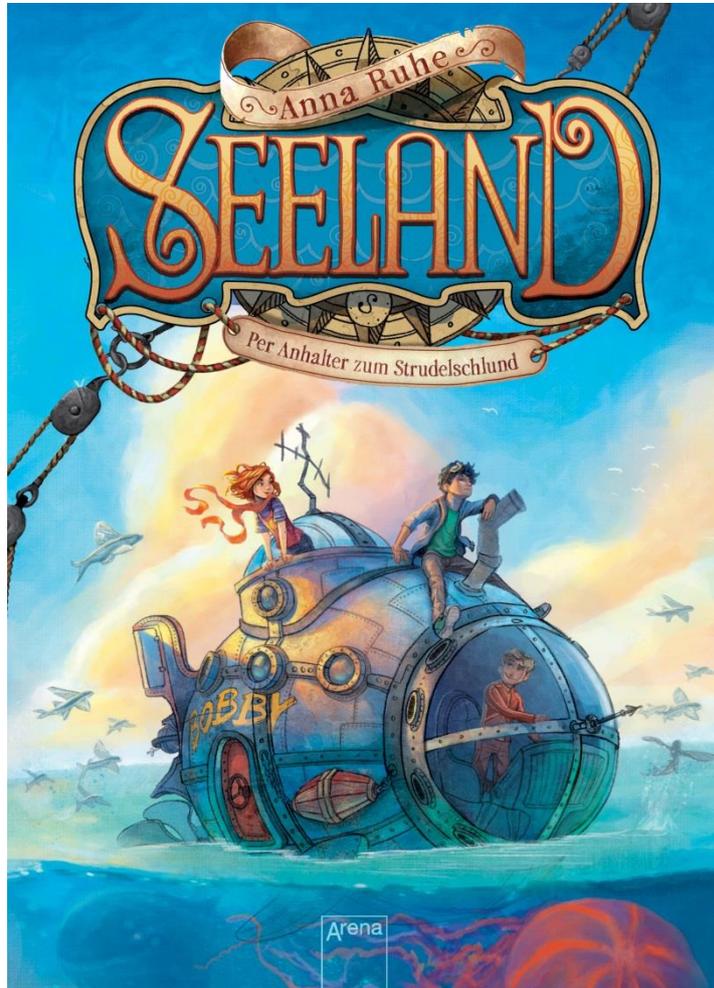


## SAMPLE TRANSLATION



## SEALAND

by

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German title: Seeland

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## Chapter 4

'Psst!' Max put his index finger to his mouth. From far away a quiet humming could suddenly be heard and waves were striking the rock ledge beneath Max and Emma at ever closer intervals. Emma sat up and listened too. The noise was getting louder and louder. As far as Max could see there was absolutely nowhere to hide. With their backs to the cave wall they sat motionless, watching a flickering light that was coming towards them from the depths of the gigantic cavern.

Eventually they could make out a type of raft. It reminded Max of a dinghy, except that it seemed to be made of metal. There was a man standing on the glistening deck, wearing a strange suit and holding a long pole that he seemed to be using to steer, like one of the Venetian gondoliers. All at once the humming died away, the boat slowed down and the man put the pole to the side. He looked in their direction – he had obviously seen them too.

Instinctively Max held his breath. Even Emma seemed to have nothing to say for once. They sat nervously beside one another as the raft approached them.

The man didn't look at all threatening, just very unusual. His stomach protruded from beneath a brown, tightly-fitting overall like a ball that had been cut in half. The outfit reminded Max a little of the neoprene suits worn by surfers. When the raft was close enough to touch the ledge Max stuffed Mortensen's glasses quickly back into the envelope. 'Erm...hello,' he blurted out.

'Hello to you!' the man answered. 'What are you doing here?'

'We're lost,' Emma explained. 'Please could you tell us how we get back to Bittie Cross?'

'Bittie-what?'

'To Bittie Cross. We came through a tunnel that finished in the waterfall here.' Emma pointed up to the roof. 'Do you know whether there are any stairs around here?'

The man looked at them irritably. 'I'm sorry, *where* do you want to go?'

'To Bittie Cross. It must be directly above this cave,' she repeated slowly.

