



HELEN HARVEY

Helen grew up in ramshackle and unruly corners of the internet. She led a guild of magical wolf tamers, dodged flames on fan fiction sites, and devoted webpages to pixelated dogs. She therefore grew up knowing that technology gives children superpowers.

After studying English at Oxford, Helen taught creative writing to kids in farms, forests and hedge-mazes. Having completed her MA, Helen now writes for educational publisher, Twinkl.

Helen won the 2017 United Agents Prize, for the Most Promising Writing for Young People.

About How to Beat the Queen of Mean

Online, Emmy is a powerful runemaster with a catlike companion called Cinderfeet. When Emmy's gaming video gets a front-page feature, thousands of devoted fans flock to watch her battle the Mulch Queen herself.

At school, Emmy is friendless and bullied. To Vicky and her gang, Emmy is a weirdo with bad handwriting, horrible fashion sense and no dad.

But if Emmy can take on the Mulch Queen, she can take on Vicky, too. Joining forces with all the gamers in school, Emmy sets out to beat the Queen of Mean, and to prove that she's more than just a geek.

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HOW TO BEAT THE QUEEN OF MEAN

Saviour of Sandallia

Release date: 9 May

Price: £29.99

Playable on: PC and console

On the tropical island of Sandallia, the grim reign of the Mulch Queen is over. Her slime and swamps have become rainforests and beaches once more. The Mulch Queen has been locked beneath the Enigma Tree by a legendary runemaster, never to return.

Or has she?

Without warning, the Enigma Tree splits in two. Out pours a swarm of mulchbeasts that spread the Mulch Queen's all-consuming slime to every corner of the island. Even in the worst days of the Queen's first reign, things never looked this bad.

In this much-anticipated sequel to *Island of Sandallia*, can a saviour be found to unite the island peoples, and destroy the Mulch before it wipes out Sandallia completely?

Features

- new runes to collect
- choice-based dialogue with multiple outcomes
- tougher-than-ever boss fights

More heart-stopping, brain-tangling and slime-smothering than ever before. Five stars. – Game Heaven

Chapter One

Clutching her runebook, Emmentine strides into the cave's gaping jaws. Cinderfeet pads at her heels, whiskers twitching. Around them greenish lights glimmer awake, so that the cave looks like a glow worm turned inside out. The walls drip with slime, as if the rock itself is rotting. But Emmentine and Cinderfeet don't stop.

Beneath the slime are carved symbols: zigzags, swirls, a shape like a tree. The runes are warped and dribbling down the walls, but Emmentine doesn't need to see them to know what they are, and anyway she doesn't have time to look. She has nearly reached the Mulch Queen's lair.

Then the ground quivers and gloops into nothingness. Cinderfeet scabbles at the rock, and Emmentine's purple robes billow, as the pair tumble into a fog of poisonous green. They clatter on to a floor heaving with rot and stench. In front of them towers a four-armed monster in a dress of rotting leaves.

The Mulch Queen has
awoken!

My fingers click frantically on the keyboard. On the screen, Cinderfeet shakes the flaming antennae that fan from her head like a mane. Fireballs burst out. They scorch the Mulch Queen's skin and burn holes in the swampy ground. The swamp hisses and shrinks.

The Mulch Queen opens her mouth to scream, but I click first. Emmentine runs, and Cinderfeet roars. Storm clouds burst from Cinderfeet's lioness jaws, and gather on the cave roof. Rain pours down, quenching the poison tendrils and making the Mulch Queen's slime-skin run. Lightning forks at her face and she wails, flailing her four arms.

Eighty-two damage in one attack, and the Mulch Queen hasn't touched Emmentine or Cinderfeet yet. I can do this.

The Mulch Queen belches out poison and swings all four fists, but I hammer out the key combo. Emmentine strikes with her claws twice. A perfect razorswipe! Layers of the Mulch Queen rip off in shreds, and she

collapses into a tiny brambly figure. Her health drops to nearly nothing, and she rolls herself into a ball to gather strength.

An alert pops up:

Bind the Mulch Queen before
she regains too much health!

I know exactly what to do.

The sludgy outlines of runes glow faintly on the walls:



Emmentine runs to the nearest symbol, holds up her runebook: *flash*. Light gushes from the pages, and the rune fizzles, and rewrites itself clear and shining. Vines of bright flowers burst from the wall, and race over the sludgy ground to grasp the Mulch Queen.

Emmentine darts in another direction, holds up her runebook, *flash*, and more vines burst out. Run, *flash*. The music pounds and races, and I know time is running out. The Mulch Queen trembles. Emmentine runs straight for the last zigzag rune.

