

JAMIE LITTLER



THE ORDER OF MISFITS



PUFFIN

PUFFIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Puffin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

www.penguin.co.uk www.puffin.co.uk www.ladybird.co.uk



Penguin
Random House
UK

First published 2024

001

Text and illustrations copyright © Jamie Littler, 2024

The moral right of the author has been asserted

Text design by Janene Spencer

Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-241-58616-7

All correspondence to:

Puffin Books

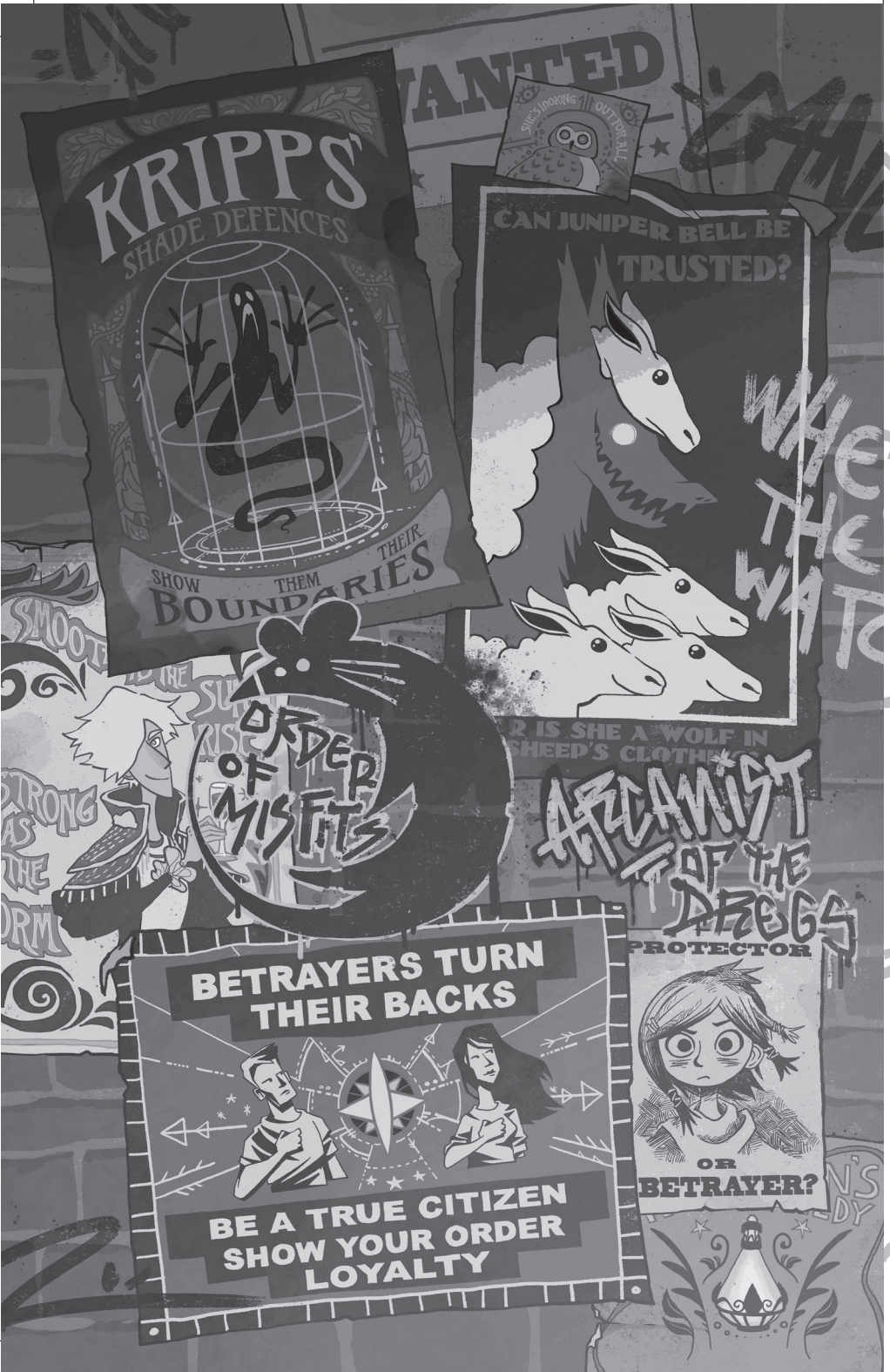
Penguin Random House Children's

One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

*To Iſ Ireton,
for helping to spread the word of the Arcanists.*



KRIPPS
SHADE DEFENCES



SHOW THEM THEIR BOUNDARIES

WANTED



CAN JUNIPER BELL BE TRUSTED?



OR IS SHE A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING?

