

## PEARL PROBLEMS

“**Holy mackerel**, Echo!” I said.

“Dolphin pods sure know how to have a **mer-mazing** time!”

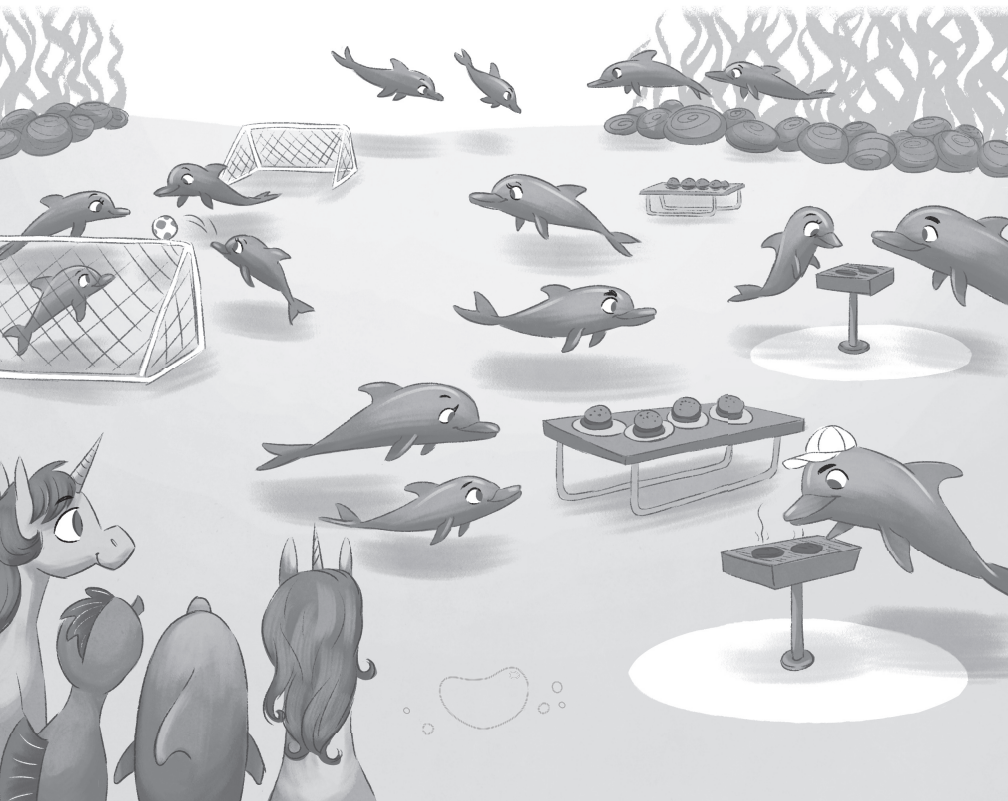
Echo, Flash, Ruby, and I floated at the edge of Pufferfish Park. Dozens of dolphins were swimming and making clam burgers and playing soccer.

“Thanks, Lucky!” Echo said. “All the



dolphin pods around Mermicorn Island  
get together every month for **fin and**  
**games** like this!”

Flash looked from left to right, taking  
in the whole park. “This is the most  
dolphins I’ve ever seen in my life. There’s  
got to be hundreds of dolphins here.



No! Thousands! Maybe even millions!”

Echo laughed. “Probably not millions, but there’s definitely a lot.”

“I don’t want to show up **empty-hooved**,” Ruby said. She squinted her eyes and wiggled her tail, and then red glitter burst from her horn. She was using her **Baking Sparkle**.

All mermicorns have unique magic that we call **SPARKLE**. Ruby’s lets her make baked treats! Other sea creatures in Mermicorn Island have powers too. Seahorses have superspeed, and dolphins have magical echolocation that helps them find anything they’re looking for,

as long as it's not too small or far away.

"Whew!" Ruby said when ten pink cupcakes appeared in front of her.

"I can't make dozens of cupcakes at once yet. Ten is my max. **Give me a minnow**, and I'll be able to make more."

Ruby's words gave me an idea.

"Maybe there's a shell in Poseidon's treasure chest that makes **fishies'** magic stronger!"

