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Opening extract from
**Sophie and the
Shadow Woods:
The Swamp Boggles**

Written by
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Linda Chapman & Lee Weatherly

Sophie
AND THE
Shadow Woods


The
Swamp Boggles



Illustrated by Katie Wood



HarperCollins *Children's Books*



The Shadow Woods...

Very few people ever enter the Shadow Woods. The crooked trees press closely together, their branches reaching out like skeletons' arms. Strange whispers echo through the quiet air, and eyes seem to watch from the shadows. Anyone who does go in soon leaves, their skin prickling with fear. For these woods are like no others. Hidden deep within them is a gateway to the Shadow Realm – a dark and chaotic world where all the mischief-making creatures like goblins, boggles and trolls live.

Many hundreds of years ago, the Shadow Realm



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creatures could pass freely between our world and theirs, but they caused so much trouble that it was decided the gateway between the two worlds must be shut for good. Yet no one knew how to do this, until a locksmith with magical powers made an iron key and then slotted a gem from the Shadow Realm into its handle. The secret had been found! The locksmith forced as many shadow creatures as he could back into their own world and locked the gateway firmly behind them.

From that day on, the locksmith became the Guardian of the Gateway, watching over the precious key and stopping the few shadow creatures left in this world from causing too much trouble. As he grew old he passed his powers on to





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his grandson, who in turn passed the powers on to his. For hundreds of years, the Guardianship has passed down from grandparent to grandchild, and the gate has always remained safely shut.

But now for the first time, disaster looms. The shadow creatures have stolen the iron key! Luckily, there was no gem in its handle when it was taken, but there are six gems from the Shadow Realm hidden somewhere in our world. If the shadow creatures find any of them, they'll be able to slot them into the key and open the gateway, letting hordes of villainous creatures loose to cause mayhem and trouble.

Only one girl stands in their way... and her name is Sophie Smith.



The New Guardian

"Take that, you ugly goblin!" Sophie spun round, her blonde ponytail flying, her right leg kicking upwards. She missed the target and huffed out a breath, cross with herself. Then her green eyes gleamed with determination and she ran forward again, this

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time spinning closer and lashing out faster. “Hi-ya!” she yelled.


THUNK! Her foot connected with the large white pillow that her grandfather was holding up.



“Better, but still not good enough!” he said sharply. “Do it again, child. Harder, faster!”

Sophie sighed. Since she had become the new Guardian of the Gateway three days ago on her tenth birthday, her grandpa had been insisting that she practise her fighting skills whenever she could. Sophie went to tae kwon do classes three times a week in the town hall, and loved any type of sport. In fact, she really wanted to be a stuntwoman one day, but even she was finding the practising hard going. Grandpa just never seemed pleased with anything she did.

It didn't seem quite fair. Sophie knew that if she was fighting a *real* shadow creature, the Guardian magic would make her extra strong and fast. But, without a shadow creature around, she was just her usual ten-year-old self, fighting her very fit grandfather! Sophie's

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grandpa wasn't like most of her friend's grandfathers. He always dressed in black, went swimming and running for miles every day and never let her win a fight if he could help it.

"Can we stop soon?" Sophie asked hopefully. She and Grandpa had been training for over an hour now, and she was getting hungry.

"Stop?" Grandpa Bob looked as if she had just asked if she could fly to the moon. "You're the Guardian, Sophie! You must train. When *I* was first chosen to be the Guardian, I trained for hours every day. You *must* prepare, or else you'll never get the key back from the Ink Cap Goblins."

Sophie shifted uncomfortably under his piercing blue gaze. She didn't need reminding of the mistake she'd made. The day before she'd

become the Guardian, she'd accidentally let a goblin steal the magic key that unlocked the gateway to the Shadow Realm. Now the goblins were trying to find a shadow gem to fit into its handle, so that the key would work again. Sophie was determined that she'd find all the hidden gems before they did. She'd found one already, so at least she was off to a good start – even if her grandfather didn't seem to think so!

“And again!” Grandpa said, holding up the pillow.

