

The **Magic Fish**

An Informative Tale

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The Magic Fish

An Informative Tale

Ryan Kelln

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE LIVED a young fisherman named Napster. Napster lived alone in a house that his father had built on the edge of a small fishing town. His parents had mysteriously died together at sea, and while he never found his parents after the accident, he did recover the boat they built together, along with his father's magic fishing net.

One day Napster got up before dawn and sailed his boat far, far out into the sea looking for a new spot to fish. With any luck he would find an area that had been missed by the huge commercial fishing boats owned by the powerful Duke who lived near the fishing town. Napster, like his father

before him, preferred to remain independent even though it meant his fortune was a result of hard labour and good luck and not the skill of the Duke's accountants.

As he always did, Napster threw his net into the water and started singing the old songs his mother had taught him. When he hauled his net back out of the water there was only a single fish in the ropey strands of the net. The fish was large, but not too big; glistening, but not too shiny; thick, but not too fat. Napster went to take his solitary catch out of the net.

"Well, a single fish is better than no fish, I suppose," he said to himself.

"I should think so!" said the fish.

Napster stopped in mid-grab and looked around fearfully.

"Sorry, Napster, it's just me," said the same watery voice from somewhere near the fish in the net.

Napster looked back down at the fish in the net and clearly saw the fish say, "I am a Magic Fish and now that you've caught me, I will grant you three *WISHES*."

Napster looked around slowly once more then sat down and thought.

“Three wishes?”

“Three *WISHES*. But, of course, you know the rules. You can’t wish for more *WISHES*,” said the fish matter-of-factly.

Napster hummed to himself. He was much more clever than the fish suspected and had far greater ambitions than more *WISHES* for himself. He smiled.

“Alright magic fish! My first *WISH* is that I can make as many copies of you as I want!”

The fish frowned, rolled its eyes three times and flapped its gills as fast as a hummingbird’s wings. There was a puff of smoke that hid the fish for a moment and smelled faintly like inspiration.

“Done!” squeaked the fish.

The fish and Napster looked around. They were still all alone on the old boat far away from land with nothing but water around them.

“Where are my copies, fish?”

“Magic Fish One, if you please,” said the fish, “Just pick me up and you’ll see.”

So Napster reached down and took Magic Fish One out of the net.

“You see, now there are two of me,”
two fishy voices spoke in unison.

Napster looked down and sure
enough, there was a second Magic
Fish in his hand. One was still in the
net where he’d left it.

“Hello, I’m Two,” said the fish in
his hand.

Napster threw Two into the boat
behind him and grabbed at the One in
the net again.

“See? There’s Three!” chorused
the three Magic Fish from the net,
Napster’s hand, and the deck of
the boat.

NAPSTER SAILED HIS BOAT BACK into the harbour and docked. He grabbed Two, the second copy of the Magic Fish (but actually ended up holding Four, the fourth copy), and got ready to head home, leaving two fish flopping on the deck of the boat and the original fish still stuck in the net.

“Shhhh!” he shhhhushed the fish, and they looked up at him with big eyes and did their best to keep still and quiet. He threw a tarp over the deck of the small boat and hoped that would keep him out of trouble until later that night. He would come back when fewer people were around and figure out what to do with all the fish.

He started walking home, stom-

ach growling and fish in hand. When he had walked far enough away that other Magic Fish couldn't hear him, he quickly and carefully ended the life of Four.

On the way home he stopped to buy some potatoes, butter and herbs to eat with Four that night for dinner. However, when he put the fish down to pay the grocer, he realized he'd made a mistake—when he went to pick up the fish again he just ended up with two (well, actually Five); one (Four) still remained right where he put it down. Napster glanced nervously around, but no one had noticed his fish multiplication. He was stumped though—it was more difficult to move the fish than it was to copy it!

“Um, Roger, how about I trade you one of these nice fish here for this butter?”

Roger looked up, surprised, but readily agreed. Napster was a long-time customer and good friend, and the fish did look tasty. A fish that size was worth at least three times the butter anyway!

“Deal.” Roger scooped up the fish and took it into the back. Napster gave

a huge sigh of relief—there wasn't a copy still sitting on the table where he left it.

“My pleasure Roger, thanks so much!” Napster would have skipped home if he hadn't worried about what the town's old gossips would have told the younger ladies.

