

THE LAND OF MINWA

The Land of Minwa is a fantasy land where magical creatures live. They are based on creatures from Japanese myths and Japanese folktales known as *mukashi banashi*. Some of their names and abilities, however, are unique to this strange world.



TANUKI: This mischievous creature can shape-shift into almost anything. In Japan, its true form is thought to be a raccoon-dog, a type of wild canine.

TENGU: These mysterious, birdlike creatures have red wings. They live in the Forest of the Dancing Pines and are expert potion makers.



OROCHI: This dragon has eight tails and eight heads, and each head has an angry temper. If Orochi is guarding a bridge, you must ask permission before crossing.



THE SNOW FAIRIES: They live along the banks of the Frosty River. Their breath can turn things into ice.



KITSUNE: These beautiful fairies have long, foxlike tails. Each one carries a mysterious golden sphere.



KAPPA: These peaceful water creatures have delicate skin and resemble turtles. They know all about natural healing remedies.

KIJIMUNA: Experts at fishing and navigation, these fairylike creatures are very unfriendly. It's best not to ride in their boats unless you have to.



UMIBoZU: This enormous creature resembles an octopus. Legend says that it tips over boats that come close to it . . . but it may not be as mean as it looks.

BAKU: These creatures can visit the dreams of those who live in the Land of Minwa. In this world, the baku looks like a tiny, colorful elephant.



LAUGHING FAIRIES: They are full of information about the Land of Minwa — but they can't stop laughing long enough to share it.



MERRY CHRISTMAS!

“A little bit higher,” Colette instructed Paulina, who was placing a sparkly **glass star** on the big spruce tree at the entrance



to **MOUSEFORD ACADEMY**.

“Stop! Hang it right next to that **SILVER** ball.”

Paulina smiled down at her.

“It’s perfect, Colette. You have such an eye for these things.”

The festive atmosphere of **CHRISTMAS** filled the air at the academy. The semester was over, and students were **happy** and excited for the holidays. They all pitched in, stringing **colored lights** and decorations through the halls.

The Thea Sisters had offered to decorate



It's beautiful!



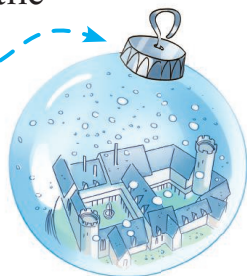
the **huge tree** that stood at the academy entrance. Each year, it was decorated in a different theme.

This year's theme was **SNOW**, and the five friends thought it was perfect. The magical silver and **SPARKLING** white colors were enchanting, and reminded them of the **fantastic** adventures they'd had together.

"I made an ornament for the tree," **Violet** said shyly. She carefully opened a small box that she held in her paws.

"Cheese niblets! It's beautiful!" Pamela exclaimed. "Did you really make this yourself?"

Violet nodded and held up the ornament — a **BLUE GLASS** ball with a perfect replica of Mouseford Academy nestled in the snow inside it.





Nicky looked stunned. “Where did you learn to make things like that?”

“My grandfather taught me when I was young,” Violet explained. “He would spend hours making **MODELS** of ships to put inside bottles. So I thought to myself, why not try it with a glass ball, and our school?”

“It’s **fabumouse**, Vi!” Colette exclaimed. “It makes the tree even more beautiful.”

“Gee, snow. Could this year’s theme be even more **boring**?” a familiar voice asked.

The friends turned to see Ruby Flashyfur behind them. She loved to make **trouble** for the Thea Sisters.

“Hi, Ruby,” Nicky said with a friendly smile. “Would you like to help us decorate the tree? We really have some **beautiful** ornaments for it.”

Ruby shrugged. “Sorry, but I have



something much better to do.”

She paused, waiting for someone to ask her what it was. But the **THEA SISTERS** weren't interested. They turned back to the decorations.

“Well,” Ruby continued, sounding annoyed, “I am getting ready to leave for the holidays. I'm going to an **exclusive** ski resort in the mountains.”





“Okay, well, have fun,” Colette replied casually.

Ruby clenched her **paws**, turned around, and walked away with her snout in the air. The Thea Sisters **LOOKED** at one another — they knew Ruby well, and this was just like her. Then they continued decorating the tree.

THEY WANTED IT TO BE
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL
TREE POSSIBLE!

