

APU & THE Monsters



Eric Lord & Pathy Aiyar

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Pictures by Eric Lord

Story by Pathy Aiyar

Acknowledgements

The idea that led to this book came from Akumal Ramchander. The pictures were produced first and the story came later. When Anya Gerlach looked at the pictures she seemed to understand the character of each of the 'monsters' and her insights helped us a lot. Janet Lord gave a lot of help in editing the first draft to give the story its present form, and especially in coming up with the wonderfully appropriate names of the creatures.

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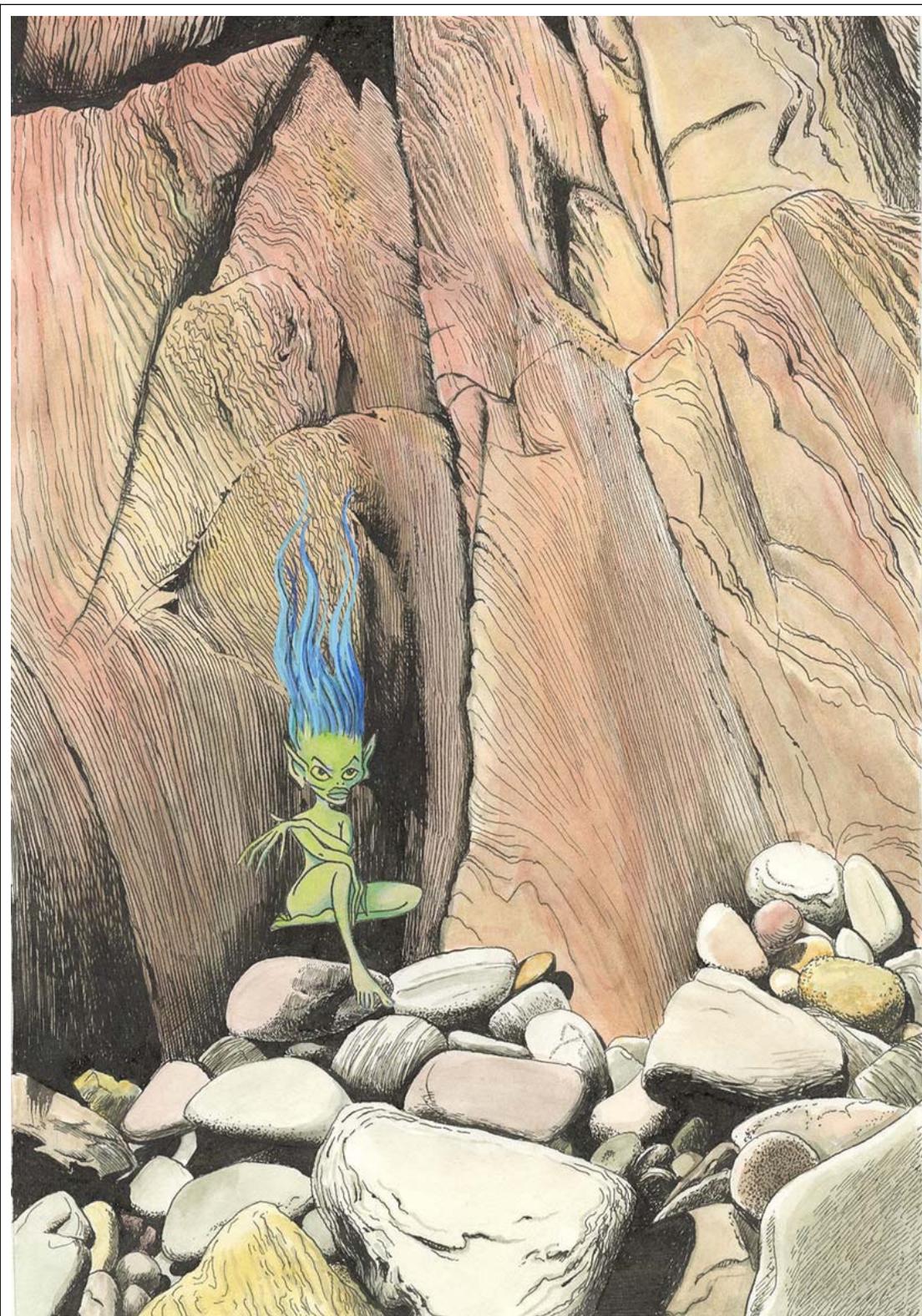
The Himalayas are the highest mountains in the world. The villagers who live among the foothills often look towards the mysterious mountains and wonder what strange creatures might live there and what the world beyond them might be like. Apu was a small boy who lived with his mother and stepfather. The stepfather was not a good man. He made Apu's mother work hard from dawn till dusk and used to lock the two of them in the house when he went off to work in the fields. Every day he would shout at Apu's mother, and he did all he could to frighten the boy. If Apu asked for an extra helping of food, he would tell Apu that the Fat Monster would come and gobble him up. If he found Apu climbing a tree he would tell him that the Forest Monsters would march down from the hills and beat him up. Apu often lay awake at night with the bedclothes pulled over his head, afraid of all the monsters that might be there in the dark.

