

THE
WIDTH
OF THE
WORLD



VEGA JANE BOOK THREE
A NOVEL BY

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SCHOLASTIC INC.

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A Place Called True

WE LANDED, INVISIBLE, on the cobbles and were nearly killed.

Petra Sonnet cried out, Delph Delphia grunted in surprise, my canine, Harry Two, yipped and I, Vega Jane, jerked back on the magical tether holding us all together, as the deafening contraption charging down on us flashed past.

It was boxy and made of metal and wood with windowed doors on either side. It also had four what looked to be wagon wheels, only there were no sleps pulling it.

The infernal thing was moving of its own accord! It was puffing and wheezing, with what sounded like metal clanking on metal. Bright lights like powerful candles housed in lanterns were perched on the front of the thing, providing illumination. The front piece was shiny metal with ridges. Etched on it was a name: RILEY.

Riley? Was that the bloke who owned it? Or maybe the bloke who built it? We'd had a wagonmaker back in Wormwood named O'Dougall who put his name on the side of each one.

In a few moments the Riley, swaying from side to side and with a belch of smoke coming out its hindquarters, turned the corner and vanished from our view.

A pale Delph looked at me. "What the ruddy Hel was that?"

I shook my head because I had no idea what the ruddy Hel it was. Rattled, I scratched Harry Two's remaining ear.

We all had scars from our journey across the Quag.

Delph's arm had been burned and blackened.

Harry Two had lost an ear.

Petra had injured her hand.

And I had the mark of the three hooks upon the back of my hand. It had been burned into my skin by some unknown means.

I drew a breath and was about to return us to visibility by spinning my ring around when the pair of males appeared.

We froze, each holding our breath, lest they hear even that slight sound.

"You sure it was from here?" the taller of them asked the other.

The male nodded.

My mind was whirling. These were the blokes we had seen earlier, after escaping the Quag. How could they have followed us?

I glanced at Delph and Petra. They looked as terrified as I felt.

I pointed to the right and we shuffled off around the corner.

We set our tucks down and I breathlessly whispered, "They followed us. How?"

Petra shook her head. But Delph said, "You reckon they can detect magic? Because you done that to get us here." He pointed to the magical tethers that kept us all invisible.

I looked down at my wand like it had just bitten me. *Could that be true?*

Delph said, "Look." He was pointing to the right. Down the cobbles at the very end of the street was a tall building made of stone and brick and timbers. I stared up at the highest point of the edifice.

"Steeple," I said in wonder.

"It's got a bell too," said Delph. "Me dad said Steeple had a bell once, before it broke."

"Steeple?" said Petra, looking confused.

"The place back in Wormwood where Wugmorts would go to listen to Ezekiel the Sermonizer deliver his very long soliloquies," I explained. "Telling us to be good while scaring us half to death with tales of how badly our lives would turn out regardless of what we did."

But Delph had a point. At night Steeple had always been empty. I wagered this building might be the same.

We shouldered our tucks and crept along the cobbles until we came to the double wooden doors that constituted the entrance to the place.

There was a sign next to it.

"Saint Necro's," I read. I glanced at Delph. "What do you reckon that means?"

"Dunno, do I?" he replied. "Never heard-a no Saint Necro. Alls I know is Steeple."

I tried the doors but they were locked. I pointed my wand at the heavy wrought-iron lock and was about to whisper "*Ingressio*" when Delph grabbed my arm.

"Magic," he said warningly.

I nodded and slowly lowered my wand.

Delph tried to open the door but it was clearly bolted shut.

Then Petra noticed a window on the side. "It's not locked."

Delph boosted her up first and she slid through. I followed. Delph lifted Harry Two through the opening and into my arms, and then he brought up the rear.

We looked around at a vast chamber that was far larger than Steeples, though it was configured quite similarly, with brightly colored windows, rows of seats and a raised area up front where sermons were no doubt given. I wondered whether the sermonizer who spoke here was as depressing as Ezekiel. Petra said in a hushed tone, "Where do we go now?"

I pointed to a set of stone stairs that led upward. "Let's see what's up that way."

"Why not down?" said Petra, pointing to another set of stairs that apparently led to a lower floor of this saint's place.

"No," I said. "Up is better."

She gave me a skeptical look, but I didn't wait for her approval of my plans. They expected me to lead; well, that's what I was going to do! I hustled over to the stairs with Harry Two gliding along next to me. Delph and Petra hurried after us.

That's when we heard the footsteps at the entry.

We ducked down between two sets of pews as I heard someone say, "*Ingressio*."

The doors flew open.

We heard footsteps approach. I lifted my head a bit so I could see over the backs of the pews. It was the same two cloaked figures.

But this was impossible. I hadn't used magic before they got here. How could they be —

I looked down at the mark on my hand and gaped. Was it that?

As the footsteps drew closer, I heard one of the males say, "Are you sure?"

I peered over the edge again in time to see the other bloke hold up his wand. "See for yourself," he said.

The wand was glowing.

The other one nodded. "Right."

He crept along until he got to where we were hidden.

"There!" he snapped. He pointed his wand and said, "*Infernus!*"

"*Embattlemento!*" I instantly cried out.

His blast of fire ricocheted off my shield spell and he had to duck to avoid being incinerated.

The second bloke rushed forward, casting spell after spell our way, each more powerful than the last.

Petra cast a shield spell as well, and his magic rebounded off it and smashed into the pews, destroying them.

Spells were now being cast so fast I could barely follow them. The inside of the building was being pummeled.

Glass shattered. Wooden pews disintegrated, and a small statue of a female exploded when hit by a glancing blow from a rebounding spell. I had never been in such a battle as this one. The sheer ferocity and speed nearly paralyzed me. And though we were still invisible we were in terrible danger of being killed simply by being in this confined space.

I was hurling spells so fast I could barely remember thinking of the incantation before sending it off. When I glanced at Petra, I saw both terror and fury in her eyes. Somehow, this filled me with resolve.