



Tess Thistleberry And The Doom Machine

Marius Visser

Action/adventure, Kids, Mystery

‘Oh, what a wonderful morning. Tess, we should fly past the city gates. It’s still early. Tess, Come on. We can make it quick and have breakfast.’

Young Tess walked up to her dad, still half asleep and said, ‘I was having such a nice dream. Why do you have to ruin everything?’

‘Come on kiddo, where’s your enthusiasm?’ he said swinging his fist through the air.

Slouched, Tess shrugged, ‘Fine. If that’s what it takes to get you stop to nagging. Let’s go.’

The blanket she had wrapped around her fell to the ground displaying the most beautiful wings, moving up and down as she stretched and said, ‘I’m ready if you are.’

Marvelling the transformation his daughter had gone through as she grew out of her baby fat, the little girl he once carried in his arms was growing up to be a woman. The fur on her face was the purest of whites and her short tail the most beautiful blue. Sighing and shaking his head as he pulled his face, he thought of the next few years of adolescence, then said, ‘I have been ready all my life.’ With that, Thom ran to the front door, slammed it open and took to the sky with Tess on his heels. Racing around each other they flew with great speed as they headed for the city gates.

The life of a Lem was an uncomplicated one. You do what is needed, when it is needed. After all, if it isn’t needed, why do it at all? Flying over the city of Lemeranthia, a roaring sound of thunder in the distance brought Thom’s attention around. Their domed sky had a tear, debris falling to the ground accompanied by the brightest beaming lights he had ever seen.

Pulling Tess closer he said, 'Go home kiddo, I don't like the look of that.'

With a shake of her tiny body, she was free from his grip and said, 'I am going nowhere...other than with you. You wanted me to come, so here I am.'

With a sigh he said, 'Stubborn as your mom was,' then gripped her hand and buzzed closer to investigate.

Down below, workers were gathering the debris and moving it away. Among the workers, wearing a fancy blue suit shouting orders, Thom saw a Lem he knew well and swooped down to talk.

'Glen, what is going on here?'

An unruly Lem, Glen would stop at nothing to gain his riches and waved Thom away saying, 'Don't you worry Thomas Thistleberry. I am only doing the city a favour by collecting all this valuable food falling from the heavens. Pure manna for us Lem. Here taste a piece,' and with that shoved it into Thom's mouth.

Chewing on the sweet white spongy cake, Thom's eyes grew large as his taste buds soared to new heights of excitement.

'Wow! What is that? And what is happening to the sky? It is looking worse than ever.'

'Don't really know Thom, saw it this morning and thought I could use it in my favour. Now please go, I have work to do.'

Tess tugged on her dad's arm as she stared to the falling heavens saying, 'Okay, I want to go home now. I don't like this anymore.'

'Ok kiddo. Let's go.'

Later that day, Thom stood in his little garden, looking at the sky and spoke to himself, 'I need to know what is going on. That tear is getting worse every day.' Taking flight he headed straight for the tear in the sky. Higher and higher he flew, his wings growing tired but still he pushed on. Nearing the tear, Thom could swear he saw a flutter of movements beyond.

Exhausted and daunted by the thought of flying to the heavens, Thom screamed as the bright light burnt his eyes as he neared the hole trying to evade the last remnants of debris falling to the ground. Like a missile one of the sponge cake took him in the face, sending him spinning in the air. Wiping the cake from his face, he righted himself, looked at the tear and went for it again.

As if all else went silent, only the hum of absolute nothingness in his ears he focused only on the immediate task and saw the existential breach for what it was. Their sky was indeed crumbling, and as he passed through, the bright lights and thundering sounds all around him awoke him to their existence. Air burnt his lungs and then he saw them. The giants roaming the heavens, sitting, flushing liquids and food down their throats. It

was these foods that fell down the breach. The beings were talking to each other, pointing towards his world but he did not understand.

'Look Tanya, it's falling apart,' Jack said as he took the saw and continued, 'Bet we can still get some use out of this table. Maybe wine rack?'

Tanya came round the table and said, 'But we've had it for years, can't we just fix it. It's part of the family. I mean, it has come all the way from your grandfather.'

Jack pressed the top and felt the movement underneath, 'I'm sorry honey, but it feels rotten. They have even patched it up to keep it from breaking in half. It's on its last legs. I mean, just look at this,' pulling on a piece of wood nailed in to the side, he broke it off with relative ease.

Leaning over the table with the saw in hand, Jack looked at the sky and said, 'Wish I had a circular saw. This is going to take a while. I'll start tomorrow morning. I don't want to work at night and bother the neighbours.'