One day the wicked stepfather forgot to lock the door when he went away. This was Apu's chance – out he ran into the village, looking for help. But his stepfather had remembered about the door and was coming back! When he saw Apu he started to chase him, shouting furious threats as he ran. Apu began to run up into the mountains. He knew that he was swift and nimble and that his stepfather was slow and clumsy.

At last he came to a silent and lonely place and stopped to rest.

When he got his breath back he looked around at the strange and rocky place. He had never come so far before. He was tired and hungry. And, of course, the more he looked around, the more he thought of all his stepfather had said about the horrid monsters that live among the rocks. They might appear at any moment! He felt very frightened and was about to run again when the strangest thing happened.

A little green goblin with blue hair appeared before him. And at the same moment the scary feeling melted away. He somehow felt that the funny creature would do him no harm. Was it real? He rubbed his eyes and looked again, and the goblin was still there! It was not sitting on the rocks, but floating above them the way he had heard that yogis do. (The yogis are the magical saints of India.) The Yogi Goblin slowly opened its eyes and looked at Apu, smiling gently. Then it spoke. The Yogi Goblin's voice was like the softest music and also like the wind that blows down from the snowy mountains.



“Apu,” said the Yogi Goblin, “I know all about you and your stepfather. I will try to help you. But I will need powerful magic to do it. Do you believe in magic, Apu?”

“Yes,” said Apu, “now that I have met you, I believe in magic.”

“And do you believe in monsters?” the Yogi Goblin asked.

“I don’t know,” said Apu, “but I know I am afraid of them.”

The Yogi goblin laughed, and its laughter was like the tinkling of bells and like the splashing of a mountain spring.

“You needn’t be afraid,” the Yogi Goblin said. “Monsters are only dangerous to cruel and wicked people. They live in the lonely places, the barren places and the secret places of the world. Those who have seen them can never be sure, afterwards, whether they were real or only dreamt about. Because, you see, they also live in that other world, where dreams and daydreams come from. They are the strangest creatures you are ever likely to meet! Would you like to meet them?”

By this time, all of Apu’s fears had gone and he was feeling brave and adventurous. “Yes, I would love to,” he said, “but I cannot travel far, for I have no shoes.”

The Yogi Goblin laughed again. “You won’t need shoes,” it said. “Just hold on to your belief in magic and come with me.” It then closed its eyes and Apu felt himself becoming lighter and lighter until at last he was floating like the Yogi Goblin. The two of them rose into the air together, higher and higher, until the village looked like a tiny model below them. Faster than the wind they travelled, towards the snow-capped mountains.

Finally they came down again on the shore of a deep, still lake. Delicate wisps of mist drifted and swirled over the surface of the water. All at once Apu saw that the mist was forming itself into a swirly, whirly kind of dragon! “This is the lake monster,” the Yogi Goblin said, “It’s called a Nebulosaur. He rests on the snowy peaks and comes down to drink the water when he’s thirsty.”

As Apu watched, The Nebulosaur seemed to get thinner and more wispy and its shape trailed away until it vanished altogether.