WHERE THE WATER

ORDER OF MISFITS

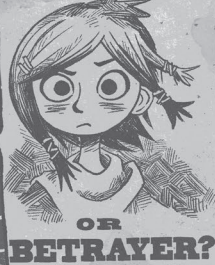


ARCANIST OF THE DREGS
PROTECTOR

BETRAYERS TURN THEIR BACKS

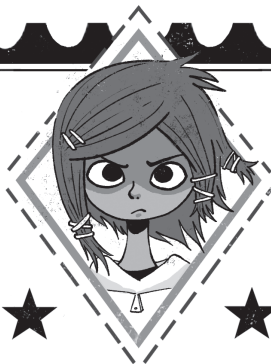


BE A TRUE CITIZEN SHOW YOUR ORDER LOYALTY



OR BETRAYER?





THE TRIALS OF JUNIPER BELL: THE GREATEST SHOW IN CENTURIES!

For a city literally ruled by magic, this is quite the statement! But the Arkspire Public Announcement Board are nothing if not messengers of the ~~truth~~ *Arcanists' lies*

You'd be forgiven for having never heard her name. By all accounts, Juniper Bell is a ~~nobody~~ *pretty cool* ~~an~~ uneducated girl from the Iris District's lower city. But this child of the streets, this girl of dubious repute, at thirteen years old, claims to have been blessed with magic by the great and wondrous Visitor – the all-powerful and wise being who first crossed over to our world from the Other Side millennia ago, gifting the first noble Arcanists with its powers.

That's right, you read that correctly.

Ms Bell has not Inherited her supposed powers from one of our five ~~benevolent~~ *stupid* Arcanist leaders. She is not a





hard-working and selfless Candidate, training at one of the five ^{overrated} great Academies for the honour to be chosen as an ~~Inheritor~~ ^{victim}.

She claims to have been chosen by The Visitor itself.

This is either a historical moment of city-changing significance, or it is heresy and treason of the highest order.

Juniper Bell has shown a knack for magic (who can forget the night of three weeks ago when the sky was lit up with arcane sigils?), but she has yet to prove whether her powers are authentic or rather some despicable trickery used by the agents of the Betrayers, who still work against us from the Badlands beyond our borders.

And so our illustrious Arcanist leaders have announced the greatest challenge of our age, a set of trials to put Ms Bell's bold claims to the test.

Sure - good luck with that!



THE CHALLENGERS:
~~OUR GREAT AND BENEVOLENT ARCANIST LEADERS -~~ ^{evil, greedy, body-snatching, murderous}
~~LONG MAY THEY PROTECT US FROM DANGERS~~
~~— OUTSIDE AND IN! —~~ *be forgotten*





*No problem -
already beat ya!*



THE SHROUDED

Leader of the Order of Midnight and ruler of the Midnight District.

- Youngest of all the current Arcanists.
- Power to control shadows and has a deep connection with the dead. Responsible for sending spirits peacefully to the Beyond.
- Midnight District acts as the final resting place for the departed, a town-sized mausoleum to honour those that came before.

THE MAKER

*Bring it on,
big guy!*



Leader of the Order of Invention and ruler of the Invention District.

- Power to breathe life into reality-changing effigies and impossible machines.
- The Invention District is the centre of industry in Arkspire, a place where the fires of creation never burn out and where imagination is the only limit to what can be made.

THE TEMPEST



Leader of the Order of Radiance and ruler of the Radiant District.

- Power of the storm and the glorious light of knowledge.
- The Radiant District is famous for its many libraries and colleges, a true beacon of enlightenment in an otherwise dark world.
- *Absolutely loves himself.*



THE ENIGMA



Leader of the Order of Gateways and ruler of the Gateway District.

- Power to create mind-bending illusions and doorways to nearly anywhere you can imagine.
- The Gateway District is a hub of portals leading across the globe, essential for the city's resource gathering. It is also known as the district that never sleeps – a place of entertainment and revelry.

THE WATCHER

*Booo!
Stay away from my sister!*



Leader of the Order of Iris and ruler of the Iris District.

- Power to see through the eyes of lesser beasts and read the signs written in the stars.
- The Watcher hasn't been seen for fifty years. Whether she'll set Ms Bell a trial is yet to be seen. *Hiding away, more like!*
- The Iris District is the security centre of the city, its many observatories looking out for any sign of Betrayer activity or other threats. Some say The Watcher has been searching for The Visitor, hoping to find a way to bring it back to lead the city into a new golden age of prosperity.

THE CHALLENGED:

Juniper Bell, a girl of little note. *Uhhh... so little you gotta write this pamphlet about me?*
Absolute pro
Suspected pickpocket and relic hunter.



- Leader of the Order of Misfits and ruler of her bedroom.
- Power of untouchable roof-running skills, mad tricks and mind-blowing wisecracks.
- Has a small order and no district, but who needs one when you have Cinder, Thea, Everard and Madame Adie on your side?



