

**FREE SAMPLE CHAPTER!**



## Chapter One

'HELP! HELP!' screamed the man on horseback, as he galloped into the town of Iz.

'KING MORIBUND IS DYING!'

A huge gasp went up from the crowd, and the two wizards, who had been performing magic tricks in the town square, suddenly stopped what they were doing. The King's messenger slid from his mount, approached the two wizards and bowed before them, which caused his hat to fall off on to the dusty ground. The first wizard bowed gracefully and picked up the messenger's hat, causing his own hat to fall off. The second wizard then bowed and picked up the first wizard's hat, which led to his own hat falling off. There was an awkward silence while the second wizard waited for someone to pick up his hat ... but when he realised that wasn't going to happen, he grumbled and picked it up himself.

'Good sirs,' said the messenger, 'I have come to seek the help of a wizard.'

'Then you have come to the right place, goodly sir,' replied the first wizard. 'I am Diego Oscuro, Wizard of Iz – at your service.'

'And I ... oh lovely sir ... am Pancho Tonto, Wozard of Iz,' said the second wizard. 'I might be able to help. I can do spells and magic and that sort of thing.'

'You? Do magic? You're about as magical as a teabag,' laughed the first wizard.

'Well, somebody's help is desperately needed. The King is dying; despite the efforts of our best doctors he is getting worse by the day. Someone must journey to Mount Popotolutopu (Pronounced poppa-to-loo-to-poo) to collect the Great Blue Ruby. It is an elixir for life, and our only hope.'

'I will go,' said Diego Oscuro. 'I am brave and full of cunning.'

'No ... I'll go ... I mean ... I've got toots and a bent, I mean, boots and a tent ... I can walk ... I'll walk all night,' said Pancho Tonto, almost wetting his pants with excitement.

'You?' sneered Diego. 'You couldn't find your way up a one-way street!'

'Well,' said the messenger, 'I have a horse, a map and a bag full of food, but only enough for one man. You must compete to see who will make the journey. The winner will not only get the royal provisions and one of the King's finest mounts, but will also be installed as the Royal Court Wizard if he succeeds on his quest.'

He then cried: 'LET THERE BE MAGIC!'

The crowd roared with delight, and Diego Oscuro stepped forward into the middle of the town square, leaving footsteps behind him that were about the size of a rat, or two small hamsters, depending on which measuring system you use ... although it doesn't really matter. Anyway, he muttered some words in an incomprehensible, un-understandable, indecipherable and uninterpretable language, then threw his hands skyward, launching two fireballs to the heavens. On reaching the height of a giraffe's head, the fireballs exploded, sending the blackest beams of light across the mass of faces crowding the town square: even the shadows had shadows, and two great clouds of smoke were left hanging in mid-air. From those clouds flew two jet-black doves.

There was a deathly hush as Diego Oscuro laughed theatrically, a bit like vampires do when they hear a really good joke about robbing a blood bank, and a fearful but polite round of applause rippled around the square.

He stood there, snarling at the muffled reaction of the crowd, and then turned to Pancho and simply said, 'Beat that, you fool!'

Pancho stumbled forward, his cloak dragging in the dust behind him.

Come on, Pancho, show them you're not a fool, he thought to himself as he rolled up his sleeves and threw his hands up in the air. (Well he didn't actually throw his hands into the air, but you get the picture.)

This is the spell he used:

*Feet for socks,*

*Hands for gloves,*

*Don't give me parrots,*

*Give me doves.*

Then he screamed 'ALAKA MALAKA BALAKA BLAM!' and into the air shot two beautiful white doves. He smiled in amazement and the crowd oooooed with wonder and awe until, when the birds were high enough for all to see, they exploded into fireballs. A shower of burnt feathers and doves' entrails rained down on the gathered masses.

'Oh my goodness!' cried Mrs Chaffinch, as a dove's spleen landed on her shoulder.

'Oh my word!' cried Mrs Chaffinch's mother, as a dove's gizzard landed on her nose.

'Oh dear!' said Pancho Tonto as he sank to the dusty floor, the crowd's laughter ringing in his ears. 'What have I done?'

The messenger silenced the crowd and made an announcement.

'Diego Oscuro,' announced the messenger, 'you have won the right to use the King's horse, the map and the provisions I promised. You will leave immediately for Mount Popotolutopu.'

'I will leave forthwith sir, although I'd leave thirdwith if I could, because that would be quicker,' said Diego Oscuro, grinning wickedly at Pancho, whose cheeks were still red with embarrassment.

'But sir,' said Pancho, looking up at the messenger, 'what about me?'

'Pancho!' interrupted Diego Oscuro. 'You will never be a wizard like me. I mean, look at you! You'll always be a wozard. Face facts, Pancho. Your father was a wozard and your father's father was a wozard and your father's father's father ... well, you know what I mean!' An evil sneer crossed his lips. 'It kind of runs in the family doesn't it?'

Pancho ignored his rival, stood up and gave the messenger his best little-lost-kitten face.

'Sorry,' said the messenger, 'the decision has been made.'

Pancho sank to the floor again, as he always did when he was disappointed – which was quite often, hence the scabs on his knees – and Diego Oscuro jumped on to the royal horse, a huge black steed that suited him perfectly.

‘See you later, wozard! I’m off to get the Great Blue Ruby. I’m gonna save the King and then I’ll be the Royal Wizard. Imagine the power! Banning wozards will be at the top of my list.’

Then, with a flourish of his cloak and a slight burp which slipped out by accident, he laughed and galloped off in the direction of Mount Popotolutopu.

Meanwhile, back at the Royal Palace, the King’s head had turned bright green.

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