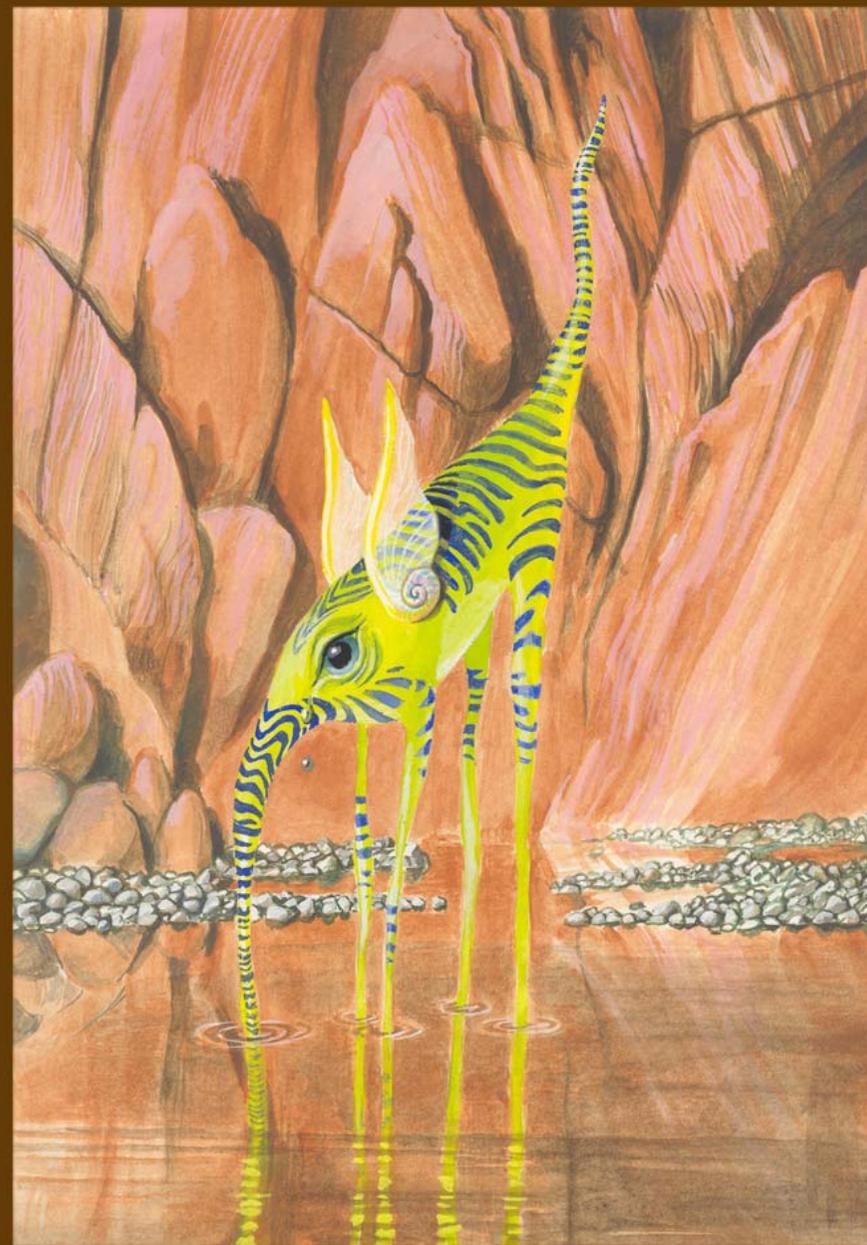
The Yogi Goblin took Apu by the hand and they began to float again. Not upwards this time, but downwards into the dark, dark ground! Apu shut his eyes but soon opened them again. All around was a mysterious green glow. They were in a huge, damp, gloomy cavern, far under the earth. And there, in the still waters of a dark lake, was an unquestionably ugly creature. Yet it kept looking down at its own reflection as if it were pleased by what it saw. "What has it got to be so pleased about?" Apu whispered to the Yogi Goblin. The creature heard and looked up. "I am Podsnapster," it proudly said, and its voice, which was like a hundred croaking frogs, echoed around the cavern. "I know more than anyone else in the world," it boomed, "is that not reason to be pleased? What do *you* know? It's not what you look like, it's what you know that's important."