Has Ms Bell truly been blessed by The Visitor, or is she nothing but a brazen liar? One thing's for sure – the Trials of Juniper Bell will be a spectacle the city of Arkspire will never forget!

You got that right!







1

A VIEW TO DIE FOR

‘Would you look at all that gleaming goodness?’ Juniper Bell said, smiling. She paused mid-clamber high atop an archway, gazing out at the incredible view before her.

Thea, Juniper’s best friend, nodded. ‘I would.’

Much like Juniper, she’d painted black charcoal marks across her cheeks, a flowery headband pulling back her cropped black hair. Black flowers, of course; they were on a stealth mission, after all. ‘Without all the manufactory smoke the light looks kind of clean. Like the sun’s had a bath.’

‘Behind the ears an’ everything,’ Juniper agreed.

If you wanted to be anywhere in Arkspire, it was in the Uppers. Held high above the lower city upon massive metal plates, the only things that rose higher

were the Arcanist towers they were attached to: colossal structures that reached up to the clouds. The Uppers were places of luxury, where laws were made and the city was governed.

That said, it would be fair to say the Uppers of the Iris District had seen better days. The once gleaming white plaster crumbled from the walls of its lofty buildings. Its domed roofs were speckled with bird droppings. Its magnificent stained-glass windows and ornate observation towers were dull with grime.

The district had struggled over the fifty years since the disappearance of its leader, The Watcher, that was for sure. Her Order had become lazy, neglecting its citizens, shutting themselves away in their headquarters, waiting for their leader to return. Despite all this, the Iris Uppers were still a darn sight nicer than the pile of rust and ruin that were the Dregs far below.

Especially when the sun rose. Its rays glinted off the windows, igniting them with colour and for a brief, wonderful moment returning them to their original glory. It washed over the dirty walls, turning the faded white to a vibrant peach.

‘Sure is something,’ Juniper said.

She was in a good mood. Her second trial had been announced the day before. Machines had appeared all over the city, like bugs crawling from under a damp log.

Giant insectoid things, all pipes and wires and more legs than they knew what to do with. But instead of faces, they had curved glass displays, shiny and blank.

It wasn't hard to guess who'd sent them. Strange contraptions, inventions beyond understanding? This was The Maker's doing. Surprise, surprise, his image had flickered on to the displays, grainy and dull green. As always, his face had been lost in the shadow of his wide-brimmed hat, his eyes peering out from the darkness like lamplights.



‘Three days,’ he'd said, ever the chatterbox. ‘Juniper Bell's second trial will take place in three days, within the confines of my Invention Tower. There we shall see the truth of who Ms Bell claims to be.’

Most people would get a little jittery knowing they had to compete with an all-powerful Arcanist. A sensible few might even be frightened, especially if they'd known the terrible secrets Juniper and her friends had discovered. The Arcanists hadn't created

the trials because they wanted to give Juniper a chance to prove the truth of her claims. They wanted an excuse to kill her.

Who knew what could happen in the heat of a magical trial? An unfortunate accident here, a cheeky beheading there. The Arcanists couldn't allow some girl from the Dregs to put silly ideas in the people's heads that someone else could become as powerful as they were.

The Arcanists weren't the divine saviours the city believed them to be. They hadn't been passing their powers on to noble Inheritors each generation so that the legacy of the Arcanists could live on. They were the very same souls who'd been gifted magic a thousand years before. Instead of benevolent rulers, they were evil ancients who stole the bodies of children to prolong their unnatural lives.

And as the only ones who knew the Arcanists' dark secret, Juniper knew it was up to her Order of Misfits to stop them.

Two days to go.

And here she was, feeling pretty hyped, all in all, despite the ominous threat of death.

Juniper hated sitting around doing nothing, not knowing if the Arcanists would challenge her to another trial or just grow tired of playing games and kill her in

her sleep. It made her feel defenceless and . . . *trapped*.

But now the second trial had been announced? She could act. She could finally bring the fight to the Arcanists! She wasn't going to hide away, cooped up inside reading all the dusty books Everard had brought down from his district's libraries. He kept blabbering on about the importance of research, but what was the point when she had someone as powerful as Cinder at her side? He had some of The Shrouded's shadow-magic now, for Visitor's sake! Juniper had never felt more confident about her chances.

Cinder was her secret weapon, the ace up her sleeve.

That didn't stop the flashbacks of her last trial, though.

The darkness.

The clawing, skeletal hands.

And, worst of all, the sight of Nyx Neverbright, a girl only a little older than Juniper, fighting to keep control over her body as The Shrouded's spirit attempted to wrestle it away from her. Yeah, two weeks later Juniper still had nightmares about that one.

