



First published in 2020
by Faber & Faber Limited
Bloomsbury House,
74-77 Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3DA

Printed by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

All rights reserved
Text © Kate Saunders, 2020
Illustrations © Neal Layton, 2020

The right of Kate Saunders and Neal Layton to be identified as author and illustrator of this work respectively has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

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

ISBN 978-0-571-36112-0



2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Trouble on Planet Christmas



KATE SAUNDERS
ILLUSTRATED BY NEAL LAYTON

faber



ONE Pests

It was the week before the Christmas holidays, and something strange was happening to the Trubshaw family.

‘I think we’ve got mice,’ said Mum. ‘I keep hearing funny scrabbling noises in the kitchen.’

Dad looked in all the cupboards and drawers. He climbed on a chair to look at the top shelf, he shone a torch under the washing machine, he checked the shed in the back garden, but he did not find the smallest sign of even one mouse.

‘Maybe you heard something else,’ he told Mum. ‘I’ll call Zappit just to make sure.’

Zappit was a firm of pest controllers. If your house had mice, or cockroaches, or any other pest, they put down poison to kill them.

The man from Zappit came – but he couldn’t find any mice either.

‘I don’t understand,’ said Mum. ‘I know I heard something!’

‘I’m sure there’s a rational explanation,’ said Dad. ‘There’s a rational explanation for everything.’

Mr David Trubshaw was short and rather fat, with glasses and curly hair, and he worked with computers. Mrs Judy Trubshaw was tall and skinny, with long blonde hair, and she worked part-time as a librarian. They had two children – Jake, aged ten, and seven-year-old Sadie. Jake was tall and thin, like Mum, and Sadie was small and round, like Dad.

Jake didn’t care about the mouse drama. He was too busy looking forward to Christmas and making plans with his friends for the holidays.

Sadie thought mice were sweet, and if anyone

mentioned poison she burst into tears (she was always bursting into tears – Jake thought she did it to get her own way).

On Wednesday evening, when the Trubshaws were eating their supper at the kitchen table, they all heard something – a scratchy, scuttling noise, followed by a squeak.

‘I told you!’ said Mum. ‘Now do you believe me?’

‘It’s in the food cupboard,’ said Dad.

‘I’ll get it!’ Jake jumped out of his chair and flung open the cupboard doors.

‘Don’t hurt it!’ shouted Sadie. ‘If you hurt that mouse, I’ll poison **YOU!**’



The rows of tins and packets on the shelves looked completely normal – until Dad picked up a box of cornflakes and they all poured out through a large, jagged hole in the cardboard.

‘That’s been nibbled!’ said Dad. ‘We’d better call Zappit again.’

The man from Zappit came back the next day. He found no sign of mice, but left some little pellets of poison. ‘These will fix them, Mr Trubshaw – one nibble, and they die in horrible agony!’

Sadie said her parents were ‘evil mouse-killers’.

Another day passed, however, with no mice – dead or alive – and no more weird noises. The Trubshaws had almost forgotten the whole thing when Mum went into the kitchen and gave a loud squeal.

Everyone rushed in to find her leaning against the table, her face pale with shock.

‘The fridge!’ she whispered. ‘Something moved in the fridge! I heard the bottles clinking together!’

‘OK, I’ll deal with this,’ said Dad bravely. He opened the fridge, and this time everyone squealed.

It looked as if all the food inside had exploded. The



shelves were dripping with a great mixed-up mess of red jelly, chocolate pudding, yoghurt and soft cheese.

‘I don’t think mice did this,’ said Dad. ‘It has to be something bigger – a rat, or a squirrel!’

‘Whatever it is, it’s destroyed our food and made a disgusting mess.’ Mum went to the sink and pulled on her pink rubber gloves. ‘What if it’s still lurking in there, and it leaps out and attacks me?’

‘I’ll prod about with a wooden spoon,’ said Dad. ‘Just to check. Stand back, kids!’

Jake watched as his parents took bits of ruined food out of the fridge, and suddenly had a feeling something weird was happening.

‘Sadie!’ he hissed.

‘What?’

He grabbed Sadie's hand and pulled her out of the room. 'This isn't normal!'

'What?'

'Come on – people don't get squirrels in their fridges! This has got to come from you-know-where!'

Sadie's face lit up. 'You mean – Yule-1?'

Last summer holiday, the Trubshaw family had been whisked off to Yule-1, the planet owned by Father Christmas. They had made friends with elves and talking reindeer, Jake had learned to fly and it had been wonderful – but Father Christmas had wiped the memories of Mum and Dad, and only the two children remembered it now.

'FC said we'd go back one day,' whispered Jake. 'Maybe this is the first sign that he's about to call us, and I'll see Percy again!'

'Oh, wouldn't it be **BRILLIANT?**' Sadie whispered back. 'My human friends are OK, but I miss Belinda so much!'

