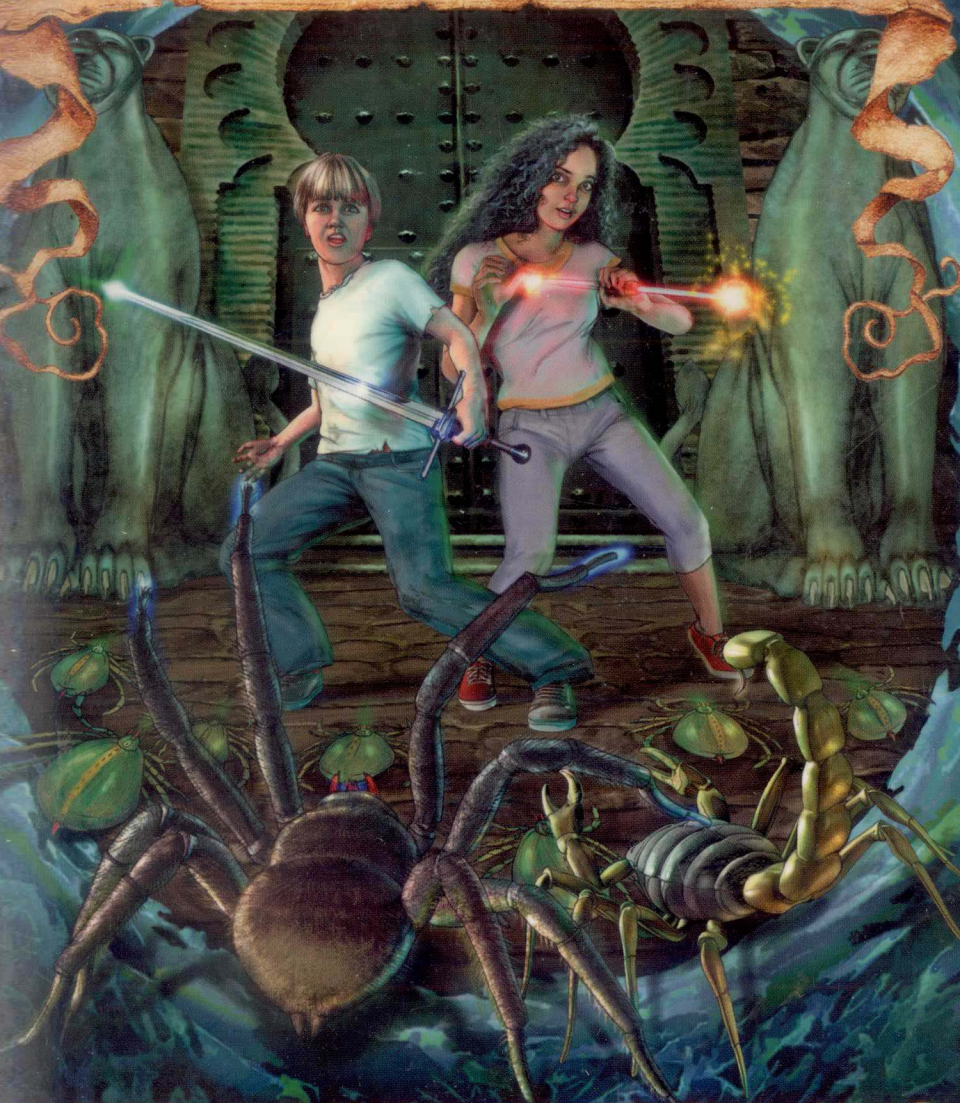
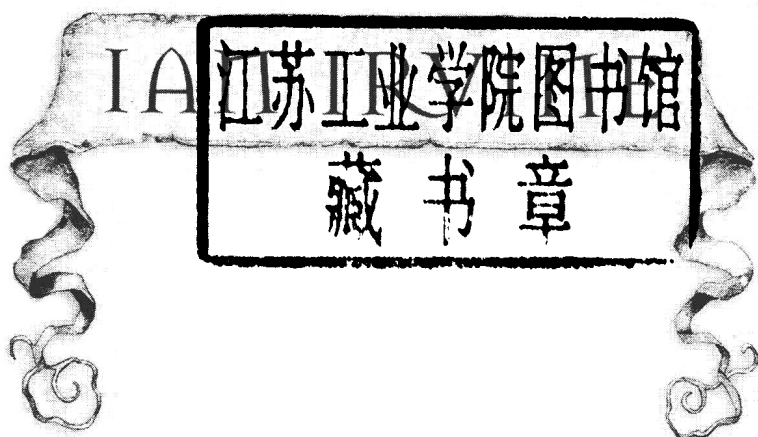


IAN IRVINE



RUNCIBLE JONES  
— AND THE —  
FROZEN COMPASS.

