



# OMNIBOZ

*Tales from The Land of Oz*

*Edited by* JENDIA GAMMON *and* ERNIE CHIARA





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*Tales from The Land of Oz*



# THE FIELD MOUSE QUEEN TAKES FLIGHT

Jendia Gammon

The Queen of the Field Mice of Oz was known for her storied rule and leadership, and also for rescuing Princess Dorothy, Toto, and the Cowardly Lion from the deadly poppies that swayed their sinister, scarlet heads above the burrows of her domain. What she was *not* known for was taking a vacation.

For starters, she had many children; countless, it may be believed, who skittered and clambered and scurried and sniffed and did all the things mice will do, while being under both their mouse queen's protection, and that of Ozma, ruler of Oz. Ozma was a great friend of the Field Mouse Queen, who had, like Ozma, gone by other names over the course of her whiskered life. Being a wise fairy, Ozma had ensured the small, silver-grey-brown mouse would continue her rule over her extensive domain without interfering with the general governance of Oz. Ozma also, it may be said confidently, knew when her subjects needed something but might never get around to asking for it. So it was that she sent a message by dragonfly to another friend one late, late summer day, when the long grasses of the rolling meadows outside the great City began to burnish and bend, and the air smelled of honey and apples and bread and sweet blue flowers of all sorts...as well as dizzying poppies.

The mice, however, were so small that the poppies never affected them. In fact, the Field Mouse Queen had advocated they should remain, rather than be cut, for those flowers served other purposes for the pollinators and detritivores that either bounced gently above them or worked with decaying matter underground. And also, in late summer, many of them began to go to seed. A fine feast for any royal court, but especially for any mouse; the gentle roasting of poppy seeds by tiny mouse hands twitching their tails in excitement heralded the beginning of harvest season, and then autumn. So the harvest was a bustling time of lavish balls, with mouse and rat and vole and shrew and both larger and smaller guests of field and forest cavorting under the Harvest Moon. The

Queen of the Field Mice loved that time of year, but she had begun to admit, after many wheelings of sun and stars overhead, that sometimes, she would have liked to have allowed some of her more mature children to take the lead for a change, to sit out the society season.

She, as Queen of all mice in the Land of Oz, must choose the Acorn out of a parade of young mice from all corners of Oz, and its countries: Winkie, Gillikin, Munchkin, Quadling, and of course the Emerald City itself. This was the highest mouse society honor: the Acorn of the Harvest Season. For that season, it was the only opportunity for a mouse from any lineage to wear a crown bestowed by the Queen: that of a bronze acorn, studded with the tiniest, finest topaz crystals, gifted long ago by a Winkie miner. And while the larger denizens of the Land of Oz might never realize it in their daily lives that time of year, every little hillock and hollow and tiny trail rustled and rippled with a great many mice streaming in for the crowning of their society at that harvest ball.

It amused the Queen to do this, as, in her younger days, she had enjoyed parties and balls as a little mouse princess. She also adored the harvest feast with snippets of fresh apple; slivers of nutty, hard cheeses (kindly donated from a Munchkin farmer); droplets of honeydew and hyssop syrup and maple sap in wee goblets; freshets of mineral water; poppy mead and perry and blackberry wine, and so on. It was also a spectacle to behold, the dancing of many twinkling whiskers, the chatters and whispers and laughter and general gaiety, the frilly outfits, the occasional fancy masks, the decorative bows and diadems on the tails of the mice. Oh! She did love it.

But *this* year. *This* year, she sighed.

Far away to the South, in Quadling Country, Glinda smirked to herself and tossed back her deep red curls as she stood from where she had been sitting. Just behind her, a dragonfly landed on a bouquet of fresh flowers. Before her lay open the great book that she used to keep up with all things and all times. And upon its pages, the letters bled forth: *The Queen of the Field Mice sighed*. Glinda leaned back and steepled her long, ruby-tipped fingers under her chin and nodded to herself. The dragonfly then flew to her shoulder and whispered something to her that only its own kind and Glinda might understand. Then the gauzy-winged insect flew off, shimmering, and Glinda watched it go.

