

Margaret Mahy

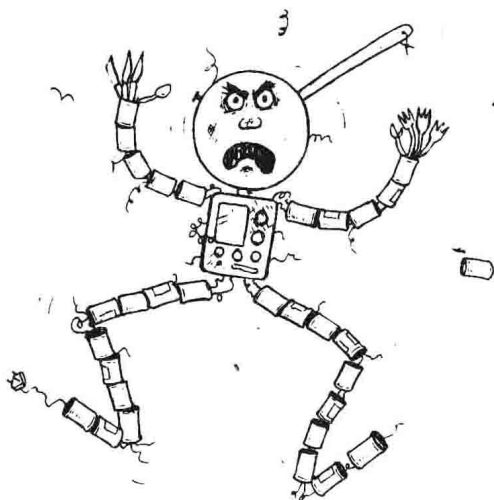


# RAGING ROBOTS & UNRULY NCLES



# Raging Robots & Unruly Uncles

Margaret Mahy



Illustrated by Peter Stevenson

Puffin Books

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PUFFIN BOOKS

## RAGING ROBOTS & UNRULY UNCLES

'Watch out, villains,' muttered Prudence. 'Two can play at that game. One bad robot deserves another!'

Out of spare radio parts, biscuit tins and old soup cans, milk-bottle tops, bent nails, wire and an old frying-pan, Prudence created the Nadger – a veritable demon of a robot – to send to her seven cousins in return for the sickly-sweet robot, called Lilly Rose Blossom, they had sent her.

Prudence and her cousins hoped that the robots would cause trouble in each other's home, but even they could not have guessed just how bad things would be!

Margaret Mahy's rollicking adventure speeds from chaos to disaster and back again as the two tyrannical robots fulfil the awful promise of their creators. A rib-tickling story, which will keep the reader chuckling to the very last page! For readers of nine to eleven.

*The Great Piratical Rumbustification* by Margaret Mahy is also published in Puffin.



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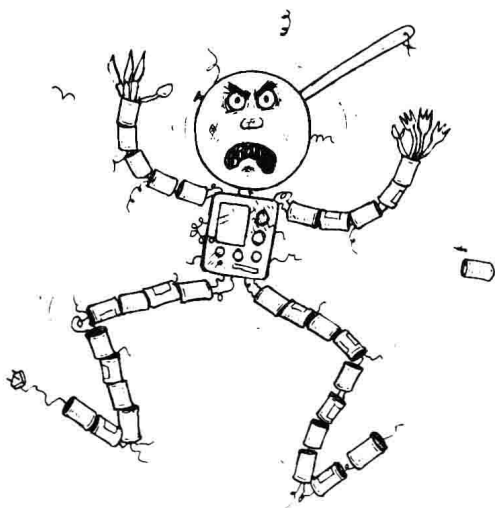
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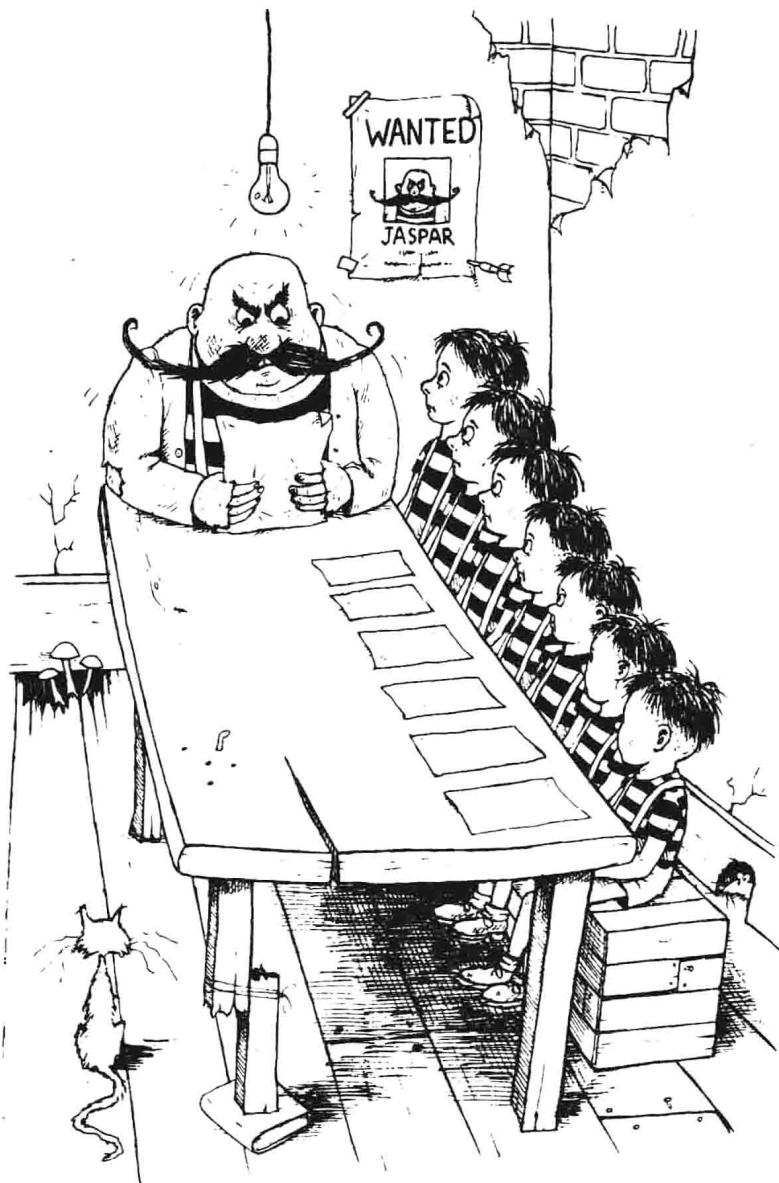
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## Uncle Jasper and his Seven Sons

