

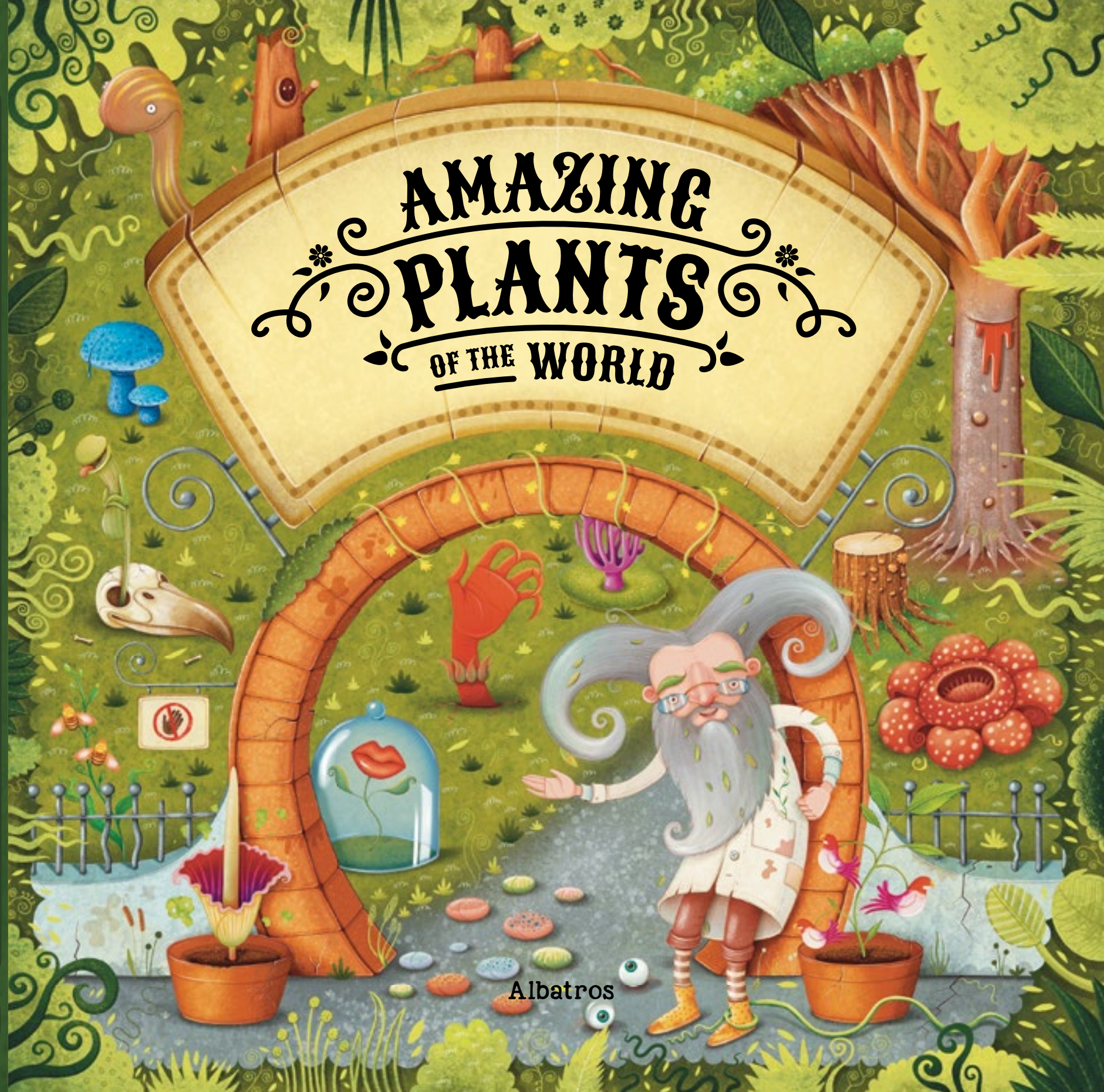


AMAZING PLANTS OF THE WORLD

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AMAZING PLANTS OF THE WORLD



Albatros

STINKING CORPSE LILY

Have you ever seen a truly giant plant? Not yet? Well then come closer. Quickly! You won't believe your eyes. What a flower! Meet my pride, *rafflesia arnoldii*. I am so proud of it that I am going to forgive its unfair growing method. This parasitic flower drains the water and nutrients away from woody climbing plants called lianas. This is why it needs neither its own stem, nor its own leaves. It just keeps blooming with its huge flower, stinking like forgotten meat at the back of your fridge. If it's lucky, its beautiful red flower with white patches reaches a size of three feet and a respectable weight of 20 pounds. My dear children, you are truly lucky today that you can enjoy its charm because the rare *rafflesia* unfortunately blooms for only one week before dying off.



QUITE THE
ICKY GIANT



TITAN ARUM



It takes time for this darling of mine, native to tropical Asian forests, to bloom. Possibly several years! So be patient. When it finally blooms, though, you will remember it for just as long. Because it stinks to high heaven. Even the less sensitive noses can find its scent within a radius of nearly half

... a mile. And as it smells like a pile of rotten seafood, flies, which compete for the honor to pollinate it, love it. It is a true race against time, as this dark-violet flower, aptly called “cadaverous,” sees this world for a mere three days. When the blooming ends, this proud tropical beauty waits ages to bloom again.

WESTERN SKUNK CABBAGE



Do you want to know how badly a skunk stinks when it feels threatened? Check out the Western skunk cabbage and you'll know right away. Ugh. Not a pleasant scent, I must say, although it comes as no surprise that this stinker prefers growing in mud and in ugly reeking swamps. On the other hand, if you hold your breath for a moment and take a good look at this plant, you may even forgive it for its odor. Is it not beautiful? And it's so

... hardy, frost is no bother to it, which is why it thrives in North America, and even up in Alaska. Furthermore, while its smell makes us a little sick to the stomach, bears waking from hibernation hurry to places where the skunk cabbage grows. They pick and eat it. The reason is because Western skunk cabbage has laxative effects, and after their lengthy sleep throughout the wintertime, bears need to, ahem, you know, empty their bowels.