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♦ FROZEN COMPASS ♦



Puffin Books

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# The Spying Spell

At the darkest hour of the blackest night, the cunning boy crept down the stairs of Miluviand tower to a secret door whose stone knob was shaped like the head of a white panther. Despite the cold, sweat dampened his back. Of all the dangerous things he'd ever done, this was the most deadly, and if it went wrong . . . no, he simply had to succeed.

He reached for the knob, then whipped his hand back, for the stone was warm; *blood warm*. He swallowed and grasped it firmly, but it would not turn.

'Spell-locked!' Muttering something rude, he touched the glowing tip of his walrus-tusk wand to the knob. It came to life, growling and snapping its sabre teeth at him.

With a muffled yelp, the boy jumped backwards, fumbled a leaf of brown vellum from his pocket, read the stolen spell and prodded at the knob. The panther head went for his hand but the boy was too quick, and the moment his wand touched its muzzle it returned to stone.

The door opened without a sound and the boy was smiling

at his little triumph when, from high above, a panther howled. The alarm had been raised!

He raced into a large room whose walls, floor and ceiling were tomb black; at its centre a gigantic glass globe rested on a wooden dish lined with black velvet. The Seeing Sphere, which was at least three times his height, was engraved with fine lines showing continents, islands, roads and place names.

After studying the globe, he turned the leaf of vellum over and, heart pounding, studied the perilous spell on the other side, which he had stolen from a forbidden book. Even a First Order sorcerer might quake at the thought of using such deadly magic, and the boy, for all his wicked genius, was only fifteen.

The globe rose silently from its dish, but subsided again. His heart was thundering now, the wand slipping in his sweaty hand. Dare he attempt the spell? There was no choice; he had to know what his enemy was up to.

The boy reached out towards a little island at the bottom of the globe. His hand shook but he steadied it and touched the tip of his wand to the glass. The island began to glow.

Taking a deep breath, he concentrated on speaking the spell perfectly, for a wrong syllable could mean his death.

‘*Show –*’ His voice cracked. He cleared his throat and began the spell anew. ‘*Show Shambles’s Sanctum. Show me where Lord Shambles dwells in Fortress Jaggenshard.*’

A hum issued from the globe. The map markings disappeared and a moving landscape appeared inside, as if the boy were hurtling over it. A brooding purple moon hung above him; below he made out a wild ocean thick with icebergs. A circular island appeared, glowing scarlet at its centre. He dived down, heading for the lava-filled crater of a volcano.



The boy panicked and tried to draw back, but it was too late now – he had to go on, no matter the cost. As he fell towards the molten lake a dark spot grew at its centre, where a rearing, blue-black bastion, as jagged and spiky as if it had been built of torn metal, hung above the fume and blast from the crater. Fortress Jaggenshard, which was mounted at the tops of four narrow half-hoops spanning the crater, looked like a gigantic metal scorpion.

What awesome power it must have taken to build Jaggenshard there; clearly its dread master had recovered from his previous defeat and was stronger than ever. How could he ever be cast down?

At that thought the boy's wand tip shook wildly, and the scene froze with the fortress filling the globe and the jagged roof almost bursting out its top.

Rigid with fear, he forced his wand back to his target, which was entirely built from the precious metal, rendillium. Now he was hurtling towards a lighted window halfway up the fortress.

The narrow window was surrounded with metal hooks, and not even this cunning, slippery boy could have crept through them without being caught. He shuddered at the thought of being trapped; helpless; *prey*. His physical body still stood beside the globe in the chilly Seeing Chamber, yet he could feel the heat of the volcano singeing his nostrils.

Now, like a hovering crow, he was peering down into a large oval chamber as metallic and jagged as the outside of the fortress. It must have been freezing inside though, for every surface – even the rendillium throne on which his enemy sat – was covered with frost.

At sight of Lord Shambles, the boy shook with fury. The sorcerer looked up sharply and the boy drew back, though how could he be seen when he was not physically there?

Shambles turned away, chuckling. A big, florid fellow, he had tangled hair brushing his shoulders, an extravagant waist-length beard and long moustaches twisted into springy coils. He was bobbing up and down on his throne, seemingly bursting with energy, though the boy knew that the robe across Shambles's lap concealed spell-twisted hips and legs that not even his sorcery could repair. His smile revealed a broad gap between his front teeth, making him appear a grinning yokel, but the boy was not fooled.

Shambles was the most dangerous man on Iltior. No one hated the way he did; and no one lusted after revenge more, save the boy himself. He was a tight knot of rage; he burned to use the spell on Shambles and blast him out of existence, but he was not ready; not nearly strong enough. Yet come the day, the boy vowed, oh, you just wait!

