

---

**Witches in**

---

**Trouble**

---

**Val Thame**





# *Chapter 1*

**M**adame Fustia Necromancy had once been in charge of a famous establishment for the training of young witches. She was a malevolent old harridan with an evil disposition and had, therefore, made an excellent Head Teacher. Everybody hated her at the Witches Academy. Pupils and teachers alike cowered in her awesome shadow and dreaded the sting of venom which lay on her acid tongue.

But the Academy was no more. Fustia Necromancy was Head of nothing and nowhere. Her Witches Academy, once housed in her large un-stately home, had been ruined, ravaged, by a terrible flood. Years of research into evil had been reduced to soggy

ruins. Rare potions, ancient documents, irreplaceable objects from Fustia's foul family treasures, had been swept out to sea on the rushing tide of floodwater.

Goodrun Badmanners, one of the final-year pupils at the Academy, watched in horror from the dormitory roof as the floodwater swirled round the courtyard below, surging into doorways and spilling out of windows, bringing with it a cascade of desks, chairs and tables. But this was no ordinary flood; this was magic, her magic, and it had all gone terribly wrong. Goodrun had never been very good at witchcraft, unlike her brilliantly wicked sister, Evilyn, but she had worked hard at the Academy and hoped that one day she would graduate from witchling to witch. She had just returned from her practical examination to find the Academy suffering from a freak storm.

“Goodrun Badmanners?” The feared, harsh voice of Madame Necromancy made Goodrun jump.

She looked down to see her ex-Head Teacher floating past on her upturned desk, a quivering finger pointing in her direction.

“You little toad!” screeched Madame Necromancy. “No diploma for you. You are expelled. You are the worst pupil I've ever had. I know this storm was your fault.

**You've ruined my life's work and I shall never forgive you. Nevarr! Neva-a-arr!"**

**As she spoke dozens of old crones floated out of the Academy, bobbing about in the water like old black sacks. It is well known that witches hate water and their terrified screams echoed eerily round the courtyard. Goodrun shuddered. The air was so full of dark curses it made her feel ill.**

**"Brilliant?" said Evilyn, who was also watching from the roof. "How did you do it? I wish I'd thought of it."**

**"It was my final exam," said Goodrun, miserably. "It was supposed to be a spell of bad weather, but I think I overdid it a bit."**

**"A bit?" Evilyn nearly fell off the roof, laughing. "Hey, you lot!" She shouted down to the other witchlings who were hanging out of the dormitory windows. "You know what this means? No more Academy. No more school!"**

**The pupil witches screeched and cackled their delight and some of the younger ones, who were still unable to cackle properly, whistled noisily as, led by Evilyn, they chanted, "No more Academy. No more school!"**

**Then another cheer went up as the waters surged again and Fustia, and her flotilla of angry witches, shwooshed through the school gates.**

**“I’ll be back!” cried the old hag. “I’ll be ba-a-ack!”**

**But nobody thought she would, or cared if she did because they wouldn’t be there. School had ended once and for all. Madame and her horrible rules had been washed away and a whole flock of little witchlings, including the Badmanners sisters, were suddenly free.**



## *Chapter 2*

**F**ustia, and her desk, eventually arrived at the North Pole. A place of extreme cold, where wicked thoughts came very easily. She went to the North Pole every year for her annual holidays. She stayed at the bleak and uncomfortably chilly North Pole Hotel, and it did her the power of good because she always came back feeling contentedly wretched.

The twin witches who looked after the hotel were Fustia's friends. One was called Alice and the other was Honore. Alice was a dull and dreary witch without a single original or any other thought in her head.

Honore had all the brains and hated her boring sister because she pinched all her

best ideas. Both were affected by the extremely low temperatures. Both were shrivelled and wizened, their thoughts icy, their feelings frozen. The only thing that was not affected by the weather was their temper. That was as hot as ever.

The twin argued constantly over who was cleverest, who was the oldest, who was the dumbest (which Alice always won) or who was the ugliest. When they argued they fought and sparks flew from their teeth and their toenails, and flashes of coloured lights filled the dark northern sky.

They were arguing when Fustia arrived. She saw the sky streaked with light and knew that Honore and Boring Alice were at it again. People living in the northern hemisphere saw the pretty lights in the sky and said to their children, "Look. Look. Honore and Boring Alice." But they didn't know that the fantastic Northern Lights were really a display of witchy temper.

Fustia stayed with the frosty twins until she could stand their petty squabbling no longer and one day, in a thoroughly bad mood induced by cold and irritation, she left the North Pole and flew down to the south. Although equally cold the South Pole was largely undiscovered and witch-free. She stayed there for several weeks, smouldering and brooding and occasionally erupting into

fits of burning rage. Her hot temper floated upwards into the atmosphere, and into the ozone layer, where it burned a small hole. A hole just big enough for a curious witch to poke her nose through, and then her whole head.

News of the hole soon spread and witches began dropping in by the dozen. In no time at all the South Pole had more witches than penguins. Fustia hated it. She wanted to be alone. But these over-crowded and uncomfortable conditions made her feel so wonderfully crabby and entirely intolerant she decided it was time to go.

So, bitter and twisted, suffering from chilblains and riddled with revenge, she returned to her flood-damaged home. It was a grim ruin. Its windows shattered, its walls running with slime, and creatures of unbelievable ugliness nesting in every crack and crevice. But she was back and that was all that mattered. She rolled up her sleeves, put on her best pinny, her rubber gloves, and set to work. She worked night and day, hardly stopping to eat, restoring the house to its former dreadfulness. She scabbled about in the kneedeep mud, left behind by the floodwater, searching for her lost possessions, her cauldrons, computers and coat hooks. She scrubbed and scraped the rooms most affected by the flood and



then tackled the ones damaged by weather. It took weeks, and all the time Fustia had but one thought on her evil mind.

“This is all your fault, Goodrun Badmanners. I blame you for this.” Her pique made her work even harder, tearing at the rotting woodwork. “And where are you now?” she wailed. “Remember, a wailing witch never forgets. I’ll have my revenge on you. See if I don’t.”

And so she brooded and cursed and scrubbed and planned. She wasn’t going to run a school anymore. Witchlings were hard work and unpredictable. You never knew what they might do next. She had turned out hundreds of horrible little worms from her Academy and not one of them was grateful. No, Fustia was determined not to do that again. Teaching was out. She was going into publishing. She was going to edit a magazine for witches.

*The Hag Mag* would supply inside information on what makes a witch tick or a watch tock. It would be sneaky, fun-poking and treacherous. It would give away free secrets with every issue. It would be a tell-tale, tittle-tattling, roaring good read for hags of all ages. Fustia allowed herself a satisfying smile. She might even become rich as well as powerful. But first she had to find a pack of lying, deceitful and

untrustworthy witches for her team of reporters.

She cackled merrily as she went indoors and up to her bedroom. She opened a box on her dressing table and took out a pair of gold, hoop earrings, gypsy earrings, and clipped them onto her ears. Then she covered her thick, white hair with a beaded scarf which she tied at the back of her head. Last of all, she wrapped a long, fringed shawl around her shoulders.

Her eyes glittered as she admired herself in the mirror.

“Well, Gypsy Dogrose,” she said, to her reflection, “as soon as my new magazine is published we must find that pest, Goodrun Badmanners.” She rubbed her gloved hands together. “And I think I know how we shall do it.”

A brilliant and devious plan was forming in Fustia’s maggotty mind. A plan that, in her eyes, could not fail.