'Oh no. He is going to destroy our home. I have to do something, I have to confront this being. But how?'

The way back down to Lemeranthia was bleak. Thom deliberated with himself on what to do next. Destruction of his city was imminent and he could not understand why. They had been a peaceful nation ever since they drove off the terrible critters that devoured their world's wood. Racing down to town hall, he burst through the doors of the congressional meeting, startling the hairy congressman, sending his glasses flying off his face to the ground and his staff wide eyed as they were hunkered over the table.

His large white moustache shook as he shouted, 'What in the blazes are you doing Thom? We are in a meeting. Get out!'

'Just listen to me sir. We are in grave danger. The giants are going to destroy Lemeranthia. We have to do something,' Thom pleaded as he pointed his four arms to the tear in the sky, then continued, 'I flew through to the heavens, I saw them with my own eyes. He was wielding a large machine of doom that will destroy our home.'

Everyone in the room stared at poor Thom with stern gazes when the congressman burst out laughing, holding his stomach as he fell on the floor. The whole room joined in as tears rolled down their stubby little faces. This was not what Thom expected and ran back out the door. Walking through the unadorned lobby, he looked at the portraits of their previous congressman and mumbled to himself, 'Hairy oafs!'

Town's square was laden with bustling Lems as they went about their business. An anxious, nerve wrecked Thomas Thistleberry slowly made his way to the statue of Sir Fruigleheit, the Lem that led them against the

invading Timber Eaters, the saviour of Lemeranthia. Clearing his throat, he shouted out loud to all, 'Please everyone, listen carefully! We have to leave Lemeranthia! It is not safe anymore. I saw the giants up above and they are getting ready to destroy our city.'

All the lems in the square looked at Thom as if mad, one lady walked past and slapped him hard across the face as her young one wailed and said, 'You should be ashamed, frightening people like that.'

Thom sighed as he left the square, thinking of what to do next and waited for Tess to get back home from school. He did not want to embarrass her as well, so he started packing their belongings. Lems did not travel much and relocated even less, but Thom was not about to do nothing, he would search for a new home for them. He would leave Lemeranthia.

The door swung open and a high pitched voice rang through the house, 'I am home.' Hearing rummaging, she heard books and pots and pans being flung aside and said, 'What are you doing?'

Turning around, he gripped her by the arms and said, 'We are leaving Lemeranthia Tess. I flew up. They are going to destroy Lemeranthia. We have to get a new home.'

Tess saw the fear in her father's eyes and smiled at him as she said, 'Sure dad, I will help pack. You carry on here and I will start at the top.'

Wedging open the window in her room, she climbed through and took off down the street, flying as fast as her wings would allow. Remembering the old stories of Sir Fruigleheit. Tales had spoken of a wizard, an old and crazy fool with a magician's complex. The oldest of the Lems, he had endured through the ages what no other Lem had. He was the only one who really knew all the history of Lemeranthia. If anyone knew anything about these giants, it would be him.

The rickety old house rocked slightly on its supporting stumps underneath its floor. Half of them devoured by the wood eating critters during their attempted invasion. Ascending the short staircase, she said, 'Hello. Is there anybody here? Mr Fruigleheit?'

The door creaked open and the stench knocked her breath away. A thick odour of something being cooked over a fire accompanied with the dusty old house, made it difficult to breath. The weathered old home was dark and quiet as she slowly moved through in search of Mr Fruigleheit.

A clatter to her right as pans fell on the floor, a flurry of movements and short breathed shouts surrounded her, then ceased as her short tail began to glow, lighting up the dark house. In the corner stood a figure, pretending to be a lamp, unmoving and unwilling to accept the fact that he had been caught by this sweet young girl. With a smile on her face she stared at him and said, 'Mr Fruigleheit, is that you?'

The lamp shade's eyes turned to her and said in a muffled voice, trying not to move his lips, but failed, 'Mr Fruigleheit is not here. Please come back later.'

'I can see your lips moving. We need your help. My father flew to the heavens and saw the giants. He says they are going to destroy Lemeranthia. Can you help?'

Unable to hold his pose any longer, he slipped and fell to the floor in a dismal display of aerobatics as he tried to regain his composure and said, 'He really saw the giants?'

'Why yes, sir. That's what he said.'

Rubbing the fur on his chin, he said, 'Follow me dear girl. We have much to discuss.'

Through the lounge then the kitchen filled with vials of bubbling liquids all different colours they walked when Mr Fruigleheit said, 'Be careful not to touch anything. Or we might go up in smoke.'

The old Lem reached for a trapdoor in the kitchen floor, clutching his back and groaning from the strain when Tess moved past and said, 'Here, let me.'

