

# RAFFERTY'S RULES

Part 2 of Switchers



Wendy Milton

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WENDY MILTON

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## THE STORY SO FAR . . .

Rodney Rowbottom has developed a tendency to fade. *Why?* The eccentric Mrs Strangeways tells him he's a switcher and that his fading is a sign that he's on his way to Llandringodd, a universe in another dimension. Llandringodd, Rodney discovers, is undergoing an environmental crisis.

Rodney's father is executive director of the British & Australian Association for Research into Genetically Modified Yields (BAARMY) where, unbeknownst to him, an employee is breeding vicious plants. It's an activity that could ruin Mr Rowbottom's reputation.

On a visit to Llandringodd, Rodney meets Evelyn Dopper, a girl purchased from Llondieval (an equally unpleasant universe). As Llandringodd's environmental crisis worsens and food becomes scarce, the Dopples return Evelyn to Llondieval, placing her in mortal danger. Rodney rescues her and brings her to Earth.

Ultimately there's a revolution in Llandringodd, after which the struggle to save the environment begins.

Greenhouses are erected in the grounds of company headquarters; and crop rotation, worms and ploughs become the order of the day. Rodney, Evelyn and Jimmy assist by collecting food scraps to feed Mr MacTavish's greenhouse worms.

In this sequel, *Rafferty's Rules*, Rodney, Evelyn and Jimmy have moved into Year 6 where there's a new boy, Damien Berkinshaw (son of BAARMY's new chief accountant), who's showing a nosy interest in Rodney's ability to fade. Damien questions everyone about it, including Rodney's former nemesis, Ben Houlihan.

## ONE

The rain that had drenched Frogmore for days was gone, and a brilliant morning sun glistened on the grass in the grounds of Rodney's school. Children with muddied feet and heightened spirits shrieked, laughed, ran, or played and chatted. Some huddled in groups, giggling and comparing images on their iPads and mobile phones.

Two children were seemingly oblivious to this buoyant mood: a tall, haughty boy with hunched shoulders, and a short, mean-looking, thick-set boy.

The taller boy pointed. 'Is *that* the kid who faded . . . according to you?'

His doubting tone didn't escape the shorter boy to whom it was directed. 'Ask the others if yer don't believe me,' snarled Ben Houlihan.

'Who said I didn't believe you?' The eyes of Ben's companion widened, but in their depths there was triumph. His companion had risen to the bait.

Damien Berkinshaw's father had recently moved to Frogmore to take up the position of BAARMY's chief accountant, a position left vacant by 'Creepy' Creevey who was now occupying a cell in Silverwater Jail. Damien got his kicks from teasing people. He'd chosen Ben to inform him about Rodney. Ben, who'd spent a great deal of time by himself following the defections of Razza Radford and Billy Hinchcliffe, was grateful for the attention.

'I've found out what *that* lot are doin',' he told Damien, pointing at Rodney, Evelyn and Jimmy.

'Really? What *are* they doing?'

'Would'ya believe they're goin' around askin' people for scraps?' Ben had observed the trio cycling around Frogmore with wheely bins attached to their bikes, collecting mountains of kitchen scraps and compostable waste. He wasn't to know that they were helping combat Llandringodd's environmental crisis. Mr MacTavish needed worms to revitalise the soil, and there were no food scraps in Llandringodd.

'I'm gonna front 'em,' boasted Ben. 'You watch this.' Hands in his pockets, he sauntered towards the trio. 'If it ain't the garbage collectors,' he sneered, with a backwards glance at Damien.

'Shut your face,' snapped Jimmy.

'We'll be collecting *you* next,' said Rodney. 'You're half rotten already, Houlihan. You belong on the scrap heap.'

Ben, who couldn't think of an appropriate comeback, sauntered back to Damien.

'And *you* reckon that when Rowbottom stopped fading, he started disappearing?'

'Yeah. The police were lookin' for 'im. *Six days* 'e was gone . . . an' *I* got the blame!'

'That hardly seems fair.'

'It *wasn't!*'

As the trio moved away, Jimmy was still laughing at Rodney's quip. He'd accepted, without question, Rodney's and Evelyn's explanation about the kitchen scraps (they'd told him Mr MacTavish was establishing a commercial worm farm), and Evelyn felt bad about not telling him the truth. She persuaded Rodney that as Jimmy was helping them collect scraps, he had a right to know why.

'Do you still want to know where I went when I disappeared?' Rodney asked him at lunch. Jimmy's eyes widened and he nodded vigorously.

'I was in Llandringodd . . . it's another universe. To get there, you have to be a switcher. I'm a switcher and so is Mrs Strangeways. She took me to Llandringodd and that's where I met Evelyn.'

Jimmy's stare shifted from Rodney to Evelyn. 'You're an *alien?*'

'Does that worry you?'