'Above us?' He smiled as though someone had just told him a really good joke. 'I've never heard that one before! And that's saying something, I know my way round this area pretty well.' With practised movements he tied the raft to a stone and jumped over to Emma and Max on the ledge. 'Let me just get this done first, children.' He bent over his boat and dragged over a large crate. He began to chop up giant mushrooms with a long knife, one after the other, and put them into the crate.

'No more stories now, you two: where are your parents?'

Emma wrinkled her forehead uncomprehendingly. 'At...home?'

'And your floaters?'

'Our what, sorry?' Max asked.

‘Your floaters!’ the man repeated and pointed to the metal raft that was bobbing up and down in the water. ‘How else did you get here?’

Emma gave Max a disbelieving sideways look. ‘We just told you, we came through the waterfall up there.’

The man folded his arms. ‘You’re really trying to tell me that you come from above the cave?’

‘That’s right,’ Emma replied. ‘We’re just looking for the way back.’

He scratched his chin. ‘There’s probably a simple explanation. When you’re lost you sometimes get a bit confused. We’ll find the way back to your Pretty House.’

‘*Bittie*, Bittie Cross,’ Emma corrected him.

‘Whatever. What are your names, anyway?’

‘I’m Max and this is Emma.’

‘I’m Ziggy. You’re very lucky that I came to harvest the mushrooms today. If you like I can take you to Eldena with me and you can show me exactly where your village is on a map.’ He waved the pair over to the floater. ‘If you move back a bit you’ll fit next to the crate there.’

Emma sat so close to Max that their arms were touching. ‘We don’t know him at all,’ she whispered into his ear. ‘And I think he’s a bit crazy.’

‘Perhaps he can help us though,’ Max whispered back. ‘And anyway there are two of us.’

‘Come on, I don’t have all day. Are you coming or not?’

They climbed uncertainly onto the platform of the strange raft, which rocked to and fro at the slightest movement. It wasn’t easy to keep your balance.

‘You’re acting as though it’s your first time on a floater. You’d better sit down before you fall in.’ He picked up the pole and straightaway the humming could be heard again. The floater lurched into motion.’

‘It’s really nice of you to give us a lift,’ Emma said.

‘It’s no problem, children. I’d like to know where you really come from. It’s beyond me at the moment.’ He steered the floater skilfully around the waterfall. They soon picked up speed, gliding smoothly over the water.

‘The cave is huge,’ Emma whispered to Max and pointed into the distance, where two large tunnels led into the darkness.

‘I don’t know whether it was such a good idea to move away from the waterfall,’ Max murmured back.

Ziggy cleared his throat. ‘It’s a complete puzzle to me how you two managed to come through the long waterways without a floater. It’s a good distance and there’s nowhere in between. I’ve always thought that Eldena was the closest place to the cidum caves.’ Ziggy seemed to be talking

more to himself and obviously didn't expect an answer. As it turned a bit darker he kicked a sort of lamp with his foot: a round wire mesh surrounded a small piece of rock that began to glow after it was kicked.

They chugged onwards. The cliff walls receded further and further into the distance until there was soon little else but clouds and water all around them – as if they were on the open sea. But clouds? In a cave? The roof was so far away that they could hardly see it anymore. A dense light-grey sky stretched out above them. The light seemed somehow muted ... and there were no shadows.

Max turned to Ziggy. 'Why is it so light here?'

'Don't you children learn anything at all in school anymore? Because of the lumirocks, of course.'

Emma and Max looked at each other in disbelief. 'Lumirocks?'

Ziggy rubbed his forehead as though he was dealing with two idiots. 'Yes, the stones that light up.'

'Ah...yes, of course. How do the stones do that then?'

Ziggy looked at Max as though he'd just sprouted a second head. 'Well, you make them glow. For warmth and light. You know...by making them vibrate.'

Vibrating, glowing stones...Max's head was spinning. What was this place? Or was this fellow really mad? He opened his mouth a few times and then shut it again. It probably wasn't a good idea to ask more questions now.

They glided on, still humming. The light gradually dimmed, as though dusk was approaching. After a few minutes Ziggy struck his pole against two funnel-shaped stones that were tied onto the front of the raft, which then cast beams of light onto the water in front of them like two headlights.

