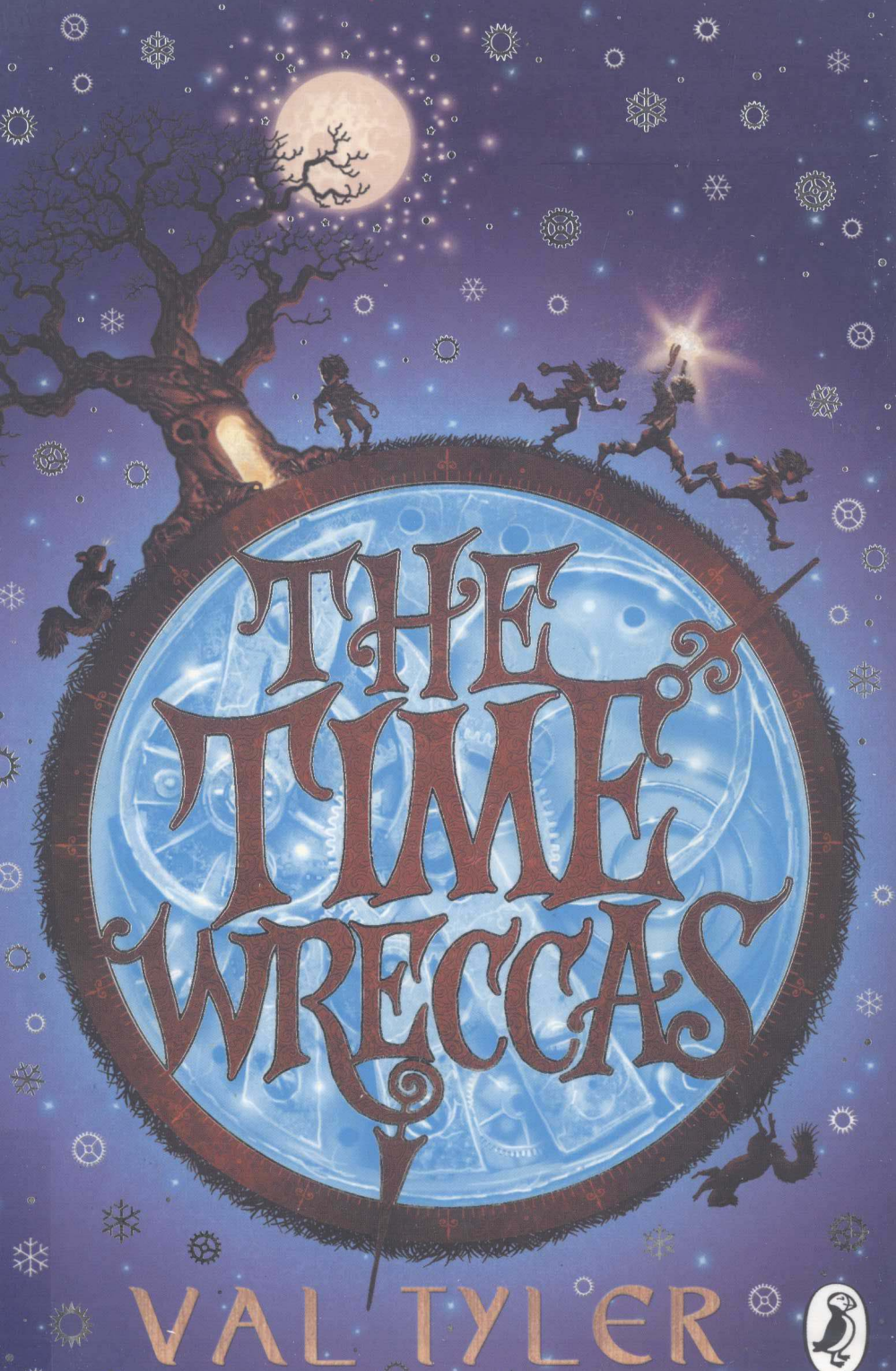


THE GREENWICH CHRONICLES



# VAL TYLER

— THE GREENWICH CHRONICLES —



PUFFIN

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—THE GREENWICH CHRONICLES—

# THE TIME WRECCAS

*To my wonderful children,  
Chris, Edward, Henry and Bethia,  
with love and thanks*

I would like to thank Dr Nicholas Perkins at Girton College, Cambridge, for explaining to me the finer points of Old English, and also Jan Quinn for her help and patience.

