



CHAPTER 1


Erika frowned as she looked at the
handwritten poster on the wall of
the girls' toilets.



Do YOU have
a **UNIQUE** talent?
Could you **WOW** the judges
and **WIN** the **BIG** prize?
If so, then bring yourself **AND**
your **TALENT** to the school
hall for the **BIG SHOW** on
Wednesday afternoon!



This was tricky. On the one hand, Erika had some quite literally **UNBELIEVABLE** talents. She could talk to animals and swim through rocks, she could ride on clouds and make objects appear and



disappear. The problem was, she could only do these things in her dreams, which wasn't much good for the school talent show.

When it came to real life, Erika's unique talents amounted to:

1. Watching a dead fly for quite a long time

Last year Erika had wanted to get into the *World Records* book and decided that all you needed to do was pick something strange enough and you'd be in with a chance.



Unfortunately, there was an old lady in Mexico who had already stared at a dead fly for three days. *Three days!* How would you even stay awake for three days . . . ?

2. Basketball tricks

Erika definitely had skills in this area. Once, during a crucial game against their rival school, she had scored the deciding point in the last seconds of the match. Unfortunately she had been facing the wrong way and scored the winning point for the other team.

Erika sighed. The talent show was only two days away, so there wasn't even time to learn anything new. It would be fun

watching the other acts though.

She was still staring thoughtfully at the poster when, suddenly, she felt a curious tingling on her chest. Erika looked furtively around to check that no one else was there, but the room was empty. She walked over to the mirror, opened her collar and pulled out the large, pulsing crystal that hung on a chain around her neck. In the mirror it shone and gleamed with a dazzling light; but in the actual room Erika's hand was empty.

This was why Erika had checked that she was alone. The magic crystal was her way of communicating with the **DREAM TEAM** – the TOP SECRET organization that looks out for people while they're asleep and dreaming.

Erika tapped the crystal three times
and a beam of
light shone out.
Projected in
the beam
was a boy
who stood
about her
height,
but was
made out
of curling
shadows,
which
faded away to
nothing just below
his knees.

‘Silas!’ exclaimed Erika.



‘Wait – you do know I’m at school?’

‘Yes,’ replied the shadow boy. ‘And I’m sorry, I don’t want to disrupt your education. Learning is a vital part of the human experience and I—’

‘I’m not actually in a lesson, Silas,’ interrupted Erika. ‘If I was then you’d be being beamed out in front of thirty other kids! And the TOP SECRET **DREAM TEAM** wouldn’t be very top secret any more. It wouldn’t even be BOTTOM SECRET. It basically wouldn’t be a secret at all!’

‘Ah, no, I suppose not . . .’ replied Silas. ‘*Anyway*, I just wanted to give you a heads up. We’re going to need your help on a mission tonight, so make sure you get to bed early – we’re going to need a

full Dreamcycle to crack this one!

Erika's heart leapt. 'OK, will do. See you later!'

Silas smiled as he saluted Erika, and then he disappeared.

A thrill of excitement coursed through Erika as she put the crystal back under her shirt. *A new mission!* It felt like ages since she'd received a call from the **DREAM TEAM**. She whistled happily as she washed her hands, then turned and walked out of the bathroom.

A door to one of the cubicles opened and a girl walked out, shaking her head slowly. 'Erika Delgano is **SO** strange . . .' she muttered under her breath.

Erika entered the bustling chaos of the

school hall for lunch. The unique scent of school dinners drifted through the room: a heady mix of chips, gravy and pizza, with subtle notes of soggy vegetable. Still, nothing could dampen her mood – tonight she was going to have an adventure! Erika grinned as she sat down next to her friend Kris.

‘Hey, Erika!’ he said. ‘I’ve been making up new jokes, do you want to hear some?’

‘Sure thing,’ said Erika eagerly. She loved Kris’s jokes – he was one of the funniest people she knew.

‘OK,’ said Kris, adjusting his glasses. ‘So, last weekend my mum took me to a cafe that served breakfast at any time.’ He paused. ‘So we went for sausage and eggs in the Stone Age.’

Erika chuckled as Kris carried on.
‘What’s brown and sticky?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Erika.

‘A stick!’ replied Kris. He smiled as she laughed and then pretended to look sad.

‘People always point and laugh when I walk the plank – I hope one day my parents actually get me a dog.’



Erika exploded with laughter. When she had calmed down she said to Kris, ‘Hey, you should enter the talent show! You’d be brilliant!’

Kris’s smile vanished. ‘No way. It’s one thing telling jokes to you, but what if I was stood up there and got the punchline wrong? What if I just froze? Or worse... what if *nobody laughed?*’

Kris looked so worried at the idea that Erika didn’t try to convince him to enter. It was strange though, *everyone* could see how funny and clever Kris was – everyone apart from Kris.

Smudges of darkness crept across the sky while Erika and her family sat together in their living room. Erika was sipping





a mug of hot chocolate, savouring every last velvety drop.

‘Right then, Randall,’ said Erika’s mum once their drinks were finished. ‘Time for bed, OK?’

‘Sto-weeee?’ asked Randall.


‘Yes, you can have a story,’ replied Erika’s dad. ‘Which one would you like?’

‘Wicka!’ shouted Randall.

