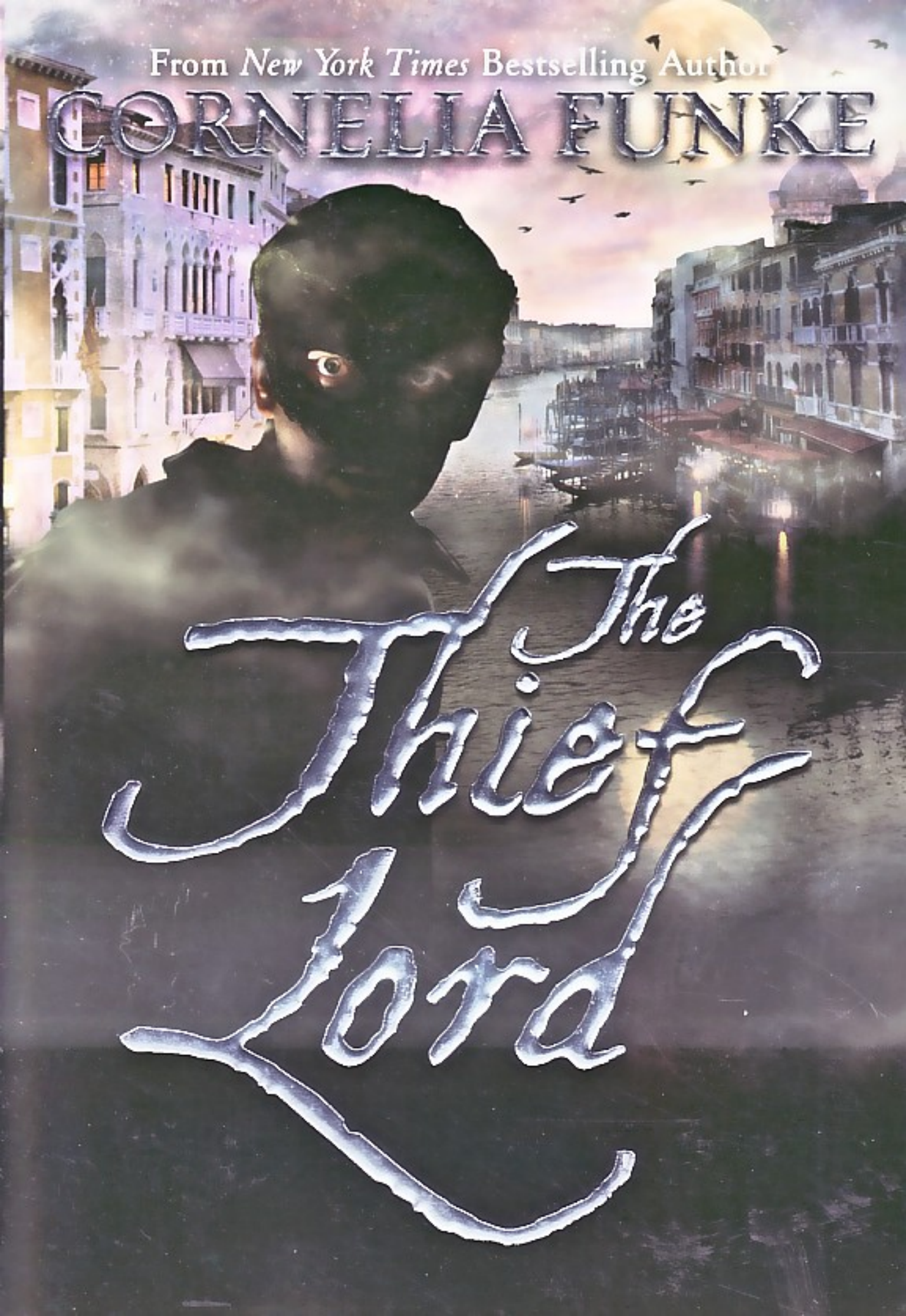


From *New York Times* Bestselling Author

CORNELIA FUNKE



The  
Thief  
Lora



It was autumn in Venice when Victor first heard of Prosper and Bo. The canals, gleaming in the sun, dappled the ancient brickwork with gold. But the wind was blowing ice-cold air from the sea, reminding the Venetians that winter was approaching. Even the air in the alleyways tasted of snow, and only the wings of the carved angels and dragons high up on the rooftops felt any real warmth from the pale sun.