‘Do the flashy thing to the lightning bolt,’ says Ryan behind me.

I jump. ‘I know!’ I didn’t hear Ryan get home. And there’s only seconds left.

The Mulch Queen begins to unfold. Her arms fly out, and Emmentine dodges as *thud*, a fist slams the floor behind her. Cinderfeet swipes again. The swamp wobbles. One more rune, one more shooting vine and *snap!*

The Mulch Queen is wrapped in a net of greenery and flowers, like a fly in a web.

The cave’s roof cracks open, and light pours in. In the powerful sunlight, the festering Mulch Queen shrinks to nothingness. The Enigma Tree bursts into leaf, as grass and flowers grow frantically over the rock. But I’m barely watching now.

I stand up so fast my chair tips backwards into Ryan's stomach. I grab the corners of my striped blanket like a flag, and leap around the living room.

'I did it! I did it! I defeated the Mulch Queen without taking any damage. Yes, yes, yes!'

'Why are you jumping, Emmy?' Ryan tips the chair upright and sits on it. 'It wasn't that hard.'

'You don't understand, I think I just did a world record or something. I bound the Mulch Queen and she's the final boss on Island of Sandallia, and I did it in one try, *and* Emmentine and Cinderfeet kept full health the whole way through. And I videoed the whole thing for my gaming channel, and, and, and WOOHOO!' I jump and skip and leap on the sofa and nearly trip on a cushion, but I bounce away in time and land, *bang*, on to the floor beside Ryan.

'So what?' he says. I think there are secret rules telling big brothers they have to be mean to little sisters.

'You couldn't do it,' I tell him. The game credits have finished rolling and the main menu pops up in front of him. 'Not even ~*indigo*chalice*~ could pull off a binding like that. MeowMeow thought it was impossible, but I did it.' They are my two best friends on Sandr, the Island of Sandallia message board.

'Who are Invisible Cabbage and MooMoo?' says Ryan, clicking on NEW GAME. 'Seriously, these people have the weirdest names.'

'It's ~*indigo*chalice*~ and MeowMeow, and they're my friends,' I tell him. 'Obviously.'

'Your online friends, though, right?' says Ryan as the MAKE A RUNEMASTER screen loads, and my stomach goes tight. 'Not real-life friends?' I try to shove him off the chair with my shoulder, but he's too heavy.

'Online friends *are* real friends,' I say.

'What's a runemaster?' he asks. Ryan has this trick of changing the subject just when I'm really annoyed at him. It works though.

'Runemasters have a runebook and they gather these symbols by writing them in the book,' I tell him, trying not to show that he's bothered me. Not showing you're bothered is part of the rules for little sisters. 'Runemasters can also train and control an animuse.' I jump on to the sofa arm behind him. 'See, you don't even know how to play. As if I needed your help.'

‘You were about to tank, before I came along,’ Ryan says, colouring his runemaster’s hair bright pink, then sunset orange, then settling on pitch black. ‘How do I get a cat thing?’

‘The cat thing is called a felixiad.’

‘Oh, a felixiad,’ he says, not very seriously. He always talks like this with me, like everything is a big joke. Probably from being a teenager. ‘Of course.’

‘A felixiad is a type of animuse. They can use magic powers to fight the Mulch.’

‘Oh, the Mulch.’ He nods, wisely. ‘Of course.’

‘But they don’t all look the same. You can do the quiz if you like, to find your perfect animuse.’

The quiz asks all sorts of questions, like: *Sand or sea? Sun or moon? Blue or red?* When Ryan’s animuse pops up, he reels back.

‘A merewulf? It looks like a dog with skin disease.’

I press my lips together to choke the giggle down. ‘No, look, it’s glittery. And those slits are gills, so it can swim underwater,’ I say. ‘You can change it, if you think it’s ugly.’

‘Shh, Emmy. Don’t call it ugly, you’ll hurt its feelings!’ Ryan says, putting his hands on either side of the screen, as if he’s covering its ears. I laugh. I always try not to laugh at Ryan, for as long as possible, but eventually I can’t help it. ‘I like my mutant frog puppy. Now how do I get to that slimy woman?’

‘The Mulch Queen is the final boss. You have to get to the end of the game before you can fight her. But the sequel is coming out in less than a week, and I can’t wait!’ I bounce on the sofa arm.

The front door lock scrapes open.

‘Hi, kiddos,’ says Paul. Clattering sounds follow, and a big bang, like something heavy crashing into a wall. ‘Careful with that box,’ he says.

‘The tattoos for the fayre are here!’ shouts Mum.

‘What are you two up to?’ Paul sticks his bald head round the living room door. ‘That game again?’ he asks, and winks.