“It is time to have a bit of a chat with an old friend,” she murmured, brushing her glistening skirts, spun from threads made of garnet, ruby, tourmaline, and rose quartz. She clapped her hands lightly, and soon a maiden in a smart pink outfit appeared. That young woman bowed to the

Witch of the South. “Come closer, child,” bade Glinda, “for I have a special message.” The young woman bent forward, and Glinda whispered in her ear. Then the girl’s eyebrows lifted, but she bowed, smiling, and turned. Glinda nodded to herself, lost in happy thoughts for several minutes, before turning back to her great book, where letters seeped into its pages faster than lightning, faster than fleeting memories. She wanted to learn what might happen next...



Dawn broke upon the fields that stretched between the gleaming spires of the Emerald City, over into Munchkin country, where the fences were painted every hue of blue to match the blue flowers of that land, and its bluegrass shivered and sparkled with morning dew. Closer to the city, the fields were rich green, and the fences also. There were delicate lime-hued and teal green flowers bobbing there. It made the poppies, which were now either dropping their petals or nearly so, stand out all the more.

The Queen of the Field Mice had awakened after a fitful night of dreaming about harvest preparations. She’d even dreamed that the Acorn Crown had been made of brown sugar that crumbled upon its chosen wearer. That made her snort in her dream, or so she thought.

But no, it was another snort that woke her.

She blinked, fully awake now, whiskers twitching, her dark eyes gleaming like little beads of onyx. She sometimes liked to sleep in a little hollow, on a bed filled with dandelion seed tufts, rather than in the warrens beneath her. Her excuse was that she wanted to remain vigilant at all times for her mouse dominion, but deep in her heart, she really preferred being outside so that she could see the stars at night, and then watch the sunrise send its long, golden shafts of light over the wakening fields. She began to groom herself as she listened for the sound she’d heard. She had just cleaned her silvery-grey fur and brushed off her long tail when she heard it again.

*Snort-bonk! Snort-bonk!*

She squinted up at a great tree at the edge of the boundary between Munchkin Country and the Emerald City. At its top there was a snag, and within that sat a broad, massive bowl made of sticks, grasses, tufts of moss, and all manner of other items. It was a nest, an eagle’s nest, to be precise. And two eagles were working on it just then! They sorted and adjusted several sticks, and fussed and kissed their beaks as they did so.

“Ah,” the Queen of the Field Mice said to herself, “they are preparing for a new season this winter! I wonder how many eggs there might be.”

*Snort-bonk! Snort-bonk!*

There came a great flapping of wings, and an immense eagle burst from the top of the nest. It was then followed by another.

Some deep, ancient mammalian instinct sent her running for cover, although these days, she knew that she truly had nothing to fear under Ozma’s protective rule. The Land of Oz provided for all who lived there in its own ways, with great fairy magic. But still. Casting her gaze left and right, the Queen could see that her subjects were also spooked, and had dashed into the undergrowth or beneath the earth altogether. But she was a Queen! And she was *their* queen. She must show them all bravery.

“Fear not!” she called in her high-pitched little mouse voice. “No harm will come to you.”

“Of course-SNORT-HONK-not!” bellowed a voice.

Despite herself, the Queen gave a little squeak: for above her a great shadow gave way to one of the two immense eagles. The other circled in the air above. Every bit of fur on the Queen’s body stood on end. The eagle was landing! In front of her! And it was *huge*. One quick glance at the flying companion told her this was the lady eagle, and her companion, who was smaller, was the sir.

She drew herself up as tall as she could before this magnificent lady eagle, who stared down her golden beak with piercing silver eyes under a white feather cap. The Queen of the Field Mice needed no scepter or cloak, and not even her crown, for her command was obvious. But for all that, she was still surprised that the eagle *bowed*.

Then she stood in a heraldic pose and threw her great beak skyward. *SNORT-HONK!* Her husband, soaring, responded in his own eagle language.

“What brings you to the lands of the field mice, Madam Eagle? I see a nest in that tall tree yonder.” And the Queen’s tail twitched as she looked up at the fearsome, sharp beak, and down at the great, golden talons...larger than her own body. She swallowed and fought a shaking tremor in her whiskers. *I may be safe, it is true*, she thought, *but the wilder days of yore remind me of what once was. Will Madam remember as well?*

The lady eagle tossed her proud head toward the tall tree. “We have found this beautiful old snag, and an ancient nest. See its great size! Many eaglets have been born there. But that is not the only reason we are here.”