'Look at that!' Emma pointed to some lights that were glowing in the distance.

'Is that Eldena?' Max asked.

'Yes.' Ziggy steered purposefully towards the lights until they could make out a group of houses rocking up and down in the middle of the water. Long platforms floated underneath and in between the houses with countless landing stages attached to them. As they got closer they could see that the ground consisted of separate parts, which linked the houses closely to one another like a chain. The little town looked as though it had been cobbled together, as though all the building materials had been taken from a scrap yard. The houses were built of different-coloured sheets of metal. Many were just one storey, others were three or four. The flat roofs were obviously used as terraces, studded with countless tub containing strange plants.

There were colourful murals emblazoned on most of the houses' metal facades. The facade that they were just steering towards had a picture with dancing octopuses. Beside it was a portrait of an older man with silver hair combed back over his head. In his hand he held a trident and on his head was a crown of flowers.

*Oh great. Hippies,* Max thought involuntarily. All the metal didn't fit somehow. But he didn't have time to think about it for long. Ziggy steered over to one of the many jetties.

'It seems to be a sort of harbour,' Emma whispered and pointed at the rafts in front of them.

'For scrap metal, maybe,' said Max quietly, so that Ziggy couldn't hear him. 'Look over there.' Lots of even stranger-looking boats bobbed away in the water some distance from them. They were either spherical or elongated in shape with windows down their sides, and looked like a cross between a submarine and three VW buses that had been joined together. They were all different sizes, shapes and colours. Some of them stretched high up into the air while others sank right down in the water and only their round metal roofs were visible above the surface of the water. The humming died away and they docked at one of the jetties. Ziggy lifted the rudder up and tied the floater to one of the posts. 'Right, everyone out please. Welcome to Eldena.'

They followed him along the jetty which led up to a broad alleyway between the houses. Their steps made a quiet clattering sound. Rows of glowing stones vibrated above their heads in wire cages, like lamps. The damp evening air smelt salty. A few of the buildings were obviously shops. Ziggy stood standing in front of one of the smaller ones and waved through the window to a woman inside.

'Wait a minute, I have to sort something out here quickly.' The metal door made a screeching sound as he opened it. *Neptune's Nature* was painted on it in white and green. Emma and Max pushed their way nosily behind Ziggy into the little shop. They were met by a pervasive smell of dried fish, salt and seaweed. Inside it was hard to turn around, there were overflowing baskets all over the floor full of strange tuberous plants and herbs.

The woman who had waved to Ziggy leant against a green-painted counter with some weighing scales standing on it. 'Hello Ziggy. A bag of anemone crumbs and two seaweed plants, just as you ordered!' She laid everything on the counter good-temperedly. 'The seaweed is really fresh. Toni has just cut it.'

'Thanks Vela, that sounds delicious.' Ziggy put two interlocking metal rings on the counter and reached for his purchases. 'I'm in a rush I'm afraid. See you tomorrow.'

'Say hello to Muriel,' the shopkeeper called after him.

Ziggy marched out along every-narrower side streets until he reached a three-storey red-brown painted house. Its different-sized windows gave it a lopsided look.

‘Come in!’ Ziggy opened a door that led directly into the kitchen and called into the hubbub of voices: ‘Muri, darling, I’ve brought some visitors with me!’ He pushed the pair into the little room in front of him. The inside of the house was just as colourful and chaotic as its exterior.

‘This is Emma and Max, I met the two of them on one of our cidum fields. They lost their way and now they’re a bit confused.’

Out of the corner of his eye Max could see Emma breathing in to disagree, but then a powerful woman with smooth black hair came up to her.

‘Oh hello, you two,’ greeted Ziggy’s wife. Come in. Let me introduce you: this is Maila, my daughter, and her brothers Maik and Manon. And behind them in the arm chair is our great-grandmother Elsa.’ All at once the loud chatter in the kitchen died away and Emma and Max were scrutinised curiously by several pairs of eyes. The similarity between the members of the family was probably due to the fact that they were all wearing rubber suits. But there was something else, something much stranger that Max had already noticed in Ziggy: they all had different-coloured eyes. A strange feeling overcame Max. He had always thought that he was unique – but apparently here everyone had one green and one blue eye.

