

Synopsis

The Sunlight has mysteriously disappeared. The life saving tea crops have failed, and a cold grey fog has descended on the land. The great forest is slowly dying...

Can four naïve Treewoods (part tree and part human) and a smelly wizard cat called Brian, find the source of the trouble and save the Treewood nation from extinction?

Find out as the travellers leave the safety of the forest and embark on an exciting, often dangerous, quest to look for both the missing sunlight and the old astronomer, who set off a hundred years before them and never returned.

'Search for the Sunlight' is a unique and lightly humorous adventure packed full of peculiar characters and bizarre places.

The story is aimed at both young adults and those of us who are struggling to grow up.

Preface

To the south of the Gogo River, beyond the Stake Hill Valley and the Gouldong Mountains, lies Treewood Forest. Forgotten by time and man, this vast ancient woodland is home to a gentle peace loving species known as Treewoods. Part tree and part human these peculiar mutations live harmoniously with one another, enjoying the idyllic lifestyle that the great forest provides.

One day however, the sunlight on which their fragile existence depends mysteriously disappeared from the heavens. Almost overnight, their perfect world was reduced to a dark murky state of depression. Slowly, everything began to wither and die.

Chapter 1

Basil S. Treewood sat in his favourite elm chair gazing out across the lagoon.

As he stared motionless into the cold grey mist, he could easily have been mistaken for dead. Moving only his eyes, he looked beyond the dune grass towards the jetty at what little remained of his dinghy. Ravaged by time and neglect, its wooden hull had rotted through, causing it to sink into the slimy black silt. The prolonged absence of sunlight had brought his perfect world crashing down.

Basil closed his eyes. He could still recall the days before the fog, when he and his friends used to dive from the overhanging branches of the tall Stonewood trees into the crystal blue water and race one

another to the tea house on the opposite shore. There they would while away the long hot afternoons, lazing in the shade beneath the giant cedars, drinking the finest of teas that the Gouldong Plantations had to offer.

In the evenings, when the sun went down behind the mountains, they would wind their way home and gather round the night fires to play music and listen to the Elders' tales of magic and the mystical secrets of the universe. But now, in these dark sunless times, few Treewoods ventured from their homes. The Teahouse had long ago closed its doors and shutters for good and everyone in the forest had become grumpy and selfish.

Basil leaned on the arms of his chair and forced his weak wooden body to sit upright.

His frostbitten limbs creaked and groaned as he stooped forwards and plucked a wrinkled marshmelon from a sack by his feet. With a pained look on his face, he drew his stiff arm back as far as he could and lobbed the sticky pink fruit into the lagoon.

In the chilled silence, a loud splash sounded out as the withered melon broke the icy surface of the water.

In sunnier times, wading birds and water fowl would have taken to the air in their thousands and small mammals on the surrounding banks scattered for cover, while Basil and his friends laughed out loud at their mischief. But in this present cold and hellish environment nothing stirred, for nothing lived there anymore.

Chapter 2

Basil's grandfather was a leading figure within the community.

A sturdy Scots pine of strict Presbyterian upbringing, Charles S. Treewood had been an active and well respected member of the Grand Council of Forestry Affairs for as long as anyone could remember. Amongst his duties, it was his responsibility to ensure that life in the forest ran smoothly and, in his spare time, when he had any, he liked nothing better than to indulge in his favourite pastime, astronomy.

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Many years ago, working from the blueprint in an out-of-date copy of the quarterly journal 'Interstellar and Unusual Galactic Phenomena in the Known Universe' - a publication which he had stumbled upon in the waiting room during one of his rare visits to the Tree Surgeon - Charles built a large and powerful telescope.

Employing a hollowed out oak trunk, a large sheet of mirror glass, two tins of French Grey paint and a variety of miscellaneous ironmongery - all of which he recovered from the depths of his shed and cost him nothing - he began construction.

After several months, patiently grinding and polishing the mirror glass for the lenses and several lengthy visits to the Treewood Central Reference Library, in order for him to fully grasp the principles of chromatic aberration and magnification, his work was finally done. Through sheer hard graft and single minded determination, Charles S. Treewood had become the proud owner of the finest telescope in the land.

At first his knowledge of the night sky was limited, but with continued practice, he was soon able to locate all the major constellations in the galaxy without need for reference maps or star charts.