“And what,” the Queen of the Field Mice squeaked, “are your...other reasons?”

Another snortle escaped Madam Eagle. “Our crops are full, o Queen, and not of your kith and kin, nor shall they be!”

“Oh, well, that’s a relief,” the Queen caught herself saying with a nervous laugh. She felt then that time had slipped backward many years, for in Oz no one aged visibly while they lived there. She could just barely remember her days as a young mouse, bounding over grass archways and clambering carefully through thorns to snatch fat berries. Back then, she had not been a queen; she had been a mouse princess newly anointed, and the land had been tangled and wild and at times quite terrifying, far more even than for any mouse outside of Oz. For in those days, there had been monsters aplenty: kalidahs and vicious beasts without names that slinked out of deep crevices in the earth and between fairyland and the outside world. She shuddered. Madam Eagle watched her intently.

It was then that the Queen spied a small scarlet ribbon around the right talon of the great bird.

“You’re wearing red, Madam Eagle,” she noted.

The bird dipped her massive, elegant head. “You are astute, Your Highness. I hail from Quadling Country.”

The Queen’s little ears perked up; the rising sun shone through them, setting them aglow like tiny petals. “What might bring you from that fair land?” she asked Madam Eagle.

“I was asked a favor by the witch, Glinda,” said Madam Eagle. “I at first protested, for nesting season happens soon. But the Good Witch said, ‘One may find a new perspective, unlooked-for.’ She is, after all, known for being a bit cryptic,” Madam Eagle added with a honk. She glanced up at her mate, who now perched close by on a lower branch in a tall pine. He sent out a high-pitched set of chortles. Madam Eagle squawked back in four short bursts, so her husband relaxed and began grooming his feathers from his perch.

“That is Glinda, certainly,” agreed the Queen. But she was intrigued. Glinda rarely sent messengers forth, and in fact tended to move of her own accord throughout the Land of Oz. Like the Queen, she was rather independent; they understood each other in that way. It had been a long time since the Queen of the Field Mice had ventured so far South, but now she thought fondly of the vivid reds and pinks and magentas of the flowers and fruits there, and it was warmer as well. Her eyes glazed over for a moment. Shaking her head, she asked, “What favor has Glinda asked, if you don’t mind?”

Madam Eagle shook her wings and straightened her proud shoulders.

“I have been asked,” she said, impressively stretching out her wings just a bit, “to give you a day off.”

The Queen of the Field Mice felt her jaw go slack as she stared up at the huge bird.

“I...what?” she stammered, taken rather by surprise by such a proclamation. “What on clovered earth made her think that?”

Madam Eagle leaned slowly, frighteningly down until her eyes locked onto the mouse queen’s.

In a low, whistling voice, she said, “I do not question the ways of the Witch of the South. For we are friends, of a kind, but she is the wisest of us all.”

*That is true*, the Queen managed to think, still holding back a wall of near panic within herself as she faced the eagle.

“I am afraid I do not understand,” the Queen murmured, “why an eagle—er, such an extraordinary herald, I should say—ought to be sent to me for such a message.”

Madam Eagle stood up again, and the Queen could swear that the lady eagle winked up at her husband, who then launched himself back up to the nest tree.

“I have the keenest sight of any animal in the land by day,” Madam Eagle said proudly. “I am tasked with taking you on a journey, to give you the day off. I happily oblige.”

Oh, how the Queen of the Field Mice protested then. “I can’t possibly! The Acorn Crown! The celebrations! The harvest! The...the...” She was at a loss for squeaks.

A long stream of snort-honk-chuckles erupted from Madam Eagle, and her shoulders shook. “I begin to see now why you need the day off! As a fellow mother, dearest Queen of the Field Mice, we all need a day off. Between nesting, between hunting—er, eating—between feeding the eaglets—er, mouse pups. I mean, not *actually* feeding *them* the—”

Madam Eagle shook her head in deep embarrassment as the Queen shivered on her hind legs, her front paws on her hips, her tail whipping to and fro behind her.

And then she *laughed*. She laughed like she hadn’t since she was a pup herself, her eyes fully open and her legs springy as a young mouse. Her high, tinkling laugh echoed over the hills, and all the other mice dared to peek at her, facing the huge eagle, laughing. Slowly, they crept forth to watch in awe, and then in glee, and then pride at their queen. The Queen

of the Field Mice laughed at a huge eagle! What better queen, aside from Ozma herself, could they have asked for? they chattered to each other.

