

# SOUMOUTOU SERIES-BOOK 3

## How the Witch Soumoutou Got Back Her Wise Book

By Vaso Psaraki

In long ago forgotten times, upon an endless stormy sea, the pirates' islands lay scattered. Tiny, rocky islands, against which angry waves beat furiously, as if trying to swallow them up.

Ships never went near there... They sailed by at a distance, because stories and legends spoke of ghosts and dragons that churned up the sea and threw ships onto the rocks. There were also tales of monsters, living in caves on these islands.

It was for this distant, wind-blown sea, for these "haunted" pirates' islands that the wise old wizard, the wizard Albradra set out!

He left his castle, his castle that stood upon the towering Three-peaked Mountain, he left his old servant Dradra, he left the Garden of his Dream, he left the dragons digging, ceaselessly digging the bedrock to make him new cellars. It was in these cellars that he planned to store all the treasures of the world.

For three years and days and months he studied Soumoutou's Great Book of Magic.

Under the chapter *On Treasures* he had discovered maps with sea routes leading to hidden treasures...

A thirst for wealth and power came over him...

He sent worthy dragons to bring him gold and silver and precious gems from old mines. And corals and pearls from the bottom of the sea. And from sunken ships, the fabulous treasures that lay hidden in their holds.

To the most fearless he gave maps and instructions to gather all the treasures from the pirates' islands and meet him in Ataran. It is there that the wise old wizard is now traveling!

The night is stormy. The wind is howling and the thundering of the waves goes all the way up to the clouds, to where a strange bolt of lightning rips through the darkness.

The wise, the terrible wizard Albradra has soaked his cloak in magic potions and is traveling through the clouds... Traveling like lightning.

He hears the angry waves crashing upon the rocks and he knows he has arrived. He has arrived at the islands, at the islands of the pirates...

He can't wait to find himself in the cave on the big island, among the treasures that his dragons will have gathered.

"Oh, Soumoutou, Soumoutou...if only you knew," he mutters filled with pride... "If only you knew how worthy I made the dragons which you thought I had made disappear..."

He stretches his arms before him...Rubbing his magic ring, the solitaire he wears on his right hand...and he begins his descent. Below him the roaring of the sea and absolute darkness... Suddenly, he sees fires being lit... and then going out. Flames darting out... and then disappearing.

"Of course! That's Ataran!" he whispers happily. "The dragons have arrived and are awaiting me!"

Indeed... how was Soumoutou, the wise old witch, to know!

How was she to know that the dragons which had filled her castle three years earlier were alive and serving the terrible wizard Albradra!

She was very angry at the injustice done to her by the wizard. When she had called on him to make the dragons disappear... And he... had grabbed her precious, priceless Great Book of Magic... She could never forget that!

But, that was three years ago...

Nowadays, Soumoutou was living a quiet life in her castle, within the stone hill of the forest. At her side, as a companion, assistant and apprentice she has Toutou.

She also wants to become a great witch.

Before the sun peeks over the mountain opposite, Soumoutou and Toutou jump out of their hard beds, run up the endless stone steps, and up there, on the castle's balcony they do their morning exercises.

Up there, they listen to the sounds of the forest waking up, they "eavesdrop" on the morning chattering of the birds and enjoy the first rays of the sun... they have their "breakfast": Milk and fresh butter from their goat, Cassiope. Toutou's homemade bread. Wild strawberry jam and berries and two partridge eggs fried with mushrooms!

"What shall we make for lunch today?" asks Toutou... the way she asks every day.

"How about... a dip in the lake?" replies Soumoutou.

"Shall we have... frog's legs with roast sweet potatoes?" suggests Toutou.

"Or would you rather... we fly to the mountain?" asks the witch.

It's like this every morning... Toutou thinks only of food and Soumoutou... only of running around.

"...But, 'flying'... is no easy thing..." the apprentice witch says plaintively. "...Shall I use... a broom?"

She sees the witch's angry stare and falls silent. She lowers her eyes and runs quickly to her room, to put on her wings. Soumoutou has told her a hundred times.

"You will use the broom only to sweep, never to fly... If you want to become a respectable witch!"

Ever since she was a little girl, the wise, respectable, great witch Soumoutou had flown using wings: eagle, owl, bat, magpie, kingfisher wings... depending on the occasion, her mood, the distance she was to cover, whether it was night... whether it was day...

However, for the past few years, the wings of a butterfly—and, in fact, those of the huge and beautiful butterfly Machaon—were the ones she preferred.

Toutou feared the butterfly's dainty wings. She didn't trust them.

She thought they would disintegrate under her weight, that they would not withstand the wind and rain! She was afraid that birds might come after her. She was afraid that spiders might catch her in their webs. She was afraid of lizards, toads and chameleons...

Thus, she preferred bat wings. In fact, Soumoutou had taught her to hang upside down from her feet, whenever she got tired... With her head on the bottom... like a bat...

Soumoutou had taught her so many things! Toutou loved the magic games the witch would play. She wanted to learn everything.

She too wanted to paint with the colors of the rainbow. She too wanted to make butterflies chase after birds, make mice frighten cats... make the huge black and red beetles, the giant beetles, block the forest paths...

But her wise old teacher kept telling her "Don't be in such a hurry"...

For the past three years, Soumoutou hadn't stopped thinking, not even for a moment, of her unique, priceless, Great Book of Magic. She couldn't forget, not even for a moment, that this huge, precious book of hers, with its countless rare magic spells, its instructions, information and advice, was still in the Castle atop the Three-peaked Mountain.

As long as her book was in the hands of the terrible wizard Albradra, she was racked with worry... because she knew... She knew that, if one thirsted for gold, in its pages one could find ways to acquire great treasures... If one wanted power... if one wanted one's will to be respected by all... if one wished to be master of men, and animals, and Nature itself, by studying this book one could achieve it.

However, Soumoutou waited... she waited for the right moment, when she would bring her book back to her castle and punish her enemy, the wizard Albradra.

Every now and then, she would meet the postman and traveling merchant of magic wares at the crossroads, supposedly by chance, and she would get him talking...

She would ask about the witches and wizards whom the postman called on... About the wily Tantoufou, the old hag Pantalì, the wise old Albradra... She would ask about their health, their exploits, their riches, their castles, the magic potions they asked for... about what people were saying...

But the supplier of potions and herbs kept his mouth hermetically sealed.

"I don't know... I didn't see... I didn't hear... I haven't been by there in a long time..." he would reply.

This seemed strange to the witch.

"Why won't the postman talk? ... Something must be wrong..."

But when it came to his magic wares, the merchant talked on... and on... and on...

He would reel off names, both known and unknown, both common and scientific...

He spoke to the witch of bizarre spells, of qualities and traits, of quantities, actions and reactions...