My **SPARKLE** hadn't shown up yet, but a powerful mericorn named Poseidon gave me a treasure chest full of magic shells. I'd found shells that make



**fishies** invisible, let me speak dogfish,  
make things grow (sometimes *too* big),  
and so much more. We call it **Shell**  
**SPARKle!**

“That would help a lot,” Ruby said.  
“Especially with Flash’s toy trident.”

I could control my magic shells’  
powers by putting them in Flash’s toy  
trident. It was **mer-mazing!** But if  
I broke a shell, those powers could get  
a little **out of hoof**, so I had to be  
careful.

“We can’t just float here all day,”  
Echo said. “Let’s go join in the fun!”

Just as we reached the edge of the

soccer field, a dolphin came to the sidelines and blew a whistle around her neck.

**“ATTENTION, PODS!”** she yelled, waving a crab claw clipboard. “I’m here to remind you about tomorrow’s Perfect Path Pearl Hunt! Come see me, Dolly Porpon, if you want to sign up.”

Dozens of dolphins swarmed Dolly. They looked about as excited as I do when I get a new set of markers. That’s really, *really* excited!

“Perfect Path Pearl Hunt?” Ruby asked. “What’s that?”

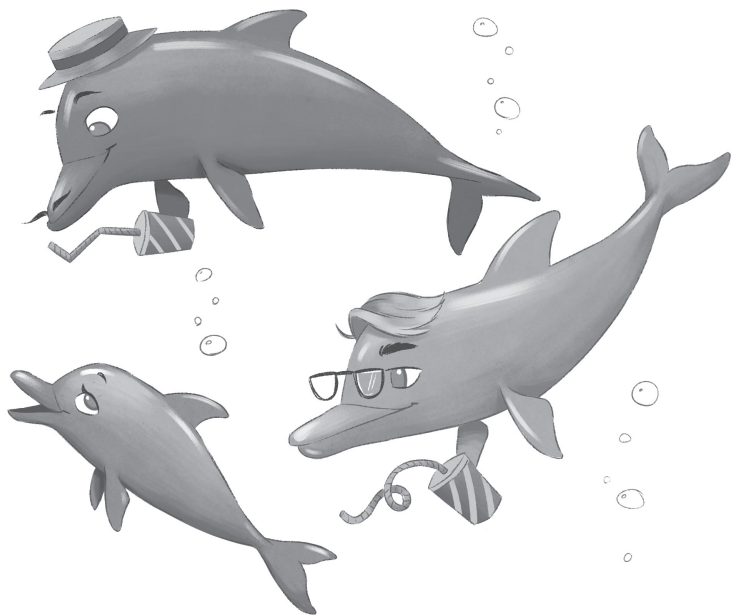
Echo shrugged. “I don’t know,”

she said. "Let's go ask my dads."

Echo led the way as we swam toward her parents, Dalton and Phineas. They floated near a mermaid selling milkshakes.

"Dad! Pop!" Echo said. "What's the Perfect Path Pearl Hunt?"

"It's an event where kid **fishies** look





for eight magic Perfect Path Pearls,” Dalton explained. “They show you all the steps you need to take to achieve your biggest goal and get your heart’s desire. **Any-fishy** can enter, but dolphins love the challenge. Pearls are so small, it takes extra magic strength to find them with echolocation. It’s at the Narwhal Adventure Theme Park.”

“That sounds **fin-credible!**” I said. “Our friend Nelia’s aunt and uncle made that park.” I couldn’t wait for the next time she came to visit so we could all go together.

“Ooh, ooh, ooh!” Flash said, bouncing



on his tail. “Can we enter? Please, please, please, please?” Flash talks about as fast as he swims, which is *super* fast!

“Yeah! Can we join the hunt?” Echo asked. Her dorsal fin shook again. “It sounds like a **mer-mazing** adventure.”

Dalton and Phineas looked at each other. They both had big frowns on their snouts.

“I’m sorry, honey,” Phineas said.  
“Kids need to enter in teams of eight. We were going to surprise you and have your cousins come to town for it. But they all got sick with **fin-fluenza**.”