At that moment a little birdlike creature flew into the cavern and whispered into Apu's ear. "I fly around all day. I look and listen and then I come and tell Podsnapster what I've seen and heard. That's how he knows so much. I am his best friend", it said. "I am his *only* friend, and therefore the best."

As Apu and the Yogi Goblin drifted up again into the air and sunlight, away from the two conceited creatures, Apu wondered what was the use of all that knowledge if it remained forever shut away, hidden in the dark.



They travelled on and came to a narrow canyon. There stood a strange but beautiful monster looking very sad. It had stripes like a zebra and a long thin trunk, and its ears were like pearly shells. It didn't seem to notice Apu and the Yogi Goblin. It only sobbed quietly and seemed to search the puddles at its feet with its long trunk. "This is the Pearly Lachrimate," said the Yogi Goblin. "Years ago he lost a beautiful jewel he was going to offer to his girlfriend. Since then he's been looking for it. He can't find it because he's wept so much he can't see to the bottom of the pools of his tears. Sometimes, when he hears of anyone unhappily in love, his tears become pearls." Just then, the melancholy creature fished up a pearl and gave it to Apu for his mother. Apu thanked him and, with the Yogi Goblin beside him, soared once more into the sky.



“The magic is working strongly now,” the Yogi Goblin said, “so we can travel faster and further.” They rose higher and sped forward until the whole land was a shimmering blur beneath them. In the blink of an eyelid they reached the vast deserts of Africa. Apu was amazed to see so much sand. He hadn’t known there was so much sand in the world.

And there on a rather small rock stood the rather large Elephonster. Do you suppose that, with all those eyes, he could see any better than you with your two eyes? No, not a bit! And do you suppose that, with all those ears, he could hear any better than you with your two ears? No, not at all! And when he tried to run away from Apu and the Yogi Goblin, he tripped himself up with his own clumsily feet. Poor Elephonster! “We should have elephoned to warn him we were coming,” they said, as they floated away.



They breezed along the banks of the Bosphorus, where a brace of Bosky Basilisks were basking in the bushes. “They’re very bashful,” whispered the Yogi Goblin. Apu thought that meant they were eager to bash anyone who came too close, so he cried “Let’s go!” and off they went.

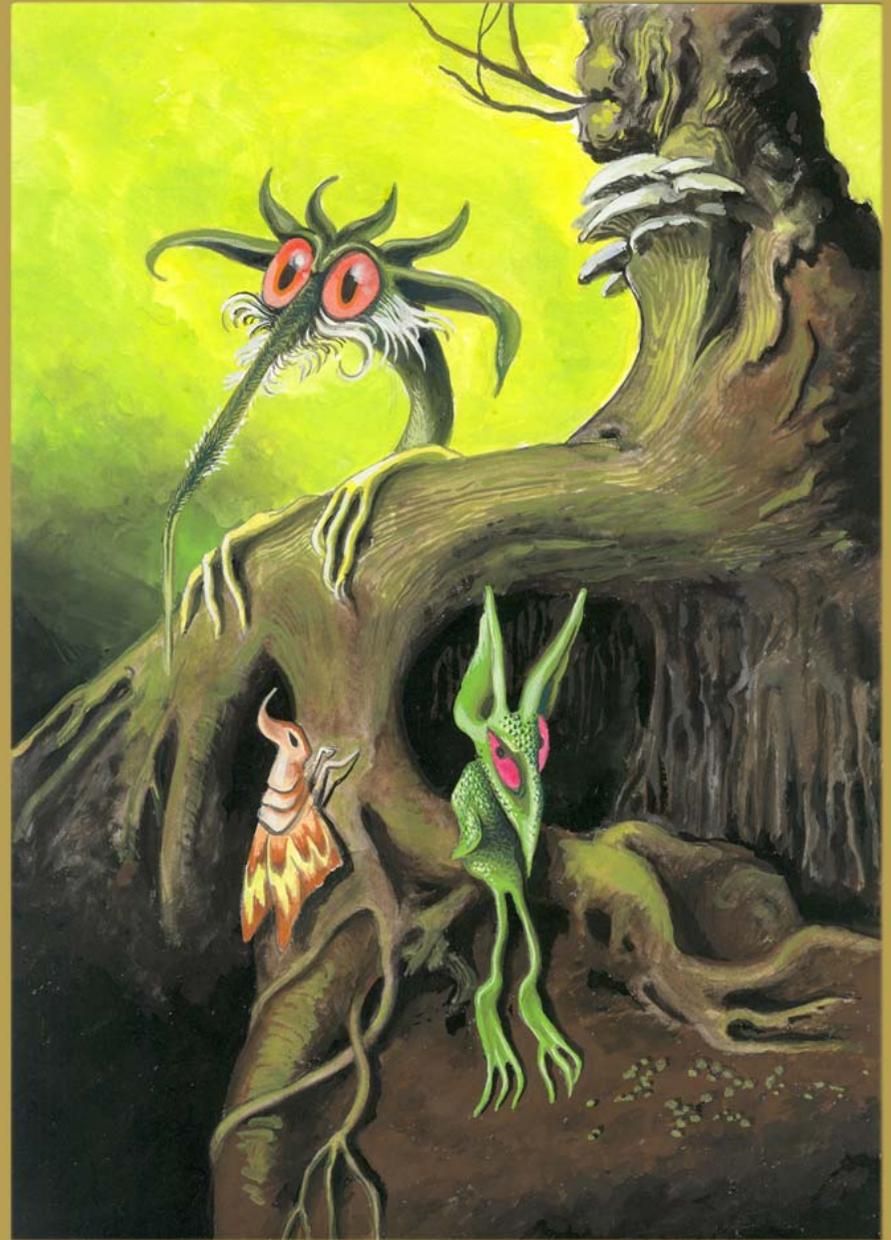
“Where to next?” asked Apu. “To the woodlands of Europe,” said his friend.



