

READ ST

FOR

THE VINE

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FOR
THE VINE

One Hundred Nineteen
Homegrown Stories by
Sixth-grade Students of
Berkshire Middle School

Edited by

Daniel Fisher
Deana Straub

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To the Authors

Six seconds is not long enough to showcase your talents.
Your editors are proud of the time and effort
you put into the work exhibited here.
Devote your time to what matters.
Keep up the good work!

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Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover

*When a homeschooled boy goes to a public school he has trouble making friends. He gets bullied, but, on the way, he makes a new and unlikely friendship in **DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER**, by Neve R.*

Hi! I am Josh, and I am going to a new school. Tomorrow is my first day! I was homeschooled, so my parents wanted me to go to the most stereotypical high school. I am going to a school called MHS, which stands for Maxwell High School.

I am going in as a freshman, also known as fresh meat for all the seniors. So, to make a good impression, I put on my ironed clothes plus some aftershave. I went to school. I walked in with everyone whispering 'new kid' to their friends. I went up to my locker and opened it with a song to help me remember my combination, "15 to 10 to 35." My mom made up the song. I started walking to my classes.

In between classes, we have ten minutes to talk to your friend and go to your locker. But the thing, I have no friends. So, I went to the closest vending machine and got a cherry Coke. As I went to grab it, another hand got there before me. I looked up and saw a big, fat face with some peach fuzz on it. I ask him if I could have my Coke back.

He said, "Well, I am thirsty, so how about no!"

I had near dealt with a bully because I had been homeschooled since I was four years old. I said, "Look, I just paid \$1.50 and I would like it back, please!"

He said, "No, get lost!"

So, as fast as I could, I ran away and went to Band with my big, clumpy Tuba. Then, at lunch, I ate by myself. As the day went by, and it was my last hour with Mr. King, I walked in and THERE WAS FAT FACE! Why does he have to be here and it's my last hour and to top it off he sits right behind me? I will just pretend that he is not there.

We took a seat and listened to Mr. King talk about how we are going to have to work hard this year, but also have fun. While Mr. King was mumbling this, fat face put his feet up on his table.

“Can you please put your feet down?” I asked.

“How about NO!”

I was starting to think that fat face liked to say ‘no’ to people. I still even don’t know his name. So, to fit in, I went up to fat face and said, “Hi, my name is Josh Green, and what is your name?”

“Hi, my name is Luke Clawson and get lost!”

I said, “Can we make friends?”

“Did you not listen to me...get lost! Did I stutter?”

“Look I just want to fit in,” I explained.

“You don’t fit in anywhere!” Then Luke grabbed me by the neck and threw me.

Right as that happened, Mr. King walked passed and saw him and took him to the principal’s office. In the middle of class, the office called my class and asked for me to come down.

Mr. Clark, the principal, said that we both have to have one detention and we have to talk to each other in that detention. I also have to get my parents to drop us off at school. So, that will be fun telling my parents what happened!

The detention day finally came and it was not like I wanted to do it. I just wanted to get it over with. So I walked in to a sad, grey room with a first grade table and two rusty chairs. Sitting there was Luke and Mr. Clark was there too. I sat down with them. Mr. Clark told us that we need to talk things out.

So, we started talking and he ended up being a really nice guy. He told me stories of how he and his friends would prank Mr. Richard and put a baby monitor under his chair so they could hear him sing in his free period! Somehow we are now friends and we walk to class together.

He was my first friend and now my best friend. We also play lacrosse and hockey now and Luke has stopped being a bully.

Double David

*A boy and his family are almost killed by something that comes out of a common day object. Can this young boy save himself and his family? Find out in **DOUBLE DAVID**, by **James Laport**.*

David Ronner was pinned against the ground. He could not release himself from the grasp of... Oh, you want to hear the beginning of the story? Well, here you go.

David jumped up out of his bed and ran to the window on a bright sunny morning. He ran downstairs for a quick breakfast and ran back upstairs to get ready for his day. As he got ready and brushed his teeth, he decided that today would be the day that he asked out his crush Maddie. He wanted to see if he looked good, so he looked in the mirror.

All of a sudden, the rim of the mirror started to glow. David stared into the mirror and couldn't look away. The bright light started to burn his eyes. He kept on staring and staring, until he could finally bring his attention away.

David moved away from the mirror. He started to see a figure move inside the mirror. It seemed as though it was walking toward the outside of the mirror. David almost thought he could see a figure of him. And he could. The reflection of David was actually coming out of the mirror and reached out to grab him. But David blocked it and ran down to the kitchen. David's reflection started to follow. "Help!" David screamed. "My reflection is trying to kill me!"

"What?!" David's mother asked surprised. "David, are you sleep walking?"

"Mom, I'd be happy to drive him to the mental hospital!" David's sister, Jessica, said mockingly.

David's reflection ran down the stairs and stopped on the last step and said, "Hello, Ronner family. I am Divad, David's reflection. And I am here to take your mother. You see in the mirror, I was just waiting for someone in this house to look at their reflection. This would help me jump out of the mirror and take their form. David here was just the idiot to do that. Now that I am in the form of David, I can put David in the mirror and I will be out here as him."

Divad sprang toward David and threw him to the ground. Divad forced David to run up the stairs and go to his room so he could talk to him. Mrs. Ronner ran after David but, just as she was at the first step, Divad tackled her and snapped her neck. He ran after David.

From downstairs, the other Ronners could hear the door to David's room slam shut. They could make out a yell, "You know why I brought you here, right David?" Divad asked.

"No, Divad. But I could make a guess," David answered.

"Okay, go ahead."

"I'm going to guess that you are going to do what the bad guy does in my video game."

"And what is that?"

"Either convince me that my life is terrible so I will kill myself or tie me up to keep me quiet," David said.

"Oh David, you idiot. I am not going to do either of those things. What I am going to do is put you into your mirror that I came out of. And trap you in there forever like you did to me," Divad exclaimed.

David called for help. He squirmed to try to be released from Divad's grasp. He couldn't get out; he needed a miracle to be saved from this situation. Suddenly, he had a burst of strength and escaped from Divad. This made David realize that he can overcome his reflection by making him go back to where he came from.

David sprang for his reflection and struggled to push him back into the mirror. Divad and David both fought, and pushed, and pulled, and punched, and kicked to try to put the other to the ground.

From downstairs, the other Ronners could hear what was happening. They were afraid of the sounds. Little Susie Ronner wanted to go see what was happening upstairs. She slowly climbed up the stairs and reached David's room. Susie pushed the door open just a crack to find Divad pinned to the floor. "Help me," David pleaded.

Susie ran and helped David. Together they picked up Divad and carried him over to the magic mirror. They struggled, but they finally pushed the evil reflection back into the mirror.

Once again, the mirror started to glow. The brother and sister stared into the light just as the mirror exploded. The glass flew everywhere, up and down, left and right. One shard of glass hit Susie and gave her a deep wound in the leg. She fell to the ground with great pain. "Owwwwwwww!" she screamed.

David ran to her and helped her up. Together they walked down the wooden stairs. "Come on sis," David exclaimed. "I'll fix you up."

When they got downstairs, Susie and David had found their mother. But she wasn't dead. It was a miracle. Mrs. Ronner had come back to life when Divad was put back into the mirror. So, the Ronner family celebrated the life of their family and agreed that they would destroy all the mirrors in the house.

The End of the Road

*Have you ever been ashamed that bad things are happening to you, and you can't find the strength to fight them? Discover how to build that strength in **THE END OF THE ROAD**, by **Jaden Kathawa**.*

My name is Tom. I might seem like a regular kid, but like probably 90 percent of the people in this world, I get bullied. I have one friend named Danny, but he is always busy. My parents do care, but they never see what happens in my life.

I get bullied by a kid named Rick, the leader of the popular kids in school. He's a tall, skinny, and black-haired kid while I'm normal height, skinny as anything, and have brown hair. He always pushes me around, hits me, kicks me, and starts rumors about me. Even on the way home, I get pushed off my feet and scrape my knees! Even on social media, I post something and someone automatically comments, 'Get a life you loser!' It never ends.

It was a warm spring night and I was in bed. I get a text from Danny and he says my Instagram was hacked! I go on the app and see my account open and fake pictures of me. Rick hacked my account, so I changed my password and deleted everything. It was probably the most embarrassing thing of my life. I knew I just needed to get back to sleep. Besides, it was the weekend.

The next day, I had nothing to do, so I decided to go for a walk. I was a street away when I saw Rick with his friends. I knew they were going to see me because they were right across from me. There was no running away. I had to stand up to him and pass them. They were three feet away. "Why, isn't it the loser from school? Always trying to hang out with the cool kids but no one wants him!" Rick said.

"Listen Rick, I wouldn't want to hang out with bullies and posers like you and your friends. Now, I have to be somewhere else so I have to go. See you losers," I responded. I fought back. I actually fought back! I told him off! But I knew it wasn't over, I knew it. I started walking when Rick and his friends jumped me. I threw as many punches as I could, but they took me down to quick. Before I knew it, there were scrapes and probably fractured bones.

“DON’T YOU EVER, EVER MESS WITH ME LIKE THAT AGAIN YOU LITTLE IDIOT!” Rick yelled. “GO BACK HOME AND CRY YOU LITTLE BABY!”

He left me with a broken body. I was in pain. But I had to get up and go home. I walked in the door after a long, painful day. My dad was watching TV. “Hey son,” he greeted me.

“Hey, Dad,” I said. I was going to go upstairs to wash off the blood when my dad spotted me bleeding.

“Son, what happened?” he asked.

“I fell. Nothing major,” I explained.

“Son, come here,” he said. I walked in and sat on the couch. He sat there with a confused look on his face. “What happened? A fall wouldn’t give you a black eye, a punch to the face, a bloody nose, scratches and a bloody lip.”

I couldn’t lie to him anymore. I had to tell him about Rick. “Dad, for a long time, a kid named Rick has been bullying me; does anything to get to me. He hacks my Instagram, jumps me during recess, and even makes fun of me during class. I don’t know how to stop it. I can’t do anything.”

“Son, why didn’t you tell me any sooner? This would have been taken care of!” he explained.

“Cause I knew Rick would keep bullying me!” I said.

“Son, I’m sorry. I’m always busy whether it’s with work, sleeping, or even just relaxing. I never pay attention to you. Now, how about this! Let’s get this issue resolved tomorrow, all right?” he said.

A day later, my dad was on his computer when I got home from school. “Hey. Dad, what’s up?” I asked.

“Son, I think this might help. I am emailing the superintendent and telling him the situation. I will not let this happen to you again. After I talk to this guy, Rick will never be bothering you ever again. Anyway, it might take a day or two for him to respond,” my dad told me.

I wasn’t sure if emailing the superintendent about a bully that was treating a kid like the dirt on his shoes was a good idea. I would rather take care of it with my principal. I wasn’t sure what my dad was going to do? Have the kid suspended? Or even worse, was he going to be expelled? I don’t know what my dad’s going to say or do!

Two days later, my dad said that he received an email back. He told me that the superintendent responded after school. "All right son, let's see what he said," my dad said as he was opening up the email.

"Ok, right here. Harry Williams. 'Dear Mr. Phil, I have been informed that your son is being bullied in and out of school. I would like to tell you that I have scheduled a meeting at your son's middle school with myself, you, your son, your wife, the child named Rick, and his parents. This meeting has been scheduled for Thursday after school. If you will have problems attending, please inform me so I can reschedule the meeting. Thank you for your time, John Williams.' Well, it looks like we have a meeting tomorrow at 4:30 after school!" my dad said.

I was kind of afraid! I mean really afraid! I would be in a room with the superintendent, Rick and his parents, and my parents. That is kind of scary and shocking, but it kind of makes me happy. The bullying just has to end!