The Queen smirked, setting her whiskers trembling. Then she called upon her staff, and they scurried forth, keeping a respectful distance from the enormous former apex predator, Madam Eagle. They, too, held that long buried memory of a different time and place. But if their queen could stand strong, so could they.

“My dear kith and kin,” she said to her grown children and her maids, “I have decided to take a vacation.”

A ripple of the tiniest gasps and squeals undulated among the grasses and under the poppy seedheads.

“Yes,” the Queen continued, “we have much to celebrate. And I see that all the harvest preparations have been made, the Acorn Crown is polished almost to copper, the food is ready, and everything is beautiful.” She admired the streamers and little bells and wildflower clusters tied with vivid string, the small, bright tents and tables made of mushrooms. “And I shall rejoin you soon enough. But I am taking a break. I trust that everymouse here will enjoy themselves, and feast upon the fruits of the harvest. It is a full moon tonight as well! May you dance beneath it in joy and pride in another summer that wafts out and away, and we shall let autumn glide in.”

She clapped her tiny paws, and then everyone cheered. But she stood, hesitant, staring up at Madam Eagle.

In the tiniest little mouse voice, but one which the eagle could hear easily, she whispered, “I do not know how to take a vacation.”

Madam Eagle threw back her head and let out another honk. “Easy,” she said to the little Queen. “Climb on my back.”

The Queen of the Field Mice swallowed. “In all my days, never once have I even dreamed of climbing upon the back of an eagle,” she admitted to the great bird.

“But you *have* dreamed of taking a break,” noted Madam Eagle.

“I have,” the Queen admitted.

So up she clambered, quick as a wink.

“You are nimbler than the flying squirrels who annoy us in our nests at night,” Madam Eagle said.

“I should give them a talking to about doing that!” the Queen tsked.

Now she was at the nape of Madam Eagle’s neck, where the white feathers changed to dark russet brown. She looked down at her queendom, and all the mice were waving their handkerchiefs up at her, some laughing, some cheering, some actually weeping.

“I shall return soon!” she called down to them. She felt rather as though she might be headed to the moon.

But nothing prepared her for the ripple of muscle beneath her feet, and she clung carefully to the bird’s feathers as Madam Eagle pulsed her powerful wings. *Thawoosh, thawoosh!* The wings carved the air as Madam Eagle soared higher.

“Oh, oh!” cried the Queen of the Field Mice. They were now so high that she could barely see her subjects below. And then, within a minute, they flew high above the trees, above the nest, even...and Sir Eagle chortled at them as they flew away from him.

Over the hills, around the Emerald City, down into valleys they flew, the wind shrieking in the mouse queen’s delicate ears, her fur ruffled constantly. But the smells! The smells of fields, forests, rivers, distant rain, breakfasts being cooked by people below; and all the sights of the great Land of Oz itself, in all directions. How vivid they all were! Although she, like everyone in Oz, knew that beyond that horizon lay a vast, impenetrable, horrible desert, where nothing could survive, and beyond that, the fairylands of Ev and Ix and so on. She gazed up, and quite suddenly Madam Eagle carried them through a cloud. There, diaphanous sky fairies waved and laughed, just as amazed by the little mouse queen’s presence as she was by theirs.

And then, down, down, down, in a long spiral, Madam Eagle took her over fields of red and pink, south into Quadling Country. The shimmering halls of Glinda lay there, entwined with vivid bougainvillea and columbine and bright red and fuchsia roses. Madam Eagle turned and angled lower, and swept right onto the balcony of the Witch of the South, who stood smiling, waiting to meet them.

With utmost care, Madam Eagle lowered down to allow the Queen of the Field Mice to descend from her back, and she did so in one quick slide. Glinda’s helpers arrived to set food and drink at a table carved out of pale pink granite with veins of garnet and silver. For Glinda, there stood a flute of a pink sparkling beverage, with a raspberry in its base. For Madam Eagle, there rested a plate of red-tinged slabs of protein of unknown origin (truthfully, the Queen of the Field Mice did not wish to know its source). And for the little mouse queen herself, there sat a bowl filled to the brim with jewellike raspberries, strawberries, red currants, and a few chunks of sharp white cheese.