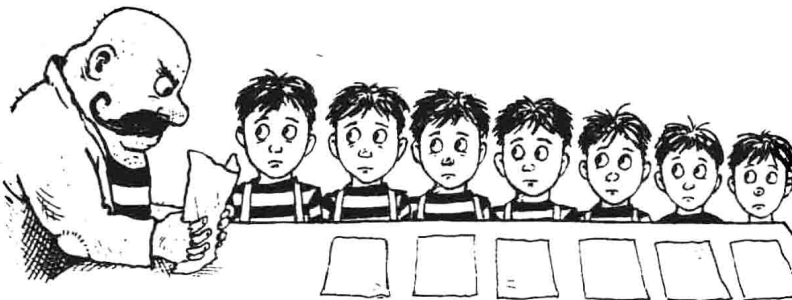
Wicked Uncle Jasper was a villain by profession. He had seven sons, all boys, and all named after great villains of history — Caligula, Nero, Genghis, Tarquin, Belshazzar, Adolph and little Jack. Naturally their father wanted them to follow in his wicked footsteps and sent them to a very select School for Villains, but it was idle to pretend that they were doing at all well.

"What's this?" cried Uncle Jasper in horror as he read their school reports. "Caligula is at the bottom of the class in Despicable Treason, and though Nero is well up in Music he has totally failed in Utter Selfishness. Genghis — I hoped much from you, but your marks in Persecution are a disgrace and Tarquin, Tarquin — what can I say to a boy who has done so poorly in Cheating and Embezzlement. Belshazzar seems to be a dead loss at Robbery with Violence, and Adolph would be better at embroidery and stamp collecting than he is at Bribery and Corruption . . . and as for little Jack — words fail me. You are bringing me grey hairs in sorrow to the grave."

(But this was just a poetic way of speaking as Jasper had no grey hairs that you'd notice, because he touched them up with a good brand of hair dye.)

"We do our best, Dad," said Caligula, "but it's all so boring."

"Not good enough!" Jasper cried, hitting the table with his riding crop. (He didn't go riding but he kept a good supply of riding crops around the house especially for hitting the table with whenever he lost his temper.) "That's not good



enough, Caligula. I've worked hard to send you to that school. Oh, the widows and orphans I've ground (when I could get any)! Oh, the state secrets I've sold (if I could lay my hands on them)! I've worn my fingers to the bone – to the bone I tell you — with Assault and Battery day in, day out, morning, noon and night. And now – now you tell me that Villainy is boring! Great Grommetting Wanglers!" (for he was given to terrible swearing and cursing). "Suppose Ivan the Terrible or Richard the Third had said it was boring and just given up? No villains! No villains at all! Nothing but heroes! Do you want that, hey? No darkness, only light! No balance, boy, no balance! Talk about *boring*."

There was a guilty silence among the boys. They did not want to disappoint their father but there was no way out of it – they were all bored with Villainy. Genghis, who loved learning and scholarship, said, "Actually, Father, there seems to be a lot of doubt whether Richard the Third *was* such a villain after all. You see, the history books of the time were written by his enemies, so, naturally. . . ."

"Don't try to confuse me with your academic quibbles," howled Jasper. "Do you want to wind up as a University lecturer or even a teacher? I'd never shout at you again if you did that. No! I've made up my mind. You shall go to a special class on Black Magic that's being run by the Witches' Action Group every Saturday morning. That ought to ginger you up and it's bound to come in useful some time."