CHAPTER II.



Proceeding onward with our tour, let's go to another area of my incredible botanical garden. Do not hustle, do not shout, and definitely do not trample the plants. And leave your fears at the gate, as this time you will stare in amazement at the peculiar shapes these plants can take. They may look like various objects present in your everyday life. What do you think, kids? If you thought botany was just some boring old hobby for aging gardeners and zealous botanists like myself, I'm sure the next tour will have you running to the nearest florist to buy some seeds, seedlings, pots, and soil in bulk. See for yourselves! For sure there is no one who wouldn't wish to grow a little cup, umbrella, or whatever else. Come in, please, boys and girls! Enter the realm of plants indistinguishable from objects you know very well.





SILVER ARUM



Is that a flower or a vase? you ask. Well, your question is very relevant. The bromeliad called *aechmea fasciata*, native to the jungles of South America, is actually also called a vase. The silver vase. And do you happen to know why? Well, take a look at its leathery leaves. What color are they? Green? No way. They're the color of precious metal. And what about the vase? The center

of its leaves, arranged in a circular fashion, works as a cup where water can collect and be stored. Of course, water in this silver vase should be replenished regularly. *Aechmea fasciata* is actually very demanding about humidity. It needs water to live, so I visit it every day to moisten it. It rewards me for my care with a beautiful pink flower, which it can proudly bear for up to half a year long.



FLASH-SHAPED PITCHER PLANT



What I am most proud of is my collection of little green flasks. Laughing, are you? Clearly these are not real flasks of glass or wood. These cute containers are just another plant. Stunning, isn't it? To be botanically accurate, these flasks are sophisticated hollow traps, or tubes, which serve to catch their prey. And you heard me correctly it is prey! The flask-shaped pitcher plant, or *nepenthes ampullaria*, which grows

on Indonesian islands, used to be a much-feared carnivorous plant. As time went on, it switched to vegetarian food. Instead of insects, it now catches falling leaves in its flask. The leaf sticks to the open cap, where it goes right into the flask, the plant's belly, where the plant uses a special digestion fluid to transform the leaf to much-needed nutrients. And this happens over and over again.