Just like him.

## Chapter 5

‘Are you hungry?’ Muriel asked, stirring a steaming pan. ‘There’s still some cidum mushroom stew left from lunchtime,’ she said. ‘Unfortunately it’s a bit stodgy, the water’s running low again.’

Max nodded thankfully as Muriel filled two steaming bowls and poured them both a cup of tea. Max examined the white metal cups curiously. The drink inside was clear and colourless like water and smelt sweet.

Ziggy was rummaged around in a cupboard and then turned to his sons with a stern look. ‘Boys, where has the box with the maps got to again?’

Maik and Manon explained to their father where the box was, both talking at the same time. They ran out of the kitchen – each with a different idea.

As Max lifted the cup to his lips Emma hissed: ‘Don’t drink it! It tastes absolutely awful.’

But it was too late; Max had already had a mouthful. ‘Ugh!’ he exclaimed. ‘What’s that? It tastes like rancid cooking fat with sugar in.’ He put his cup down on the bench. But instead of saying ‘I told you so,’ Emma just smiled at him and Max realised that they hadn’t argued for a while now.

‘This is getting more and more weird,’ Emma murmured.

‘Maybe this is somewhere no one’s ever been before?’ Max said. ‘It looks that way – as though the people here know as little about us as we do about them.’

‘What if the tunnel really was a secret passage? There must be other people who have come here before us.’

Maila hopped over, sat down on the bench next to Emma and smiled at her. She was fairly small and slight, and with her brightly coloured hair bands Max guessed that she was about seven-years-old. ‘I don’t know why my mother insists on torturing everyone with this terrible stuff. I don’t drink it, anyway.’

‘What is it?’ Emma asked.

‘Cidum tea.’ Maila turned the corners of her mouth down as far as she could. ‘She puts cidum in everything!’

‘Cidum?’ Max had no idea what Maila was talking about.

‘Yes, cidum mushrooms! We’re mushroom farmers.’

Emma giggled. ‘Oh, you mean those giant things?’

‘Yes. We have a couple of plantations in the caves. That’s why we always have cidum here – all kinds. There was even some on my birthday cake. I can’t look at it anymore.’ Maila shuddered. ‘At least there’s always elmo for supper!’

‘Elmo?’ Emma raised her eyebrows but just then Ziggy came in and let the box under his arm drop onto the table with a loud crash. ‘Now let’s see where your village is. That’ll keep us entertained.’ With these words he spread several rubbery mats out in front of Max and Emma. He lifted one of them up high and pulled it around.

‘That’s awesome!’ said Max, as he watched Ziggy’s fingers disappearing into the soft material and prod about inside. The rubber mats seemed to be a 3-D map, with a consistency like chewing gum. There were tiny islands stuck into the 2-3cm-thick, milky substance. Like a model railway, Max thought, but much smaller.

Ziggy put the map back on the table, bent over it and shook his head. He put his index- and middle finger in one place and then pushed them carefully apart. The rubber gathered in folds at the edges like the skin of a hippopotamus, but in the middle the map was enlarged as though under a microscope. Suddenly they could see houses and plants there, as well as waterways complete with place names.

As Ziggy examined the map further a vast watery landscape unfurled in front of Emma and Max. They could see caves, islands and isolated strips of land. All the villages and towns were on platforms in the water, like Eldena.

‘So where exactly is your Bittie Cross? Above the waterfall you said?’ Ziggy rubbed his forehead. ‘What does it look like there?’

Emma looked helplessly at Max. ‘Well. It’s green and we have earth under our feet instead of water.’

‘I see.’ Ziggy was obviously still not sure whether to take them seriously. He pulled on the edge of the map depicting the waterfall. This was where the map finished. ‘I don’t understand. There’s only stones and water there, see for yourselves. There’s no village called Bittie Cross here.’

Max and Emma looked perplexedly at the edge of the map.

‘Isn’t there another map that shows the area behind the waterfall?’ Max asked.

‘No, this is the most detailed map of the caves I have. There’s the cidum field, there’s the waterfall and around it are the cliffs, there isn’t anything else. Do you have any other landmarks besides the waterfall?’