### *Author's Note*

The Old English in this book is as accurate as I can make it and still leave it readable.

The name, Wrecca, comes from the Old English 'wræcca' which means 'wretch, exile, outcast'. It is pronounced Wrecker.

Ruckus comes from the Middle English word 'ruck' (and is probably related to the Old Norse 'ruka') and means 'to fight'.

Tid is Old English (and also Norwegian) for 'time'.

'eagan ne shawiath' is Old English and literally means 'eyes do not see'.

'tide healdath, ealle brucath' is also Old English and means 'we guard/keep time; everyone uses/enjoys it'. The final 'e' in 'tide' would be pronounced but not stressed and so the pronunciation is verging on 'teeda haldath, alla brucath'.

Vremya, Wakaa, Zeit and Seegan all mean 'time' in the language of each Guardian.

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## *The Beginning of the End*

Old Killjoy was miserably sitting on top of the smelly pile of rags that he liked to think of as his throne, picking his nose.

‘It’s finished,’ he grumbled.

‘Yer, him’s finished building it now,’ Stink confirmed.

Old Killjoy threw him a threatening look and he immediately fell silent. A nervous hush fell on the Wreccas, who were huddled together in a gloomy underground chamber. No one knew what to say. They shifted and shuffled uncomfortably.

After an uneasy moment, Sniff ventured an opinion, hoping to make Old Killjoy feel better. ‘Doubt it’ll work.’

‘Yer, doubt it,’ echoed the other Wreccas, desperately trying to please their leader.

Old Killjoy sulked. ‘It will work. Us hasn’t even slowed him down!’

Each Wrecca tried to think of something useful to say, but Wreccas were not very good at thinking.

‘Isn’t there nothing us can do?’ asked Stink.

No one answered.

‘Us can’t give up!’ he added.

## *The Time Wreccas*

‘Can’t give up,’ chorused the others.

The Wreccas were gathered together in the Underneath. Unless it has changed since this story happened, the Underneath is a series of dark, damp, dingy tunnels that smell very musty and are dimly lit by flaming torches. The Wreccas live here. They are nasty, dirty, stupid beings who are smaller than Humans and usually very skinny due to lack of proper food. They have stooping shoulders because they spend most of their time in low tunnels, their hair is matted because none of them understands what a brush is for and their fingernails are grimy because they seldom wash their hands. They have forgotten how to make things better and so they eat rotten food and dress in rags. Their only amusement is to pester and persecute others. If they are not causing trouble they easily become bored. Their leader is Old Killjoy. He is the nastiest of them all.

On this particular day everyone was feeling gloomy, everyone, that is, except Scratch. He was the second-in-command and was called Scratch because he liked scratching people with his long, carefully sharpened nails. He had a little more brain than the rest and could be relied upon to think of the most diabolical plan or the worst punishment. Old Killjoy depended on him because Old Killjoy, like the others, was not very clever. Scratch really should have been the leader but he was too scared to suggest it and knew he had to bide his time. One day, he hoped to get the better of Old Killjoy and take over, but until that day he would keep coming up with the ideas and Old Killjoy would keep passing them off as his own.

## *The Beginning of the End*

Scratch's gaze lingered on the dejected Wreccas, who were lounging in disorganized heaps on the bare earth floor. He had an idea. He enjoyed announcing good ideas because it demonstrated how clever he was. Standing up, he waited for all eyes to fix on him. When he finally spoke, he tried to sound very important.

'There is a way to stop it working.'

Everyone stared at him, wanting to hear more.

Scratch enjoyed the attention and paused dramatically before saying, 'Us can steal the Tick!'

No one knew if this was a good idea. Scratch had said it and so it probably was, but everyone was waiting to see what Old Killjoy thought. All, that is, except Sniff. He rubbed his long nose with a bony finger and asked, 'How can us steal it? Us doesn't know where it is. Us doesn't know how it works. Us doesn't know why it was maked and us doesn't . . .' He sniffed as he hesitated, trying to remember what else they did not know.

'Us doesn't know nothing!' said Snot triumphantly.

