

Volume I
of the MUD Trilogy

The Rescue at Fragment Crag

A Classic Words Novel

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CHAPTER ONE

Mud's Obsession

No doubt you read *Sentence Island*, and you recall the story of the fish whose name was Mud and how he swam to Sentence Island to study the secrets of sentences. There, many sentence-wise animals helped him, and after what we will call—to be gentle—a series of misunderstandings, Mud began to understand sentences. Partly.

Some years had passed since Mud first journeyed to Sentence Island, and though he had sometimes jumped back in the ocean for visits home to his splashy reef, he had become ever more attached to the wind-blown island and his new sentence friends there. Life was

fine. Everything was in its place. Everyone stuck together and talked about sentences, and it was so much fun. Mud finally had gotten used to walking on his tail fins, and everyone on the island loved sentences.

Especially Mud. Each year, it seemed, Mud's love of sentences grew more profound, and everything he did made him think about them. If he had a snack, he thought how tasty sentences are. If he raised a right fin, he thought how sentences have right sides and left sides. If he was not finished with his supper, he thought about how sentences are complete. If he made a subtraction mistake, he was reminded that subject-verb disagreements are odious. (Fidget, the tough little cricket, had taught him that.) If he watched the blue sky scrolling above, pulling white puffs along, he thought of how sentences roll by, pulling one word after another. If Mud saw

profound: adj. deep
odious: adj. hateful, disgusting

a beautiful sunset, he thought how beautiful sentences are.

Mud's sentence obsession did not abate with time; it only got stronger.

Mind you, Mud did not know as much about sentences as he thought he did, but his enthusiasm was impressive.

Too impressive, at times. Sometimes Mud would sink into a dazed, glazed sentence spell—he called it a sentence *distraction*—and his blue scales would grow gray, and his normally alert countenance would freeze into a wide-eyed stare, and his fishlips would silently form sentence words, such as “Agreement” or “Object,” and no one could snap him out of it. Of course, being a fish, Mud had no eyelids and was always wide-eyed, but his dilated sentence stare was still something to see.

When Mud went into one of those sentence

abate: v. diminish, lessen

countenance: n. facial expression

dilated: adj. wide-eyed

stares, even his sentence friends thought he was over-doing it. “Eccentric,” they called him. That means odd. Fidget, Mud’s subject-verb cricket friend, was particularly disturbed.

One morning on the gleaming beach, with the ballet winds dancing white foam over the waves, Mud and Fidget went for a walk. They were having a nice talk about singular and plural ideas. Suddenly Mud got that tremulous sentence look, stopped walking, and turned his empty gaze out to the far ocean. Fidget, alarmed, tried everything to break Mud’s trance.

“Mud!” cried Fidget, but Mud did not react. He had a vacant, distant look, like a scaly statue.

“Agreement,” he whispered, speaking to something in the unknown distance. He smiled as though greeting a friend.

“Mud!” Fidget expostulated, frustrated by

tremulous: adj. trembling
expostulated: v. cried in disapproval

Mud's goofy grin to nowhere. "Get it! Get it!" and Fidget jumped at him, bouncing Mud's scaly nose with all six feet. It was no use. Mud was locked in his strange stare, and visions of sentences danced in his head.

Even for a creature with the wisdom of a cricket, this was exasperating. The incredulous cricket stared at Mud, who was in his own world. "Mud...get it...get it...," Fidget chirped pitifully, but he could not finish his thought.

A white cloud softly traversed the blue sky, and Fidget's left antenna slumped, as only cricket antennae can. High above, the cloud billowed along until it was out of sight on the right. On the moving sea, the cloud's reflection followed nervously behind, and Mud saw two pelicans chase the reflection out of sight.

incredulous: v. full of disbelief

traversed: v. crossed

billowed: v. swelled and bulged, like a cloud

Suddenly Mud got that tremulous sentence look, stopped walking, and turned his empty gaze out to the far ocean. Page 10.

Punctuation is not random. In good writing, it is not personal, allowing anyone to punctuate however he or she pleases. Instead, there is a relationship between the punctuation and the story. Like words, punctuation points have meaning. Here, two commas pause and resume the sentence, allowing the sentence to stop walking just as the character does.

Language: Notice the alliteration on the *f* consonant in the first lines of page 13.