Squinting her eyes, Sophie imagined that the pillow was Ug, the leader of the Ink Cap Goblins. She pictured his knobby face, his white flaking skin, his dark scheming eyes... She ran forward, this time spinning and aiming a backwards kick.

“Take that, you stinky... *Whoa!*” She staggered

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as her grandfather grabbed her foot, pulling her off balance and making her fall over.

“Ow!” She sat up indignantly. “Grandpa! What did you do that for?”

“If I could do it, so could a shadow creature.” Grandpa Bob pursed his lips. “You must never show weakness or let them get the upper hand. Always expect the—”

“*Unexpected*,” Sophie finished the sentence for him. He said the same thing every training session! She grinned suddenly. “Does that mean I can expect school to be cancelled for the rest of term, or Anthony to be less annoying? They’d both be cool.”

Grandpa fixed her with a gimlet stare. “This is no laughing matter, Sophie.” Reaching into the pocket of his waistcoat, he pulled out a black belt with a purse sewn into it. “Now, this

is for you. It's to keep the gems in when you find them. I think it's too risky to leave them hidden around the house. The goblins could get in and get to them. If you keep them in this purse belt, then you'll always know they're safe."

"Unless the goblins get it off me," Sophie pointed out.

Grandpa raised his eyebrows. "But that won't happen, will it?"

"No, of course not," Sophie said, trying to sound sure.

"Wear the belt at all times," he instructed.

Sophie couldn't resist. She looked at him innocently. "Even in the bath?"

Grandpa frowned.

Sophie bit back her smile. He really didn't have a sense of humour. "Sorry, Grandpa! I promise I'll wear it whenever I can – and those



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goblins won't get it off me." She tightened her ponytail. "Now, where were we?"

Her grandpa held up the pillow. "Practising fighting. Attack again. Do it—"

"I know: harder, faster, stronger and without getting hurt." Sophie sighed. She squared up to him again. "Just call me Indestructo Girl!" she said wryly.

Taking a breath, she began to fight.



Deep in the Shadow Woods, Ug, the king of the Ink Cap Goblins, was sitting on a throne made out of a mouldy old tree stump, with an ivy crown perched wonkily on his large head. Black splodges covered the crumbling white skin on his squat body. Three other Ink Cap Goblins grovelled in front of him.

"Numbskulls!" Ug glared at them with his



beady black eyes. “Worm brains! The whole lot of you are a useless bunch of maggot heads! *Useless!*” Jumping up, he marched over to them. “What are you?”

“Useless, great King Ug – OW!” yelled the three goblins as he kicked each of them in the bottom.

“It’s been three days since I used my great cunning and cleverness to steal the key.” King Ug pulled a large iron key from his pocket and brandished it in front of the end goblin, who had a nose like a potato. “And yet I still can’t open the gateway because of *this!*” He pointed to a hole in the key’s handle. “Tell me what this is, Potato Nose.”

“Um, it’s a hole, King Ug,” stammered the goblin.

“I *know* it’s a hole, idiot.” King Ug rolled his

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eyes. “But what’s so important about this hole, Potato Nose?”

Potato Nose’s black eyes darted nervously. “It’s... um... it’s... a very *round* hole.”

King Ug thwacked the goblin over the head with the key. “A *round* hole! You caterpillar-brained compost head! It’s not the shape that’s



important, it's what's missing from it! In this hole there should be a shadow gem. So, why haven't you found me one yet? Why? Why? WHY?"

"Um, King Ug?" The goblin next to Potato Nose, who had very big feet, stuck up his hand helpfully.

"Yes?" King Ug sighed.

"We did find one, didn't we, three days ago, but the Guardian beat you up and you let her keep it."

"*Let her keep it!*" King Ug spluttered like he was a volcano about to explode. "I did not *let her keep it!* I was forced to give it up when you three cowards deserted me! You're all useless, and so..." He narrowed his eyes cunningly. "And so, I have decided to call in reinforcements."



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“Reinforcements?” echoed Potato Nose.

King Ug rubbed his hands together, making black gunge drip out on to the forest floor.

“Yes! Sneaky, slimy reinforcements, who will get one of the gems for us.”

“Who is it?” cried all three of the goblins.

King Ug smiled craftily. “Just you wait and see!”