'Shut up, Snot!' Old Killjoy snapped. He had no time for silly girls. He was eager to know what despicable plan Scratch was coming up with this time.

Snot's smile faded on her lips. She was not very good at being a Wrecca. Although she tried hard to be nasty and unkind like the rest, it did not come naturally to her. Being only a child, she was often bullied and so she accepted Old Killjoy's rebuff without comment, as nothing more than her due. Wiping her nose on her sleeve, she listened to Scratch.

'If I know Old Father Tim, and I does,' Scratch was

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saying, his deep-sunken eyes scanning the upturned faces of the Wreccas, ‘him willn’t be able to keep his big mouth shut. The Timepiece thing has taked ages to make. Him will’ve telled somebody that it’s finished.’

‘Who?’ everyone asked together.

Scratch paused, basking in the limelight. Eventually, he said, ‘Tid.’

‘Oh, I hate him!’ Snot exclaimed.

Nobody took any notice.

‘So what if Tid knows?’ Old Killjoy was asking. ‘How will that help us?’

‘Us can kidnap him,’ ventured Sniff, ‘and make him tell!’

Everyone liked this idea and they started shouting out thoughts of their own.

‘Us’ll pull his hair out!’

‘Stamp on his toes!’

‘Shout in his ears!’

‘Tickle him to death,’ said Snot, not too loudly, nervous in case the others did not agree.

Scratch clipped her around the head because she was saying too much.

She rubbed her head sulkily, but said no more.

‘One of us . . .’ Scratch paused for effect. The Wreccas leant closer so that they did not miss anything. ‘One of us,’ he repeated, ‘. . . can go Topside,’ their eyes widened in horror, ‘pretend to be nice and kind, make friends with young Tid and trick him into telling where the old fool’s workshop is.’

There was an awed hush from the gathered throng

## *The Beginning of the End*

that was eventually broken by Sniff asking, 'What's "nice and kind"?"

Old Killjoy was beginning to understand and he nodded to himself. After a while he started to smirk, and so did Scratch. Although none of the others understood why they were both smiling, they began to smile too.

With a nod of his head towards Snot, Scratch silently suggested to Old Killjoy that she should be the one to go. He thought she would be able to make friends with Tid because they were roughly the same age. Old Killjoy liked this idea and also turned his cold gaze upon her. One by one the other Wreccas did the same.

Being noticed by everyone was terrifying for such a young and frightened Wrecca, but not half as terrifying as the thought of going Topside. As Snot slowly realized what was being suggested, she started backing away.

'Ner, not I,' she said, looking at Old Killjoy. 'I hate that Tid.' She had never seen the boy but she had heard the others talking about him.

Old Killjoy stood up and began walking towards her.

Snot tried to catch Scratch's eye, in the forlorn hope that he might rescue her. He had no intention of doing so.

'Tid's horrid,' Snot whined, 'such a goody-goody. Him's all clean and knows numbers and things!'

As she backed away, the other Wreccas drew closer. From deep in their throats there arose a low, menacing, monosyllabic, grunting chant that echoed throughout the tunnels.

'If you doesn't do it,' Scratch said, his threatening

## *The Time Wreccas*

voice rising above the chant, 'I'll scratch you,' and he lashed out at her with his long, vicious nails.

Snot ducked out of the way, just avoiding injury.

'If you doesn't do it,' said Spit, not clever enough to work out what Snot was going to do, but desperate to support his leader, 'I'll gob in your food.'

Snot started to tremble.

'Her will do it.' Old Killjoy's voice was so cruel and menacing that all the Wreccas shook with fear, even big ones like Sniff and Scratch who often went Topside. 'Her will do it,' Old Killjoy continued, 'because if her don't I'll deliver her up to the Ruckus!'

Snot felt her heart beating wildly and she pressed her hands against her chest so that the others might not hear it.

The Wreccas continued their chant but it was different now. Slowly and rhythmically it was changing from a grunting sound into, 'Ruckus, Ruckus, Ruckus . . .'

Snot looked from them to Old Killjoy. 'I's like to help,' she said in a small voice. 'I's really like to, but him willn't believe I. The Guardians doesn't trust Wreccas.'

'Him don't have to *know* you's a Wrecca,' said Scratch, stroking the nails on one hand with the fingers of the other.