It was finally meeting day. The clock said 3:10, then I looked back it was 3:30, then I looked back and it was 4:15. Finally, my parents arrived and it turned to 4:30! I could see the superintendent through the window, and Rick and his parents. The next thing I know, I am in a room with all of these people.

"All right, let me start off with saying I would like to thank everyone for coming today and joining us in this discussion. So, let's get started. First, Tom, please tell me what is going on. Your dad emailed me saying you were harassed by Rick," the superintendent said.

Well, it was time to tell the truth! I didn't know if I could handle it. I think I was sitting there lifeless for at least a minute. Now I had to talk. "Well, since the third grade, I have been bullied by this kid and his friends. Every day I walk into school knowing something is going to happen. The other day, Rick came up to me and just pushed me to the ground and started laughing at me. And it is not just in school! You see this bump on my forehead? Yeah, Rick ran into me while I was taking a walk and jumped me. I have only one friend that I met in the first grade, but he always has after school clubs and is always busy. I can't even go on my phone and go on Instagram and not see that my accounts were hacked! And that is what is going on. And this is the truth; nothing I just said is a lie," I explained everything quickly.

I looked over to see that my dad was angry. I saw Rick sitting there with so much guilt. "Well then, Rick, is any of this true?" the superintendent asked.

He just sat there. It was like nothing was working in his body. "Rick?" the superintendent asked.

He was frozen! "Um, uh, I, I don't know. You know, it's all true, all of it! I can't lie! Everything he said was true!" Rick said. Well, he admitted what he did!

"Well, Rick. I thought that this was one time. I didn't know that this was more than three times and even out of school. Rick, I have no choice; you are expelled!" the superintendent said.

I can't believe it! "You know Tom, I am dearly sorry that I did this to you. I do deserve to be expelled. I will never talk to you, bother you, or even bother you over Instagram. I will never bother you again. I'm deeply sorry," Rick explained.

I can't believe it, it's done! The bullying is done! I think my parents were happy because now they know that he can't mess with me. And his friends are nothing without him, so I know I will be fine. I just can't believe it! There is no more bullying.

No more bullying!

The Haunted Forest

THE HAUNTED FOREST by *Sara Sherman* is the story of a girl and her friends who will dare to step foot in the haunted forest. Will they make it out?

Ring, Ring! Selena ran to the phone. “Hello! Who is this?” Selena sang. It was a bright, sunny day in Highland Park, Illinois. The birds were out singing and the kids were outside playing!

“It’s Lilly,” she answered. “I was wondering if you could come over. I already invited Jasmine and Rachel!”

“Sure, I’ll be right over!” Selena grabbed her shoes and ran next door. On the porch sat Rachel, Lilly and Jasmine. Out of all the people there, Rachel and Selena were the closest. They had known each other since preschool and been friends ever since. Rachel and Selena met Jasmine and Lilly last year when they were in fifth grade at Highland Park Elementary.

A couple of minutes later, Lilly’s brother, Jake, came out of the house yelling ‘watermelon’. He was a strange child. Jake was in third grade at Highland Park Elementary. Jake had bright blonde hair and freckles all over his face. After about an hour of doing nothing but talking and gossiping, Jake came out again, but with someone new. His name was Scotty, Jake’s friend. Scotty had dark brown hair and no freckles. He was a little shorter than Jake, but not too much shorter than him.

They both blurted out, “I dare you to go into the forest behind Rita’s house!” Rita is an old woman around 70 years old and behind her house stands a forest. Everybody in the neighborhood believes it’s haunted! We call it “The Haunted Forest.”

At first everyone was silent until Jake said, “Come on, don’t be CHICKENS!”

Selena was skeptical about this dare. But, since she was on the spot and was nervous, she blurted out, “Fine, we will do it next weekend. We will leave first thing in the morning!”

Everybody went silent.

It was Saturday and Jasmine, Lilly, Rachel, and Selena were getting ready to go to “The Haunted Forest.” They had made a list of what they thought they needed for this adventure. On this list were

lots of water, food, blankets, sleeping bags, flashlights, and phones. They had no clue how long they would be in the forest. It could be days. After all, it was a big forest!

At around noon, they walked over to Rita's house. The forest was pitch black even though it was bright and sunny outside. This couldn't be good. Selena was the first to step in and a chill went down her spine. It was cold in there. At least they brought blankets. After a couple of minutes, everybody was in the forest. They were on their own from there.

It had been hours. They hadn't even seen the slightest bit of sunlight and everyone was scared. The tall trees swaying in the wind were pretty intimidating. Every second felt like a tree would fall right on top of them. Also, even though they hadn't seen them yet, they knew that animals were watching their every move.

Wolves, bears, and many others animals were in the forest. Even though we knew there were vicious animals all around, we decided to set up our sleeping bags and go to sleep. We were tired after a long day.

After about six hours of sleep, Selena woke up to the sound of the swaying trees and footsteps. At least she thought she did, but she was wrong! There was a pack of wolves surrounding the campsite. Selena tried not to act scared as she woke up the rest of the girls. After she woke up all of the girls, they sat there frightened, scared, and cold.

After about an hour, Selena got bored and threw a stick; hoping it would go far. The stick dropped right in front of Lilly. She was never good at throwing! All the wolves turned their heads and pointed their yellow, beady eyes at Lilly.

At that moment, everyone and everything were completely *silent!* The wolves slowly moved toward Lilly. Lilly was trying to hide her fear, but she just couldn't hold it in. Tears started streaming down her face. After that little moment, Selena knew she wouldn't make it out of this forest alive. Now, Lily was bawling. She just couldn't hold it in! Selena picked up a stick, a bigger one, and threw it with all of her might down deep into the forest. The wolves turned their heads to the direction of the stick and ran off.

"Phew!" Selena said with total delight. We would all make it out alive. Then she saw something she thought she would never see again....*sunlight!*

They made it out of “The Haunted Forest” alive! Selena was so happy that a tear ran down her face. She ran up to Lilly’s brother and hugged him even though she wanted to slap him across the face for getting them into that. They all went back to their normal lives and never spoke of “The Haunted Forest” ever again.

The Killer

THE KILLER, by *Caleb Carroll*, is the story of a wonderful King and Queen in a city called the Royal Kingdom. They are trying to find out who is killing the new people in the kingdom. Who do you think the killer will be?

There once was a city called the Royal Kingdom with a King and a Queen. They were both very good people and were respectful to their people in the city. They gave them food and if they did not have a house or food they would offer a room in the castle and they would feed them. The castle was so big that it surrounded the whole city for protection. They had guards everywhere you can think of. And the new members who came to the Royal Kingdom were led in by the captain guard.

The captain guard is named Captain Ralph. He is one of the best protection captains in the world of all; he owns a lot of guards. That's why this city is so protected. So when he led them in they had to bow down to the King and the Queen for the respect of letting them go into the city. And each new member has to meet the King and Queen before they move in. A new member had come in. He was led by Captain Ralph to the King and Queen. The strange man had a devious looking face and he didn't say anything; not one word. And, when they bowed, the man didn't return a bow.

"Bow down, sir," said Captain Ralph.

"Why thus not bow?" asked the Queen. He just kept his devious look.

"Sir, can you speak?"

"Yes I can," the man said in a deep voice.

"Then why thou not answered my question?"

"Thou do not want to talk."

"Go on thou member!"

"What is wrong with that guy?" said the King.

The next morning that the King and Queen woke up, the Queen went to the bathroom and all of a sudden, "AAAAHHHHHHHHHH!"

"What happen?" said the King with a fearful voice.

WOW! There was dead body in their bathroom. A couple of minutes later, the Queen had thought of that strange man who came in that day. She sent Captain Ralph to get him. When Captain

Ralph got there, he opened the door but he was gone. They went searching for him. They heard screaming, so they ran that way. No one was there.

“Hey, over here,” the guard said. They found a man running real fast down the sides of the houses. They ran after him and all of a sudden the man slipped and fell and they caught him.

“You’re under arrest!” They took him to the King and Queen. He was trying to talk but Captain Ralph wouldn't let him.

“You are now punished and will be abolished from this Kingdom,” said the Queen.

“Wait what?” he said to the King. “I was just collecting this money to give to the poor man out there.” They set the strange man free.

The next morning, the King went to see if there was a dead body in the bathroom. The strange man was dead. The King and Queen began to think again of who the killer could be. First, how could that person be in the castle? Maybe it was one of the knights?

BOOM! The doors came flying open. It was the poor man and two knights. And, by the way, the poor man was not in the city. He was outside the gates and that is why he was poor. The poor man said that he saw who did it.

“Who did it?” asked the King.

“It was that captain guy,” said the poor man.

CAPTAIN RALPH? Yes! So, the knights ran back to the house of Captain Ralph. When they busted in, he was gone and there were dead knights everywhere. Their heads were cut off and blood was everywhere.

They ran back to the kingdom and said he was gone! The King and Queen sent people out to find him before he caused more trouble. They went out and found a note on the outside wall of the kingdom. It was from Captain Ralph to the King and Queen saying he was sorry that he betrayed them. But, he was mad that they did not give him the money they promised. So now he was going to get that money and would be in disguise.

When they went out, they walked 15 miles with still no sight of Captain Ralph. He came from behind them and cut their heads off. When the soldiers fell down, Captain Ralph looked so different. As he walked away, the King and Queen saw him and when the wind came across his body he had vanished.

Land of the Magic

*This is not like other stories of magic and royalty. The **LAND OF THE MAGIC** by **Maria Elgohary**, is an enchanting story of heroes, princesses, enemies, and friends.*

In the magical land of Equestria there lived two loyal sisters. The eldest brought out the sun at dawn and the youngest brought out the moon to begin the night. The two sisters brought harmony throughout the land, but one faithful day the youngest was resentful. The people played in the day her sister brought forth and shunned and slept through her beautiful night. Then she became so resentful.

She turned into a wicked person of darkness, Nightmare Moon. She tried to keep the land in eternal night. The eldest princess, Celestial, used the elements of harmony and banished her permanently in the moon.

One thousand years later, Princess Twilight was reading a book and saw clues to Nightmare Moon's return. On the thousandth day, in the thousandth year, the stars will aim her return and she will bring forth eternal night.

Princess Twilight had to find her friends and get the Elements of Harmony. She had to find her friend's Rainbow, Rarity, Applejack, Flutter By and Pinkie because they power up the Elements to save the land.

When they were almost there, there was a broken bridge. Twilight almost fell, but since Rainbow Dash had wings, she would just fly and tie the rope to the bridge back. When she went to the other side Luna (Nightmare Moon) turned into Rainbow's favorite team, the Wonder Bolts, the fastest flying team in the world.

It was her dream to fly with them. They were tempting her to leave her friends and go with them but Rainbow refused to go. They finally got to the castle and found Nightmare Moon on the Elements. Twilight was going to zap herself right next to her. But when she zapped herself to the Elements, it was impossible to get Nightmare Moon off the Elements. So Twilight tried to do a spell.

When she finally made the spell, the Elements were doing what the book said, but she spoke too soon! Nightmare Moon broke the

Elements, but Nightmare did not know that Twilight's friends represented the Elements.

When Twilight's friends arrived, the Elements started glowing. When Twilight called out what the Elements were, they started becoming necklaces on everybody. They defeated Nightmare Moon and turned her back into Princess Luna of the moon and Harmony was there forever.

But, it wasn't long before something happened! Celestia and Luna were kidnapped! And there was something wrong with the sky. It was half night and half day. Princess Twilight woke to see what was happening.

"Why are you awake in the middle of the night?" asked Spike. Spike was the dragon assistant to Princess Twilight.

"It's night," the Princess replied. "But, could it be morning? I can't tell!"

Spike looked at the sky. "Weird," he said and he went back to sleep.

"Spike, this is no time to sleep! We need to see the Princesses right now!"

