

CHAPTER 1
in which
WE MEET ALICE
AND WE LEARN
ABOUT CONSTANCE
AND OCEANIA

SOMEWHERE between the 51st and 52nd parallels—and not too far from the Flamsteed House—you will find Legends & Leagues, Ltd., the overstuffed offices of Mr. Azimuth Latitude and Mr. Meridian Longitude.

In these offices, one Thursday morning, Mr. Latitude was playing chess. But not with Mr. Longitude. Mr. Latitude was playing chess with a



young girl named Alice.

“When my wife, Oceania, asked me to watch her young friend this morning, I had no idea it would lead to a rousing game of chess,” said Mr. Latitude. “I must say that I am delighted. Mr. Longitude has no aptitude for the game. He is only interested in the rooks, since they travel across the board in long straight lines.”

“I’m not young,” protested Alice as she moved a pawn two spaces. “I am seven and a half exactly.”

“Seven is my wife’s favorite number,” interjected Mr. Longitude from behind his desk. “My dear Constance says it is the perfect number. Mrs. Latitude’s favorite number is four, though mine is thirty-six.”

“Mrs. Latitude did not say what your company does,” continued Alice as if uninterrupted. “You have a great many books and maps and oddities in your office but no visitors at all.”

“Legends & Leagues, Ltd. provides geographic services for people who need help knowing how to get from Here to There,” answered Mr. Latitude.

Alice brightened and said, “I know all about geography. London is the capital of Paris, and Paris is



WE MEET ALICE



the capital of Rome, and Rome . . .”

“No, that’s all wrong!” yelled Mr. Longitude as he fell off his chair in shock.

Stunned by Mr. Longitude’s exclamation and extreme behavior, Alice made a very foolish move with one of her pawns, exposing her king to one of Mr. Latitude’s bishops.

“Alice, you are endangering your king,” said Mr. Latitude, seemingly unruffled by Mr. Longitude’s outrageous outburst.

Roused, Alice replied, “Oh, that is alright. I never met a king or queen that I ever liked. No way, no how. In fact, one king I met ate ham sandwiches and hay. *Can you imagine?* And once I met a queen who wanted to hire me as a lady’s-maid—paying me two pence a week, and jam every other day.”

“Then it is settled,” proclaimed Mr. Longitude as he raised himself to his full height (which was *quite* high). “We must introduce you to some good kings and queens we know. That will cure you of your dislike for them.” And in a bit of a mumble, he added, “Perhaps along the way we can cure you of your woeful ignorance of geography as well!”