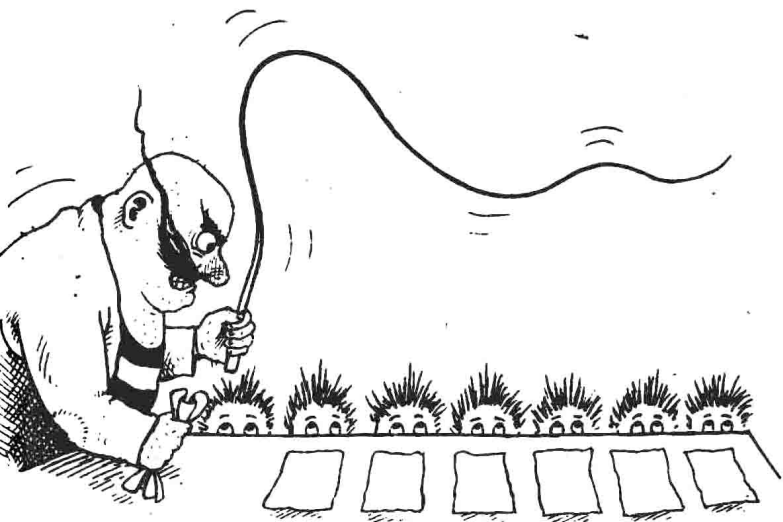
The boys groaned and moaned but actually when they came to do their lessons they quite enjoyed them, and did a family project for the Shadows and Simulacra part of the course. They made a doll out of wax and enchanted it so that it seemed to be alive.

Even Jasper was intrigued. "You've done well, boys," he said grudgingly. "I suppose it's a beginning. Why did you have to make it so pretty though? It looks all sort of worthy and virtuous. It looks just like a heroine of the old-fashioned sort, and you know I can't stand them."

"When we were making it Genghis put a lot of the wrong stuff in," Caligula explained. "We were supposed to put in a teaspoonful of Naughtiness and he put in a tablespoonful of Nobleness. It's made a lot of difference."

"You know I'm short-sighted," grumbled Genghis.

"Well, I don't want it around here!" declared Jasper. "It reminds me too much of my brother Julian. It's just the way he would like your cousin Prudence to be."

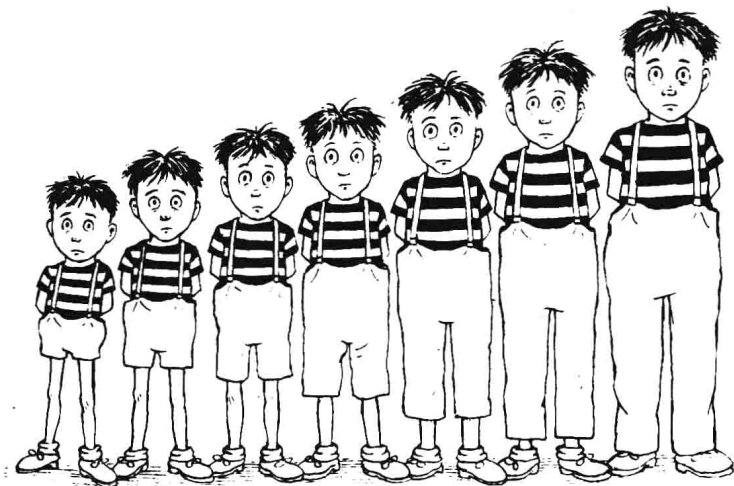


"Hey Dad," said Nero eagerly, "I've got a good idea. Let's send this doll to Cousin Prudence as a present. Being a present they couldn't send it back, and it might stir up a lot of trouble one way and another."

"There you are, boys!" cried Jasper, a sudden gleam of hope in his tired eyes. "Nero has had a good idea! It's very gratifying. One battles on doing the best one can for one's children and then, just as one is losing hope – voilà! – things begin to drop into place. We'll buy some wrapping-paper with roses on it and twenty metres of pink ribbon."

"Ugh! Roses! Ugh! Pink ribbon!" cried the boys, who had been specially taught at their select school to detest roses and pink ribbon.

"Never mind, lads. The end justifies the means!" Jasper replied. "I have a feeling that this sickly doll is going to prove a thoroughly worth-while source of discomfort and misery to your cousin Prudence and her father, my virtuous twin brother Julian."



## Julian and his Daughter Prudence

Jasper's twin brother – the virtuous Julian – lived with his only daughter Prudence on the other side of the city. They did not have much to do with the villainous side of the family, just sending them cards at Christmas and birthdays to keep in touch. (Jasper, of course, scorned to send Christmas cards, though he did send the occasional page of Foul Abuse which he was good at, or sometimes a begging letter on the off-chance.)

Whereas Jasper's wife, who had always planned to redeem him from his wicked ways through the love of a good woman, had gone off to join the army soon after little Jack was born, and risen rapidly to the rank of Sergeant Major, Julian's wife had, sadly, died. Being the only parent of an only daughter was a grave responsibility for Julian who was not sure of the rules. Different people told him different things. When Prudence grew up, berry brown, beanpole thin and needle-sharp, and often forgot to brush her tangled mouse-brown hair, he was sure he'd gone wrong somewhere. Worried about the taint of Villainy in the family, he enrolled her at the select Academy for Old-fashioned Heroines, a vegetarian school for girls. However, even this did not seem to be meeting the case. It was an anxious father who looked at Prudence's school report, and worried about her future, while Prudence (who already knew she was going to be a designer of computers and not an old-fashioned heroine) sat calmly buttering her toast.

"Look at this report, Prudence. You've got an A for reading – well, that's very good I don't deny – but you're only