When she went to their room, she did not see them. She looked everywhere, but the Princesses weren't there. They were kidnapped!

Out of the Ever Free Forest came Zecora. She's a zebra and she is really good with potions and she loves to rhyme. She said, "From the forest, I had to flee. The forest has gone too wild even for me."

Then she said, "I have a potion that I do not dare to use it myself. The results would be tragic. It only responds to powerful magic. Princess Twilight, you can turn this potion from purple to white, and with this white potion, you will be able to see the past."

When Twilight drank the potion, she saw the fight between Nightmare Moon and Princess Celestia. When she woke up, she was confused and she didn't understand

She took another sip of the potion and she saw the Princesses flying up to a tree. They called the tree the Tree of Harmony. Twilight told her friends about the Tree of Harmony and that that's where the Elements came from.

They asked where they were to find the Tree of Harmony. She said it would have to be in the invading Ever Free Forest. A few hours later, they were close to the Princess's old castle. It was filled

with spiky vines and there was something glowing. They went down the stairs and found the Tree of Harmony.

Rarity said, "I think it's dying!"

Twilight remembered all the things that she saw when she drank the potion. She told her friends to give their Elements to the Tree the Elements. All of her friends were surprised, but they agreed. The Tree empowered the Elements and harmony was in all the land once again.

The Monster Who Keeps Attacking

THE MONSTER WHO KEEPS ATTACKING by *Erin Patton* is the story of a girl who is trying to catch a ghost that has been hunting her family for two years.

My name is Anna, and I have one sister and one brother. My sister, Isabella, is six, and my brother, Jacob, is 15. I'm 13. Two years ago, my father died of a heart attack, so we live with our mother.

But, instead of living in depression because our dad died, we have been living in fear!

The day my father died, my sister, brother, and I saw this very old lady walking around our house. We asked our mom if she had seen her or known about her. She didn't know what we were talking about! There hasn't been anyone else in this house!

Sometimes my sister and I are watching TV and we just see the lady standing in front of the TV. My mom will be watching the same show and sees nothing at all. The old woman never shows her face. Her hair is dark brown and silky. She wears the same white dress every time we see her. It looks like a wedding dress.

For the last two years, we have been seeing this lady and it leaves us in fear. Sometimes at night, I can hear whispers through the door. Sometimes the whisper sound like my dad's voice but I know it's not him. It's just that old lady messing with my mind. I see shadows walking past my door, back and forth, and I know it's not my mother because I can hear her snoring in the other room. My whole life is tragic and I'm tired of living in fear of this lady.

The next night, I went up to my room to go to sleep when, suddenly, she was in my room. I freaked out! She had never followed us into our rooms, so I didn't know what to do.

She started to turn around slowly I felt a tear come down my face because I knew she was going to kill me. There I was, staring into her face. It was burned, so all I could really see was that her eyes were green. As I sat there and looked at her, I remembered that my dad was a firefighter and that might have something to do with it.

I walked up to her and she was as cold as a Michigan's winter! I asked her if she could sit and she did. I asked her if she could talk and tell me why she's been stalking us for the past year.

"I'm Leah Fane," she said. "Well, I was getting ready to become Leah Fane before I died. The day of my wedding, the church caught fire. Your dad was one of the firefighters helping people get out. They wanted to save everyone in the church. When your dad saw me, he tried to get me and he did. But, the bottom of my wedding dress caught on fire then your dad threw me into the fire. The reason I come around your house is to imagine the life I could have had before that fire."

"Well, um," I wasn't sure what to say. "What can I do to get you to go?"

"You just did!" she said. "I had to tell you my story to let my sprit free. Now I have and I'm going to an amazing place."

WHERE AM I?

WHERE AM I? by *Adolphus Cast*, is a story about a 12-year-old boy who goes back in time to meet Michael Jordan. He gets stuck in Chicago in 1996. Will he be able to find his way back home before his own basketball game?

Javier Jackson was riding his bike home when he noticed a shiny object in his lawn. He picked it up and was surprised that it was a gold Michael Jordan trading card. He took it into the house to show his dad.

“Dad, I found a gold Michael Jordan trading card!” Javier said.

“Cool son!” Dad answered.

The next day, Javier saw the back of the card. It said, “Scratch the back of the card to get Jordan’s signature.” As Javier was walking to school, he scratched the back. A bluish-clear ball surrounded him. He stopped and looked around, but no one was paying attention. Forty seconds later, he was in Chicago. “This is weird, where am I?” he wondered.

He looked around and noticed an innocent man over by the sports store. He asked him, “Where am I? What’s the date?”

“You are in Chicago, Illinois. Today is Thursday, June 16, 1996. Are you going to the Bulls game? It’s game six!”

Javier wasn’t sure, but said, “Yes.”

He went to a hotel. They didn’t let him in. He went to a restaurant since he had \$100 in his pocket. Then it was time for the game. He saw a guy selling Bulls tickets. He said \$20. He let me pay just \$15.

There’s five seconds left, the Bulls are winning 87-75. The crowd is going crazy. 5...4... 3...2...1, the Bulls have won the 1996 NBA finals. The announcer went to the middle of the court and said, “Who wants to go and celebrate in the locker room?” He picked Javier!

He went to the locker room! Michael Jordan told him to come here. “Do you want to sleep at my house for a night?”

“Yes!” he answered quickly. Michael Jordan and Javier drove in this Bentley to his house for the night. The next morning, Javier was trying to go home. He tried to scratch the back of the card to get back home.

Michael walked in and said, "You need to find the same looking Jordan card with the same code on it."

"How do you know I'm from the future?" Javier wondered.

"In previous years, random kids, like you, came to my playoff games."

"Wow, so can we go any of the card stores?" Javier asked.

We went to every card store in Chicago. Javier was so tired. We had one more store left. It was the smallest store ever! It was called 'The Card Packers'. It had a poster that said

Special Michael Jordan Cards! \$40 for each card!

As soon as Javier walked in, he saw it. It cost \$40, but he had \$45 left!

They were going back to Michael Jordan's house. Michael said, "Have a great future life."

"Okay! Have a great past life," Javier joked.

He scratched the card and bam! Javier was flying in a crazy universe for at least ten minutes. When he was home, he asked his parents about the date.

"It's March 5, 2015," they said.

"Get ready for your game! The game starts in 25 minutes," his dad said.

Javier got ready. He was confused because he thought he missed his game. He was so happy that he could go to his own basketball game! Suddenly, this random portal came up. It was Michael Jordan saying something!

"Hey Javier, score 30 points in your game!"

He tried to answer but it disappeared! He went to the car, and left for the game. He ended up scoring 30 points! He played so well that his dad treated him to some ice cream after the game.

You Know
Who You Are

Blast Off to Mars

*When you go to a space museum, don't play with the rocket ships. Otherwise, you may end up like John and Felix in **BLAST OFF TO MARS** by **Sydni Rosenfeld**.*

John Potts was a comic strip writer, and Felix the Fox (yes, a real live talking fox!) is his sidekick. Today was an exciting day because John was going to take Felix to the History and Space Museum for the public viewing of the first launch to Mars of *The Airbuster 8*...the newest state-of-the-art space shuttle.

"Felix, Felix, where are you?" asked John.

John looked around the museum trying to see where Felix went. He looked all around but could not find him. Finally, John looked up at the space shuttle. John's eyes widened as he saw Felix up at the space shuttle entrance.

"Felix, get back here right now, you sneaky fox!" John exclaimed.

"Chill out, John. I am just going to look inside the space shuttle," Felix replied.

"That is not allowed, Felix!" John said. John quickly ran after Felix.

John was almost up at the shuttle when the whole museum went pitch black and alarm bells went off and red sirens flashed from the ceiling.

"Oh no, Felix must have gotten into the space shuttle." John ran as fast as he could to the space shuttle. He saw Felix through the tiny window of *The Airbuster 8*. Felix was pressing all kinds of buttons, and the door was about to close. John ran as fast as he could and jumped into the shuttle just as the door was closing. He barely made it on!

All of a sudden, John jolted forward as he felt the floor shaking below him. The bright blue sky emerged through the small window, and all John could see were tops of big, white, fluffy clouds. He could not believe how bright the sky was. He thought to himself how small the Earth looked as he was exiting the atmosphere. Within minutes that bright blue sky was a faint memory as

darkness approached. Now he saw nothing but glowing little dots in the darkness.

I can't believe Felix launched us into outer space, John thought.

John approached Felix as he was sitting in the Captain's seat and said, "I guess I am your co-captain!"

Felix laughed and said, "You sure are, Buddy."

John knew that *The Airbuster 8* was equipped with state-of-the-art automatic course technology. So he and Felix were set on course for Mars!

Knowing he would be approaching another planet made John feel nervous but excited about the amazing views. When John landed on Mars he pressed a big red button on the ship and it turned into a space station and housing unit. As John looked out the window he saw a cloud of a light orange dust with little specks of white.

"Felix, look, it's the Milky Way!" John exclaimed.

John had always imagined that Mars would look like a big, red, sandy ball. John started to see a little bit of an orangey-red color in the distance. As the space shuttle approached their destination, John could fully see the planet of Mars.

He looked at Felix and said, "Isn't that one of the most amazing sights you have ever seen?"

"I think it looks like a giant cheese puff," Felix replied.

John and Felix looked at the dashboard of the shuttle, which had lots of blinking lights. All of a sudden a voice came through the speaker announcing that the shuttle would be landing in "5, 4, 3, 2, 1..." *BUMP!* Spacesuits immediately dropped from a small box above them.

John looked at Felix and said, "Let's go for a spacewalk."

Felix noticed a small hose marked "air pump." As John and Felix were getting suited for their spacewalk, Felix thought it would be hilarious to plug the air pump into John's suit. At first John did not notice, but then all of a sudden he was puffed out like a giant marshmallow. He immediately knew it was Felix. As he was trying to get the pump out he saw Felix outside floating around.

He pressed his hands up against the spaceship window and yelled, "FELIX!"

Felix could not hear John through the glass, but Felix could tell by the look on John's face that he was very angry.

When John finally got his spacesuit on properly, he jumped out of the space shuttle. “Felix, you cannot mess around with the equipment. Do you want to break it and have us lost in space?” asked John.

But Felix is just so mischievous he just can’t stay out of trouble.

After their spacewalk John was tired, so he told Felix he was going back to the shuttle for a little nap. “STAY OUT OF TROUBLE, FELIX!” John said.

John was not ten minutes into his nap when he heard a *vrooom* sound outside the shuttle. John opened his eyes and saw something moving outside his window. It was Felix riding around on a dune buggy doing wheelies and circling around the craters.

John had to suit back up.

Once John got out where Felix was, he said, “Felix, the dune buggy is for research-related things only. No horsing around with it!”

As John and Felix headed back to the shuttle, Felix hopped out of the buggy and started running away without John noticing. Felix said, “Come on, John, there’s a big lake to swim in. Let’s go!”

John thought, *I could go for a little fun.*

John and Felix took the buggy to the lake. As they jumped in John realized it was a crater that looked like it had water in it. He yelled to Felix, “This is a crater!”

Felix’s face quickly turned from a smile to looking petrified.

They both hit the ground with a huge thud.

“Great job, Felix. Now we’re stuck in a giant crater,” said John.

“So now what do we do?” asked Felix.

“I don’t know! It was your idea to go swimming!” replied John.

As John and Felix were thinking of ways to get out of this crater John looked up and saw hundreds of little Martians saying, “TAKE US TO YOUR LEADER! TAKE US TO YOUR LEADER!” The Martians were green with one eye and two little antennas.

“We can’t get out of this crater to take you to our leader,” said John.

Suddenly the Martians were holding hands making a ladder for them to get out.

