

The Fearless Four. Chapter Three. "En Route!"

(Editor's note to author: When are you going to acknowledge your debt to Enid Blyton?

Author: Ah. Yes. Right now.

Editor: Go on then.

Author: I willingly bow my head to the influence on me of the incomparable Enid Blyton. And also a little bit to Marvel Comics.

Chapter Three..

The children stared in amazement at the man in the shimmering white suit who had appeared before them in a flash of lightning.

'Hello,' he said again.

'Er. Hello,' said Bloodblade.

'How do you do?' said Emily.

'Eek!' squeaked Lily.

'Ooh Er,' muttered Twinblade.

The man in the white suit smiled, and looked around. 'I think we'll leave the umbrella men to thaw out, and get going.' he said.

'Get going where, sir?' asked Bloodblade, politely.

'Good question. Follow me,' said the man, and strode off. The children trotted after him.

'You know you're being followed?' said the man. The children stopped and looked around anxiously.

'Are we?' asked Emily. 'By who? I mean whom?'

'A large man with big eyebrows and a thin lady with glasses,' said the man.

'Who on earth can they be?' mused Bloodblade.

'Don't you see?' said Emily. 'It's Mr. Million and Miss Schutzenfuffen.'

'Oh gosh.' said Lily. 'Do you really think so?'

'Course.' said Twinblade. 'I 'spect it's 'cos I didn't do my homework'.

'Come on. Keep moving along, or we'll be late.' said the man in the white suit.

The children followed him as he strode quickly to the beach where a rowing boat was waiting, with a man in army camouflage uniform standing by.

'Here we are, Sergeant.' said the man jumping in and helping the children aboard. 'You may cast off.'

Bloodblade pulled himself up to his full height and looked fiercely at the man in the white suit.

'Just where are we going, exactly?' he demanded, wobbling about a bit as the rowing boat set off.

'There.' replied the man, pointing. Lying at anchor in the bay was a beautiful white cruiser with a lot of radar-like stuff on its bridge.

'There?' said Bloodblade, gaping. 'What for?'

'All will be revealed when we get there. And we'll have a meal and a drink. Don't worry. You're in safe hands. Got you away from the umbrella men, didn't I?' said the

man, with a broad smile.

'Well, that's true,' admitted Bloodblade. Emily asked, 'Do you have a name, sir?'

'Yes. I have a name,' said the man. He paused. 'I'm The Messenger'. The children goggled. 'On the subject of names,' continued The Messenger, 'You boys have got very odd names. And too long. I shall call you Twin and Blue. O.K.? Look. We've arrived.'

The children stared up at the white cruiser which seemed very large and also shimmered slightly. The Sergeant manoeuvred the rowing boat round to the back of the cruiser where they stepped on to a platform. The Messenger ushered them through a door. Inside, the cruiser seemed even bigger, with shining white walls and lots of rich brown mahogany fittings, wooden gangways, and a low hum everywhere.

'Ginger!' shouted The Messenger.

'Here, sir!' said a voice and out of a door marked 'COMMS OPS' jumped a boy with bright ginger hair, his face covered all over with freckles.

'Here they are, safe and sound,' said The Messenger, with a big smile. 'Let's go into the Conference Room and work out our next move. Come along, all of you. Through here.'

In the meantime, Mr. Million and Miss Schutzenfuffen were hot on their trail. Well, sort of. They were driving up the motorway to London in Mr. Million's cute little Chinese car, a Ying Yang 1.2 litre, tdi, with three extra exhausts Mr. Million had fitted (making four in total) and shiny new hub-caps. They were going to get a train at Waterloo Station. Because Mr. Million had made a cleverly thought-out deduction when they could no longer find any trace of the children, on the island. Here's what happened. They were standing on the beach and Mr. Million was wearing a very severe frown.

'Grrr,' he growled, 'Where are they? Where are they?'

'I don't know', answered Miss Schnutzenfuffen. 'Um, should we be getting back now? Back home for a nice cup of tea?'

'No time for that stuff!' came the reply. 'Now. Think. Where can they have gone?' And he banged the side of his head with his fist.

'Oh dear,' said Miss Schutzenfuffen, 'Don't do that. You'll damage yourself!'

'Yes! I have it! They must have gone to see their parents - in Beaulieu! That's it! Now we'll have them. Kill two birds with one stone. Tell the parents how badly behaved their children are. And bring the little so-and-so's back to their homework. Which I shall double! Hah!' Mr. Million looked positively pleased.

'Now. To London and the Eurostar train to the Riviera! Come, Miss Schutzenfuffen! The chase is on!'

