

The goblin struggled more fiercely than ever, but Maddy's runes still held him fast. 'He'll get yer!' he squeaked. 'The Captain'll get yer, and then you'll be sorry!'

'Last chance,' said Maddy, drawing the bolt. A tiny wand of sunlight fell onto the cellar floor only inches from the goblin's foot.

'Shut it, shut it!' shrieked the goblin.

Maddy just waited patiently.

'All right then! All right! It's . . .' The goblin rattled off something in his own language, fast as pebbles in a gourd. 'Now shut it, shut it now!' he cried, and wriggled as far as he could away from the spike of sunlight.

Maddy shut the trapdoor, and the goblin gave a sigh of relief. 'That was just *narsty*,' he said. 'Nice young girl like you shouldn't be messin' with nastiness like that.' He looked at Maddy in reproach. 'What d'you want me name for, anyroad?'

But Maddy was trying to remember the word the goblin had spoken.

Snotrag? No, that wasn't it.

Sna-raggy? No, that wasn't it, either.

Sma-ricky? She frowned, searching for just the right inflection, knowing that the goblin would try to distract her; knowing that unless she got it completely right, the cantrip wouldn't work.

'*Smá*—'

'*Call me Smutkin, call me Smudgett.*' The goblin was babbling now, trying to break Maddy's cantrip with one of his own. '*Call me Spider, Slyme and Sluggitt. Call me Sleekitt, call me Slow—*'

'Quiet!' said Maddy. The word was on the tip of her tongue.

'Say it, then.'

'I will.' If only the creature would stop *talking* . . .

'Forgot it, hast yer!' There was a note of triumph in the goblin's voice. 'Forgot it, forgot it, forgot it!'

Maddy could feel her concentration slipping. It was all too much to do at once; she could not hope to keep the goblin subdued *and* make the effort to remember the cantrip that would bind him to her will. Already *Naudr* and *Isa* were close to failing. The goblin had one foot almost free, and his eyes snapped with malice as he worked to release the other.

It was now or never. Dropping the runes, Maddy turned all her will towards speaking the creature's true name.

‘*Smá-rakki*—’ It *felt* right – fast and percussive – but even as she opened her mouth, the goblin shot out of the corner like a cork from a bottle, and before she had even finished speaking he was halfway into the cellar wall, burrowing as if his life depended on it.

If Maddy had paused to think at this point, she would simply have ordered the goblin to stop. If she had spoken the name correctly, then he would have been forced to obey her, and she could have questioned him at leisure. But Maddy didn’t pause to think. She saw the goblin’s feet vanishing into the ground and shouted something – not even a cantrip – while at the same time casting *Thuris*, the Thunderer’s rune, as hard as she could at the mouth of the burrow.

It felt like throwing a firework. It snapped against the brick-lined floor, throwing up a shower of sparks and a small but pungent cloud of smoke.

For a second or two nothing happened. Then there came a low rumble from under Maddy’s feet, and from the burrow came a swearing and a kicking and a scuffle of earth, as if something inside had come up against a sudden obstacle.

Maddy knelt down and reached inside the hole. She could hear the goblin cursing, too far away for her to reach, and now there was another sound, a kind of sliding, squealing, *pattering* noise that Maddy almost recognized . . .

The goblin’s voice was muffled, but urgent. ‘*Now* look what you’ve gone and done. Gog and Magog, let me *out*!’ There came another desperate scuffling of earth, and the creature reversed out of the hole at speed, falling over its feet and coming to a halt against a stack of empty barrels, which fell over with a clatter loud enough (Maddy thought) to wake the Seven Sleepers from their beds.

‘What happened?’ she said.

But before the goblin could make his reply, something shot out of the hole in the wall. Several somethings, in fact; no,

dozens – no, hundreds – of fat, brown, fast-moving somethings,
swarming from the burrow like—

‘Rats!’ exclaimed Maddy, gathering her skirt around her
ankles.