The next thing they knew the Martians were carrying them on their backs to their headquarters. When they got there they saw a giant machine. The machine started by dropping a little bit of

dough. Then a conveyor belt brought them into an oven. By the time the dough balls came out they were perfectly cooked so that they were light and airy. The balls were sprayed with cheese and put in bags. As the bags came off the belt a Martian handed them both a bag.

Felix and John both tried the little cheese balls and said, "These are delicious."

The Martian responded by saying, "Didn't you know that Mars has cheese pools all over? You just have to dig them up."

Felix then said to John, "I told you that Mars looked like a giant cheese ball!"

The Martian told John and Felix to take as many bags as they could fit onto their shuttle back to Earth. John looked at Felix and said, "The pirates have booty, and we will have Mars Puffs!"

"Won't we get in trouble?" asked Felix

"We have the most delicious cheese puffs around. They will forgive us," replied John.

Felix and John took as many bags of cheese balls as they could, and loaded them onto the shuttle.

The shuttle had an Emergency Exit to Earth button, which John pushed. They felt a rumble underneath their feet as *The Airbuster 8* lifted up. As they looked out the window, all they could see were little balls of fire from beneath the shuttle. John and Felix thought it was from the shuttle engine, but little did they know that it was the Martians shooting a zillion Mars puffs as a send off!

Buster and Me

*Many a baseball fan has fallen under the spell of baseball cards. But one collector experiences real magic with his cards in **BUSTER AND ME** by **Jonah Edelman**.*

I just got home from school, and my mom wasn't home. That is a good sign, because she does not like when I travel back in time with the use of baseball cards. She doesn't like me traveling through time because a while back my dad got hurt badly in an accident. When he traveled through time with me he used to try to get autographs and souvenirs so he could sell them. She didn't like his dishonesty, either.

It is pretty cool. I can hold any past baseball card, and my body starts to tingle. After thirty seconds I am gone to the destination. I found this out when I was a little kid. My dad and I were looking through old baseball cards, and I picked up a Honus Wagner baseball card. My body started tingling, so I dropped it. Wait a minute; I think I might have read that in a book. It sounds really cool, but that's not how it really works.

What happens is that I get a baseball card of the player, and a news article from the Internet from the date of the event. I have to put on clothes from the past. Once I have all of the stuff together I run as fast as I can through my backyard into the forest where the time portal is. The time portal is an abandoned shell of an old Ford Shelby Cobra. I don't want anyone to see me travel through time, so I have to go in the middle of the forest.

This time I wanted to go back in time to save Buster Posey from colliding into Scott Cousins and having a season-ending injury on his left leg. I need to go pretty fast before my mom gets home; lucky for me she is getting home late. I grab the Posey card from 2011 and a new set of baseball cards to get back home, a Giants jersey and hat, an article that I found on the Internet, and some money to buy the ticket for the game.

Once I get to the Shelby Cobra I have to sit in the driver seat and I hold the card in one hand and the news article in the other. Then the tingling starts at my toes and goes through the rest of my body.

The next thing I knew I was in San Francisco in 2011 right across the street from AT&T Park. I saw cars getting into the parking lot for the 7:15 game.

I got across the street, and I already saw a bunch of people inside the park with jerseys and hats on watching the Giants warm up. I walked up to a ticket salesman and asked, "Can I buy a ticket?"

He said, "Fifty bucks, kid."

I was so relieved because I had just the right amount. I gave him the money, grabbed my ticket, and went inside the front entrance. There I was, standing in AT&T Park three years in the past. As I walked farther inside I saw Buster Posey catching ninety-five-mile-an-hour fastballs. As he caught I could hear the loud smack of the ball in the glove.

I went down behind the plate to try to talk to Buster. There were at least ten other people and reporters trying to get autographs from all of the players. I had no chance to talk to Posey. When he was done catching, I sneaked past the reporters and other fans and ran to the Giants dugout to talk him. I was the first one there. He heard me call his name, so he turned around to talk to me. I exclaimed, "This might sound crazy to you, but I am from the future."

He did not even let me finish my sentence. He sighed, "I am sorry, I don't believe you, but would you like something autographed?"

"No, thank you. I need to tell you about the future."

"Ok."

"You are going to get into a collision with Scott Cousins at home plate. You are going to have a season-ending injury to your left leg and you won't get to play in the World Series with your team."

"Sorry, kid, I don't believe in time travel. I have to go warm up."

I decided to stay to watch the game even though I knew that the score was going to be 3 to 1, Giants. It was a great game, a real pitching duel. Then it was time for the collision between Posey and Cousins.

There were runners on first and third. The pitch was inside: a ninety-six mile an hour fastball, just how the batter liked it. He smacked a hopper to center field. The center fielder got it in his glove and threw it to Posey. The runner from first rounded third and headed home fast. Buster was ready to catch the ball right

smack in the middle of home plate. *BAM*, he and Cousins collided. "Out!" called the umpire.

The runner got up, but Buster didn't. The whole crowd went from screaming to completely quiet. No one in the stadium said a word, and the trainers ran out to check on their all-star catcher. They exclaimed, "Buster, are you okay? What's wrong?"

Buster said, "I don't know. Everything hurts."

One minute and then two passed, and he still did not get back up. After about five minutes, the trainers helped him up, but he was struggling to walk. As they were helping him to the dugout, I got out of my seat and ran to see him. Buster saw me. He exclaimed, "I should have listened to you."

"Buster, it's okay. I'm really sorry about your injury, but next season you are going to have a great one after you heal."

I went back to my seat to watch the end of the game. It ended with a Giants' 3-1 victory, as I already knew. Buster told me to meet him by the back entrance and gave me a V.I.P necklace so I could see him after the game. He wanted to apologize for not listening to me.

I felt bad for Buster, so that was another reason I went. He didn't look good when he walked out the door. Buster struggled to even talk, but he said, "Do you want something autographed since you told me I would get hurt and I didn't listen to you?"

I said, "Sure," and he signed the hat that I was wearing.

I had to get back home before my mom got home from work. I got my new baseball card and an article from today's paper, and the tingling feeling started again at my toes and up. I was out of San Francisco and back in the driver seat of the Shelby Cobra. I knew I needed to run home fast since my mom would be home soon.

As I was running back in my yard I saw my mom's car pulling into the driveway. That was a relief. As she walked in the door and asked, "What did you do all day?" I had to tell her, even though I knew she would get mad.

I said, "I traveled back in time to San Francisco. I'm really sorry."

She said, "I already knew. I could see Buster Posey's autograph on your hat. Jonah, you know I don't like it when you travel back in time without telling me; this is not like you."

"I tried to save Buster Posey from getting into a collision at home plate."

“So what happened?” she asked.

“He reacted like he did not believe me. I told him I was trying to save him from the collision at home plate and he said, ‘I am sorry, I don’t believe you,’ and then ran to warm up. He was really nice but rolled his eyes like I was crazy. Then it happened, just like I already knew it would. After the game he asked me to come and see him, and he apologized and signed my hat.”

“Jonah, sometimes things happen for a reason. You can’t always change the past. Maybe the reason Posey got hurt was because it was meant for him to take time and rehab to get stronger and better as a catcher.”

“I understand, Mom.”

I went in my room and flopped down on my bed. I thought about it. Mom was right. Maybe I shouldn’t try to change the past.

It made my head hurt. I had to figure this out, but maybe I’ll wait, because I really want to see if I can change the outcome of the 2012 World Series so the Tigers win!

Dare to Scare

Taking a dare can be fun. Then again, it can end up like the one in DARE TO SCARE by Anja Rouaud.

If you knew me better you would know that I never back down from a dare, never. It goes with my name, Kristen Dare.

“I had such a weird dream last night,” Lily called to me as she walked up to me at the bus stop. Lily is my best friend, and she is not afraid of anything...except cannonballs. Seriously: spiders, heights, ghosts; if you could name it she could face it. But for some reason when you mention cannonballs.... “We spent the night in the old Gilroy house,” she said. “It was epic. We should do it.” And that is how I ended up at the old Gilroy house at nine o’clock on Friday night.

The house looked creepy in the moonlight, and as I walked up the lawn I swear I saw something move in the window. We walked in and chose a room to lay down our sleeping bags. As soon as we laid them out we heard a creaking noise and saw that the door was slowly opening. Something was trying to get into our room!

“BOO!” the cloaked figure yelled.

“AAAHHHH!” we screamed. Suddenly we heard the high-pitched laughter that only one person could have made.

JAKE!” Lily yelled. Jake was our friend, sort of. He was funny and nice but could be annoying too. Jake must have known he was going to get his butt kicked because when Lily’s mad, you want to pray she’s not mad at you. She grabbed his shirt and started yelling at Jake about rudeness and immaturity blah blah blah. I was more interested in the strange humming noise from downstairs.

“Lily! Lily! LILY!” I yelled. This got her attention. She stopped yelling at Jake and listened.

“What’s that?” she asked.

“NO idea,” said Jake. Lily glared at him. She looked at me.

“I don’t know.”

And being who she is she responded, “Let’s check it out!”

“Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Let’s not! How about we just sit down and play a board game?” I said.

“Board games?” We’re in a haunted house and you want to ‘play board games’? Let’s explore.”

“No, let’s play!”

“No, let’s explore!”

“No, let’s play!”

“I dare you to come with me in the basement.”

“I hate when you do that!”

“Yep, let’s go.”

We opened the door that led to the basement and walked down the stairs. The first thing we saw was a laboratory with a table, test tubes, and a big machine in the corner that was making a humming sound. “I have to video this,” Jake said. He pulled out his camera and pointed it around his room and suddenly screamed, “AAAHHH!” He said, “I just saw a face in the window. I caught it on camera.” We crowded around the camera.

“Freeze it there!” Lily said. “See! There, in the window!” She was right. There was a pale face in the window in the corner.

BOOM! Suddenly the basement door slammed shut. I went over to check on it. “It’s locked!” I called.

“There must be another way out,” Lily said optimistically. Looking around I noticed a small wooden door in the corner. I pointed this out.

“I vote we leave now,” Jake said as we ran toward the door. At the same time we heard the door swing open at the top of the stairs. Behind us Jake tripped and dropped his camera. We raced toward the exit as we heard footsteps coming down the stairs. We burst outside and ran to the end of the street before we slowed down.

“Tomorrow, we’ll go to the police. For now, don’t tell anyone! Not even your parents!”

The next day we met up at the police station and tried to tell them what happened. It was hard; I mean, who would believe three kids who didn’t have any evidence except memory? We asked them if they could go back and get our stuff. We also told them about the weird laboratory. They said they would look into it. Jake asked them to go in the basement and get his camera so he could show them the video.

When they came back, the camera was intact, but something with sharp nails had taken the memory card. So there you have it. We get traumatized for life and have no evidence.

After that day we would sometimes go and check out the house but during the day with an adult. We never have heard the strange hum since.

Different

*Entering a new school is difficult for anyone. For Frank, the transition is especially hard in **DIFFERENT** by **R Pawlik**.*

Ding, ding, ding, ding.

“Welcome, all students! My name is Mrs. Auburn, and I will be your third-grade teacher. I am very excited to get to know all of you,” my teacher said just as I put my backpack down and got settled in my seat.

It was first year at a public school, and I was very nervous. My whole life, I’d been homeschooled. Honestly, I don’t know why. My mom said I just wasn’t ready for it. I don’t understand it, but whatever. I mean, I do have a disease in my foot that makes it hard to walk, run, and be active. I guess it’s shorter than my other foot or something. I haven’t had surgery because the doctors think it’s unfixable, but I just really don’t see why it matters.

We went over a few rules, played a few games. Oddly, people kept looking at me funnily. It might just be because I’m new, I thought.

The morning wasn’t that bad. Of course, it’s scary being in a new school, and I was nervous, but the time I really realized how much people hated me was the first time we had to go out for recess.