Early one mid-summer's evening, whilst observing the sunset to the west of the Gogo River, something out of the ordinary caught his attention. Instead of the usual deep rich red normally associated with the reflective particle distribution in the stratosphere at this time of year, the light had taken on a pale insipid yellow colour. In his notes, he likened the effect to that of a partial solar eclipse or to a late November afternoon when the sun would normally sit much lower in the sky. But it was only June. Something was wrong.

As the weeks passed, allowing for seasonal adjustment, the days became unnaturally short. Then, one morning in early August the old astronomer rose from his bed, pulled back the curtains to greet the new day and, to his dismay, it was gone! The sunlight had disappeared from the Heavens and in its wake, a fine feather-like frost, faintly illuminated by a sinister greenish-blue half-light, was all that remained.

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Over the coming days, a thin, wispy mist crept in. It appeared, at first, like wood smoke from a distant leaf fire on a still autumn evening, but as the temperature continued to drop, the mist thickened, resulting in a damp freezing fog that engulfed everything in its path.

As if it were winter, his healthy green pine needles wilted and his rich copper-grey bark faded and flaked. The crystal blue waters of the beautiful lagoon succumbed to a covering of sludge grey ice and all but the hardiest of plants and creatures fell silent. In less than a quarter of a year, the great forest had become a place of darkness and despair.

During the long cold months that followed, Charles worked alone in his observatory, searching the heavens for clues as to whom, or what, had brought about the environmental catastrophe that threatened the future of Treewoodkind. But, in spite of his vast knowledge of the cosmos, and all the technology to hand, all he could see was fog.

Late one afternoon, unable to bear the intense cold any longer, he abandoned his search. With a heavy heart, he wrapped his precious telescope in protective oilskin sheets and returned home to contemplate the bleak future that lay ahead.

That evening, alone in his study, a ghostly apparition appeared before him. Shimmering in and out of focus, like celestial visitors from the spirit world tend to do, the mysterious electroplasmatic messenger instructed Charles that as Elder in charge of forestry affairs, he must travel east, beyond the Peckwood Desert and The Gouldong Mountains, in search of the missing sunlight. A few sinister moments later, with its short but fateful message conveyed, the ghostly figure exploded in a spectacular burst of white light and disappeared into the ether. All that remained was a strong smell of burning ozone, a rusty compass and an ancient parchment map. Thoroughly shaken by his brief encounter, Charles S. Treewood packed a few essentials into an old lapsack and, following the messenger's instructions, set off in an easterly direction, into the unknown. To date, he has never returned.

Chapter 3

Basil S. Treewood rocked slowly back and forth in his old elm chair. It was a struggle for him just to remain conscious. The crushing depression that he suffered, due mainly to the lack of sunlight, made even the most basic of physical movements a chore. With the passing of each insufferable day his mind, body and spirit grew steadily weaker.

How long ago was it since his grandfather left the forest? He couldn't remember exactly, but he knew it was at least a hundred years. The very notion that such an alarming length of time had somehow slipped by unnoticed made him shiver, but his anxiety was short lived, for within moments, his dull soggy mind returned to its usual state of lethargy and he lobbed another marshmelon into the icy lagoon.

Suddenly, in a flurry of dead twigs and dried leaves, Harry and Herbert F. Treewood - the Hawthorn brothers from next door - burst through the hedge like an avalanche, shattering both the silence and the fence surrounding Basil's plot.

"Good morning, Baz," the brothers announced in unison. Their boisterous entrance gave Basil such a fright that he fell from his chair and landed, face down, on top of the open sack of marshmelons that lay by his feet. "What's good about it?" he grumped, picking himself up from the ground. "It's just like every other rotten morning. Damp, grey and miserable. The only difference being, that this morning, you two have destroyed my fence and half frightened me to death in the process!" He wiped the sticky melon gum from his face and set off huffily across the muddy lawn in the direction of his house.

"I've had enough!" he stamped, cursing and grizzling to himself along the way.

"Precisely!" Herbert called after him. "We've all had enough. That's what we've come to discuss!" He turned to his brother and prompted him with his elbow. The sharp, unexpected prod

momentarily aroused Harry from his dreamy twilight state. “Y-Yes, we’ve got a plan,” he stammered. “We need to talk!”

Cold, wet and grumpy, Basil climbed the stairs that led to his front door. But before he entered the house, he stopped. ‘A plan,’ he thought. ‘What kind of a plan?’

With his curiosity suitably aroused, he turned slowly to face his shabby little Hawthorn friends and with a loud sigh, and a sideways nod of his head, he beckoned them both inside.