But out here, up in the heights of the city, Juniper felt like she could breathe. She couldn't wait until her district woke up and saw what the Order of Misfits had done that night.

'The only sight I'll stop to admire is that of my

enemies, broken and defeated at my feet,' Cinder grumbled, looking at the sunrise as if it had insulted him. Pretty much how he looked at everything, to be fair.

'Whoa, I had no idea you could be so poetic, Cinder,' Juniper teased.

He sneered, revealing a row of needle-sharp fangs. 'If you two are quite finished admiring something that happens every single morning, can we get on with this petty misadventure you have us on?'

Juniper fell into a bow. 'Sorry to keep you waiting, m'lord.'



To say that Cinder could be difficult was an understatement. He could be downright nefarious at times. But he was kind of growing on Juniper. They were quite literally magically bonded together for a start, that always helped. He'd also saved her life too, shielding her from being pancaked by a falling bronze bell. And he'd helped her convince the city she was magic. All this for the low, low price of a simple promise to help Cinder get revenge on the Arcanists who'd imprisoned him.

Cinder's tufted tail swished back and forth, something he'd really taken to since becoming a physical being rather than an incorporeal shadow-thingy. His blue eyes gleamed bright against the mask-like patches of black fur that contrasted with the white colouration of his face. He was strangely cute for a mysterious, otherworldly creature. Cute in a 'look at me wrong and I'll bite your nose off' kind of way.

The girls peeked over the edge of the archway and signalled to Everard who was in the cobbled street below. Before climbing back down, they needed him to give them the all-clear. They were already treading on very, very thin ice. If the Arcanists caught so much as a whiff of her being arrested for trespassing, Juniper reckoned her jail cell would be the last thing she ever saw.

Everard looked left to right, his blond, perfectly

messy hair almost as pale as his wide-eyed face. You'd think he'd be happy to be back in the Uppers, the world he came from, but he looked considerably uncomfortable with the whole situation.

He gestured with a hand still pinned to his side, a movement so small and subtle, Juniper wondered if she'd imagined it. He was trying his hardest not to look suspicious but succeeded in looking as trustworthy as a mouse whistling in the corner of a cheese shop.

'Such a natural,' Juniper murmured.

'Is that our signal or is he just playing air cello again?' Thea asked.

'Let's go with the first one. I need some breakfast!'

Thea smiled. "A day without a good breakfast is a day waiting to slap you round the face," as Grangran always says.'

'Too true,' Juniper said, swinging herself over the side of the archway. She used the crevices between the stone slabs as holds to climb down.

'Please focus on getting us down safely rather than the ramblings of a mad woman,' Cinder said, leaping on to Juniper's shoulders and digging his claws into her dark grey sweater.

'Madly brilliant,' Thea said under her breath.

The archway was incredibly tall, but as expert roof-runners the girls had scaled far worse. As they scrambled

down, a high-pitched whine shattered the peace of the morning, the phonograph speakers in the nearby plaza doing their very best to wake up those still trying to sleep.

‘To be disloyal is to walk the same path as the Betrayers!’ said the well-spoken announcer. ‘Remember what your Order has done for you! It has kept you safe. It has protected you from the horrors of the Betrayers’ curse and the desolation of the outside! Stand with your Order! Anything else is a betrayal!’

‘As if the boy wasn’t bad enough, we have to listen to his father’s incessant voice too?’ Cinder hissed.

Magister Amberflaw, Everard’s father, was the voice of Arkspire, the official announcer of all the lies the Arcanists wanted the city to believe. And, boy, did he like to talk. These messages came every half-hour, emphasizing the countless posters that had been hastily pasted up since Juniper’s victory in The Shrouded’s trial, encouraging Arkspire’s citizens to remain loyal to their district’s ruling Order.

‘They *really* don’t want anyone supporting us, do they?’ Thea said, securing her footing in a gap between the stonework. ‘Which is a shame, as we’ve worked so hard on our branding.’ She indicated the patch she’d sewn on to her jacket shoulder showing a rat circling round towards its tail. It was the symbol of Juniper and

Thea's old gang, the Misfits, now rebranded as the emblem of their new self-made Order: the Order of Misfits. Sure, the Order might only consist of a few children, a spiteful critter and an old lady but at least they could rest safe in the knowledge that Juniper, their leader, wasn't an evil, parasitic sorcerer. You had to be grateful for the small things.

The stone wall became sheer and featureless near the bottom. The girls would need to slide down a lamp post for the last stretch. They looked to Everard before they made their final descent, just in case he could see anyone they couldn't.

He peered into the plaza on his one side, a covered walkway to his other, then gave them another small hand signal to come down. But as Juniper reached for the lamp post, he began waving his arms around frantically. Juniper held her breath, caught between the post and the wall, her body dangling precariously above the two wardens who'd just appeared.