The descent down the short staircase proved more than the old Lem could handle and as soon as he got to the bottom, slumped down on a wooden crate, breathing ferociously.

Walls lined with more vials, tables with beakers over flames and bubbling liquids rising to the top adorned the small room. Tess looked around and asked, 'What is all this?'

'Well, this my dear is magic. Where you are standing now is exactly where I stood create the potions we used against the Timber Eaters.'

'You mean science right?'

'What is science?'

'It's a subject at school. What did you want to discuss?'

Struggling to get to his feet, Mr Fruigleheit pulled himself up as he said, 'My grandfather, and his great grandfather before him passed down that box over there. Bring it to me real careful like.'

Inside a glass cupboard hanging over the table, was the little wooden box. Taking it out Tess saw the intricate carvings on the lid depicting a Lem and in the distance the giant. As she handed it to Mr Fruigleheit she said, 'What does it mean?'

'Have you ever heard the saying, "Nothing new under the sun"? It means that everything you might think is new, has happened before and it will happen again. We just have to be vigilant and do what is needed to get us past this hurdle.'

Inside the box laden with red silk were three vials, one blue, one red and one bright yellow.

Wow that is beautiful. What does it do?'

Mr. Fruigleheit set the three vials on the table and turned the box in the air as he studied the pictures and said, 'Well my dear, as I remember the stories by my gran-pa-pa, we have to get the giant to drink this potion after I have mixed it. This will make him able of hearing and understanding you. But the effects wears off so you better convince him real quick not to destroy our city.'

'Got it.'

The earth shook below his feet, a rumbling in the sky as debris started falling down on Lemeranthia, destroying houses and buildings everywhere. Thom grabbed his coat and shouted up the stairs, 'Tess, let's go. It is starting! Tess! What is she doing now?'

Running up he opened the door and was greeted by the empty room.

'What? But where?'

Running back down, he ran outside and looked up at the sky. The teeth of the doom machine was tearing their city apart, sending the debris everywhere. Lems ran and flew around looking for cover. Shouts of fear filled the city. In the distance, he saw a tiny speck making its way to the heavens and squinted.

'Oh no!' His heart stopped in his throat and he felt at the edge of passing out when he saw his little Tess flying towards the machine of doom. Without hesitation he flapped his wings and took to the sky as fast as he could. Timber missiles serenaded the sky as pieces fell from up high. Shouting as loud as he could, he saw a large piece taking her in the chest. His emotional safety walls crumbled as he saw her falling, her left wing hanging limp as she twirled in the sky, plummeting to the ground. As a bullet he dove after her, his wings at the point of tearing from his body.

Shouting he said, 'Tess! Look up!'

Her father was racing past the falling timbers, weaving through them like an Olympian. Reaching to grab her hand, a big piece of timber knocked him over the head and tore through his wings. Tess held on to her father's hand shouting, 'Hang on dad, I got you.' Dazed, Thom shook his head as he saw his little girl with a limp wing fighting for them both.

'Get ready, it is not going to be a soft landing,' Tess shouted and just before hitting the ground she let go of Thom's hand. With a rumbling, tumbling, dust swirling plunge to the ground, they rolled and rolled until eventually came to a stop.

Quickly to his feet, he grabbed Tess, inspecting her to make sure she was okay and said, 'What were you thinking Tess? You could have got yourself killed! Lucky for you, your wing doesn't look permanently damaged.' Tears streamed from her face as she said, 'I wanted to do something about it! Not just run away!'

Taken aback, Thom stumbled over some rocks as he said, 'What would you have me do? I needed to protect you. These Lems did not want to listen to me.'

Taking out a vial with a white liquid from her pouch, she said, 'We need to get the giant to drink this. Please trust me daddy.'

'What is that? Where did you get that? Give it here young lady and march back home.'

'No! I am sorry daddy. But I have to do this.' Quickly taking to the sky once more she knew he could not follow her and said, 'I will be safe. I promise.'

Flying up and up, weaving once more through the debris falling from the sky, she could still hear her father calling her name from below. Her wing was hurt, but she was not about to quit this mission. The doom machine was almost halfway through Lemeranthia, the teeth of the silver machine destroying everything in its path. Lems flew around gathering their belongings to escape the inevitable end.

Flying next to the grinding doom machine, Tess thought she was going to go deaf as the machine moved, tearing at their city. She could see the bright light that Lems hated so much, blinding her from above. Everything was shaking, her head was buzzing, and her insides wanted to be on the outside as she went up and up. Finally passing through, she was greeted by the exultation of serenity as sounds fell away and the imminent danger was gone.

