

Oliver Moon's Christmas Cracker



Sue Mongredien



My Family



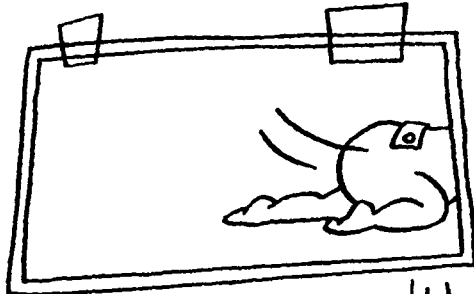
Dad



Me
Oliver Moon



Mum



my sister, the Witch Baby

Oliver Moon's Christmas Cracker



Sue Mongredien

Illustrated by

Jan McCafferty




For Joshua and Rachel Thulborn, with lots of love

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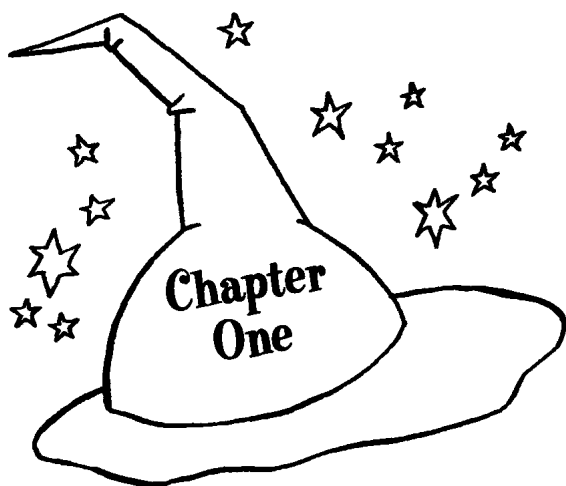
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Oliver Moon opened his eyes, yawned sleepily and stretched. Then an exciting thought struck him, and he sat bolt upright, wide awake all of a sudden.

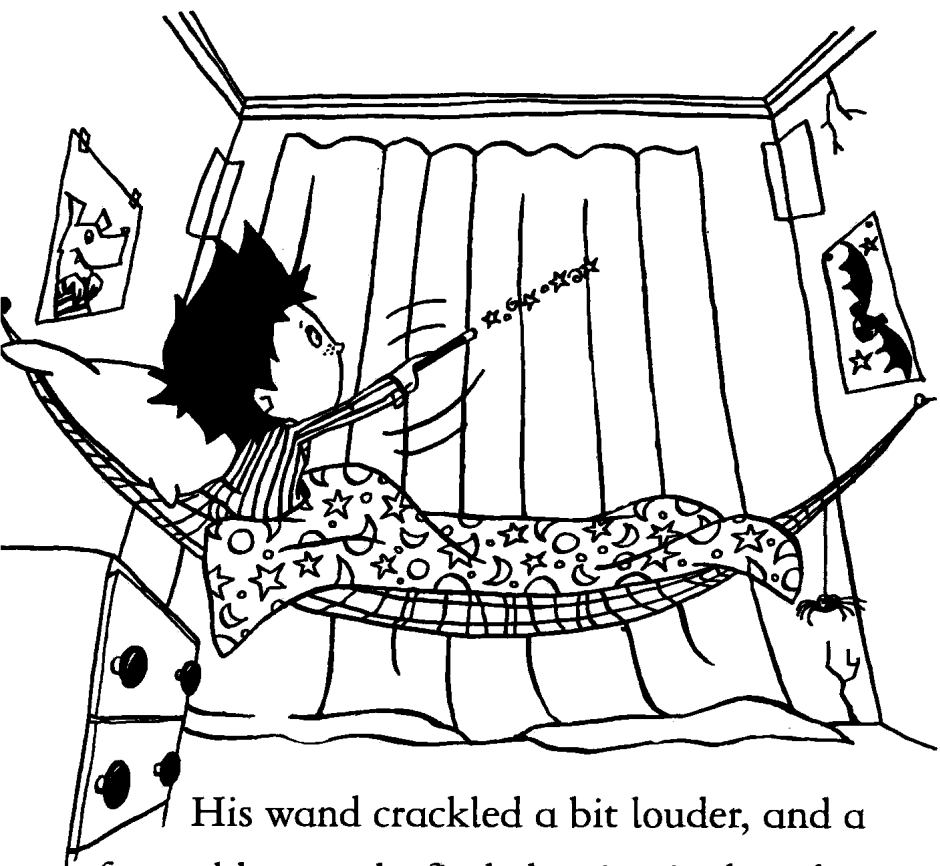
It was the first day of the Christmas holidays, and Magic School was closed for two whole weeks! Even better, the weather wizards had predicted a white

Christmas. Oliver really hoped it would snow soon. He and his best friend, Jake Frogfreckle, were dying to go sledging down Cacklewick Hill together, not to mention have a few good snowball fights, too!