I had no one to play with, no one to talk to, and no one to explain things to me. I was so sad, yet I was too afraid to go up and ask someone to play with me. This went on for like 15 minutes, until I saw some kids starting a kickball game. I walked up just as they were about to pick teams.

“If you want to play, line up against this wall!” yelled a redhead from my class.

“I’ll pick first!” another boy yelled. People kept filing out of the wall—everyone except for me.

“I guess he’s mine,” Redhead muttered in distaste. The game started, and I was not doing very well. You’d assume no one would care that much; I mean, we’re not on a pro kickball team. But lots of the boys were looking at me with anger. It was like I was that rotten fish and they were the fishers. They were yelling at me, for reasons I didn’t understand. It got so intense, I was about to cry. I

just walked away, tears about to spill out. I could hear kids laughing at me as I was walking.

“Dork Brain!” they yelled. Then the bell rang, and we had to go to lunch. This has been a horrible start to a horrible day.

Lunch wasn’t fun either. I had to sit by myself, all alone, for a horrible 20 minutes. I could see people pointing at me and saying, “Look at that new kid. He’s so weird!” Again, I could feel tears. I just wanted the day to be over.

My last horrible adventure of the day was right before the bell rang so we could leave. I was walking down the hallway to get my backpack from my locker when the boy I was walking next to tripped me. I fell to the ground hard, seeing that I was power walking. It hurt really badly. My books and pencils spilled everywhere. Of course, just then the bell had to ring. Kids ran out of their classrooms from all directions.

It was a disaster. I got kicked and hit, and no one even stopped to help me up. My books were ruined, and my pencils were scattered all down the hallway. Nothing like this had ever happened to me. The kids at Rose Field Elementary are so rude.

The first thing I did when I got home was go up to my room and cry. It just wasn’t fair. Why were kids being so mean to me? I was so confused and sad and angry at my mom for not letting me stay homeschooled. The outside world was crueler than I had realized.

The next few weeks were just as bad. People were mean to me, and I was alone everywhere I went. People continued to laugh at me, point at me, and pick me last for all games. I didn’t know what I was doing that was so weird. So what, I don’t like to talk to people. There was one question that everyone kept asking me: “What’s wrong with your foot? It looks sooooo weird! Hahaha.” I mean, I have a little trouble running and walking, but it shouldn’t really bother other people. The only person it should bother is me.

In gym class, about a month later, things got a little bit better. We were doing our usual three laps before we played a game. Dean, the red-headed bully I was telling you about before, was running directly behind me. He sped up and just as he was passing me, stuck out his foot, and tripped me.

“Stop it, Dean!” shouted a voice from behind me.

“What? I didn’t do anything, Daisy. He tripped on his foot. The way he runs, it’s bound to happen someday.”

“Just leave Frank alone. ‘K? I’ve seen you guys torture this guy way too many times, and I’m done with it.”

This was the first time ever someone had actually stood up for me. It was nice, but why would she do that? I stood up, barely hurt, and dusted myself off. I was the last person to finish their laps, and again, the last person to be picked for our game of spiders and flies.

At lunch, Daisy and her friend Rick walked up to me.

“Just ignore Dean. He doesn’t have a heart,” Daisy said. I gave her half a smile. “Do you want to come sit by us?” she asked.

Me? They really want me to sit by them? This is a first. “Um, I don’t know?” *This is nerve wracking.* “Sure?”

“K, great. I’m Daisy.”

“And I’m Rick.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“K. Well, nice to meet you, Frank Levetty.” We walked over to their table, and they told me their whole story: about them seeing me get bullied by all these kids and not knowing what to do about it; how they thought this anger the kids were showing me would end; and how they finally yelled at Dean when they realized it was time for somebody to do something. It was very interesting. I never realized anyone was thinking about me, nonetheless worrying about me.

Daisy, Rick, and I became better and better friends. It took me a little while to get comfortable around them. Over time, I actually gained enough confidence to go out and stand up to Dean—well, with my friends to back me up. I guess I’m not strong enough to be myself yet. Out on the playground, I went up to him and told him I really didn’t care what he thinks, and that I won’t continue worrying about him. Really, why waste your time with things that aren’t worth worrying about? I guess it sort of made an impact, because he is not as mean anymore, especially now that I have friends. And of course I still have bad days, but at least now I have friends to help me struggle through them.

At least for now, I have friends, or people that don’t think I’m different.

Dr. Wicked

DR. WICKED by *Alex J. Smith* follows *Dr. Wicked* and his evil plans for us all. Surely someone will save the day....

When Dr. Wicked woke up, he did his daily routine. He brushed his teeth, washed his face, and ate breakfast. Flapjacks, orange juice, and boiled eggs are what he normally ate for breakfast. After, he would usually go to his lab.

He went to the basement where his not-so-secret laboratory was hidden. There his henchmen sat, awaiting orders as they did every day. "What's on the agenda today boss?" said Stien, his right hand man. He was short and stocky with a hunched back and half of his teeth. He did all the extra jobs like take out the trash, clean the bathroom, and find scrap metal for the inventions Dr. Wicked made. *He must have lost a lot of chocolate chips in the cookie jar*, thought Randy, Dr. Wicked's left hand man. He was tall and bulky and the smartest person you'd ever know. He was Dr. Wicked's body guard.

"Today we're finishing up the weather machine, so that I—"

"*Ahem*," Randy butted in. "You mean 'we,' boss."

"Right, I mean, *we* can rule the world," Dr. Wicked lied. "We just have to fix some kinks here and there."

"That should do," Dr. Wicked said after finishing up the weather machine. "Now let's see what this baby can do. How about winter in summer?" Dr. Wicked cackled. "It'll surely ruin everyone's day." He turned on the power and switched the knob from "rainy" to "snowy." Kids were dropping their ice cream cones and picking up hot chocolate. Adults were putting salt on their driveways and roads. Teens were already ice skating, totally oblivious to the blazing sun over their snow-covered backs. But there was one person who noticed... Ice-O-Dome.

Ice-O-Dome was the local superhero. He burst open the wall and flew into Dr. Wicked's lab. "Get him!" cried Dr. Wicked.

Ice-O-Dome sent an Earthquake at Randy. While Randy was off balance, Ice-O-Dome threw one mighty punch at him. Randy dodged and kned Ice-O-Dome in the gut. Feeling none of the pain,

Ice-O-Dome flung him into the sky. When he came flying down he punched him down the block.

Next Ice-O-Dome ran at super speeds to make a tornado and sucked him up and spit him out, hurtling him at Stien. Stien barely dodged, and then charged Ice-O-Dome. Ice-O-Dome just froze his feet and literally kicked his butt. Then he sent Randy and Stien running away by setting their butts on fire.

He then used his invisibility power and sneaked around Dr. Wicked to the machine. He cut the wires. The town had its summer back.

It was the final smackdown of the day. He became visible again so the fight could be fair. Dr. Wicked put on his super gloves, booster shoes, and armor. He was used to this type of stuff.

They both charged at each other at super speeds. In the blink of an eye their fists were colliding. With dust flying everywhere Dr. Wicked jumped up and came down with a fierce blow. Ice-O-Dome staggered back. Then he returned with a low kick, sweeping Dr. Wicked off of his feet. He took advantage of that and ate some ice cream. Ice cream was his power source. He felt a lot stronger.

Dr. Wicked made it back to his feet and charged. With Ice-O-Dome more energized than ever he quickly dodged the first blow, caught the second, and flipped Dr. Wicked over. Dr. Wicked kicked Ice-O-Dome in the shins and regained his ground. He punched Ice-O-Dome in the gut and took his ice cream. Without it he wouldn't be able to regain strength. Then with the advantage he kicked him furiously, using his rocket boosters to add effect. It was all going well until he saw Stien come back.

Of course Stien is holding ice cream, the only thing that could make Ice-O-Dome stronger, thought Dr. Wicked. *Why would I even hire such a Neanderthal?* he thought again. Ice-O-Dome quickly scooped out the ice cream from Stien's hands and ate it, regaining his strength, while Randy was face-palming. "Ok, this is where the real battle starts," said Ice-O-Dome. At the quickest speeds ever made by a super human he dashed past everything in the room and punched Dr. Wicked in the chest and jaw. Dr. Wicked was knocked out and done for the day.

When Dr. Wicked woke up, he was in prison—the best prison. He was in Alcatraz. While he was screaming because the new guy always gets beat up, Ice-O-Dome was enjoying a nice triple fudge nonfat strawberry ice cream with a cherry on top and sprinkles. He

had won another victory. And as for Dr. Wicked...he had lost another fight. He let himself down again. He disgraced his family's long line of successful super villains. But he was used to it. After all, today was a normal day.

A Duel for Time

In **A DUEL FOR TIME** by **Matthew Frink**, a young warrior owes payback to an evil lord. And, yes, this time it is indeed personal.

Zayne awoke to the sound of birds chirping and the brightness of the sun through his cabin's old, cracked window. He threw on his clothes. Zayne's armor was worn and tattered. He had again dreamed of his life before all of this, before the Shadow Lord's Chaos Machine sent the world back in time. He shook his head, trying to get rid of the memories of sitting down with Anna on the mahogany porch, talking about all of the things that they wanted to do in the future, all of the things that they wanted to accomplish in life. Anna has been long missing, and Zayne couldn't help but feel that he could've done something to get her back. Just picturing Anna's face, her jet-black hair and perfect skin, brought a tear to his eye. He grabbed his staff and ran outside.

The practice room was his favorite place in the whole camp. He loved everything about it—the smell of sawdust, the sound of metal striking together, and most of all, his friends. His friends were always trying to catch him off guard.

Suddenly, he heard a twig snap. Zayne shook his head: rookie mistake. He quickly turned and swung his staff, knocking Zack off his feet. He leapt and pinned him down. "Nice try, Zack," Zayne said, smiling. He then stepped to the left, causing Calin to collide on top of Zack.

Suddenly, Zayne dropped his *guan dao*. His knees buckled, and he fell to the ground, barely catching himself. "Something terrible is going to happen," Zayne said weakly.

"What happened?" Zack said, worried.

"I don't know, I just saw a vision, and I could only make out one face. *Him*."

"You beat him once, can't you do it again?" Zack said, desperate for hope.

"He's...stronger. I don't think I can beat him this time."

"If this is true, then we must inform everyone immediately," Calin said grimly.

The Shadow Lord arose from his chamber, scarred from his last duel with Zayne. A scientist approached him. "You are not well, return to the chamber immediately," he said.

"No! Prepare the concoction now," the Shadow Lord snapped. The potion was an ancient legend said to give one incredible power. The Shadow Lord grabbed a syringe from the scientist and injected it into his arm. He howled in pain, and everything was dark.

Zayne had been training hard. He had been working harder for the past three days. Zayne heard a small click, the loading of a crossbow. He turned to see a dark creature, its skin a blaze of red with curved horns, one of the Shadow Lord's soldiers.

The creature fired. Zayne rolled and slashed the crossbow in two. The beast charged, but Zayne leapt over it and sliced through its torso. "And so it has begun," Zayne said.

The chamber was dark. An ebony glow emanated from the Shadow Lord's right hand. "An arm of dark magic!" the Shadow Lord exclaimed. As the evil smile spread across his face, cracks on his skin appeared like war paint.

"Sir, I,..." the scientist started to say.

"I've had enough of your babbling!" the Shadow Lord snapped, blasting the scientist with a beam from his hand. "You! Assemble a team. Destroy Zayne's camp. Do not fail me."

Zayne was the first to see the ship coming. He quickly alerted the rest of the camp. "Everyone to the underground bunker!" he shouted. Blood red, horned demons with black war paint rushed out of the ship, carrying jagged swords and *guan daos*. Three of them tried to overpower Zayne, but he swung his *guan dao* and knocked them away. Zack jumped up and slashed two more demons. Calin smashed another one with his axe. Zayne jumped off a beam and pushed forward, his blade fatally slashing many of the soldiers. The three fought off most of the demons.

