellers work together to make the woods a wonderful place for everyone to explore and enjoy. Working together is what makes their magic strong and good, keeping the woods alive."

When you visit the park, you will become an Adventurer, and you must do your part to protect the woods.

If you speak with enough different living things, together, you **may** be able to find the Ringmaster, and the rings can be safely hidden away - saving the forest.

How many magical living things must you find before the Ringmaster will appear? It depends - often on the time of year or weather. You won't see everything shown in the guidebook or on the website, but that's okay.

Some things appear for years, some for months, some for weeks, some for a day, some for a minute, some for a few seconds, and some will appear and be gone in a flash, so

there's no way of promising you will see them all.

If you look **very** carefully, maybe, just maybe, you will come to see the magic of the forest - the same way Nikoness does ... an always changing land to explore.

PLANT MAGIC

When given a ring, one curious Adventurer by the name of Sean, asked Nikoness, "Do plants really speak to each other?"

"Well, you decide. Is it magic or is it science?" Nikoness answered.

Looking up at a Loblolly pine tree, Nikoness asked, "Do you want to explain it, or should I?"

The tall Loblolly's needles shook softly as he laughed. "Of course I do. Plants don't talk the way humans do."

"Really? Then how?" Sean asked.

Loblolly rustled his branches. "We have special ways. Let me tell you about them."

"Down in the soil," Loblolly explained, "our roots stretch out and touch each other. And guess what? Tiny fungi live down there too - like little forest messengers. They help carry signals from one tree to another." Sean smiled.

"If there's danger, like a bug chewing on our leaves, we can warn the others through our roots. That way, they can get ready to protect themselves."

"But that's not all," Loblolly added. "We also send messages through the air."

"You mean, like... talking wind?" Sean asked.

"Yes," Loblolly said. "When a plant is hurt, it releases special smells - kind of like invisible perfumes. Other plants smell those and know something is wrong. They might make their leaves taste yucky so bugs don't eat them."

Sean giggled. "So plants can wear stinky perfume to scare bugs away?"

"Exactly!" Loblolly laughed loudly.

Sean looked around the forest. "So we're all connected?"

"Yes, little one," Loblolly said softly. "We help each other grow. We warn each other, we share water, and sometimes we even give food through our roots. Plants are quiet, but we care a lot."

Sean asked, "Loblolly, are you the Ringmaster?"

"No, I am not. But good luck in your search."

Sean felt proud to be part of the forest. He smiled and stretched his arms high into the sky and whispered through his toes, "Hello, friends. I'm happy to grow with you!"

Deep underground, the message was passed from tree to tree, flower to flower, bush to bush.

The forest smiled back.

But the forest did not smile for long. Disguised as another Loblolly pine, Storm had listened to their conversation.

"So, that's how you talk to each other."



“Well, take this”, and she cast a spell over the forest. “From roots to roots. From leaf to leaf. Speak no more from tree to tree.” And she waved her wand.

But the magic of the Dwellers was strong, too. They heard her speak her spell and fought back together - with their own.

“We heard you, Storm, and we answer back. Be gone evil spell. As long as we have the rings, you have no power here.” And all was good in the forest.

Storm was furious, but knew she had been beaten - for now. Knowing her chance to take the rings would come when they found the Ringmaster, she would continue to follow the Adventurers.

**THE END - OR
IS IT?**

YOUR TURN



Unfortunately, from time-to-time, the Ringmaster forgets where the rings are hidden. When this happens, the rings lose their power, and new Adventurers must begin searching the woods again, bringing new magical rings to be hidden by a new Ringmaster.

You are now an Adventurer. The Ringmaster could be almost any living thing in the forest - or even your backyard, schoolground, or other park.

Continue discovering many new and interesting things as you explore.

Make the adventure your own. Have fun as you learn about - and protect - the living things around you.

Remember: Look, but be VERY careful what you touch! Something may look harmless, but everything has a way of protecting itself - even if you don't know what that way is - or see what it is.

Signed,

Nikness
Wizard of the Woods