Jimmy shook his head. 'Nah.'



'Llandringodd's in a mess,' Rodney went on, 'and Mr MacTavish has been helping save people from starving. He uses our scraps to breed worms.'

*'He's feedin' 'em worms!!?'*

'No! He's using the worms to make the soil fertile in his greenhouses where he's growing stuff they can turn into bread.'

'Is Mr MacTavish a switcher?'

Rodney nodded. 'So's Remus – Mrs Strangeways' cousin.'

Jimmy looked at Evelyn. 'Are *you* a switcher?'

'No. I wasn't born in Llandringodd. I . . .'

'Evelyn comes from a place called Llundieval,' Rodney explained. 'She was sold to people in Llandringodd so she could breed with their son.'

'Who was *gross*,' added Evelyn.

'So you haven't got a mum and dad?'

'Mrs Strangeways and Remus and Mr MacTavish are my family.'

'Wow!' Jimmy fell silent.

Evelyn glanced at Rodney, who nodded. 'You won't tell anyone about this, will you?'

Jimmy shook his head. Who'd believe him, anyway? But Rodney had whetted his appetite, and for the next few days, questions kept popping out of him like rabbits out of a hole.

*'A walkin' plant was gonna eat your dog?'*

'They were called nards.'

'How did they . . .?'

'You heard about those plants Professor Nettleforth was breeding. Someone in Llandringodd must have had the same idea.'

'Did your dog . . .?'

'He escaped *that* time. Rodney rescued him.'

'Are there still nards?'

'Most of them have been eaten,' said Rodney.

'What about in that other place?'

'There aren't any nards in Llundieval, but it's still horrible.'

'You said they were gonna *burn* Evelyn!' He turned to Evelyn. 'But you didn't get singed?'

'No. Rodney cut me free. Then he brought me here, and I've been staying with Mrs Strangeways ever since.'

'An' *then* he went back to that nardy place to rescue . . .?'

'Mrs Strangeways. Yes. She'd been drugged and . . .'

Jimmy had heard many times how Rodney had struck down Miss Tremblechin with her own hypodermic, but he never tired of hearing it again.

Damien Berkinshaw was asking questions too, and it wasn't difficult finding others eager to talk. Fiona Winchcombe already had him in her sights. 'Oh, *absolutely*, Damien,' she said with a flutter of her eyelashes. 'Ben was jealous because he was in love with me, and the police thought he'd murdered Rodney. They even dug up his parents' back yard!'

'Did *you* see Rowbottom fade?'

'Of course! We *all* did! Some of us tried to get a picture of him, but he stopped. Charmaine Chuddeley's mother wanted a photograph to show the principal because he wouldn't believe her, and . . . well, Rodney stopped. No one believes us now, but *I* saw Rodney fade with my own eyes.'

'And then he vanished and no one knows where he went?'

Fiona nodded. 'The doctors *said* he had amnesia.'

'You don't think so?'

'Fiona was cautious. 'I wouldn't know. He might have told Evelyn and Jimmy. Why don't you ask them?'

Damien waylaid Jimmy the next morning. 'Waiting for your friends?'

'What's it to you?'

'My father works with Rowbottom's father.'

'So?'

'Just being friendly. It's Jimmy, isn't it?'

'Yeah.'

'I don't know anyone yet.'

'Yeah, you do. I saw you hangin' out with Houlihan!'

'Houlihan's a loser.'

Jimmy's attitude softened. 'You can say *that* again!'

'I've heard Rowbottom can disappear.'

'Who told you that? *I* never told you that!'

Damien shrugged. 'A few people have mentioned it. I should introduce myself to Rowbottom if our fathers are working together.'

'His name's Rodney.'

'Rodney, then. Get on well with him?'

'Why else would we be hangin' out?'

'What about that girl . . . Evelyn? Is she *his* girlfriend or yours?'

'Mind your own business . . . better still, ask her yourself!' Jimmy trotted towards Rodney and Evelyn, who'd just come through the gates.

Damien followed and gave Rodney and Evelyn a flashy smile. 'I've been annoying Jimmy. Thought I'd introduce myself because our fathers work together.' This was directed at Rodney.

'Work together?'

'My father's the new chief accountant at BAARMY. Dad said the man he replaced went to prison.'

'Dad hasn't told me.'

'He's probably too busy making sure things don't get out of hand again. Pity your father didn't know what that weird professor was up to, eh? We read about Nettleforth in the papers. And now he's disappeared!'

'The police will find him.'

'We have to be off now, Damien,' said Evelyn, 'but we hope you're happy here, don't we, Rodney?'

'Yeah. I'll ask Dad about your father.'

Damien sauntered off.

'I wouldn't trust that boy as far as I could kick him,' said Evelyn.

'Me neither,' chirped Jimmy.