"Behind you!" Zack yelled. Zayne turned to see a demon towering over him. Zayne dashed and struck the monster in the back of the leg. Zayne's attack was quickly countered by a strike that snapped his staff. Turning his head, Zayne saw a bow discarded by a dead soldier. Zayne dove for it and shot a bolt at a teetering crate on a high shelf. The contents of the crate fell onto

the creature, trapping it long enough for Zayne to draw his sword. Zayne slashed the demon as it was standing up.

"This is terrible," Zayne said.

"Zayne, your voice just got dark and foreboding. What's going on?" Zack inquired with a shaky voice.

"This was one of Nehilous' personal guards," Zayne replied.

He heard a slow clapping. "Well, well, well," Shadow Lord Nehilous said in his evil raspy voice. "Zayne, I bet you've been looking for this. I caught her trying to spy on me." He beckoned to his guards to get a girl... Anna.

"Let her go!" Zayne shouted. "She's not involved in any of this!"

"Don't worry. I'm not going to hurt her. I'm going to hurt you. And I want her to watch."

Zayne charged at Nehilous. He countered with a parry that sent Zayne reeling. The two collided, and Nehilous knocked Zayne to the ground. He lifted his sword and swung down, but Zayne rolled and avoided the attack. Nehilous leapt back, pulling his sword out of the granite floor. "Finish them!" he yelled to the only guards left standing.

The two guards dashed to join the fray. Zack sprinted and slashed one of the demon guard's torso. Zack and Calin incapacitated the other one. Nehilous returned, using his dark magic to throw Zayne into a wall, his left hand a blaze of deep purple colors. In his right hand, Nehilous raised his transparent ebony blade and prepared to strike. Zayne scrambled up just in time to parry a cut aimed at his waist. Nehilous's supernatural strength overpowered Zayne. Nehilous kicked Zayne onto a staircase and raised his sword to deliver a final deathblow.

"I don't think so!" Zack ran and kicked Nehilous in the chest. Stunned, Nehilous staggered backward. Zayne took advantage of the time Zack had bought him and dove for his weapon.

"You cannot destroy me!" Nehilous yelled.

"Everyone can be destroyed. With the right weapon." As Zayne uttered these words, he cut Nehilous' wrist and took the transparent ebony blade from his severed hand. With rage fueled by the love for his sister, Zayne impaled Nehilous with his own sword, making him vanish into fiery dust.

"Anna!" Zayne said as he embraced her. "I missed you so much!"

"Who is this?" Zack asked.

“This is my sister, Anna.” And with that, Zayne took Anna back to his cabin so they could reunite in private.

Later they all celebrated, everyone except Zayne. Anna noticed Zayne was deep in thought and said, “Why are you so serious? You should be happy, Zayne. You defeated Nehilous!”

“That’s just it. For as long as I can remember, that’s been all I could think about. What do I do now?”

Anna sighed. “With Nehilous dead, we should bring everyone that survived this attack back to camp and try to restore Earth to its right time period.” Then Anna cracked a smile and said, “But I think you should worry about it later. You’re missing the celebration!” And so the group celebrated the victory.

The next morning they set out to find survivors. While searching, Zack inquired, “We’ve solved one problem, but what about returning Earth to the right time period?”

“I’ve already come up with a plan,” Anna said. “Here’s a map of Nehilous’ castle. In Nehilous’ chamber, there’s a hidden corridor leading to the room where the Chaos Machine is held.”

“Your sister’s smart!” Zack exclaimed.

“She gets it from me!” Zayne replied laughing.

“My cell was here. The outward facing windows are loose. Together, we could pull it out. Once we’re in, Zayne will pick the lock. The hallway to the left leads directly to Nehilous’ chamber. Once we’re there, all we have to do is find the corridor and shut down the Chaos Machine!”

The team gathered the survivors and had them guard the camp while they set out for the castle. Nehilous’ castle was silent. Warriors stood scattered throughout the halls. One of the evil warriors heard a quiet creak coming from the prison hallway, followed by the sound of a lock opening. Slowly, the curious warrior walked down to the cell. “Hey!” he growled at seeing Zayne, Zack, Calin, and Anna running through the hallway.

“You go shut down the Chaos Machine. I’ll hold him off!” Zayne instructed the other three. While Zayne battled the alerted warrior and his reinforcements, the rest of his team searched for the hidden tunnel.

After ten tense minutes of searching, Zack finally found the hidden entrance. “Anna, go shut down the machine!” Anna sprinted down the tunnel into a large room, while Zack guarded the entrance.

“Hurry up!” Zayne yelled. Frantically, Anna searched for any sign of a deactivation switch.

Calin turned back to help Zayne once Anna and Zack found the secret hallway. Calin leapt at the nick of time, saving Zayne from a fatal blow. Together with Calin, Zayne defeated the remaining evil warriors.

Anna finally located a keypad on the Chaos Machine’s main reactor. “Zack!” Anna shouted. “Look for anything that could be a password to shut this thing down.”

Zack noticed a tilted painting on the wall. Looking behind, he discovered a sequence of five numbers. “Anna, I found a code that could be a password. I’ll give it to you.” Zack shouted the sequence. “4 – 5 – 9 – 8 – 5!”

Anna quickly typed in the code. Anna heard the heavy cranking of gears slowing down. The pass code had worked!

As the beast fell, Zayne and Calin heard Anna shout with joy.

“I did it! The Chaos Machine has been deactivated!” Anna shouted.

“She did it!” Zack yelled excitedly. In a flash of light, as the four friends stood together, the world slowly returned to the right time.

Flipping Without Fear

*For gymnasts, hurtling through space requires faith in one's abilities, as we see in **FLIPPING WITHOUT FEAR** by *Jocelyn W.* But what happens when that faith slips?*

I was doing a back walkover, back handspring, flipping through the air, expecting to land on the beam. I stretched up for my back walkover, and my hands landed evenly on the beam. I watched my first foot connect with the beam, and then my second foot. I went for my back handspring expecting my hands to hit the solid beam, but instead they were grasping at air. The next thing I knew I was not on the beam but on the floor with my toes in excruciating pain.

"What happened?" I asked out loud.

"Shinaya, you missed your hands on the back handspring," Ava replied.

"That seemed really painful," Paige interrupted.

"What I was going to say was, are you okay?" Ava continued.

"Yeah. I seem fine except for my toes. They really hurt," I replied to Ava as I limped over to my coach. Miss Malanie, our coach, made me put my foot in a bucket of ice for 15 minutes before I got to do my stretching and go home from the gym.

Man, I can't fall asleep. I wonder why, I thought as I lay in bed the same night. I have my foot and toes elevated, and I iced them. That's pretty much all I can do for right now, so I am going to try to go to sleep. I'll just keep counting sheep.

"Your toes are just bruised. No major injuries," the doctor told me the next day.

"Okay. Thank you!" I told the doctor.

Off to the gym and time for more beam. Ew! I thought.

"Shinaya! You'll never guess who's here!" Ava screamed as I walked into the gym for practice.

"Nikki is here. Yes, I know, her locker is right next to mine. Please watch the toes," I said as Ava bounced in front of me.

"She said she's going to coach us!" Ava said excitedly.

"GIRLS, LET'S GO!" Nikki said as she called us to begin practice.

“Do you want to lead warm-up, Ava? ‘Cause I don’t,” I told her.

“Sure, I’ll lead,” Ava said as she started running ahead of me. “Circle! Heads. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. Arm circles!” Ava ordered.

“After warm-up, Level sevens, you are going to beam. Fives are going to bars. Fours are going to vault, and the threes are going to floor,” announced Malanie.

“Nikki, who are you with?” Ava asked.

“I’m with you guys on beam. We are doing meet warm-up. You are going to have to time yourself.”

“Okay, Nikki,” Ava and I responded.

“Ready, go!” Nikki started us.

Full turn, jump three quarter, leap sissone, and mount, I thought .

“Tight knees!” Nikki yelled at me.

“Ten seconds!” Ava said right after.

“Your turn, Ava,” I said.

Before I knew it, it was my turn. I vowed not to do the dreaded back walkover, back handspring in warm-up. I got up on the beam and did just a back handspring step out.

“Ten seconds!” Ava called.

Okay, step, step, step, cartwheel back tuck, stick, I thought.

“Aren’t you supposed to have a tumbling series?” Nikki asked me.

“Yeah, um, about that. I am scared to do it because I slammed my toes yesterday,” I explained to Nikki.

“Ava, just keep going. I’m talking to Shinaya right now,” Nikki called to Ava. “You know, Shinaya, I had the same problem.”

“You did? But I don’t understand; you’re such a great gymnast, Nikki.”

“Thank you, but you have to listen to me. Just focus on your feet and hand placement. Do you think you can do that for me?”

“I’ll try, Nikki,” I said.

“Let’s see it, then,” Nikki replied.

“Hands, foot, foot, hands, feet!” I said to myself. “I MADE IT, NIKKI!”

“Starting on beam, Michigan Academy of Gymnastics,” said the announcer at our competition a week later.

“Okay, Shinaya, let’s see what you can do!” Nikki pep-talked me before the meet began.

“1704. Shinaya,” the judge said and saluted to me.

Okay, press to handstand mount. Come down slow. Tumbling series. Hands, foot, foot, hands, feet! Leap, sissone, full turn, pose. Back handspring step out. Step, step, step cartwheel, back tuck, SALUTE!

“OMG! You stuck it!” Ava screamed at me after I completed my competition beam routine.

“I know. For the first time in forever, I stuck my routine!” I cried back.

From that point on, I knew that it was going to be a great meet.

Guarded

*The world has gone mad, and a ruthless leader has taken control of a chunk of it. One brave fighter challenges his power in an attempt to free the oppressed in **GUARDED** by **Hailey Van W.***

My eyes flutter open, and the dim light that hangs above my head sits covered in rust. I scoot myself into the corner of the dirty, cement cell and bring my knees up to my chin. The iron door swings open to one of Falorn's guards. Falorn is the ruler, dictator, warden; it doesn't matter what you call him. The point is he's the "bad guy."

"Get up," he commands. My bones move, weak and in pain from sitting on cement for three days. My mouth is dry, more than I realized when it was closed. I reach for the wall to help hoist me up. The guard handcuffs me, and walks me down to the cafeteria. We pass by cell after cell. The sun from the skylight burns my chapped lips. I lick them slowly, knowing it will only make them worse.

All the guards and prisoners here are complete idiots. They—well, let me explain. It started off as a war. People soon scrambled for power in the ruins. Falorn got it. He captured everyone, or so he thought. Then he recruited the "smart" ones for guards. The world has become a prison, and I am trapped in a cell.

I have hidden out for four years in the wastelands. No one found me, until I let them. I went in to find a way to destroy their little world, put them in a cell for once. That's a bit cruel, but it's also the truth. I just need to make some allies: some actual smart allies or somebody as brave as the whole Hun army.

"Get in." I step through the door he holds open. It slams behind me, bringing attention across the room.

I grab a tray in the food line. Once it's my turn to retrieve food, I catch a glimpse of my appearance in the glass roofing the food. My chocolate hair has been cut right to my ears. I have bruises and dirt smudges covering my face. My blue eyes pierce through the glass, but there's a sign of defeat in them.

My cell turns dark as the lights go out. I seat myself on the metal bed and lean against the cold wall. There hasn't been much talking since I got here four days ago. All sentences have the word "get" in

them. My words are only spoken with my expression. I hate it here. Figuring out a plan to escape will be harder than I thought. But it's not just about escaping; it's also about changing the way we live.