Max wondered how he could explain something that was actually so simple. As he shoved his hands into his trouser pockets he felt his father’s envelope. It didn’t feel all that different to Ziggy’s funny map. Decisively he pulled the envelope out and laid it on the table. ‘I do have an address, perhaps it’s on the map somewhere.’

Ziggy bent over and his expression lightened visibly. ‘Holdeener platform 71543, Emptern District. Well, that’s in Milmar!’ He moved the map quickly in another direction until a large town appeared and his gaze flew over a branching network of streets. Shortly afterwards he tapped Holdeener jetty with his index finger. ‘But I thought you wanted to go back to your village?’

‘We want to do that too. The person who lives there might be able to tell us how we get home.’

‘I don’t understand. How do you think that going to Holdeener jetty in Milmar will help you find your way back home?’

Max couldn’t say that perhaps his father lived there, but that he didn’t even know him. ‘I found the envelope at my Grandma’s house in Bittie Cross. So the person who it’s addressed to might know how you get to Bittie Cross,’ he explained.

‘And this person is called Mortensen Hickmans?’ Emma read the name above the address out loud and looked at Max, wide-eyed. She was obviously trying hard not to ask a whole lot of other questions.

Ziggy on the other hand seemed to appreciate the explanation. He rummaged around in the box again until he found another map, which he held out to them. ‘You can take this with you; I have a few of them. It’s smaller but you’ll find your way around Milmar with this.’

‘Are you sure? It looks very expensive,’ said Emma incredulously.

Ziggy laughed. 'What? You can get these anywhere for a couple of Greshams.'

'That's not paper, is it?' asked Max.

'Paper? No, maps have to be made from elastopri, otherwise they can't be magnified under water.'

'Under water?' Emma asked and raised an eyebrow.

'Well, if you want to go down to Milmar's under-city, for example, it's completely under water. Children, children, have you really never heard of it?' Ziggy fiddled around in his breast pocket. 'I'm assuming you don't have anything to pay for your journey to Milmar.'

Max and Emma stared confusedly at the two unusual coins that Ziggy offered them. The two round metal discs were made of several concentric rings. Apparently you could take out the individual rings.

'Take them, ' Ziggy said. 'There are several waterbuses to Milmar each day that leave from the harbour where we arrived. If you take the express you'll be there early tomorrow morning. The journey costs one large Gresham per person. I hope you find this Mortensen and that he can help you further.'

Max pulled at the map as he had seen Ziggy do. 'Is Milmar very big?' he asked, as his finger moved over numerous tower blocks.

'You could say that. Milmar is the capital of Sealand. The maze of streets is a little confusing at first, but if you follow the map you can't go wrong.'

*Sealand*. Max looked at Emma – he was sure the same word was going through her mind too. They really had arrived in a completely different world.

## Chapter 6

Maila insisted on accompanying them both to the harbour and they followed her thankfully through the streets of Eldena. The ground beneath their feet never stopped bobbing up and down. It was now late evening and in contrast to when they arrived, the streets were empty. There was a light mist in the air that gave off an unpleasant, pungent smell. Suddenly everything seemed more sombre and the few people around in the streets stared grimly ahead.

Maila began to walk more quickly. 'Hurry up! The fog is coming down.'

They hastened after her.

There was a strikingly tall vehicle swaying at one of the jetties. Max could hardly believe his eyes. It looked like a cross between a triple-decker bus and a submarine. Its glass front curved outwards like a half moon. Instead of windows there were portholes all along its metal bodywork. The swaying thing was painted bright blue with a white star. Next to the star were the words *Deep Blue Line 265* in sweeping letters.

Maila ran onto the pier. 'This is it! The 265 is the express bus. You can buy your tickets over there.' She pointed to a small metal shed where a queue had formed.

'What's it like in Milmar then?' Max asked, watching Maila as she hopped from one leg to another.

'Big and really crowded. Papa always says that only mad people and criminals live there, but he says that about every town that isn't Eldena.' Maila looked up at the clouds of mist that were gathering above. 'I have to go. Come and see us again sometime!' She waved at the two of them and then ran off.

'Why was she in such a rush all of a sudden?' Emma asked.

Max shrugged his shoulders and stared at the blue wall towering in front of them. Passengers were looking out of a few of the countless portholes and each level had a number painted on it. There must have been six passenger decks altogether, of which only decks four, five and six were above the water level.