Miss Schutzenfuffen was overwhelmed with all this powerful activity. 'Ooh,' she said.

The Conference Room was round, the walls were lined with light coloured wood and there was only one window, which looked out on to the sea. On one of the walls was a large blank screen and on another a black and white clock which, on its upper part, read 22.00 hours. On its lower part, minutes ticked away, downwards - 27-26-25-24. In the middle of the room was a round table. On the table stood a large globe, lit from within, and on one part of it a white light blinked on and off.

'Sit yourselves down', said The Messenger, taking off his jacket. 'Food's ordered and

will be ready in an hour. Anything new, Ginger?’

‘No sir,’ answered Ginger.

‘No problem,’ said The Messenger, taking out his pen and some small cards, which he placed on the table. He looked around the table, significantly. Then he looked at the clock. ‘We have twenty one minutes. So, we’ll get on with it.’ he said.

‘I am The Messenger, as you now know. I receive messages and send messages. Hence my name. You do not need to know where my messages come from. But those messages tell me where there is a spot of trouble that needs my attention. Where some people are attempting to do something they shouldn’t. With the help of my team, I stop them.

That’s my message to those people. Behave.’ The Messenger glanced round the table at the fascinated children and a proud-looking Ginger. ‘All clear? Good.’ None of the children felt that anything was clear at the moment, but they were not going to interrupt right now.

‘The messages that are sent to me appear on this globe,’ he said pointing, ‘And this morning’s message indicated that you were in some kind of trouble. So I came to see what it was all about and brought you back here. Now. Why did I bring you back here?’ The children looked at each other in confusion, ‘Ginger will explain.’

Ginger took a deep breath and stood up. ‘No need to stand up, Ginger,’ said The Messenger. Ginger sat down again. Wiggled on his seat and said.

‘The light on the globe shows where the trouble spot is, more or less. And then I go and localise it on my equipment. Where it is exactly. Only there was summat wrong this time, because there were two lights on at the same time. Never had it before. Weird.’

‘Weird, indeed,’ said The Messenger. He pulled back his shirt sleeve and spoke to his watch. ‘Is there any tea coming?’ The door to the Conference Room immediately opened and in came a lady with a tray of tea. ‘Here you are, dears,’ she said and put it on the table. ‘You must be famished, poor things. Now, sir, don’t you keep them too long. It’s time they had a good meal. And that Ginger is looking a bit peaky.’

‘Thank you, Mrs Nadgett,’ said The Messenger. ‘Most kind.’ He handed round the mugs. ‘Anyone like digestive biscuits?’ he asked, putting the plate out.

‘So, we have two danger lights working at once. As they both seem to concern you, we thought you’d better come back here and give us some idea of what’s going on.’

‘We’ll be very pleased to help,’ said Emily.

‘Of course,’ said Lily in an uncertain voice.

‘Ra-ra- rather!’ said Twinblade.

‘Absolutely’ said Blueblade, thinking how much he would like to wear a badge like the one Ginger had on his shirt, which read ‘comm ops’.

‘Good!’ said The Messenger. ‘Now, as concerns the second light. Does a place called Beaulieu-sur-Mer mean anything to you?’ A feeling of dread came over the children.

‘Beaulieu-sur-Mer?’ said Emily. ‘Oh dear. That’s where our parents are.’

‘Ah,’ said The Messenger.

‘Oh no!’ cried Lily. ‘What has happened to them?’

‘I’m sorry to say that we don’t know.’ answered The Messenger. ‘So we shall have to go there and find out. Without delay.’

‘But it will take ages to get to the Riviera!’ exclaimed Bloodblade.

‘Not with me, it won’t,’ said The Messenger. He looked at the curious clock, which the

children noticed now had 06 on it, and which then flicked to 05. 'Off you go, Ginger, and fix the co-ordinates.'

'Yessir!' said Ginger and ran off looking excited. The Messenger spoke to his watch. 'Major McCallum. Ginger is fixing the co-ordinates. Pursuit in three minutes.' He turned to the children. 'We'll find out what the problem is down in Beaulieu. And we'll take care of it. We're transmogrifying there, now. There'll be a white flash.' There was a blinding white flash which made the children jump. And as fast as it had come, it was gone. The children looked quickly at each other, relieved to see that they were alright. Nothing seemed to have changed.

'Come and look out of the window,' said The Messenger. They crowded to the window and looked out on the blue water and rippling sunshine of another bay. A different bay, no rain, not a cloud in the sky. With a curving beach and small, colourful houses stacked up behind it.

'It's - it's Beaulieu!' exclaimed Bloodblade.

'Just so'. said The Messenger.