Percy Prancer and his little sister Belinda were reindeer, and they had been Jake and Sadie's best friends during their time on the Christmas planet.

'It could happen any minute – remember how we were beamed up last time?' Jake wondered if he should sleep in his trainers, in case they were taken away in the middle of the night; he had missed his trainers on Yule-1. 'We'd better be prepared.'

* * *

Nothing else happened until Saturday morning.

Since the incident with the fridge, everything in the Trubshaw household had been completely un-magical. Jake and Sadie didn't mind too much because this was the day they were getting their Christmas tree, and that was always exciting. Mum went out to buy the tree and Dad climbed up into the loft to find the big box of lights and decorations. Sadie was playing a dancing hazelnut in the Christmas show at school and she practised her dance in the sitting room, while Jake played a computer game in his bedroom.

He didn't take much notice when something smashed downstairs, but a moment later, Sadie called out, 'Jake – come quick!'

'I'm busy!'

'Come **NOW!**' Sadie was waiting impatiently at the bottom of the stairs.

'What's going on?'

'Shhh – did you hear it?'

'You broke something in the kitchen,' said Jake.

'That wasn't me,' said Sadie. 'It was – something else!'

Jake caught Sadie's excitement. 'Dad's still up in the loft. It's either a burglar, or—'

Behind the closed door of the kitchen, something squeaked.

'Burglars don't squeak,' said Sadie. 'And it's too loud to be a mouse.'

Jake's baseball bat was on the floor under the coat pegs in the hall. He picked it up, in case he needed a weapon to tackle whatever lurked behind the door. Then, very carefully, he pushed the door open.

The kitchen was empty. Broken glass glinted on the floor. There were a few small toys scattered across the table, and nothing more.

Sadie took a closer look at the brightly coloured toys. 'Where did those plastic dinosaurs come from?'



Are they yours?'

'Don't be silly, I haven't played with toy dinosaurs since I was little.'

'Well, they're not mine,' said Sadie. 'I've never seen them before.'

Jake went to the table and picked one up. It was a stegosaurus, five centimetres long, and bright red. 'I don't think this is plastic.'

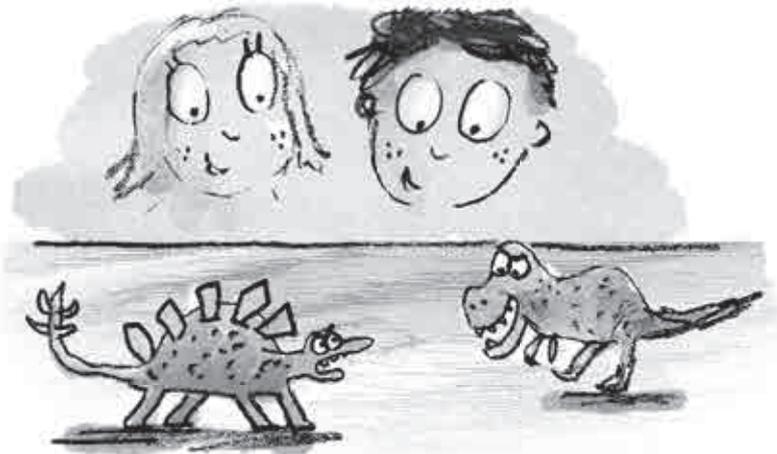
The tiny stegosaurus felt oddly soft and squidy. He squeezed it in his fingers – and then nearly jumped out of his skin when the little creature suddenly wriggled and gave him a sharp bite on the thumb.

'Ow – **OW!**' Jake shook his hand and the stegosaurus dropped onto the table.

This was the most astonishing thing they had seen since their adventure last summer.

The stegosaurus scuttled about on the table, letting out a cry that was something between a growl and a squeak. Two bright yellow T-Rexes came running

towards it. The two children stared in stunned silence as the little dinosaurs started to fight. They punched and bit, and their tiny, angry faces looked so funny that Jake and Sadie couldn't help laughing, though they did their best to break up the fight by pulling the creatures apart.



'These dinosaurs are really naughty!' giggled Sadie. The weird little things were suddenly still again, like ordinary plastic toys.

'They must've come from Yule-1,' said Jake, looking at the tiny tooth-prints on his thumb. 'That's the only place where any kind of magic happens. But why are

they here? I hope Father Christmas's computer hasn't gone wrong again.'

'I hope it **HAS**,' said Sadie. 'Then he'll need to bring Dad to Yule-1 to fix it.'

They heard Dad coming down from the loft with the box of decorations.

'We can't tell Mum and Dad about this,' said Jake. 'They don't remember, and they won't understand.' He quickly picked up the tiny dinosaurs and dropped them into one of the kitchen drawers. 'But wouldn't it be great if we got summoned again?'