Looking up, she saw the giant working the doom machine and looked around for any water he might be drinking, but only an empty glass stood on the table.

'What am I going to do?' A memory of her biology class came to mind where she heard something about the nose and mouth being connected, then pulled her face in disgust at the idea.

'Oh well. Here goes nothing.'

As fast as she could muster, she flew towards the giant's face aiming for a nostril.

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Looking over his work, the saw was stuck halfway through the table. He still had so much to do. Sighing he said, 'Well, it's not going to do it by itself.'

An unnerving feeling rocked Jack as something flew up his nose and sent him into a fit of spewing and blowing his nose all the while shouting at whatever distressed him so. The most gross and despicable noises followed for a while until eventually he felt the discomfort disappear.

Jack shook his head as he took up the saw and stumbled a bit, knocking into the table as he tried to right

himself. The glass shattering on the ground.

‘What’s happ...?’

The world spun faster and faster as Jack turned paler and paler, not knowing what was happening as he saw everything surrounding him grew larger and larger. Minuscule insects could now be seen as they were even bigger than him. Suddenly falling through the air, Jack shouted, ‘This is just a dream! This is just a dream! But he did not recognise the language he spoke, yet understood it. A mere clucking and buzzing sounds that escaped his mouth.

Finally realising he was not falling anymore, he looked up and started screaming as he saw a furry creature with two legs, four arms and a tight skirt gripping his arm as they flew to the top of the table.

‘Please! Let me go! What are you? Please don’t eat me!’ Jack shouted.

As he was set down, the creature said, ‘I am not going to eat you. I am Tess.’

Looking around, Jack fell to his knees, vomiting down a crack in the wood then turned back and saw the disgust in her face as she said, ‘You are throwing up? I should be the one throwing up. Who do you think had to fly up your nose to get you to drink the potion? I did not expect this, you were only supposed to be able to hear and understand me.’

‘Argh. What is going on here? Is this a dream?’

Down in Lemeranthia, the congressman ran outside trying to get to his home when out of nowhere was covered in a repulsive green liquid, making him stink from head to toe.

This day was just getting worse for the poor congressman as he shouted up to the sky, ‘Which one of you Lems just threw up on me?’

Tess slapped him across the face to stop jabbering like an idiot as she said, 'Calm down! The effects wears off in a while. I needed to do this so you would stop destroying our home.'

Jack shook his head and felt the earth shaking as his wife walked outside with a glass of water. Gigantic, she towered over them and set down the glass, then heard her say, 'What in the blazes did he do here, and where is he anyway? Jack!'

Shouting at the top of his voice, Jack waived his arms about, trying to get her attention as she turned about and vanished through the door.

Sighing, Tess said, 'Come we have to go.'

Wide eyed and terrified, Jack turned to run when Tess grabbed him with all four arms and held him in place as she said, 'I told you. I just need to show you why you need to stop what you are doing.'

Down the tear they flew, as Jack hung screaming by her arms. Flying to the lookout over the city, Tess set Jack down and said, 'Look around you and see the devastation you have caused.'

Climbing to his feet, Jack stared down at the chaos below. Houses were demolished, debris lay strewn all over, smoke trailed over the city and in the distance he could see the massive saw plunged halfway through. Some Lems lay on the ground injured and unable to move. He heard the screams and crying from below and fell to his knees as he said, 'I didn't know, I swear. Take me closer.'

Slowly flying over the city she heard her father's voice somewhere down below and shouted back, 'Dad! I am here! Where are you?' A tall building stood in front of them and Tess decided to put Jack down on the roof to have a better look.

'Tess! Get off the building.' Thom shouted as he saw her landing on the roof. A sudden buckle of the building collapsed the roof in a flash, sending Tess and Jack tumbling down into the furnace below. Trapped, fire raged around them, the heat intense. Thom wanted to run into the building but was restrained by the authorities saying the building is about to collapse and that he could not enter.

Tears streamed down his face as he shouted, 'No! My baby is in there. Let me go! I have to save her! Let me go!' But they did not relent.

Up in the building Jack quickly grabbed a few rags in the corner and wrapped it around them as he said, 'Stay low and try not to breath in any of the smoke. We are going to have to get to the bottom of the building to get out, the roof is sealed shut.'

Tess grabbed his arm and said, 'Why not go out the windows?'

'No! You have been exposed to too much smoke. The pure oxygen onslaught you will get once you go out might just make you pass out and fall from the sky.'

Slowly they made their way down the stairs and felt the weight of the building shift beneath their feet. They had gone down two floors without any problems when Jack heard the screams of a Lem close by, 'Please help! I am stuck!'