"Psssst," a voice whispers from the cell to my right. "Psssst!" I walk over to the corner where the voice is strongest. "Psssst—"

"What?" I cut him off.

"I know what you're thinking about," the voice says with a thick Irish accent. I sit in silence. "I used to watch you get closer every day outside my cell window. No one would voluntarily come into this ditch. You're trying to destroy them. Set everyone free. I want to help you. I want to. What do you say?"

I am taken aback by his words. Should I trust him? Is he a spy? I've heard those types of things, out in the wastelands: people screaming for their lives; the people, who once tried to escape, offered up by a spy. Living in the wastelands was depressing, but knowing I was free—well, not in the prison—was a bigger relief. One day I thought, while watching the guards guard outside the prison, *Why would Falorn want to keep people locked up? Did it bring him pleasure? That's just sick.* But most importantly I decided to go into the prison. I just thought, *Why should I sit out here staring, when people in there are suffering?* All I knew is that living in there was the equivalent to being dead.

"What's your name?"

"My name? I can't remember my real name. They changed it to Lyndon. Your name?"

I hesitate, "Kimberly. How long have you been here?"

"Two years."

Our conversation goes swiftly. He answers questions directly after I ask them, sometimes cutting me off. We make a plan, all in one night. We decide tomorrow morning I'll have a breakdown, a big one. This will work perfectly because they've never dealt with me before. Lyndon will sneak out; his guard will be distracted by me. He'll go to the warden's office and turn the power out. He will open all cell doors with the help of allies we'll find tomorrow morning. We'll also need some more to direct people out of the building and hide them. Our only problem is we don't know how the prisoners will function.

I nod slightly and turn my head away. I face my pillow that is stuffed with old newspapers. I lay my head down ever so slowly and decide to let myself dream.

"Run! They're coming!" screams an elderly woman.

I look up from the wounded child. The senior comes running from the outskirts of our base; she is bombarded with questions and being assured her safety by others. Off in the distance I see figures emerge from the edge of the site.

"Look! They really are coming! Hide your children, hide your wife, and hide yourself! To the storm shelters!" I scoop up the fragile child before me. He stays buried in my chest as I scavenge all the extra food I can find, pushing past the panicking people.

I'm the last one in. I place the small child down. I call out one last time for any people outside in the open. I shut the well-hidden door. Silence falls across the room. Footsteps are heard above us. Dust falls from the dirt roof, as we are underground. The mud door opens wide. I quickly blow out the candle supplying the room with light. I pull the nearest children behind me.

"AAAAACHOOO!" a person across the crowd sneezes. I feel my eyes widen. The guard turns his flashlight on. The light from the flashlight shines across the crowd. He blows his whistle, and other guards parade in the shelter, handcuffing and grabbing other people. Gunshots are blown at ones who fight back.

I fight my way through the scene. I reach the door, and I am being pulled back. I pull myself closer to the door until the person holding me back lets go. Once I reach daylight I make a bee-line for the market. I fill one bucket of water and another with fruits. I dash out of the crumbly base, heading for the mountains.

I wake up from my nightmare.

"Get up! Get up I say!" A hard fist pushes into my jaw, causing me to fall off the rusty bed. The guard kicks at my stomach; I fly across the room, hitting the cement wall.

"W-why?" I whimper.

"Falorn heard your little conversation last night. Thought he better have me teach you a lesson. As well as London."

"It's Lyndon!" I screech back at him. He's taken aback by this, but then he oozes with rage.

He throws another kick at me, but I roll out of the way. His foot collides with the cement wall. I pull myself up, wincing at the pain in my stomach. I kick the man on his shin, and he falls to the floor.

His head pounds against the floor. I guess I'm escaping a different way. I grab the man's gun as well as his keys.

Walking out of my cell was easier than life. No guards are around, just security cameras. I head back into my cell, taking the laser from the man's pocket. I hesitate at first as the wounded man claws at me. I dive for the keys and pick them up in one swift motion. I shoot the laser at all the cameras, making them go blind.

I place the laser back in my pocket. I point my gun at the nearest person who seems important. He appears to be the head of security. He shows me through rooms I've never seen before. I am amazed by the offices full of modern technology.

I find myself standing in the security room I was led to. I tie the man up in a chair with rope I found in one of the supply drawers. The computer turns on by clicking a circle with a small line at the top center. I click on the screen where it says "Electricity." The lights flicker out. I hear distant screams, as well as a few gunshots.

I pick up all the pairs of cell keys I can.

My way out to Lyndon's cell is uneasy. The breeze from people running by causes my hair to fly back. I stumble upon a chair, landing on a pair of handcuffs. That is sure to leave a bruise. I walk along the walls, unlocking cells as I go. People huddling in a corner scared to come out were hard to deal with. Lyndon will help with that. I just need to get to him.

Once I reach Lyndon's cell, he's already at the door. I unlock his door and toss all the keys to him, but keep two for myself. "If we're going to do this, we have to do it right. You've been here longer. Find the people that seem smart and unlock their cells first. Direct them to the exit so once the gate is open we'll be ready to leave." He nods through the darkness, walking away.

I make my way back to the control room. I stop when I hear heavy footsteps.

"It's probably that Kimberly girl, the new one."

"Yeah, if we find her, I call taking her to Falorn."

"Oh, no you won't."

I grab my mouth, realizing I had just said that aloud. I run past them as I hear them chase after me. Various footsteps are joined to the parade chasing me. I dash for the control room. I open up the computer screen I used before, except this time I click on "Security." I tap on the screen as it confirms with me that I would like to open the gates. I hear a large rumbling sound from the front

of the prison. The gates are open. I turn around, satisfied with my work. Until I hear sound of a gun clicking.

My heavy breathing is heard across the room. I try to keep my breath at a steady pace. I freeze, remembering I left the Security Man in the room. He walks around the room; I crawl behind him, kicking his back. He flies forward. The gun drops, releasing a bullet. It ricochets around the room, bouncing off the walls. I stay down as the man crawling on the floor is hit with the bullet.

I don't want this to be our world, how we live. But, until Falorn, and all his followers, understand that this is not the way human beings act, killing will be second nature. It doesn't matter that I wasn't the one who pulled the trigger. Another life is gone.

I stare deep into the man's eyes; I make my way over to him and bend down in the small pool of blood his body is releasing. A tear rolls down my cheeks; it leaves a clean streak, different from my face covered in bruises.

"Kimberly," I hear Lyndon softly whisper, "are you okay?"

I wipe the tears clean from my face. I stand up weakly as I am led out the door. He goes back into the control room to turn on all the lights. One by one they flicker on. I sniffle slightly.

I walk down the hallway slowly, monitoring that all the guards were taken care of. The people walked out crying happy tears and some sad ones. Some walked out emotionless, and some walked out holding guards by their collar.

The plan? To get back to what civilization really is. We might have to stay here for a while, until we build a new place to stay. But hopefully this time, things will stay okay.

Heading South

*Does a zoo feel like home for an animal who lives there? In **HEADING SOUTH** by **Dominic Delgado**, a trio of animal friends looks for a new opportunity outside of a cage.*

It was a chilly, fall morning in Michigan when the leaves were all red and falling from the trees. Honker the Goose woke up and decided it was cold and so it was time to head south. He wanted to spend a last day at the zoo with his son before leaving for their house in Florida. He woke up his son Junior, and they ate a fish breakfast. Then they flew to the zoo that was a mile away.

When they got to the main entrance they heard yelling, and what they saw was a ginormous giraffe running toward them. There were two fat men with mustaches chasing him. One of them was eating a donut while he was running, so they couldn't catch the giraffe. The giraffe yelled, "Get out of my way!" at Honker and Junior. They jumped to the right, and the giraffe got out of the zoo.

They wanted to know why the giraffe was running away, so Honker and Junior turned and chased after the giraffe. Because they could fly, they went up in the air and followed him. They caught up to him at an alley. Junior ran over to the giraffe and said, "Why are you running, friend?"

The giraffe said, "My name is Arnold, and I want to live in a bigger place. The zoo makes me feel like I am in jail with all those bars around me. Those guys chasing me only care about making money off of people staring at me all day." Junior thought back to the time he went to the zoo last year and remembered thinking how small the giraffe cage was. Junior decided they needed to help their new friend escape to a better place.

As they looked over they saw the animal control people running by the alley. Junior said, "We need to help him, Dad. Maybe he can come to our house in Florida."

Honker was worried the animal control people would keep tracking Arnold, but he never could say no to Junior. They decided to help him escape, even though they might put themselves in danger.

So, while they flew south, Arnold ran on land, but they could still see each other. During the day, Arnold avoided being seen by

ducking between buildings and tall trees. At night, he ran more freely as most people were sleeping. He was careful to dart out under the streetlights every once in a while to check in with the flying geese.

When they got to Georgia, Junior looked down at Arnold while he flew overhead. He was clumsy and flew into a tree. When he fell he noticed that he didn't hit the ground, but landed on Arnold who had stopped to chew on a leaf. Honker didn't see Junior fall and kept on flying. He lost track of both Junior and Arnold.

When Honker turned his head to tell Junior to look at a cool cloud, he noticed Junior was gone. Honker dove down to the ground to search for them. He wandered all night and finally found them outside a Taco Bell. It was dark, so people didn't notice the giraffe in the parking lot. They were once again all back together and happy. They decided to sleep for the night, then in the morning, take off on their way to Florida. Finally they made it to Florida, without any more problems.

Honker didn't think the animal control people would find them in Florida, so he let Arnold live with them from then on. They expanded the house up and down to fit Arnold's neck. When the summer came, they decided Arnold would stay at the house to take care of it until Arnold and Junior would come back the next winter. All because of a small home for a very tall giraffe, they were now a strange but happy family!

The Ice Cream Parlor

*Sabotage is someone's evil deed. It will take persistence by a group of kid detectives to identify the culprit in **THE ICE CREAM PARLOR** by **Becca Woodrow**.*

It was a Monday in the middle of summer on the hottest day of the year so far when best friends Daisy, Ocean, Lucy, and Christophe are sitting in a hammock in Ocean's backyard. "I wonder how many people are at the ice cream parlor today. Anyone want to guess?" asks Ocean. Ocean is twelve and the most mature of the group. She often starts these kinds of guessing games and likes puzzles, mysteries and solving problems.

"I'd say thirty-five families in line. Wait! No five! Thirty! Nineteen?" replies Lucy. Lucy is a crazy talker; she says everything she is thinking. The others have to remind her to stop talking sometimes. However, for a talker, she really loves reading. Lucy is eleven. She and Christophe are usually in the same classes. Lucy has read *Narnia* about a hundred times because one of the main characters has the same name as she. She also loves to use quotes from her favorite books.

"Lucy!" everyone yells.

"Sorry," Lucy apologizes.

"Maybe ten?" replies Daisy. Daisy is a strangely smart kid who knows almost everything. She is ten years old and loves to play games.

"Twenty-four kids," says Christophe. Christophe is Daisy's brother. He is eleven and the biggest of the group. He likes to eat, but isn't really overweight, just a bit on the husky side. He is also very tough.

Just then Ocean's mom came outside, "Hey, kids, does anyone want ice cream? Or is it not worth the wait?" she asks.

"ICE CREAM!" the kids scream in unison.

"Ok, let's go!" Ocean's mom says happily, and they all start to walk to the store.

On the way Christophe stepped in three globs of gum. One he tripped on, and then he fell on his face. Everyone laughed. Ocean guessed the flavor of that one was Juicy Fruit and the others were peppermint and cinnamon. He also stepped in dog waste, which

smelled terrible, and two puddles from people's sprinklers. One sprinkler was still running, so his pants got soaked, too. Daisy found a dollar bill and five pennies. The dollar bill was old and wrinkled, and the pennies were clean, shiny, and new. Ocean caught a balloon for a little kid, and Lucy got nothing as she was talking the whole way. "It's not fair. You guys all had something happen to you on our walk and nothing happened to me. Is it that I'm not lucky, or are the odds not in my favor like for Prim in *The Hunger Games*?" Lucy keeps talking.