Lord Shambles turned to the two other men in the chamber, who were brothers. One was a handsome young sorcerer with waxed black moustaches, though he was sadly transparent. His name was Munz Sparj and the boy had liked him, but Munz was now dead. Shambles had killed him last summer, turned him into a ghast and forced him into perpetual servitude.

The older brother, Count Lars Sparj, was a huge, grim-faced fellow with a brick-shaped jaw, a monocle in his left eye and moustaches that stood out past his ears like the points of stilettos. He held his hands over the flame of a brazier and gave Shambles an angry glance.

'I must have the frozen compass, Lars,' said Shambles. 'And you know where it can be found.'

Lars and Munz stared at each other. Lars shook his head, and after a long and troubled pause the sorcerer ghastr spoke in a voice as faint as his body.

‘Lord, the frozen compass is hidden in a place where no mortal man may venture; even the honest dead tremble at the thought of going there. Fortunately for you,’ Munz added bitterly, ‘I am no longer mortal, and if you demand it, I will try to recover the frozen compass. Yet even if I can, it is a treacherous device.’

‘I read the great spell in the Hiv’n Codex before it was destroyed,’ said Shambles. ‘I can force the frozen compass to speak truly, and that will be *the fifth sign* – that two worlds are ripe for the plucking. Bring me the compass, without delay!’

‘Even if I succeed,’ said Munz, ‘it will take a month, maybe more.’

‘If you have not returned with it in fourteen days I will enghast your brother.’

Lars blanched. Munz dived headfirst into the brazier, which flared as high as his brother’s head, and disappeared.

As Lars stalked out, Shambles turned, let out a chilling laugh, and the watching boy felt frost crystallise up his backbone. He tried desperately to withdraw to his body, but could not move. The sorcerer had paralysed him.

‘Little Jac Sleeth,’ grinned Shambles, ‘my fifteen-year-old enemy. I will soon have my revenge on you, as I’ve had on every adult male in your clan.’

‘You swore never to harm me,’ gasped Sleeth, struggling to break free, but his magic was nothing compared to Shambles’s, here at the seat of his power.

‘My vow only holds until your first true beard growth,’ the sorcerer reminded him, ‘and, judging by the bum-fluff on

your cheeks, that's not far off. On that day you will start to die, as slowly and painfully as your father has been dying for, lo, these past seventeen years.'

'I'll curse you all the way to the grave,' gasped Sleeth.

'I hope so,' leered Shambles, 'since the cries of my victims only add to my power, *and* my pleasure. But first, I have a job for you.'

'Nothing can force me to aid you,' cried Sleeth so fiercely that spit flew from his mouth.

'Really, Jac?'

'Don't – call – me – Jac!' Sleeth ground out. How he wanted to smash his knuckles into that grinning face.

'Well, *Jac*, I hold your father, Croome, in the dungeon closest to the volcano. Can you imagine how hot it is? And how much that adds to his terrible suffering?'

'I – I don't believe you,' Sleeth said weakly.

'Would I lie to you, Jac?' Shambles chuckled.

The Seeing Sphere went blank, and inside it Sleeth saw a large cell shimmering with waves of heat. It contained nothing save a bed of nails and a haggard man, mere rags and bone, unable to rest and crying out with every stumbling step.

A fist clenched around Sleeth's heart. 'Father!'

Croome Sleeth faded and the frosted chamber reappeared in the globe. Shambles, guffawing like a loon, twirled a coil of moustache around a finger. 'You can help him, Jac.'

All his life Sleeth had been trying to save his father from the living death Shambles had inflicted upon him long ago. Shambles could ease Croome's agony with a snap of his fingers, but how could Sleeth help the man who had caused his father such suffering?

‘H-how?’ he stammered, to gain time. Did his enemy want the stolen spell?

‘I’ll be honest with you,’ said Shambles. ‘My campaign to take control of Iltior will soon be complete and then I’m going to move against Earth, but first I must have the secret of the Earth children’s magic. That’s where you come in, Jac.’

‘Get it yourself!’

‘I can’t. Runcible Jones and his friends are too well protected in Thandimanilon’s tower.’

‘But I don’t know the secret of their magic,’ Sleeth muttered.

‘For your father’s sake, you’d better find out.’

Sleeth looked away, sickened at the idea of doing Shambles’s vicious work. His word meant nothing, and helping him would be betraying his own father, not saving him. At the thought of Croome stumbling back and forth in that furnace-like dungeon, with nowhere to rest save on a bed of nails, Sleeth’s fury overwhelmed him.

Whipping out the leaf of vellum, he read the spell, pointed his wand at Shambles’s heart and screamed a mortal spell, ‘*Degenerate Dog, DIE!*’

A pencil beam of pure light shot from the wand, through the barbed window and into the chamber, to strike Shambles in the chest. He jerked upright, gasping; his fists drummed on the arms of the throne and for one glorious second Sleeth thought he’d beaten him.