“Dear Queen,” laughed Glinda, lovely and ethereal as ever, but with a deep, wise mirth to her ageless face, “it has been too long since we have shared a meal. Now, tell me all about the doings of your queendom.”

The Queen of the Field Mice began recounting her everyday duties as ruler of all the mice in Oz, of the preparations for the harvest celebrations, and about her many children and their descendants who came from far and near. But Glinda held up her hand.

“Thank you, dear friend,” said the elegant red-haired sorceress. “Now, I want to hear about *you*. What stars have you seen at night?”

The mouse queen twitched her whiskers, wondering how Glinda might know about that.

*Is she really that wise?* she wondered.

“Well, dearest Glinda, the shield maid-mouse is high in the sky now, with her sharp reed sword,” answered the Queen dreamily, thinking of the night sky. “To the north, the aurora is faint and pink-green like a bud in the sky, unfolding. And to the south, of course, there is the archer mouse, his bow of spider silk pulled back, his splinter arrow ready...”

So they chatted about stars and constellations, and about the comings and goings through the land toward the Emerald City. The Queen of the Field Mice felt a deep, restful pleasure chatting with Glinda, while Madam Eagle preened and listened and sunned herself. They would all be working hard to prepare for winter, even in Oz where it wasn't quite so fierce. But in Glinda's land, summer still lingered both in fruit and field, and in friendship as well. The sun began to slide, and Madam Eagle glanced at Glinda, who winked slyly back at her. The witch would not rush her friend. This was her vacation, after all.

But the Queen of the Field Mice shook herself out of her reverie, and then stood brightly, before bowing to Glinda.

“Ah, but that is my task, dear friend,” chided Glinda gently, smiling, and she then bowed to the little queen. “You are a queen, after all!”

“I must return,” said the field mouse queen. “It is harvest time, and I must choose the Acorn tonight, as the moon will rise soon.” She sighed in pleasure and gazed up at Madam Eagle. “I am ready, friend eagle,” she said firmly, in a commanding but fair tone that only a queen might use, regardless of her size.

“I may send for you again,” Glinda told her, in the canny tone that only a powerful sorceress such as she might use... or that a true friend might.

The Queen of the Field Mice then sprang upon the back of Madam Eagle.

“Until the next vacation, then!” she called to Glinda, who waved to her little friend as Madam Eagle took her high in the sky, headed north.

To the East, the moon began to rise, and Madam Eagle chortled out to the owls that had begun to make their own music.

“An eagle, carrying a mouse!” cried they, in their hoots and howls.

“Two mothers, taking a break,” called Madam Eagle back to them.

And no animal in Oz had anything bad to say about that.

As the last of the twilight melted away, and the glistening Emerald City lit up for the evening in the distance, Madam Eagle carried the Queen of the Field Mice back to her home, where tiny bobbing lights and every imaginable little creature, mammal or bird or nightjar or insect, had come forth to celebrate the harvest. They all gasped as the eagle slowed and coasted down to land. The Queen of the Field Mice slid neatly off Madam Eagle’s back, and with a long, meaningful look between the two vastly different creatures, the queen nodded.

“Thank you. I needed that,” she said to her feathered new friend, who said “Snort-honk!” and flew to roost with Sir Eagle for the night. Whether or not they might stay for nesting season, the Queen was not sure. Only the eagles knew such things.

As for tonight, that was mouse business. And she was leader of all the mice in the Land of Oz, and tonight, the little queen would do something unprecedented. She would relax and have fun.

*In memory of Sandy Steers for her tireless advocacy of the Big Bear eagles and their habitat, and in honor of Jackie and Shadow and their eaglets.*

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JENDIA GAMMON** is a Nebula and three-time BSFA Awards finalist author of fantasy, science fiction, horror, and thriller novels and short stories. She is also CEO of Roaring Spring Productions, LLC and Editor-in-Chief of its publishing imprint, Stars and Sabers Publishing. She has also written under the pen name J. Dianne Dotson. Born in Southern Appalachia, Jendia now lives in Los Angeles with her family.

Jendia conducts workshops and participates in panels on creative writing for conventions such as San Diego Comic-Con and Star Wars Celebration. She holds a degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. Jendia is also a science writer and an award-winning artist.

<https://jendiagammon.com>



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