The queue moved forward and finally it was their turn.

'That will be two large Greshams.'

Emma pulled off the two outer rings of the coins and passed them to the man in the shelter.

'No seat reservations,' he said and waved them over to the access hatch, a sort of double door that led into the water bus. The outer of the two doors was made of glass, surrounded by a heavy frame. The inner one was made of metal with the exception of a small round window at eye height. It seemed to be a kind of air lock, as there was a small room between the two doors whose walls dripped onto the damp floor.

Inside they pushed their way through narrow rows of seats full of people. Every seat in the bus seemed to be taken or full of baggage and suitcases. A huge water tank with plants inside was balanced on one double seat. Emma and Max shoved forwards and made their way down the steep staircase to the lower deck. Eventually they spied two free seats.

'I want to sit by the window,' Emma cried.

Max rolled his eyes. 'What a surprise!'

There were shouts outside and the ropes were released. The doors were bolted and there was a deafening blast. The water bus began to move.

They looked through the portholes into the clear, light blue water. Max leaned back in his seat as a large woman flung two bundles over his head into the seat in front of them. She was wearing the strangest outfit Max had ever seen. A fairly tight two-piece with blue-white ruffles and slightly puffed shoulders that made her upper arms look even bigger.

Max looked away quickly when the woman noticed him staring. There was so little room that he immediately found himself looking at a young man to his right who was reading a newspaper. Instead of leafing through the paper he just kept pulling it apart, exactly as Ziggy had done with the maps.

The air in the bus smelt somewhat fishy. Emma was unusually quiet and leant her head against the glass in the porthole. 'Hot drinks, jelly fish crisps, tadpole bites!' A man with a hawk's tray weaved through the rows of seats. He bent over Max's seat. 'Maybe some dried fish chewing gum?'

'Ugh,' Max exclaimed, bewildered. 'No...Thank you.'

Emma smiled to herself before turning back to the porthole. A swarm of fish shimmered by, gliding past them like a shimmering cloud.

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After what felt like an eternity, Max tried to get comfortable. His seat was so small that he had to sit as straight as a broom handle in order to avoid continually brushing up against Emma or his newspaper-reading neighbour.

It was impossible to comprehend. Only this morning he had decided to catch a bus and go and look for his father. And now he was in fact sitting on a bus and was on his way to go and see his father, it was just not at all how he had planned.

'Pinch me, please,' he said to Emma.

'Happily!' She pinched his upper arm so hard that he couldn't help saying 'Ow!' 'I said *pinch*, not amputate.'

'It's no good if it doesn't hurt.' She grinned and gestured at the people all around them in their strange rubber suits. 'I was thinking we might have breathed in some poisonous fumes in the cave and that this is all just a dream.'

Max had to laugh and promptly received a reproachful look from his neighbour.

'Tell me,' Emma began, a few minutes later, 'your surname is Hickmans too, isn't it? Who is this Mortensen?'

Max had hoped that Emma wouldn't ask him about that. But she'd have to find out sooner or later. He reached for the envelope, pulled out the wedding photograph and held it out to Emma. The woman on the right is my Mum, Lynn Hickmans and next to her is Mortensen Hickmans.' He swallowed. 'He is my father, but I've never met him.'

'Your father. Of course.' Emma rubbed her forehead. 'But why does he live *here*?'

'No idea. I only found the envelope this morning.'

'Hmm.' Emma leant her head back against her seat. 'And I always thought my father was difficult. But at least he didn't just run off.'

Max felt the lump in his throat getting bigger. He didn't want to talk about his father anymore. Instead he suggested that he went to look for something to eat and stood up quickly before Emma could ask him any further questions.

He weaved between the people and suitcases in the rows of seats and up into the upper levels. On the last deck he emerged into a round, glass viewing point on the top of the bus. The bus cut through the waves, bobbing gently up and down. Max tried to make out the sky but could only see a thick fog above them. In the distance he could see a pair of flying fish in the air, which dived back down into the water soon afterwards. Above the headwind he could hear a shrill cheeping sound. A flock of tiny birds were flying right beside the bus. They suddenly dived into the water in a broad arc, surfacing again in a shimmering vibration a few seconds later. Max gazed at the shining creatures until they disappeared into the fog.