Until Shambles reached over and swung his brazen staff up at the window, grinning. He had deliberately provoked Sleeth, who realised, with despairing horror, that his unguarded spell had breached the defences of Thandimanilon’s tower. He’d given Shambles what he’d wanted all along.

The sorcerer shook his staff at Sleeth, and rumbled, '*Seeing Sphere, Shatter.*'

The chamber and fortress vanished and Sleeth was back beside the Seeing Sphere, which was shuddering on its dish and emitting a dreadful screech. As cracks began to snake around it he tried desperately to reverse Shambles's spell, but he did not know how.

As he turned to run, high in Miluviand tower the white panthers howled. A woman screamed, piercingly, then the Seeing Sphere burst asunder, deluging him in a million fragments of glass.

Sleeth lay where he had fallen, knowing that Thandi-manilon's mighty tower was now unprotected, and Shambles would soon come to plunder it. And then, he began to whisper orders about Runcible Jones into Sleeth's defenceless mind.



## Nightquake

Runcible Jones was being a First Order magician, astounding everyone with his spells, when someone shouted, 'Runcie, wake up!' He groaned and pulled a pillow across his head, trying to hang onto the dream, for dreams were the best part of his life.

After driving off Lord Shambles last summer, he'd believed that he had finally found his magic, and on the few occasions when his spells had worked it had been the most wonderful feeling in the world.

Here in Miluviand, Thandimanilon's tower on the enchanted world of Iltior, his friends Mariam, Giddion and Ling were learning magic rapidly, yet Runcie kept failing at spells any two-year-old could use. Something was blocking him and even when he did get a spell to work, it was really painful. Why? His dead father, Ansible, had been brilliant at magic; his mother, Millie, was in prison on Earth merely for having a copy of Ansible's banned book of magic. So why couldn't he, Runcie, do magic?

'Will you *wake up!*' someone bellowed.

He opened his eyes. It was Giddion Taw, the only other kid in the boys dormitory. The Itiorian prentices had gone home for the festival month but Runcie, Mariam, Giddion and Ling, unable to return to Earth, had remained in the tower. Behind his thick glasses, Giddion's blue eyes looked worried.

'It's the middle of the night,' Runcie said crossly. 'Will you stop shaking the bed?'

'I'm not. It's an earthquake!'

'There have been an awful lot of earthquakes lately.'

Half the beautiful city of Pellissidan had been destroyed in a quake last week, and the mansion of Clan Mummery had vanished into a hole in the ground.

With a mighty crack, a chunk of ceiling landed on the foot of Runcie's bed and smashed to pieces, the painted stars on the plaster still twinkling. Giddion scrambled out of the way as the dormitory tried to shake itself apart. The bed tilted over so far that Runcie began to slide into a crevasse that had opened across the floor. He clung desperately to the bed-head as the bed crashed down about ten feet, then jammed, but for how long? The crevasse was widening by the second.

Runcie looked down into a dusty gloom where uncanny shadows flitted.

'Help!' he cried.

'*Helllllp!*' said a tiny voice.

At first Runcie thought it was mocking him, until a slender little man, only knee high, flew by on an absurdly small pair of wings. His face was red, the arching nose nearly touched his pointed chin and his glistening eyes seemed as old as the stone itself. Runcie stared. Thandimanilon's tower was full of marvels but he had never seen little people before.



The winged man flew into the hollow floor, took hold of a tumbled block of stone bigger than himself and heaved, but could not budge it.

‘Where did you come from?’ Runcie said. ‘Are you a fairy?’

The hovering man swung a hand. It did not come close but Runcie felt a stinging slap on the cheek.

‘How dare you!’ the winged man shrilled. ‘Imps have dwelt at Miluviand since the dawn of time.’ He kept trying to lift the block, but could not.

As Runcie’s eyes adjusted he saw that the broken floor was honeycombed with little chambers, now broken, and dozens of imps were fluttering around, gathering children and possessions. The fallen block had collapsed one dwelling and from inside Runcie heard the piping cries of trapped imp children.

Without thinking, he scrambled up, squeezed in, and carefully lifted the block away. It was very heavy but he managed to heave it out and drop it down the crevasse.

Three little imps fluttered into their father’s arms. He put them down in a corridor, said, ‘Run, that way!’ then flew across until he was nose to nose with Runcie, his wings flapping furiously and his face scarlet.

‘Thank you,’ he choked, his voice tight with humiliation. ‘My name is Theodosius Tamp and you may call upon me three times. The third time repays the debt in full.’

‘That’s all right,’ said Runcie. ‘I don’t expect any – ’

The imp’s face turned purple. ‘*You–will–call!*’

‘Okay,’ said Runcie, who had no intention of doing so. ‘There’s no need to get your knickers in a twist.’

He felt another stinging slap and the imp was gone.