



“Luca, Yazmine, and Zane. Come to my desk immediately!”

Luca sat up with a jolt. He had completely zoned out. Had Ms. Long noticed? Probably. She was the kind of teacher who always seemed to know exactly what was going on. But surely Ms. Long would understand why Luca was distracted. After all, how often did you discover the imaginary place your

teacher always talked about—Imperia—was not imaginary at all?

He'd found this out when he, Yazmine, and Zane were suddenly transported to Imperia! In Imperia, Luca had turned into a flying, fire-breathing dragon. Zane had become a beast—one that was super big, super strong, and super fluffy. Yazmine had stayed in human form but had the power to become invisible.

At school, the three were not friends. In fact, they barely spoke to one another. But in Imperia, they'd become a team. Their first task had been to battle with a massive lava snake called the Magma Mamba, and safely

deliver the Thunder Egg into the Crown of Fire—in a volcano!

They'd been through a lot. It was hard to go back to normal after such a big adventure.

As Luca stood up, he glanced over at Yazmine. She shrugged, a smile twitching at the corners of her mouth. She did not look worried. In fact, her eyes sparkled with excitement. Luca's heart thumped as a new thought crossed his mind. Maybe they weren't in trouble. Maybe they were going back to Imperia!

They had completed the first task. But where there's a *first* task, there's always more! Luca knew there were two other Thunder Eggs to

return. That meant two more rounds of this dangerous game they were playing.

Luca, Yazmine, and Zane all arrived at Ms. Long's desk at the same time. It was clear from the grin on Zane's face that he, like Yazmine, was confident they weren't in trouble.

"So, Ms. Long," Zane said, grinning as he ran his fingers through his hair. "Have you got a *task* for us? Is there somewhere *special* you want us to go?"

Zane was either incredibly brave or incredibly foolish to speak to Ms. Long like this. It was sometimes a little hard to tell with Zane.

Ms. Long fixed Zane with a stony stare that made him wilt.

"Yes, Zane," she said. "I do have a job for you three. I need you to go to the gym and clean up the equipment room. The gym teacher tells me that your class left it in a terrible mess."

Ms. Long turned back to the rest of the class.

"What?" Zane protested. "That's not fair! We—"

Yazmine grabbed Zane by the arm and pulled him out of the classroom. Luca followed close behind.

"We dealt with that snake in Imperia," Zane grumbled. "And we beat Dartsmith at his own game. She should be treating us like heroes! But no. We're being punished!"

"Don't you get it?" Yazmine asked, leading

the way down the empty hallways toward the gym. “We’re probably going back to Imperia right now. I bet when we open the door to the equipment room, we’ll be transported back there!”

Zane went quiet. Luca felt a rush of adrenaline. What Yazmine said made total sense!

The gym was empty when they arrived. The trio made their way over to the equipment room at the back.

“Let me open it!” Zane said. He made a face at the others as he turned the door handle. Slowly, the door pushed back, revealing . . .

A very messy room full of sports equipment.

Luca’s heart sank. Zane looked crushed,

too. But Yazmine just shrugged. “No use getting upset about it.”

Even so, Luca could tell she was disappointed as well.

In the back corner stood a metal cage where all the balls were kept. There were footballs and soccer balls, volleyballs and basketballs. But the trapdoor at the front of the cage was open and the balls had spilled out all over the floor.

Yazmine waded her way through them and shut the metal trapdoor. “Let’s get this job done,” she said, pushing up her sleeves and bending low.

They quickly got a good rhythm going.

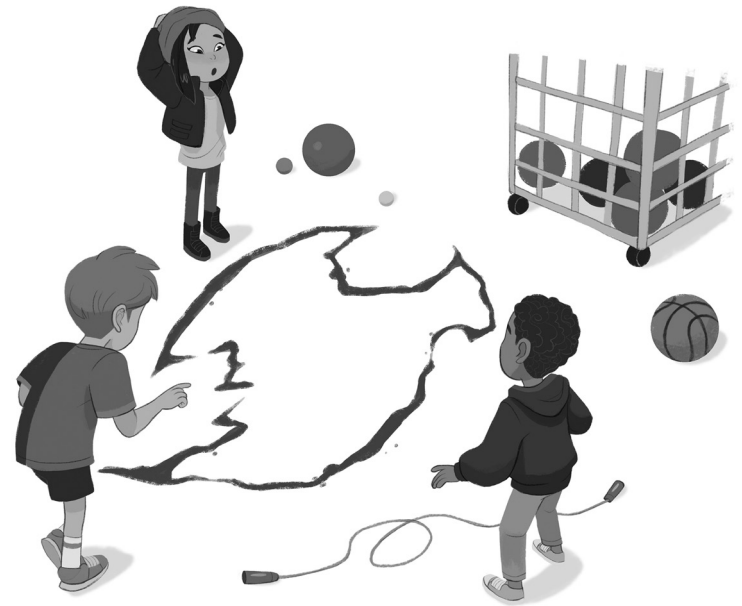
Luca scooped up a ball and passed it to either Yazmine or Zane. Yazmine dropped the balls in the cage. Zane, being Zane, used it as a chance to practise his basketball skills. He jumped as high as he could to toss the balls into the cage.

As the room started to clear, Luca noticed funny marks on the floor. There was something about the shape they made . . .

“Hey!” he called to the others. “Does this look familiar?”

Zane stared at the squiggly lines on the floor. “It’s just like the map that was on the blackboard before we went to Imperia last time.”

“You’re right! There’s Wisdom Mountain,”



Yazmine said, pointing to a toothlike shape in the middle. “And there’s the inn and the Crown of Fire. All the places we went to! But hang on . . . what’s this?”

Yazmine kicked aside a basketball near the top of the map. Luca squinted at it. *Was it a house? A palace?* It was surrounded by dots that looked a bit like snowflakes. Or insects?

Luca shivered. Maybe they were Dartsmith's army of insect drones. They had been hard to battle last time.

Luca bent down to pick up another ball. The moment he touched it, he knew it was special. It was oddly shaped, and its surface was rough.

"Guys," he said, holding it up. "I think I've found a Thunder Egg!"

"Can I look?" asked Zane. He took it from Luca and inspected it. "It's not the same as the last one. This one's smaller and lighter in colour. Maybe it's a different type of dragon? And it's cold."

"I'm not surprised it's cold," Yazmine said. "It's covered in snow."

Luca and Zane stared at her. "What are you talking about? There's no snow on it. How could there be? It's the middle of summer!"

"You can't see it? How very interesting." She stretched out her hands. "Zane, pass it to me?"

Zane did as she asked. The moment Yazmine's hands touched the egg, the sports equipment room—and everything in it—vanished.