Oliver grabbed his wand from the bedside table and pointed it at his bedroom window. "Curtain, open!" he commanded.

The end of his wand made a crackling noise...but nothing happened.

Oliver waited a moment, then sighed impatiently and blew on it to warm it up. His wand was very temperamental in the cold. He gave it a little shake, then tried again. "Is there snow? Curtain – go!" he ordered.



His wand crackled a bit louder, and a few golden sparks fizzled at its tip, but the curtain stayed firmly shut. Oliver swung his legs out of his spiderweb hammock and ran to open the curtain himself...only to see the back garden as green and wild as ever, without a single snowflake in sight.

Oliver stared up at the sky, hoping to see a few snow clouds on the horizon. No such luck. The sun was shining, and a crow was cawing cheerfully in the tanglebranch tree. It looked more like spring than winter!

Pulling on his dressing gown, Oliver headed downstairs for breakfast. Never mind. It was only the twentieth of December today, so there was plenty of time for snow. And in the meantime there were all sorts of other fun things to do before Christmas Day – decorating the Prickletree, making paper chains, and, of course, helping his parents cook lots of yummy Christmas food... Mmm! Minced eyes! His favourite!

“Morning, Oliver,” his dad said, as

Oliver entered the kitchen. "Would you like some frogspawn porridge for breakfast?"



“Yes, please,” Oliver said, sitting down at the table next to his little sister, the Witch Baby.

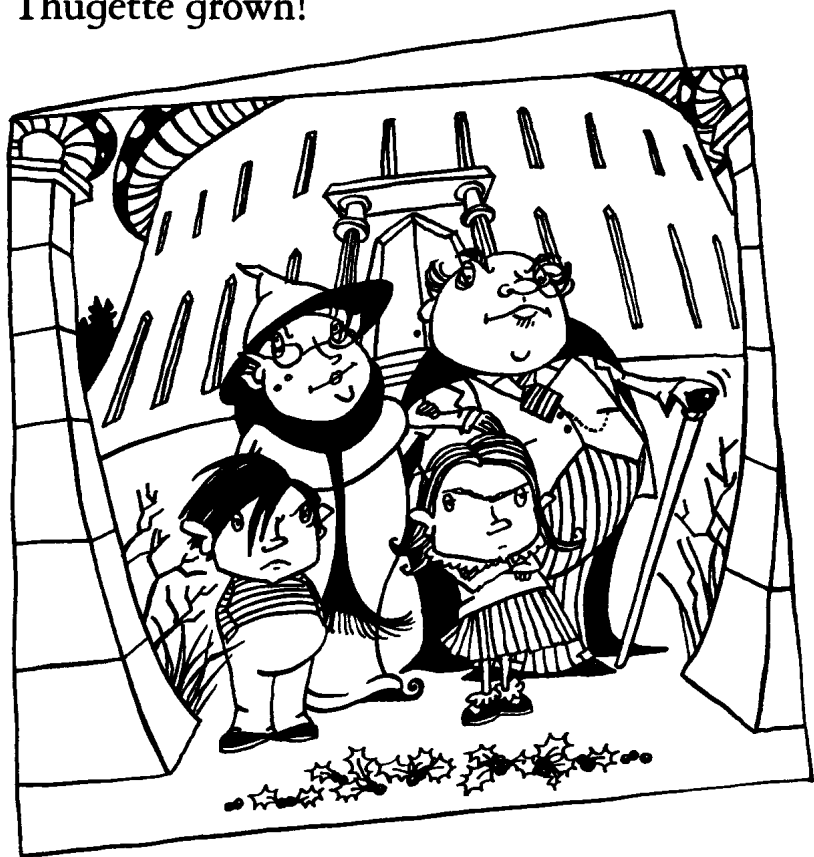
“Nice,” she told him, with a loud burp.

Mrs. Moon, Oliver’s mum, was opening Christmas cards at the table. “Here’s one from the Banshees,” she said, reading the note inside. “Oh, look, and they’ve sent a hologram of little Ethelbert with his first junior wand. Isn’t he sweet?”

She held up the card and, inside, Oliver saw a sparkling picture of a tufty-haired toddler brandishing a purple wand.