'How will him not know?' Snot asked. 'I look like a Wrecca, I smell like a Wrecca. I *is* a Wrecca!'

'Us'll give you a bath,' Stink volunteered.

They all wrinkled up their noses in disgust.

'Us'll tidy your hair,' Sniff suggested.

This was also not considered a pleasant thing to do.

## *The Beginning of the End*

‘And,’ Scratch added, ‘I’ll steal you some clothes from the Topside.’

This time they all smiled and murmured their agreement. Stealing was considered fun.

‘Then you willn’t look like a Wrecca and you willn’t smell like a Wrecca . . .’

‘. . . But you will still think like one,’ Old Killjoy interrupted. He leant right over her and she could feel the heat of his foul breath on her face.

Snot was more scared than she had ever been in her short life. She swallowed nervously before saying in a trembling voice, ‘Yer, Old Killjoy. I’ll do it.’

If you happen to be walking through Greenwich Park and feel a shiver of excitement, it may be that you are in the presence of one of the Guardians. We Humans cannot see them because it is not easy to see the unexpected. Our eyes can deceive us, but behind our eyes there is a reality that only some of us understand.

Old Father Tim is the Old Father of the Guardians. Each day he walks through Greenwich Park to his workshop. He is a majestic figure who some find rather frightening, but if they look deep into his eyes they can see the gentle side of his nature. He carries a heavy wooden staff and wears a full-length tunic under a long, dark blue outer coat with just a hint of sapphire and starlight. His hair and beard are more silver than white.

This was a special day and Tid Mossel felt the excitement as he ran along the path on his way home from

## *The Time Wreccas*

school. His short tunic was awry, no longer held straight by the leather belt he wore around his waist.

Tid was not concerned about his appearance, being far too interested in what he hoped he was going to be allowed to see. 'Have you finished it?' he called excitedly as he skidded to a halt in front of his grandfather.

'Hello, young Tid,' said Old Father Tim.

In the Guardian world it is important to be polite. Tid sighed. Manners were very boring.

'Sorry, Grandfather. Hello,' he said, respectfully. Then he quickly added, 'Have you finished it?'

His grandfather chuckled and put out a hand to straighten Tid's tousled hair. 'Yes, Tid,' he said, signalling to his grandson that his tunic was askew. 'It is complete.'

'Can I see it?' Tid eagerly asked, looking down at his tunic and attempting to straighten it.

'Yes, you may.'

Together they walked towards a large and imposing tree. As you may know, there are many magnificent trees in Greenwich Park; inside one of them is Old Father Tim's workshop.

As they approached, Old Father Tim lifted his hand and said in a deep, powerful voice, 'Eagan ne shawiath.'

At the sound of these words a tremor passed through their bodies and in a whisper of a moment they had disappeared from view. They had not gone anywhere. Old Father Tim had spoken a Guardian charm that momentarily protected them from the prying eyes of those who can see their world.



## *The Beginning of the End*

As soon as they were out of sight, Old Father Tim moved the palm of his hand over a knot in the gnarled bark and a door sprang open. Then, Tid and his grandfather climbed down the deep, worn steps into the workshop.

It lay below ground but was not rough and gloomy like the Underneath. Light was provided by a warm glow that emanated from the walls, floor and even the large, oak workbench that took up most of the space. This was cluttered with pieces of shiny wire, nuts, bolts and tiny wheels that were parts of various mechanisms used by Old Father Tim in his work. The walls were lined with wooden shelves that were as tidy as the bench was disorderly. Measures, hand drills, screwdrivers, paper-thin sheets of gold, delicate cords and tins of stardust were neatly placed where they could be easily found.

Tid loved the workshop. He was not allowed to go there by himself but was sometimes permitted to sit and watch his grandfather work. There were some things he was allowed to touch, like the glass-domed paperweight set on a heavy triangular base. If the dome was lightly tapped, shafts of light swirled within. Tid liked to touch it every time he entered the workshop. However, it was the small components scattered across the workbench that he longed to finger. He imagined how difficult it might be to put them together. Sometimes Old Father Tim would allow him to help with the easier tasks. Tid was a quick learner and his grandfather was certain that one day his grandson would have skills to match his own.