‘Come and see these tattoos,’ Mum shouts from somewhere down the hall.

‘I was actually just showing Emmy how to defeat the Munch Queen,’ Ryan tells Paul.

‘*Mulch* Queen,’ I correct him. ‘And I bound her myself, actually. Paul, I did it without Emmentine or Cinderfeet taking any damage. Do you want to see?’

‘Go on.’ Paul ambles to the computer. Ryan jumps up like he’s been burnt and then pulls off his school tie, ruffling his already ruffled brown hair. Ryan gets like this when Paul’s around.

I replay the video of the fight. I get excited all over again, watching Emmentine dash between the Mulch Queen’s fists. My fingers twitch, as Cinderfeet does the double swipe. When the vines flash around the Mulch Queen, Paul punches the air.

‘Yes! Nice one, Emmy. I bet you’re excited to show everyone.’

‘Obviously.’

‘Are you going to show your friends tomorrow at school?’ he says, still grinning.

But I suddenly feel knotted up. ‘Er –’ I look at Ryan for help, but he just drops his eyes to the floor. ‘Maybe,’ I say.

‘Well, you should,’ says Paul, still in that enthusiastic tone, like he doesn’t know he’s said anything wrong, even though my insides are tangled so tight I can’t move. ‘Have you been playing too, Ryan?’

Ryan sticks his hands in his pockets.

‘Just showing Emmy what to do.’ He shrugs. ‘It’s not really my thing. Babyish.’

At that, I feel even more knotted up. I thought Ryan was getting into it.

Mum sticks her head through the door. Her purple hair has gone extra frizzy and wild, which makes her look like a witch. My hair does the same thing, but it just makes me look messy. ‘Are you lot coming to see these tattoos, or what?’

I nod slightly. Ryan scuffs the floor, and we follow Paul into the kitchen.

A huge cardboard box is open on the kitchen table. It’s full of temporary tattoos: dragons, kittens, football logos. Mum is a real tattooist, with a shop and everything. But every year for the Summer Fayre at my school, she runs the face painting and temporary tattoo stall.

I try not to think about school, but the idea spreads in my brain like Mulch slime.

‘I knew they’d arrive in time,’ Mum says, her hands on her hips. ‘Scaremongerer.’ She nudges Paul. ‘You said they wouldn’t be here for months.’

‘I don’t think scaremongerer is a word,’ Paul says. Paul has been Mum’s boyfriend for nearly two years now, and I hope he keeps being her boyfriend. He was the one who bought Island of Sandallia for me and Ryan.

I suppose that's why Ryan doesn't want to play it.

But I'm glad he bought Island of Sandallia because it's my absolute favourite game. Without Sandallia I wouldn't be on Sandr, and without Sandr I wouldn't make videos or know MeowMeow and ~*indigo*chalice*~. I don't need school friends when I've got them.

'Shall I sort the designs out?' asks Ryan.

'No, I want to sort them,' Mum says. She plunges her tattooed arms into the box and mixes the shiny pictures around. 'That's the best bit.'

'I guess I'm making dinner then,' says Paul, unbuttoning his shirt sleeves.

'Emmy,' says Mum, 'could you print a sign with the prices on, like last year?'

'OK.'

'We'll keep the prices the same, shall we?'

'I could test the tattoos,' Ryan offers, picking up a sheet of rainbows and unicorns. 'Check they're not gummy, like two years ago.'

'I see your game, mister,' says Mum, starting a pile for animal tattoos. 'You just want a freebie.'

'No, I don't even like temporary tattoos,' he says, and throws the sheet down. 'I just thought, we don't want another gummy year.'

Paul sets a pan on the cooker. 'I think you can just relax, Ryan.' He cracks open a tin of tomatoes and pours it in. 'We've got this covered.'

Ryan grunts. He stares at the tattoos for a moment, then turns and vanishes into his bedroom.

I go back to the computer, Mulch still dripping in my head. I try to imagine Cinderfeet roaring a storm to wash out the Mulch slime, but through the rush I hear the Mulch Queen cackling.

There's only one way to stop the Mulch from taking over my brain completely: I have to overwhelm it with good things.

So, I watch the video over again. I watch Cinderfeet roar and swipe. I watch Emmentine run from rune to rune. I watch the flowering vines snap shut.

It's working. Run, swipe, flash, snap. The Mulch shrivels away to nothing.

I upload my video on Sandr, head to the message boards and post a link. MeowMeow and ~*indigo*chalice*~ will drop dead in amazement when they see it. No one has defeated the Mulch Queen without taking any damage before. No one but me.