



CHRONICLES OF THE RED KING

The Secret Kingdom

JENNY NIMMO



SCHOLASTIC PRESS / NEW YORK

Copyright © 2011 by Jenny Nimmo

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*.
SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of
Scholastic Inc.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or
by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission
of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions
Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nimmo, Jenny.

The secret kingdom / by Jenny Nimmo. — 1st ed.

p. cm. — (Chronicles of the red king ; 1)

Summary: Timoken and his sister, Zobayda, under the protection of a forest jinni but pursued by evil
viridees, straddle the world of men and the world of enchantments seeking a home while remaining young
by drinking a potion called Alixir.

ISBN 978-0-439-84673-8

[1. Magic — Fiction. 2. Brothers and sisters — Fiction. 3. Voyages and travels — Fiction.

4. Camels — Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.N5897Sec 2011

[Fic] — dc22

2010035710

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 11 12 13 14 15

Printed in the U.S.A. 23

First edition, June 2011

Book design by Elizabeth B. Parisi and Kristina Iulo



P R O L O G U E

My name is Charlie Bone. I am thirteen years old and I live in a city in Britain that was built by my ancestor, an African king.

I have always wondered about the man known as the Red King. He was a magician, I was told, and he wore a red cloak. But no one seemed to know why he had traveled so far from his own country.

When I was ten something happened to me. Something odd. I began to hear the voices of people in photographs. Some of the people were already dead. The next phase of my peculiar “endowment” began when I looked at an old painting of a sorcerer. This time I not only heard him, I traveled right into his dingy old cell, all the way back into the sixteenth century. My grandmother told me I had inherited my endowment from the Red King, and I was sent to Bloor’s Academy, a school for weekly boarders.

The Academy was run by a weird old man called Ezekiel Bloor. He was a hundred years old and a sort of magician. He was also descended from the Red King, and so were some of the students I met at the school. There were twelve of us who were known as the endowed.

In the past year there have been a lot of changes in the Academy. But we endowed still do our homework in the King's room. And the Red King's portrait still hangs in the space between the bookshelves. The paint has cracked and the king's face is shadowy and blurred, but there is a kind of light in his eyes, and I know that he is there, waiting for me.

It was my great-uncle Paton who suggested I help with the writing of this book. He had just finished reading the journals of our distant cousin, Bartholomew Bloor. Bartholomew is an explorer, and when he was traveling through Africa, he heard an ancient story about a boy and a flying camel. The same story cropped up again in Egypt. Bartholomew was intrigued. After that, wherever he went, he would ask questions about the boy and his camel. He was amazed to find the same story in Greece and Turkey and in cities all around the Mediterranean Sea. Often he was shown the caves and walls where carvings had been found, among them the image of a boy on a flying camel, as if it were a kind of signature.

Bartholomew began to draw maps so that he could revisit the places where he had heard the stories. Sometimes, when he asked about the boy and the camel, people's answers surprised him. In

fact, the dates he was given for some of the sightings made no sense at all. If they were accurate, then the boy had not aged in two hundred years, nor had the camel.

In a lonely tavern in the Pyrenees, Bartholomew had the first inkling that he had stumbled on a story that was directly related to him. The innkeeper heard the tale from his great-grandmother, who knew everything about the village and its past. “There was a camel, certainly,” he said, “and it could fly, no doubt about that. The boy would not be remembered, would he, if it had not been for the camel?”

An old woman sitting in a corner piped up, “Not true. Of course the boy would be remembered. He was a magician. An African king. He could bring rain and thunder; he could talk to animals. In that red cloak of his, he could do almost anything.”

An African king? A magician in a red cloak? Bartholomew said that his heart missed a beat. He suddenly realized that, quite by chance, he had been following in the footsteps of his very own ancestor, the Red King.

The summer holidays had just begun when Uncle Paton called me. “It’s about our ancestor, Charlie — the book I’m writing. Can you pop up to the shop this morning?”

The shop was Ingledeew’s Bookshop. Uncle Paton lived there with his wife, Julia, and Emma, her niece. They sold secondhand books, some of them very old and rare. The perfect place for a writer. My uncle was in the little room behind the shop. He was sitting at a desk piled high with ancient leather-bound books.

Uncle Paton is exceptionally tall, but I could only just see the top of his head poking up behind them.

“Charlie,” he said. “Come and have a look at this.”

The sofa was heaped up with books and papers as usual, but we pushed them to one side and sat down. Uncle Paton spread Bartholomew’s maps across his knees. “Look,” he said. “Look at the places marked with a cross. There are carvings there, pictures the Red King drew maybe nine hundred years ago.”

“Yes,” I said, sort of unsurprised. I had already seen the maps.

“Suppose you were to go and see them, Charlie. Suppose you found yourself traveling into them, suppose . . .”

“Suppose I were to meet him, when he was young?” I was so excited I jumped off the sofa. I’d already met the king when he was older. But the portrait in the school was painted at a time when the king was in mourning. He was pleased to see me, but never said much about his past. Now, at last, I might get a chance to find out who he really was and why he’d come to Britain.

Uncle Paton grinned. “You’ve got the idea, Charlie. You see those tomes” — he pointed to the books on the desk — “they might have been written hundreds of years ago, but they could have got a few things wrong. They can only tell us that the king arrived from Africa in the thirteenth century, that he was a magician, and married the daughter of a knight from Toledo. I want this book to be as truthful as I can make it. Bartholomew’s journals are invaluable, of course, especially the maps. But we

don't know what happened right at the very beginning, and why the king came so far."

"And we don't know what he thought and if his cloak was really magic?"

"The cloak. Hmm." Uncle Paton scratched his head. "We need Gabriel."

Gabriel Silk is a friend of mine. Another of the endowed. He's a bit odd — he lives with fifty-six gerbils and other assorted pets. But his family still possesses the Red King's cloak. Gabriel has incredible psychic powers. I knew what Uncle Paton was thinking. Wearing the cloak, Gabriel could use his ability to reach into the life of the Red King. Perhaps he could even see the world as the king saw it; he could listen, watch, and feel as he did.

As I said, it was the beginning of the summer holidays. We hadn't planned to go anywhere. Mom wasn't too keen on traveling; we'd just moved into a new house and there was still lots to do. But my dad was up for it. "Two weeks, Charlie. That's all I can spare for now, but we could always go again — in the autumn perhaps."

"And again and again and again?" I said.

My dad laughed. "Maybe, Charlie."

So my dad and I went to Africa. It was the best holiday I'd ever had in my life. We found the caves that Bartholomew mentioned. We found the rocks and walls and underground passages marked on his maps. We saw the pictures, the mysterious lines

and shapes that the Red King had carved. And when I touched them, I met the boy who made them. And every time we met, the king's voice became clearer and his face brighter, until it seemed as if I was just talking to a friend who was sitting beside me. Little by little he told me his story, and with Gabriel's help, my uncle and I learned about the enchanted cloak, where it came from, and how it helped the king to become a marvelous magician.

This is the first book that Uncle Paton wrote about the Red King. As for the next one — that's another story.

CHARLIE BONE

Diamond Corner