In one of the forests of France they found the Trufflesnuffler, the smallest of the monsters. He doesn't take up mushroom, so when he sits, he sits on a toadstool. Men train pigs to sniff out truffles, the delicious underground warty wallnuts, but the Trufflesnuffler does his own snuffling with his long pointy nose. "What big ears you have," said Apu. "All the better to hear the pigs with," said the Trufflesnuffler, "It's no good being taken for a fungus! And with that, he wiggled his ears and whisked away.



In the same forest they came across the three Dendrolateers: Thicket, Spinney and Copse. No-one knows what they do for a living. They are friendly to those who love the forests, but like to create panic in those who come to cut them down.



In the Black Forest in Germany Apu thought he saw an old man walking along under the trees, but as he came closer it seemed he was made of twigs and leaves. When he spoke, his voice was like the creaking of branches and the rustling of leaves.

“Hello, Apu,” he said, “I’m the Green Man. It’s my job to look after the woods and forests of this world, so I don’t get much free time, and I’m not as young as I used to be.” He gave a long sigh, like the wind playing across leafless branches. “I’ve been expecting to meet you, Apu, because I often talk to your little Yogi friend when I’m in the forest near your home.”

The three friends went along together for a little while, and Apu had a most interesting conversation with the Green Man. Unfortunately, no-one else knows what they said.



Suddenly, the Green Man pointed and said, "Look, did you see that?" It moved so quickly that Apu barely had time to catch a glimpse of it before it was gone. "That was a Twiglinger," the Green Man said. "You have to watch out for those as you walk in the woods. They like to lie in wait on a branch and grab your hair, and sometimes they crouch on the ground and trip you up. They're mischievous, but quite harmless if you watch your step."



Moments later, a fearsome beast grew rapidly out of the ground. In a few seconds it was fully eight feet tall! It was a Mushydontosaur! Though it looks terrifying, its teeth can't bite at all because they're as soft as marshmallow. The whole thing is just a puffed up lot of mushroomy, toadstooly, fungoidal stuff.