PSYCHOTRIAEALATA

Such lips are very kiss-worthy. Flies, bees, bumblebees, and butterflies know this all too well. Bewitched, they keep wandering around the mouth of this beauty. But, my dear flower enthusiasts, the red lips of psychotriaelata are just two attractive leaves hiding a gentle white flower in the middle. This is also why this seemingly seductive but in fact completely innocent plant is sometimes called the bride's lips. If someone in Mexico, where this bigmouthed plant also grows, gives you this flower, it means that he or she likes you. Its red mouths are never truly the same as each other. Similar to human lips, they vary widely in appearance, and the attractive red leaves are all folded into the shape of a different mouth. Are you interested in the lip plant? Would you like to get to know it better? Then you have to go to Central and South America, where it thrives the best.





LIVING STONE



Blooming stones? Has anyone ever heard of such things, let alone seen them? You must be surprised, shaking your heads in disbelief at all these peculiar scattered pebbles on the ground. Do they come from the sea? you ask. My answer is no. Absolutely not. These are no stones but flowers. Low succulents that look like stones. And they are actually called “living stones”. Please don’t kick them anymore! These peculiar flowers are native to dry regions of South Africa, so they are truly modest when it comes to water. When there

happens to be enough water, they collect it and store it and keep living and growing happily. Slowly but surely. If the lithops—as this plant is called—opts for it, it can retreat into soil, and blend perfectly with its surface. Once in a while these peculiar pebbles get stripped of their old leaves and form new ones. As for blooming, when they blossom a couple of years later, you can enjoy their beauty in bulk. They keep blooming from spring to autumn. I won’t hear a bad word about these living stones!

FLAME LILY



Fire, fire! Get the hoses and put out this fire. Ha! Did I fool you? Come on, I would never let fire spread in my botanical garden. I guard it jealously, keeping it safe from everything. This bright flame that is on fire here, is in fact the national flower of the African country of Zimbabwe: the well-known flame lily. And it is actually not on fire. You do not have to analyze it long to see that its blossom looks like flames. And like small fires, it flashes over to the neighboring plants, spreading cheerfully.