NAPSTER LEFT FIVE IN A FREEZER and from there he could grab as many fish as he needed. He made an amazing meal and tried to eat a good portion of Six. However, when he took a bite of Six he just made a copy of that bite, so no matter how much he ate, Six remained whole, although still cut up into nice succulent, bite-sized portions. Napster sighed, content but frustrated: He worried that he may soon be overrun with Magic Fish.

He thought for a moment, drumming his fingers on his full belly, and tried lifting his plate—the fish stayed on the plate! Then he carefully got up and brought his plate over to the garbage and shook the fish off the plate.

“Ha!” Napster grinned. The fish had

been disposed of and he did a quick check and confirmed that Five was still in the freezer.

It might be odd to throw out a whole fish, he thought to himself, but I could always make more, couldn't I?

Just to be sure, he grabbed Seven from Five and dropped it in the trash where it lay beside the well-cooked Six.

When the moon had risen high into the sky and most of the town was asleep, Napster strolled back to his boat along with his garbage can and a broom.

“Shhhh!” said One, Two and Three as he lifted the tarp off the deck of the boat. Napster put his finger to his lips and then swept Two and Three into the garbage. He gathered up the net with One still in it and strolled back home, net and fish under one arm, garbage can in the other.

IT HAD BEEN A WHILE SINCE NAP-ster had been out fishing. The first Magic Fish was still in his father's net, but now graced his bedroom wall above his bed. Before bed every night, he and One would talk about the sea, other fish and how different Napster's life had become since he met the Magic Fish.

People thought that Napster had given up being a fisherman and instead become a fishmonger—selling a single type of fish for the lowest prices in town. He was attracting all sorts of attention, some of it good, from customers who loved the consistency of his fish and appreciated his low prices, and some of it not so good. Thanks to the Duke he received many visits from

town officials concerning the health and safety of his business, proper business certification, and wheelchair access to washroom facilities for his customers. But business was good, since it didn't cost him any money to make a copy of a fish for a customer.

There was only one problem: being a fishmonger took almost all of his time and Napster preferred to spend his days on his boat. One night, as he lay in bed talking to Magic Fish One, Napster asked,

“Magic Fish, I'd like to make my second *WISH*. I *WISH* that I could send my fish copies to anyone in the world in the blink of an eye.”

The fish frowned, but was getting used to Napster's odd ideas and *WISHES*. Bubbles flew out of his mouth like water out of a firehose, his tail spun like a helicopter's rotor blade and his eyes flickered through all the colours in the rainbow eventually settling on pluberry. There was a puff of smoke and an even stronger smell of inspiration.

“Done!” squawked One. “That was a bit of an odd choice wasn't it? Don't

you want a sports car? How about some money? Maybe to be President?”

“No, I don’t think so,” said Napster, and he hummed and smiled to himself.

THE NEXT DAY NAPSTER TOOK down the names and addresses of his customers and told them about his new delivery service. Each day they could wake up and there in their mailbox would be a fresh fish waiting for them. Napster could nearly instantaneously transfer a copy of a Magic Fish to anyone in the town, but he preferred to pretend that the deliveries happened overnight to explain why no one ever saw the delivery people.

Soon customers were coming to him with the names and addresses of relatives and friends all across the lower mainland. Napster was happy to tell them that he did indeed deliver to Springfield and added them onto his

list. Next, he set up a dial-a-fish service. Customers could phone and leave a message with their orders, which he would fill in the early mornings, leaving him time for other things during the day. He started spending much less time at the small store in the front of his house and was busy preparing something Big. However, he was minding the store the morning the older gentleman dropped by.

“This is quite the business you’ve built for yourself Napster.”

“Thank you, Mr...?”

“Duke Reehah,” said the tall man as he shook Napster’s hand with a strong grip.

“Ah, what a pleasure, I didn’t know that you came to town very often, uh, Your Grace.”

“Just Reehah will do, I’m not one for formalities.” The Duke smiled broadly. “Your delivery service is all the rage amongst my staff, and I’ve eaten some of Napster’s Fine Fish myself.” The Duke’s eyebrows had put quotation marks around “Napster’s Fine Fish.”

Napster smiled politely and nodded.

“But I’ve never seen anyone ever deliver the fish. Odd isn’t it, especially

with all the security at my castle. Not a single delivery boy has ever been spotted, but right there in the morning is the fish. Amazing!” The Duke’s smile didn’t look quite so kind as before.

Napster had been expecting this moment for some time. His boat was repainted and ready to sail, all his debts had been paid off, and he’d put a locked chest of gold on his boat—just in case.

