

Magō!

by Hio Kelemete



Telehia looked out to sea. It was dawn, and the sun's rays sparkled on the tops of the waves. In the distance, she could see the fishing boats. The tautai, the master fishermen, were heading out for the day. They could see a taumanu, a flock of feeding seabirds, beyond the reef. Her father's words echoed in her head. "The taupulega have closed the lagoon. No fishing, no swimming. Everyone must stay away from the water."

She shivered. The council of elders wouldn't close the lagoon without a good reason. Motuhaga seemed very quiet this morning. The water in the lagoon looked still and deep.

On her way to school, Telehia couldn't stop thinking about what her father had said. She was deep in thought when her cousins caught up with her.

"Hey, Telehia. Did you hear about the lagoon?" asked Ata. "Te hē believe ni?* What are we supposed to do now? I mean, no swimming? We're surrounded by water, but we can't jump in. That's just nuts!"

"I know," Telehia replied. She kicked at a piece of shell on the path. "But something big must have happened for the lagoon to be out of bounds."

"Mum said there were some weird shadows in the water," Meli said. "But I reckon it will just be those stupid boys trying to scare everyone. They think they're funny."

"Nah, I don't think so," replied Telehia. "They'd have to be crazy to do that again. They got in so much trouble last time."

* Te hē believe ni? – Can you believe it?



“What if it’s a giant squid,” said Meli. “They have big, long tentacles. It could grab anyone who puts their foot in the water and pull them under.”

“Maybe it’s one of those dinosaurs from that movie,” said Ata. “Maybe it escaped, and it’s decided to make our lagoon its new home.”

Meli rolled her eyes. “Yeah, right! Maybe it’s an alien invasion and a spaceship landed in the lagoon. They’re going to invade Nukunonu first, and then the rest of the world!”

“Well you never know – it might happen,” replied Ata.

Telehia winked at Meli. “I know what it is,” she whispered. “It’s the witch Afinemata. She’s coming to get you, Ata. She wants to teach you a lesson for taking Falepola’s clothes while he was swimming last week. The poor guy had to run home in his undies!”

“Afinemata?” said Ata. She looked pale. “Do you really think so? Well, in that case, I’m never going swimming again!”



A few days later ...

“Hey! Telehia! Meli! Did you hear the news?” Ata came running up to where Meli and Telehia were standing on the jetty. “Some scientists are here from Australia. They say it’s a magō in the lagoon! A shark – a whale shark even! Harmless as. They said that maybe two came in with the tide but now there’s only one. Te hē believe ni?” Ata always spoke quickly when she had something exciting to share.

“We heard,” said Telehia. “We came down to see if we can see it.”

“Lucky it’s not an alien invasion or a dinosaur attack,” grinned Telehia.

“And it’s not Afinemata coming to carry you away,” added Meli.



“I knew it wasn’t anything like that,” said Ata. “I was only pretending to believe you. Couldn’t you tell I was just joking?”

“My mum said it’s only a young magō and it’s growing all the time,” said Meli. “Soon it will be too big to get out of the lagoon by itself.”

“How do you think they’ll get it out?” asked Ata.

“Maybe they’ll have to cut a hole in the reef,” Telehia replied.

“They could use a helicopter and carry it out in a sling, ni?”

“Maybe they could build a big water slide.”

“What if they dropped a huge stone into the lagoon? The wave it made would wash the magō out over the reef.”

“I’ve got an idea! What about ...”

The sound of their voices carried through the evening air as the setting sun’s rays sparkled on the tops of the waves.

Illustrations by Vaitoa Baker

The Real Magō

“Magō!” is based on a real event. In May 2018, a large creature was spotted in the lagoon in Nukunonu, one of the atolls that make up Tokelau. At first, nobody was sure what it was. It turned out to be a young whale shark.

Whale sharks are the biggest fish in the sea. They can grow up to 18 metres long. They only eat plankton (microscopic plants and animals that drift in the ocean currents), so they are not dangerous to humans – in fact, whale sharks are endangered, so they need *our* protection!

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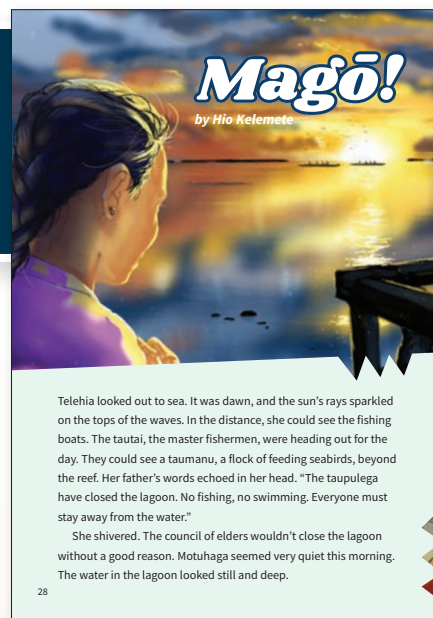
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