He wandered through the decks until he found a shop selling souvenirs and sweets. There was nothing here that he recognised from back home. There were lollipops in the shop window that changed colour in different lights, along with countless bags printed with a sea anemone pattern and labelled 'Nubi-kubi-bonbons'. Under the sign *Candied Oysters* were shrivelled little pea-sized balls. The only thing that didn't smack of food poisoning was something Max found in a bowl. It looked a little bit like red jelly that had been stuck together in little drops. He ordered one and paid for it with the smallest ring of their remaining Greshams. The shopkeeper used a scoop to load the drops into a conical paper bag. When Max licked it a sweet film stuck to his tongue. *Tastes like sugary fish fingers*, he thought. *Not bad at all*. He bought another one for Emma.

A sudden hissing and bubbling outside the bus drew Max over to the windows. He looked through one of the portholes and saw that they were diving downwards.

When he arrived back at their seats Emma was asleep. Quiet snoring sounds were audible from other seats too. Max ate his drops in the low light of the onboard lamps and stared sleepily into the deep blue water.

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He awoke with a start to a hard shove in his side.

‘Look at that!’ Emma pointed excitedly through the porthole. ‘Out there! It’s a town, an *underwater town!*’

Max rubbed his eyes and looked out in disbelief. The waterbus dived down between tall buildings that towered down into the depths, somehow upside down, as if Big Ben had been hung the wrong way around in the water. The countless storeys of smooth stone and metal had round windows which illuminated the water. It was obviously dry inside the buildings.

The waterbus moved along between two huge metal chains, marked by glowing globes. There were numerous such water streets passing above one another at different heights. The waterbus moved onto upper or lower street-levels at vertical junctions. Every so often there were heavy iron chains stretching vertically into the depths.

Max was lost for words. He would never have imagined it was possible to live under water. But here people lived in a huge town – an underwater city.

There bus travelled right alongside a long window facade, enabling them to see into some of the houses and shops. People swam around in the water in front of the houses. They were all wearing the now-familiar rubber suits but their hands and feet were attired in flippers of all different colours. No two suits were the same.

Max noticed that a lot of people were wearing helmets with two tubes leading to a canister on their backs. Others were just wearing rucksacks which had thin tubes leading to a mouthpiece. There were also tubes hanging from some of the house walls with benches and chairs attached to the walls next to them where people were sitting chatting. Now and then they breathed into the tubes as if they were water pipes, releasing small bubbles of air into the water shortly afterwards.

Emma’s index finger sped through the air. ‘Don’t the houses fill up with water?’

Max drew closer to the window too. ‘No, look over there.’

In the water in front of them a man opened one of the glass house doors and entered a special water-filled room. He pressed a button inside the room, as though he was standing in a lift. Immediately the water hissed out of the room until the man was standing in the dry, the second door opened and he disappeared inside the house.

There were other water buses chugging all around them. As well as their blue bus there were yellow, green and purple buses. They were called *Anemone Yellow Line* or *Sea grass Green Line*. Smaller vehicles whizzed through the water too. Many of them were so small that there was only room for one person. Others had several faces looking out of their portholes.

A loudspeaker announcement intoned: 'We will shortly be arriving at Milmar Main Harbour. The *Deep Blue Line 265* ends here.'

Shortly afterwards their bus changed onto a vertical waterway and shot vertically upwards between the underwater high-rises. Before they reached the surface they turned down and headed towards a particularly impressive building. On its imposing, elaborately decorated facade they read the words *Milmar Main Harbour* in red neon lettering.

The surface of the water glittered above them. Emma and Max saw numerous large openings. Their waterbus steered towards one of them. Inside the harbour their bus continued upwards. The further they went inside the building the louder the drone of the motors. Outside the water bubbled and hissed. Two seats behind them a child was crying and next to them the young man's fingers drummed impatiently on his newspaper. 'Milmar Main Harbour,' the loudspeaker announced. 'Please wait for a moment until we have docked.'

Emma jumped up immediately and squeezed through the crowd of people towards the staircase and the exit. Max pushed through the rows of seats right behind her.