

New Bridge to Lyndesfarne

A Novel by Trevor Hopkins

The story is set is partially in the contemporary world of England and partially in the world of Lyndesfarne. In Lyndesfarne, all but the simplest technology does not work, but a sophisticated society functions using pervasive magic. The crossing between the worlds is formed by two stone causeways across the marshes, joined by the Old Bridge; its immense masonry arches are partially reinforced by steel alloys and by magical sprites, visible as orange sparks inside the stonework itself. A short section in the middle of the central arch, in the region where neither engineering nor magic is entirely reliable, requires both metal and magical enhancement.

The story follows Kevin, an experienced and talented but lonely architect who is commissioned to design a modern New Bridge to link the two worlds. He has been working with Bret, his counterpart from the other world. In a friendly gesture, Bret invites Kevin to visit his home for a meal, where he meets Bret's parents and numerous family members. Kevin learns that Bret is especially adept at the Lyndesfarne art of shapeshifting, and is actually a woman.

To help his understanding of the magical properties of Lyndesfarne, Kevin attends briefings at NISSA, a university organisation in England set up to study magic, headed by Professor Alan. Kevin also learns about the Guardians and the Watchers, organisations whose purpose is both to protect the Lyndesfarne crossing and to preserve its secret.

Kevin is accompanied by Tanji, a pretty and petite woman who is his new Guide from the Guild of Directions. Tanji has recently returned to the Guild after a long absence, and replaces Ricard the previous guide who resigned under unexplained circumstances. From Tanji, Kevin first hears the legend of the Ferryman, a near-mythical figure who was responsible for guiding travellers between the worlds before the Old Bridge and causeway was constructed, but who seems to have disappeared when the crossing was opened.

On a regular trip to Lyndesfarne, Kevin sets out to review the New Bridge, at the time when construction work on the vital central section has just begun. The inspection requires travel in a crewed rowing boat, since they are entering the erratic boundary region. Blown off-course by a sudden storm, they are forced to take refuge on the England side of the crossing. Cold and damp, Tanji agrees to accompany Kevin to his home, where they enjoy a romantic evening together.

In the morning, they discover that an artefact Kevin had bought in Lyndesfarne, a prescient paperweight, is still working in England, contrary to every rule either of them had ever heard. Confused, they elect to visit NISSA where Professor Alan is initially dismissive, then attempts to imprison Kevin and Tanji in his office. By accident, they overhear a threat to end their own lives to protect the secret.

Fearing for their lives, Kevin and Tanji escape from the office and flee, making a daring and dangerous crossing over the as-yet incomplete New Bridge using the wooden scaffolding in place to construct the join. Once back in Lyndesfarne, Tanji contacts her old friend Kithyn and begs for assistance from her and her husband Amiss. Kevin and Tanji make their way to Tanji's family home, where Tanji's Uncle, as well as Kithyn and Amiss, re-assure them that they are safe. Shortly afterwards, they are all shocked by the arrival of a group of Guardians and Watchers in a police action. We discover that the Ferrymen still exist as the final arbiter of justice and control of the crossing. It is a hereditary post, and Bret's mother is the current incumbent.

In a final denouement, Kevin helps to uncover a series of plots to prevent the completion of the New Bridge, to close forever the crossing between the worlds, and to use the prescient paperweight to defraud gambling organisations in Kevin home world. Amiss is revealed as the true villain, having used his wife's innocent friendship with Tanji to keep track of Kevin's movements, while Professor Alan and the stool-pigeon Ricard are implicated in the crimes.