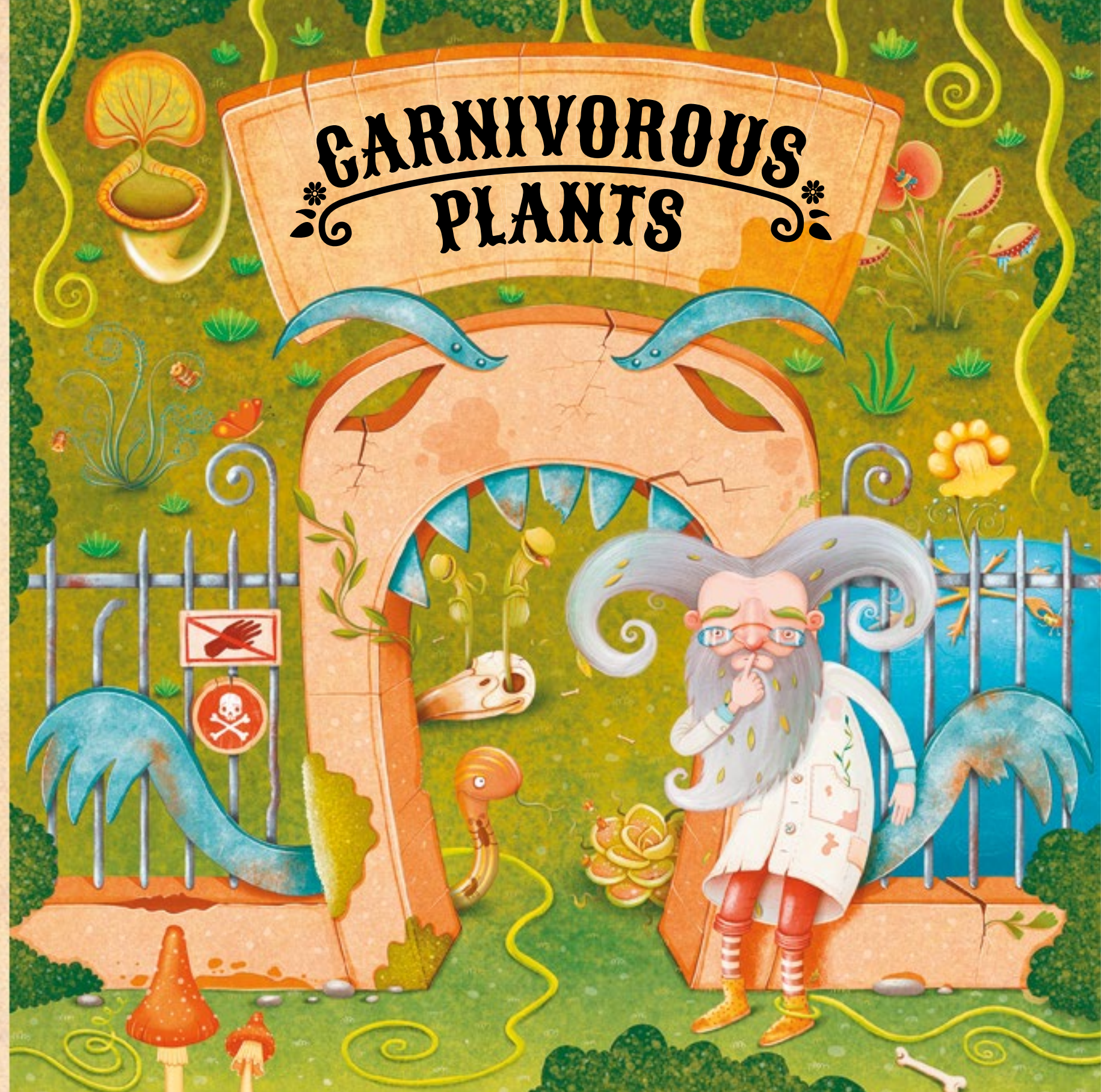
It can do so thanks to entwining stems at the tips of its leaves. When everything goes well, the lily can reach the respectable height of ten feet, and it does not mind sandy environments. But be careful and don’t burn yourselves. It is just like touching real flames. Adorable as this plant is, there is not a single part of it that is not poisonous. So, definitely do not eat or taste it, and avoid touching it, as it may cause skin problems. There’s a reason it looks like real fire.



CHAPTER III



Whoever has salami, ham, or sausage, eat it fast, as the next part of my botanical garden may prove disastrous for your snacks. You can lose them in the blink of an eye. We are entering the department of true predators among plants, the department of plants ravenous for real meat! I can see some kids are getting startled, stepping back a bit, and other faces look somewhat pale too. What's going on? Are you afraid you'll end up in the belly of a plant? Or get bitten by grassy teeth? Well, don't worry. Do not fear these fragile, carnivorous plants! I am convinced that by the end of our tour you will love them just as I do, which is a lot. Come closer, take a look!



41 PLANTS

Welcome to this botanical garden, where human feet have not trodden for many years. Actually, one has—or rather a pair of them have. They belong to a passionate botanist who spends all his time in the company of flowers. He does not seem interested in people, as he feels himself to be a plant rather than a member of the species *homo sapiens*. He may seem strange—or even scary, like anything unknown—but rest assured that he is completely harmless just like his plants are . . . unless you're a fly or a beetle, which his carnivorous plants love to eat, that is. No worries, those meat lovers might possibly snatch at your snack if you have a ham sandwich or a sausage in your bag, but that's all. Though some of the plants from this forgotten botanical garden look predatory at first sight, even spooky, they are still just plants that can never catch you. Enough talking, though! Keep your hats on as our tour of the botanical garden begins . . .

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