'Keep talking, I will follow your voice.' Jack made his way closer to the Lem as he lay under a collapsed beam, slowly being crushed as the building shifted. 'I need something long and strong to lift this beam Tess, help me search, quick.'

Tess ran back with a long piece of metal in her hands saying, 'Will this work?'

What must have been a nail from the table that had fallen down into the building lay in her hands. Jack grabbed it as he said, 'That is perfect. When I say, you lift with everything you have.'

'One, two, three, now lift!' Shouting as he heaved on the nail he placed under the beam lifting it just enough for the Lem to scooch out from the tight space. Finally free from, the three headed down the stairs as quick as they could.

'Let me go you buffoon! My daughter is in there!' Thom shouted to no avail as he was pushed down to the ground. He could not see what was going on but heard Lems suddenly screaming and then the roar of thunder as the building collapsed in on itself. 'No!' He shouted as tears rolled down his face as he lay limp in the arms of the Lem that was holding him down.

'Daddy! Where are you? Thomas Thistleberry!' Feint shouts came from the dust as it started to settle from the building as six Lems emerged. Thom jumped up as he heard little Tess's voice and ran forward to embrace her. They had rescued three more lems as they made their way down the building all of which was now in the embrace of their loved ones.

Jack tapped Tess on the shoulder as she and Thom still hugged and said, 'I am sorry Tess, but can I get back now? I would like to see my wife as well.'

Tess pulled away from her father and immediately hugged Jack as she said, 'Thank you for saving us in there.' Thom looked at the man, confused at how he could be here, then looked at his daughter and said, 'Did you do this?'

'Yes daddy, with the help of Mr Fruigleheit and his potions. His name is Jack daddy, and he did not know we lived here.'

Thom looked at Jack and said, 'Is this true?'

'Yes it is sir. And I would like you to know that I plan on fixing your city as soon as I get back.'

Thousands of Lems had heard the conversation and surrounded them as they spoke. The four other Lems came in one by one saying their thanks for saving them when Jack suddenly grew a little.

'Oh no!' Tess shouted and grabbed Jack by the hand, then continued, 'The potion is wearing off daddy. We need to get him back quickly.'

Wide eyed, Thom tried to fly, but his wings were still damaged and Jack was getting too heavy for Tess to lift into the sky. The three Lems they had saved ran closer, each grabbing a limb as Tess shouted, hold on Jack.'

Setting Jack down on the deck of the table, Tess said, 'Please, don't forget about us and one day maybe tell your son. And thank you again for saving me.'

'I am sorry that it was me that caused all of the problems in the first place Tess. I will rebuild the table. You might feel some rocking in the next couple of days, but know that it is for the best.'

'Farewell.'

Jack grew and grew to once more stand towering over them, waiving as he did.

The Lems celebrated as the doom machine was pulled from the city. Tess flew down to city hall to speak aloud, 'Do not fear dear Lems, the danger has passed. We are safe once more!'

Thom watched as his daughter give the speech, realising that she is truly turning into her mother, a headstrong Lem that was not afraid to take on anything.

The next morning shouts rang out in his house, 'Come on Dad! It's getting late. Let's go for a quick fly to the city gates. Come one old Lem, where's your enthusiasm?'

Thom rose from his bed and made his way down saying, 'What? I mean, yeah, I would love to kiddo, but my wings are still damaged. Don't think I can fly.' Shaking his head, Thom continued, 'Hang on a minute.' And rushed to the kitchen. Rummaging through cabinets, Tess heard the sound of sticky tape and saw her father emerge with wrapped wings as he said, 'I don't know if it will work, but let's find out.'

With no further delay they took to the sky playing tag through the city.

Breathing deep, Jack knocked on the door. He could hear voices coming from within and footsteps getting louder until the door creaked open. An elderly woman's knees buckled beneath her, nearly sending her to the ground as she stared upon her son for the first time in years.

Dinner was prepared and a joyous day was had as the family got together once again.

Jack sat across from his father at the dinner table, waiting for his mom and wife to leave the room and said, 'Honey, would you please help my mom in the kitchen? I have to speak to dad for a bit.'

As the women left the room, he looked at his father and started crying as he said, 'The stories you told me as a child...They were real. Weren't they? I thought you a mad old fool. The table you gave me. I wanted to cut it up because it is rotten. But they stopped me dad. I am sorry for not coming to visit sooner.'

After years of regretful stubbornness, they finally sat across from each other, his father wanted to speak as a tear rolled down his face, but was stopped as his wife walked in. Instead he just smiled and said, 'Yes my son, it is good to see you too.'

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