“And this one’s from the Batbottoms, and here’s one from the Toadtrumpers,” Mrs. Moon went on, passing them over so that Oliver and his dad could read them. Then she ran a long green fingernail

under the seal of the last envelope to open it. She drew out a glossy card with a photo on the front. "Oh, and here's one from Wart and Merv," she said, gazing at the photo. "Gosh, haven't Thug and Thugette grown!"



Oliver leaned over to have a closer look at his mum's sister, his Aunt Wart. She was posing with her husband, Oliver's Uncle Merv, in the grounds of their mansion house. Oliver's cousins, Thug and Thugette, stood in front of their parents, both sneering sulkily into the camera.

"Grown ugly, you mean," Oliver muttered under his breath, taking in Thug's mop of greasy hair and Thugette's single bushy eyebrow. He didn't like his cousins much. The last time he'd seen them, they'd tried to lock him in the family's haunted cellar. And then, once he'd escaped, they'd dropped a load of itch-beetles down his cloak.

Just then the photo started shimmering,

and a pink vapour spiralled up from the card.

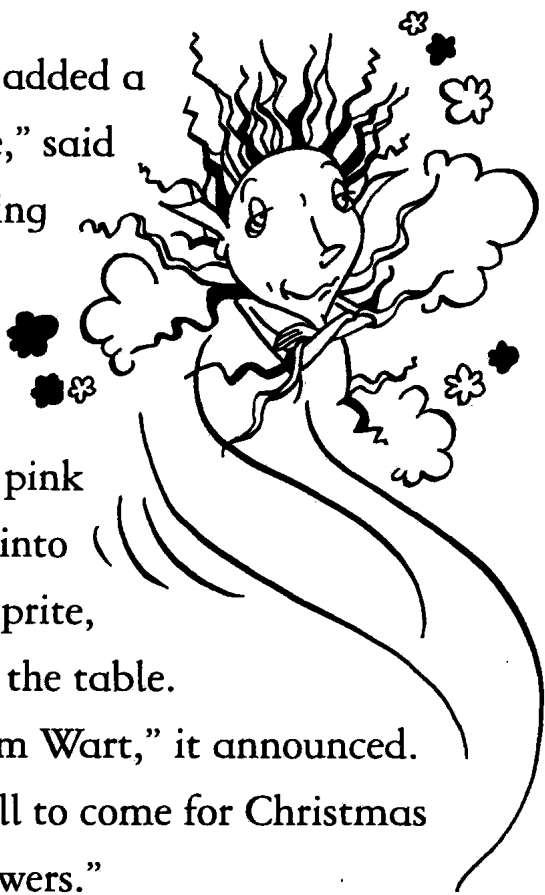
“Oh, they’ve added a Magic Message,” said Mr. Moon, raising his eyebrows.

“Very posh.”

The Moons watched as the pink vapour formed into the shape of a sprite, hovering above the table.

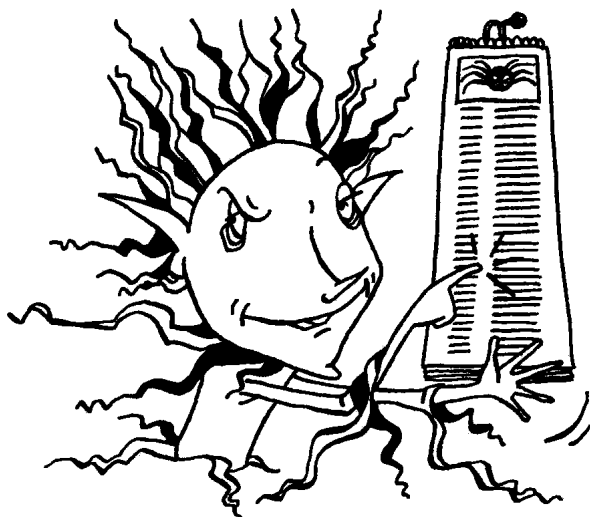
“Message from Wart,” it announced. “Inviting you all to come for Christmas in Toadstool Towers.”

Mr. Moon pulled a face, and then, realizing Oliver was watching him curiously, forced a smile. “What a shame,



we're busy this year," he told the sprite.
"Never mind."

The sprite cocked an eyebrow. "Busy? Let's see..." It darted towards the wall where the family calendar hung. The sprite tapped the calendar cheekily. "No, you're not! There's nothing written on here!"



He zipped back to the table. "She's expecting you, anyway. Dinner tonight. Don't be late!"