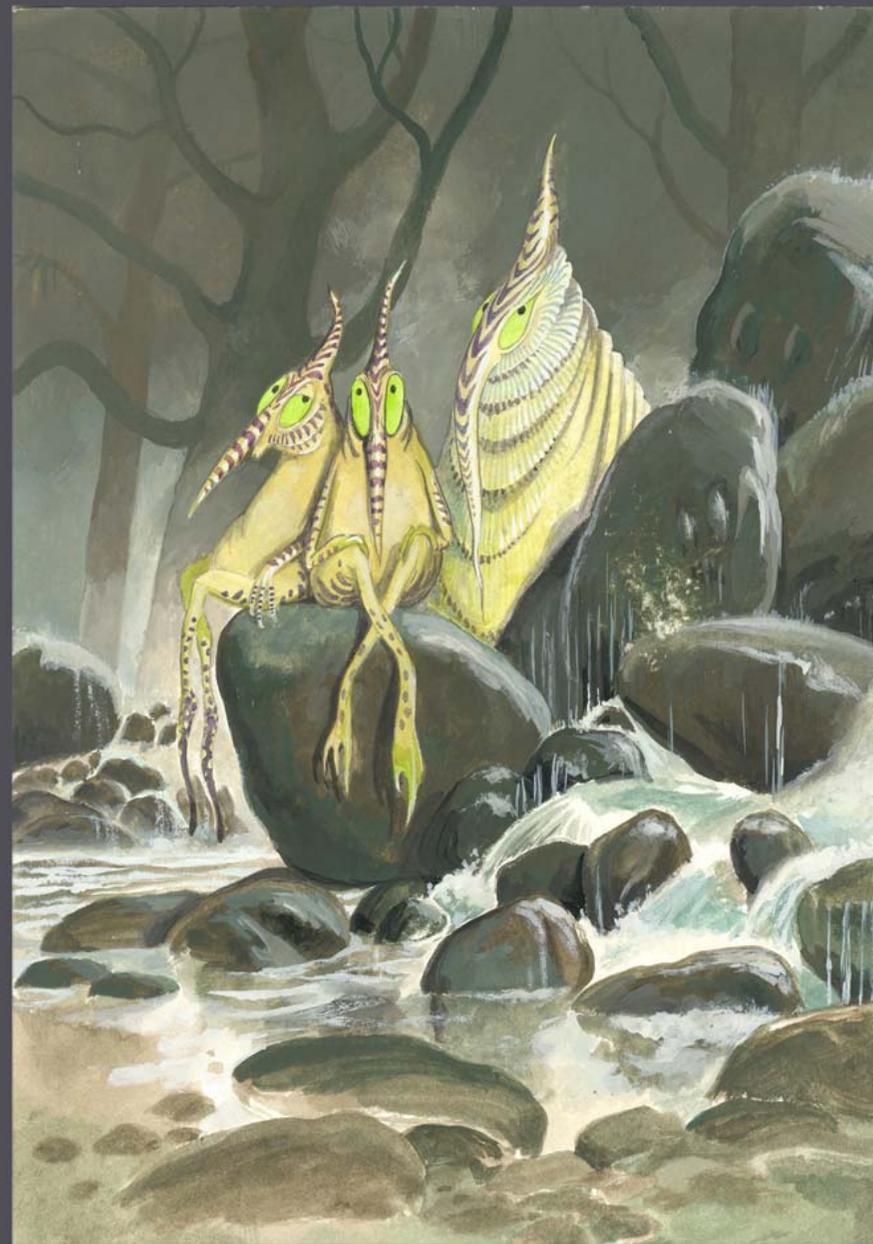


“Come with me to Norway,” said Green Man., “I have a lot of work to do there and I can show you some interesting monsters.” So Apu and the big Green Man and the little green Yogi Goblin rose into the air. Soon they were above the fjords and waterfalls and misty mountains of Norway. They descended in a shower of rain and alighted by a beautiful stream. It was very like the pure mountain streams Apu had known near his Himalayan home, with big black boulders and shiny water.

On one of the boulders sat three sad looking monsters. “Meet the Lugubries,” said the Green Man. they sat very still as if they themselves were stones. The rain ran over them and dripped from their long noses and toes. Occasionally they turned to one another and spoke in their deep gurgling voices. They seemed to be grumbling about something. Apu felt sorry for them. “What’s the matter?” he asked, “How can we cheer you up?”