“Shop’s closed,” Napster told the few other customers. “Please phone in your order when you get home. Thank you and sorry about this.”

The remaining customers growled at the Duke and shuffled out of the small store, leaving Napster and the Duke alone.

“Your Grace, please come in. Let’s talk business.”

Duke Reegah nodded and followed Napster into the house. Napster took the Duke straight to his bedroom and introduced him to Magic Fish One.

IT TOOK A LONG TIME BEFORE THE Duke believed that One was real. He had nearly left the house in disgust three times before Napster convinced him that the fish was real and Napster could make and send copies of the fish. Most of Ten Thousand Three Hundred Forty Six through Ten Thousand Three Hundred Fifty Two were scattered around Napster's house, but the last was in the hands of the Duke's wife. The Duke had passed through shock, fear, greed, and many other emotions during the presentation but rode it out and ended up at the end of his line — at *business*.

“Napster, how would you like to work for me? You'll have access to any-

thing you want—women, cars, jets, money, you name it,” said the Duke.

“A generous offer Duke, but what more do I need? I have all the food I will ever need, I can trade or sell fish for anything else that I want, and I can feed the world with just a single fish! Just think about what that means for poverty and the environment!”

“What? Look Napster, there really isn’t any other way. You *have* to work for me, I’ll do anything to get you on staff.”

“Can you grant me *WISHES*?”

“I’ll make all your wishes come true,” said the Duke.

The Magic Fish rolled his eyes.

“No, not wishes—*WISHES*.”

“One—” he pointed at the Magic Fish, “can grant me *WISHES*. That’s how I can make copies and transfer them to anyone around the world in the blink of an eye.”

The Duke thought for a moment. “You’re the only one that it grants *WISHES* to?”

“That’s right,” said Magic Fish One.

“Please, Napster, come work for me,” said the Duke in a sad, hard way.

“I’m sorry,” said Napster.

“I’m not,” said One.

“Fine,” said the Duke as he placed his hand on a long legal sabre sheathed at his side.

Napster had assumed it was merely ornamental, but now he wasn’t so sure.

“Uhm, what are you doing?” asked Napster.

“The only thing left to do—” Duke Reegah sighed and drew his sword.

“*WISH!*” said the Fish.

Napster sprang back and shouted out the first thing that came to mind—

“I *WISH* that everyone could copy and transfer fish the way I can!”

Magic Fish One started spinning in both directions at once, a small thundercloud formed over his head and shot small lightning bolts at the Duke, and his scales flew off his body and danced jigs around Napster. There was a puff of smoke and an overwhelming smell of inspiration.

“Done!” squealed the fish triumphantly and slumped exhausted in the netting on the wall.

The Duke wrinkled his nose, blinked, and with his free hand he reached out, grabbed One, and cre-

ated copy Ten Thousand Three Hun-
dred and Fifty Three.

THE DUKE LEFT IN A DAZE, COM-
plaining of the stink, still hold-
ing a Magic Fish in one hand
and his sabre in the other.

Napster phoned all of his custom-
ers and explained the situation to the
best of his ability. He was closed for
business, for good.

That night he sank into bed com-
pletely exhausted, with One still smil-
ing above him.

“Good day, eh?” said Napster.

“Very good,” said the Magic Fish.

They both smiled and fell fast
asleep, dreaming of freedom.

THE NEXT DAY NAPSTER ROSE late, awakened by the sound of pandemonium outside his window. Magic Fish were piled knee deep in the streets. People were running, shouting, laughing, slipping, and falling over themselves. Fish were being thrown wildly in all directions. Napster and One looked at each other and started to walk carefully down to the docks. Napster drew a hood over his head, making sure to meet no one's gaze. As he drew closer to his boat, he realized that in the piles of fish were copies of fish other than Magic Fish. Napster opened the lid to the basket that held One and showed him the other fish.

“Some sort of loophole, I think. Fish,

WISH, wish, fish, they all sound so similar,” said One and grinned.

“Ah,” said Napster, replaying his last wish in his head. He smiled back at his friend.

They reached the boat, and amidst the mayhem of a widespread fish fight dominated by fishermen laughing madly, Napster and One set sail on a well-deserved vacation. Back where he had first caught One, Napster placed his father’s magic net in the water and Magic Fish One swam out and to the other side of the boat.

“Goodbye Napster, congratulations on your *WISHES!*”

“So long One, and thanks for all the fish!”

“The Magic Fish” is a short story designed mainly to teach children and “digital immigrants” about the differences between physical objects and digital information.