‘What’s Wicka?’ asked Erika’s dad. ‘It’s not one of those Cakey McCake books is it?’ He pulled a face. ‘Urgh, if I had my way Cakey would be eaten on page two and that would be the end of it!’

‘*Peter!*’ hissed Erika’s mum, glaring at her husband. ‘Randall loves those books.’

‘Wicka,’ repeated Randall. ‘EH-WICKA.’



‘Ah, you want *me* to read the story?’ said Erika. Randall nodded enthusiastically.

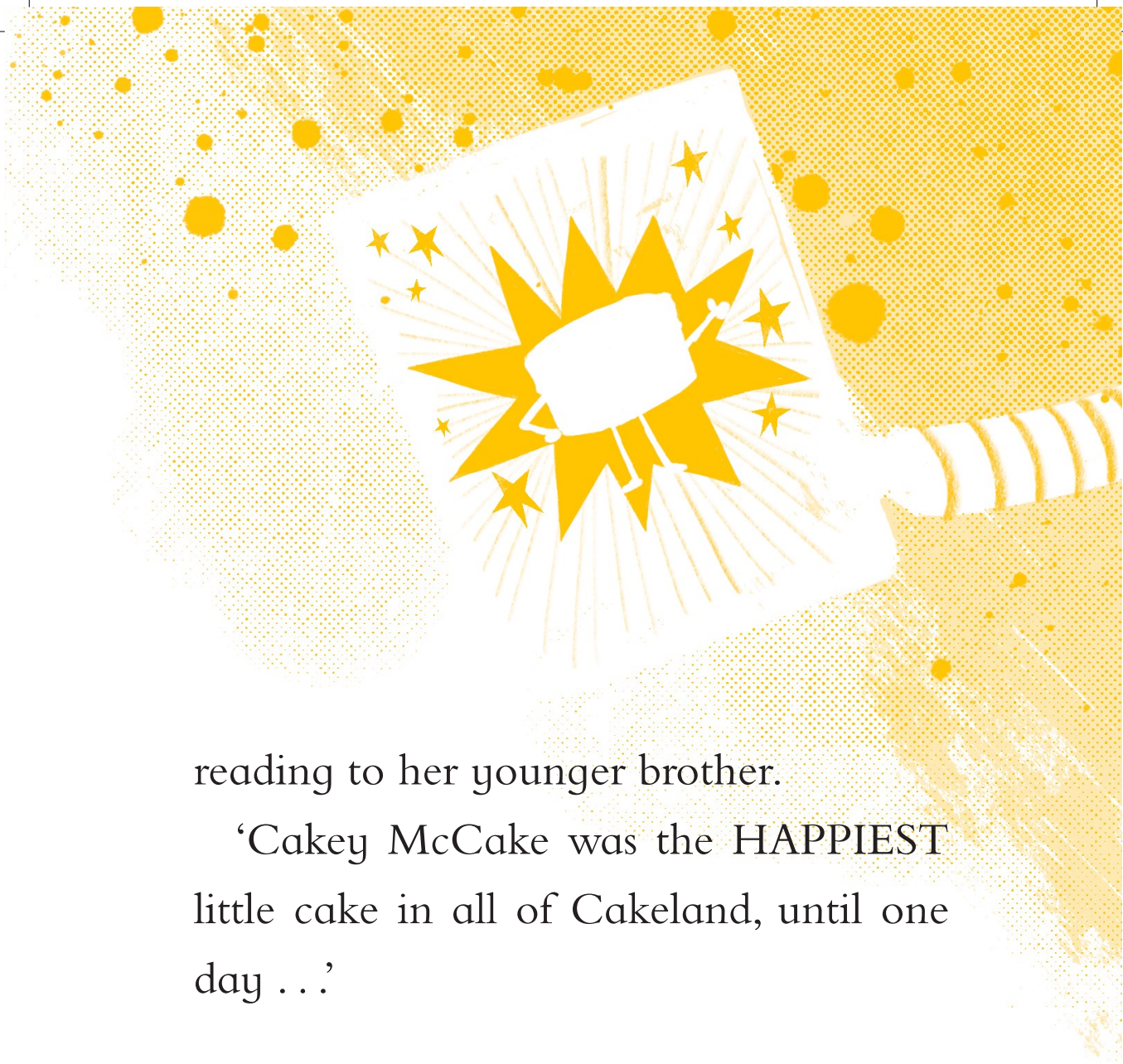
‘OK then,’ she replied. ‘But we’ve got to get you all washed and clean first.’

She held out her hand and Randall took it.

‘Are you sure?’ asked Erika’s mum.

‘Yeah,’ replied Erika, ‘I’m pretty tired too.’ Although all she *actually* wanted to do was start her adventure in the Dreamscape. ‘I’ll get Randall settled down and then go to bed myself.’

Once Randall was washed, dried and in clean pyjamas, Erika helped him into bed and asked him what story he wanted. Randall grinned happily and held out the book he kept underneath his pillow. Erika smiled as she opened it and started



reading to her younger brother.

‘Cakey McCake was the HAPPIEST little cake in all of Cakeland, until one day ...’

Once Erika had finished the story and Randall was quietly snoring, she crept out of his room to get ready for bed and that night’s coming adventure.