“No, no, no! please don’t do that,” they all said, “We like to sit here and complain about this dreadful dampness. Then if we all get colds we can sit and sniffle and tell each other how awful we feel. When the weather is warm we like to grumble about the heat. And when the ice and snow come we can tell each other how unlucky we are, that we have no warm fire to sit beside. Please leave us alone.”

So the three friends left the Lugubries, and the Green Man, who had to get back to work, wandered into the forest. Then the sun came out and a rainbow appeared in the sky.



“Look, look!” cried the Yogi Goblin to Apu, “a Roygbivski!” A sparkling creature slid down the rainbow and began to twirl in the coloured light. “They live in the clouds,” said the Yogi Goblin. “When a rainbow appears in the sky they slide down to earth, where they sing and dance with joy. Roygbivskis are found all over the world, because they travel around with the rainbows. But not everyone is able to see them.”

Just then, the rainbow began to fade, as rainbows do, and as it faded so did the Roygbivski. “Quick,” said the Yogi Goblin, “Jump into the rainbow and we can all travel together.”



Apu and the Yogi Goblin and the Roygbivski flew together in a many-coloured cloud of droplets until they reached the shores of England. They landed in an orchard. Rather unexpectedly the rain began to stop, so they had to say goodbye to the Roygbivski.

In the orchard they found a family of Frondafoles. They are very tricky chaps. They pretend to be leafy fruit trees. Some garden owners are glad to have them because they keep thieves away. When badly brought up children steal the fruit from the trees the Frondafoles can stop pretending and can bite or sting them on their noses. *Those* children will never come back to *that* orchard!



The day was now ending, and by the time they had come to Spain it was already quite dark. The Yogi Goblin brought Apu to a spooky old moonlit castle. Phantasmic luminous owls flitted about it and weird masked sentinels stood guard. "These are the Inspectres," explained the Yogi Goblin. "They inhabit old buildings that are beautiful but abandoned, and scare the wits out of anyone who even thinks of knocking them down.



The night grew cold and Apu was very tired and very hungry. The Inspectres lit a fire and prepared a feast for Apu and the Yogi Goblin. They were entertained by the antics of the Fire Monster who appeared in the midst of the flames.



When the morning came, Apu was eager for more strange sights. “Where shall we go today?” he asked. “We should be getting back,” said the Yogi Goblin, “your mother will be worried.” And away they flew. But before returning Apu to his home the Yogi Goblin showed him some of the monsters that inhabit the jungles of India, Apu’s own country.

In the topmost branches of the highest tree sat a huge birdlike monster with glorious blue wings and many eyes, “He is the prince of all the exotic birds that live in this jungle,” said the Yogi Goblin. “He looks sad because he loves the princess of all the insects but she will not marry him. But sometimes she takes pity on him and dances for him.”



As he spoke, the Insect Princess appeared and danced before them. She had long, slender grasshopper legs and shimmering dragonfly wings and her dance was delightful. But Apu thought her face looked hard.



“If you look carefully you can see the Jungiggles here.” Apu had to peer hard into the green gloom, as they were rather transparent. “They spend their days as monkeys do – jumping and swinging – but night is their favourite time! Whenever they find a visitor, camping and snoring, they make a terrible racket doing bad imitations of fierce animal noises until he’s thoroughly scared. Then they collapse into giggles and vanish into the jungle.”



Finally, Apu found himself again by the door of his own house, with the Yogi Goblin perched on his shoulder. All his fear of monsters was gone. He wasn't even afraid of his stepfather any more, especially now that he had his little green friend with him.

When the wicked stepfather opened the door he once he flew into a rage and began shouting in his usual way and made as if to hit Apu. He thought the Yogi Goblin was some kind of ridiculous doll that Apu had stolen from the market. Hr reached out to snatch it – and then he started to change shape in a most alarming way! His flailing arms became great droopy wings and his voice altered to a squeaky grunt. he began to fade away until he was quite ghostly and transparent. Eventually only his angry, ugly face was still recognisable. He drifted away over the fields, squeaking and grunting like a discontented ghost.



Afterwards, Apu and his mother lived happily together. The Yogi Goblin often visited them and helped them with their work. Even after Apu had grown up he still occasionally met his little friend, but less often. He never forgot the strange things they had seen together.