The house in which Victor lived and worked stood close to a canal; so close, in fact, that the water lapped against its walls. At night, he sometimes dreamed that the house was sinking into the waves, and that the sea would wash away the causeway that Venice clings to, breaking the thin thread that binds the city to Italy's mainland. In his dream the sea would sweep the lagoon away too, swallowing everything — the houses, the bridges, the churches, the palaces, and the people who had built so boldly on its surface.

For the time being, however, the city still stood firmly on its wooden legs. Victor leaned against his window and looked out through the dusty glass. Surely no other place on earth was more proud of its beauty than Venice, and as he watched its

spires and domes, each caught the sun as if trying to outshine one another. Whistling a tune, Victor turned away from the window and walked over to his large mirror. Just the weather for trying out his new disguise, he thought, as the sun warmed the back of his sturdy neck. He had bought this new treasure only the previous day: an enormous mustache, so dark and bushy that it would have made any self-respecting walrus extremely jealous. He stuck it carefully under his nose and stood on his toes to make himself taller. He turned to the left, to the right, and became so engrossed in his reflection that he only heard the footsteps on the stairs when they stopped outside his door.

Clients. Blast! Why were they bothering him now of all times?

With a deep sigh he sat behind his desk. He heard voices whispering outside his door. They were probably admiring his nameplate, Victor thought, a handsome black shiny sign with his name engraved in gold letters.

VICTOR GETZ

PRIVATE DETECTIVE

INVESTIGATIONS OF ANY KIND

It was written in three languages — after all, he often had clients from abroad. Next to the sign was a knocker — a lion's head with a brass ring in its mouth, which Victor had polished just that morning.

What are they waiting for? he thought, tapping his fingers on the armrest of his chair. "*Avanti!*" He called out, "*Come in!*"

The door opened. A man and a woman stepped into Victor's

office, which also doubled as his living room. They looked around warily, taking in the cacti, the beard and mustache collection, the coat stand bursting with Victor's caps, hats and wigs, the huge street map of Venice on the wall, and the winged lion that served as a paperweight on Victor's desk.

"Do you speak English?" asked the woman, although her Italian sounded quite fluent.

"Of course!" Victor answered, gesturing toward the chairs in front of his desk. "English is my mother tongue. What can I do for you?"


They both sat down hesitantly. The man folded his arms and looked rather sullen, the woman stared at Victor's walrus mustache.

"Oh, that's just for camouflage," he explained, pulling the mustache from his lip. "Quite a necessity in my line of work. Well, what can I do for you? Anything lost or stolen, any pet run away?"

Without saying a word, the woman reached into her bag. She had ash-blonde hair and a pointed nose. Her mouth didn't look as if smiling was its favorite activity. The man was a giant, at least two full heads taller than Victor. His nose was peeling from sunburn and his eyes were small and dull. Doesn't look like he can take a joke either, Victor thought, as he committed the two faces to memory. He could never remember a phone number, but he never forgot a face.

"This is what we've lost," said the woman as she pushed the photograph across the desk. Her English was even better than her Italian.

Two boys looked out at Victor from the photograph. One was small and blonde, with a broad smile on his face; the other



Includes a Q&A  
with Cornelia Funke,  
an introduction to  
Venice, and more!

Two orphaned brothers have run away to Venice, where crumbling canals and misty alleyways shelter a secret community of street urchins. The leader of this motley crew of lost children is a clever, charming boy who calls himself the Thief Lord.

And he has a dark secret. Something from a forgotten past that poses a threat to the boys' freedom: a treasure so enchanted, it can spin time. . . .

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