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APOCALYPSE KINGS



APOCALYPSE KINGS

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DEREK LANDY



Skulduggery
Pleasant

APOCALYPSE
KINGS



HarperCollins *Children's Books*

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Adedayo was fourteen when he discovered that he was magic.

Up until then, he'd lived what he reckoned to be a normal life. He was on the school football team, which he enjoyed. He was on the school debating team, which he didn't. He had his family, he had his friends, he liked dogs but was wary of cats, he didn't like spiders, he hated rats and he ran away from wasps. All pretty normal. All pretty standard.

The magic thing happened over the course of a few weeks, when things started to come to him. Not answers, or knowledge, or insight, or anything like that – but actual *things*. Lamps, and bottles of water and big, heavy books. They'd fly at him as soon as he looked at them and he'd have to duck or jump back or run screaming from the room.

At first, Adedayo thought he was being haunted. Then he thought that he must have annoyed an invisible man at some point. One afternoon, after a teapot had collided

with his face, he covered the kitchen floor in flour and waited for a footprint to appear. His mother appeared first, of course, and yelled at him, told him to clean it up. Adedayo was more scared of his mum than he was of an invisible man, so he did what he was told and wondered why he was being singled out for torment by this invisible gentleman when his two younger sisters were way more annoying than he ever managed to be.

Then his grandmother came to stay. She was a small Nigerian woman who didn't speak much English, but her health wasn't the best and she couldn't stay on her own any more. Adedayo's sisters were told they had to share a room and their grandmother – their beloved *iyá agba* – moved in. It took some time to adjust to a new person in the house, but she was lovely, so nobody minded, and a few weeks later she knocked on Adedayo's door.

Adedayo didn't speak much Yoruba, his grandmother's language. His parents were both English speakers and, once they'd moved to Ireland to start a family, that's how they'd raised him and his sisters. They'd tried to teach him a few words over the years, but he didn't have much interest in learning, so, when his grandmother sat beside him on the bed, he prepared himself for a few long, long minutes of hesitations and the slow searching for words in English that always accompanied the rather pointless stories of her childhood. But she was his *iyá agba*, and he loved her, so Adedayo smiled and pretended with all his heart to be interested in whatever she had to say.

She surprised him, then, by telling him something so brain-punchingly interesting that it changed his life forever.

She told him, in that hesitant way of hers, that magic was real, and that she was magic, and so was he.

At first, he thought she was just telling him a story to entertain him, but when she clicked her fingers and conjured a fireball into her hand it all started to make sense. The odd occurrences, the weird coincidences, the objects that moved on their own – that was magic. His grandmother explained that there were rules for people like them; there were styles of magic he could specialise in, other magical people – sorcerers, or mages – he could meet. She told him about the Sanctuaries around the world, and the wars that had been fought between the sorcerers who wanted to enslave ordinary people and the sorcerers who wanted to protect them.

He had such a life ahead of him, she said. Such wonders to uncover.

She taught him some things – how to move objects by manipulating the air around them; how to make strands of energy dance in the palms of his hands; how to click his fingers and generate sparks. She told him about the three names that sorcerers have – the name they're given, the name they take, and their true name, the source of all their power.

But she was an old, old woman, and, a few weeks after his fifteenth birthday, her health deteriorated so much she had to be taken to hospital. Her energy dipped so that

she lost all of her English and could only speak the language of her childhood. When Adedayo went in to sit with her, she woke, took his hand and said weakly, “*Má ṣì àpótí.*” Then she smiled, and closed her eyes.

Má ṣì àpótí, he repeated in his head. *Má ṣì àpótí*. He made a note to ask his folks what that meant, but it slipped his mind, and his grandmother passed away later that night, and Adedayo was left with a lifetime of questions, a heart full of grief and a polished wooden box.

His grandmother had insisted that it had to go to him, apparently. That only he would know what to do with it.

The box was the size of a biscuit tin. It had carvings across the lid and along the sides – carvings that looked like letters, that looked like words, but weren’t. There was no lock, no latch, no way to open it. There was nothing inside, though. Or there didn’t seem to be when Adedayo’s mum shook it. His dad tried prising the lid off with a screwdriver. Didn’t work.

The wooden box had been sitting on Adedayo’s desk, under a pile of pristine textbooks and dog-eared graphic novels, for weeks when Adedayo woke in the middle of the night, suddenly *knowing* how to open it.

He got out of bed, crossed the dark room and cleared the junk off the lid. He tapped the carvings on the box’s left and right sides, then pressed, then tapped again and moved his fingers in a swirling motion.

A dim blue light shone from between the carvings,
travelling across the box in strange, swirling patterns.
There were sounds from inside, like wooden cogs turning.
And then there was a click.

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