"Hey, Lucy, not all the things that happened to us are good. I would rather have nothing happen to me than what did happen to me," Christophe interrupts.

"I know, but at least you got something like dirty shoes!" Lucy replied.

"Hey, Lucy, if you stop talking I will drop a penny and you can pick it up. Then you can call it your lucky day," Daisy said kindly.

"Ok, I'll take it," Lucy says, and Daisy drops the penny. "It's my lucky day!" Lucy says as she picks it up.

"Hey, guys, look. Nobody's at the ice cream parlor!" Ocean says. They all look around the town and notice everyone at Mr. Burgers, the local burger joint. They run into the ice cream parlor, Sir Freeze, to see what's going on.

As they enter the ice cream parlor they notice the smell of warm, melted, gooey ice cream. They look around and see Mr. J. Frost sitting in the seat Ocean usually sits in, the front corner window booth. "Go home, kids. I don't have any ice cream. I'm ruined," he says.

"Why, what happened?" ask the kids.

"Well, I think someone broke into my parlor last night, tuned off my freezer and the air conditioner, then turned up the heat. Today when I walked inside the parlor it was one hundred degrees. It melted all the ice cream, and now I won't have enough money to pay the rent for the parlor. This place will have to close down on Friday if I don't figure out who did this and make them pay," he said as he starts to tear up. "Or maybe an employee did it, because they were the last people to be here last night."

"Maybe we can help, Mr. Frost," Lucy says as she gives him her penny. "That penny gave me luck, so it might give you some."

"Thank you, kids! I need all the help I can get at this point. Figure this out and I'd be extremely grateful," he replies.

“Is it ok if we look at the shop to start our investigation?” Ocean asks.

“Sure, that would be fine,” he responds.

The kids are looking around as their feet became covered in melted ice cream. Chocolate, chocolate chip, vanilla, superman, moose tracks, birthday cake: It is all here in one giant sticky blob of goo with chunks. They think about how someone would get in as they look around. No broken glass or broken locks, nothing. The mystery begins!

“Sorry, Mr. Frost. We found nothing unusual yet. We will need more clues,” Lucy says

“It’s ok, kids. Come on and I’ll show you pictures of each of my employees,” says Mr. J. Frost.

After Mr. Frost gave them the pictures of his employees with their names in bold print at the bottom of the paper, they went to Mr. Burgers to get something to eat. He just recently started selling ice cream. “Well, does anyone have any ideas of who it is?” Ocean asked.

“I think it’s Colten; he looks suspicious in his picture,” Daisy said

“I think it is Jill,” Christophe said.

“I think it is Josie. She always gives us extra ice cream, and she is the daughter of the person who owns Mr. Burgers,” Lucy said.

“You have a good point, Lucy,” Christophe said, “but I still think it’s Jill.”

They all stared at Ocean. Finally Ocean said, “Why are you all staring at me?”

They all blinked. Then Christophe said, “Well, we are always the ones to answer your questions, so now it’s your turn. Who do you think it is?”

Ocean replied, “Well, I don’t know. It could be anyone. They all look suspicious. It could be the owner of Mr. Burgers, but if you think of it, he is a nice man. I’d say it is Josie.”

“Hey, look! It looks like one of the employees across the street is showing up for work at Sir Freezes! We should go and talk to them,” Daisy said.

“Yeah, that’s a great idea!” Ocean replied.

The kids ran over to find that the employee was Colten. Meanwhile Ocean’s mom went in the ice cream parlor to clean up some of the mess.

Mr. Frost saw Colten and got to him first. "Colten, just answer their questions. They are twelve years old. You remember what it was like to be twelve, right?" Mr. Frost walked away to go call the rest of the employees to just go with a flow with the kids.

The kids approached Colten. "So, what made you want to work at Sir Freezes?" Daisy started.

"Well, I love ice cream, and I wanted to work with something I love," Colten replied.

"I see. So, can you tell me what you know about the heat?"

"What heat? I'm just showing up for work?"

"Ok, you are able to go, but don't bother going to work. There is no ice cream because someone broke into the parlor and made the ice cream melt by turning up the heat," Daisy said.

"What, that's terrible! Who would do that?" Colten exclaimed. Daisy didn't think it was Colten anymore. She didn't know who it was.

"Ok, guys, we can scratch him off our list. I think he is totally innocent," Daisy told everyone, sounding a bit disappointed. "We are never going to figure this out," Daisy grumbled.

"It's ok, guys. We still have two other suspects," Ocean said.

Fifteen minutes later Jill came in for her shift at work. They all decided Christophe was going to ask her questions.

"Ok, what made you work at Sir Freezes?" Christophe asked Jill.

"Well, I hate ice cream, so I knew I wouldn't be tempted to eat it. I thought it would be a good idea," Jill replied.

"Ok, good idea, but what do you know about the heating issue?"

"Well, I got a text from Colten a couple of minutes ago, and I wanted to see what's up," Jill responded.

"Then tell me Jill, why are you sweating? Are you lying to me?" Christophe tried to make a comeback.

"No, I have a sweating issue. I sweat when I'm nervous, and it's really hot today."

"Ok, I think you are innocent." Christophe let Jill go. "Guys, she was not the person who turned up the heat."

"Now let's just wait for Josie to show up for her shift," Ocean replied.

It was about an hour until Josie arrived. She was supposed to be at the parlor a half an hour earlier.

"Welcome, Josie. Tell us why you are late," Ocean pressured her.

Josie paused for a little. “Well—”

Ocean cut Josie off. “Were you making a deal with your father, or what?”

“No. I wasn’t. We have family issues.”

“What issues?” Ocean kept asking questions while Lucy sat looking concerned.

“My grandpa cut his finger at Mr. Burgers, so I had to help out for a while.” Josie kept eye contact with Ocean. While everything she said was true, Ocean didn’t know and just kept asking questions.

“Ok, then—”

Lucy cut Ocean off. “Ocean, stop. These are useless questions. We are figuring out nothing!” Lucy yelled at Ocean. Lucy turned to Josie. “Do you know about the heating issue?” asked Lucy.

“Yeah, because we are just across the street. I thought they had fixed it by now,” Josie answered.

“Oh, they fixed the heat, but they are cleaning, and he doesn’t have enough money to buy ice cream at this point. So, why are you working at Sir Freezes instead of Mr. Burgers?” Lucy asked.

“Well, I need my own money, not money my father gives me,” Josie replies, a little more relaxed.

“That makes sense to me, I guess. You may go,” Lucy replies

“Thanks. My father is coming over later to see if everything is okay. He told me to tell Mr. Frost, but can you tell him for me?”

“Sure,” Lucy said.

Ocean stares at Josie as she leaves while Lucy jots some stuff down on a piece of paper.

“Ok now, it’s time to interview Mr. S. Bun,” Lucy said.

They sat for a while until Mr. Bun arrived. Mr. Bun was very nice. He came over to see if there was anything he could help with.

“Ok, Mr. Bun. What does the S in your name stand for?” Lucy asked.

“It stands for Sesame,” he replied. The kids giggled.

“Ok, what do you know about the issue in here?” Christophe asked.

“Yeah, everyone is talking about it, and I just overheard some people. I wanted to see what was going on for myself.”

“What do you know about it?” Ocean asked.

“Nothing. I drove to work and found a line of people at my restaurant. I heard people gossip, and that is how I figured it out,” he replied.

“Ok, sir, you may go.” Daisy said to him in an airy voice.

“Kids, time to go back home, it’s getting late,” said Ocean’s mom.

Ocean replied, “Ok, guys, let’s go.”

The next morning the kids got up, got dressed, and ran to Sir Freezes so they could tell everyone their suspicions about who turned up the temperature. Everyone was waiting: Mr. Frost, Mr. Bun, the employees, and even the cops.

“So, kids, did you figure out who came into my store after I closed up?” Mr. Frost asked.

“What? I knew it!” Ocean screamed. “You said that the employees we talked to were in the shop last, but actually you were!” Ocean continued.

“What, no! I saw his car in the parking lot when I left, and I think I was the last employee in there. I got stuck cleaning late because some kid dropped chocolate ice cream on the floor right before closing,” Jill explained.

“You brought down your own business?” Josie said.

“What?” Colten said, looking up from his favorite game, Flappy Bird.

“Jack turned up the heat!” Daisy exclaimed.

Christophe and Lucy just stood there in awe.

“Jack Frost, is this true?” the cops questioned.

“No, it wasn’t me. I went home early,” he said.

“No, you didn’t,” said Josie. “You came in just as we were closing. I saw you when I was taking out the trash.”

Mr. Frost paused, took a long breath, and sweated as he looked at everyone who was staring at him. “Ok, I did it. I turned up the heater,” Jack burst out. He couldn’t hold it in any longer.

“Why did you do this?” the cops asked.

“Well, my business has been going down ever since Mr. Burgers started selling ice cream. I wanted to frame him so his business would close and mine would become the hangout again.”

“That’s it?” Josie asked.

“Yes,” Jack answered.

“Hands behind your back. You’re coming with us,” one cop said as he put handcuffs on Jack.

“May the odds ever be in your favor when you are in jail, Mr. Frost!” Lucy yelled as she watched the police car drive away.

After Jack Frost got arrested, Mr. Burgers became the new Ice Cream Parlor and Burger Joint for the town. Lucy, Christophe, Daisy, and Ocean got some ice cream for free and a plaque with their names engraved in Mr. Burgers. They had so much fun over the rest of the summer eating ice cream at Mr. Burgers, and they found new favorite seats: the front corner window booth.

Into the Woods

INTO THE WOODS by *Cormac Lindstrom* isn't for the faint of heart. *Terror has no name, but it has the initials "S.M."*

“Ok, Richard, could you please start over?”

“Am I...?”

“Yes, Richard, you're safe. Now could you please start from the beginning?”

“Ok, well, I asked myself, *Ugh, whe-where am I? What's this paper? 'You can't escape,'* I said to myself as I read the paper. *BAM. 'AHHHHH!'* I heard. Then I heard a *DUM DUM DUM*. I ran into the woods. I saw a tall man. I yelled out, ‘Hey, what are you doing out here! Where am I? What is this place!’ Then I heard the noise again, and as I listened, it came closer. But it wasn't moving its feet, almost as it was teleporting.

“I ran into an old house. It was empty. I went upstairs; still nothing. Then I saw another piece of paper on the wall. I saw a stone lighthouse, and I went outside to go up, but the gate was locked. I decided to go back into the woods. I tripped on a log and hit my head on something hard. I got up and saw a flashlight, but there were no batteries in it.

“After what I think was two hours of walking, I saw an abandoned construction site. I searched through it and saw another sheet of paper and a child's doll hanging on a branch. I walked toward the doll and saw the initials ‘S.M.’ on the doll. Then I saw the man again.

“I ran into an abandoned bathroom where I saw my cat, Business Kitty, but he wasn't acting normally. His head was spinning, and he was floating, saying, “Take my place” as if he was a ghost asking me to take his place in the grave for eternity. I saw some batteries and a flashlight and a key on the ground. I whispered to myself, ‘What's going on?’

“I wandered around those woods for hours, probably; I didn't have my watch. I went to my sister's house and saw an opened door. I went in and saw drawings on the wall. *Spooky*, I thought. I yelled out, ‘Kate, where are you?’ I looked around the house and saw the phone. I tried calling 911 to report that my sister was missing. Then I saw the message box. It said, ‘You have one new

message.’ I played the message. It was full of static interference. ‘Help me,’ the message said in Kate’s voice. ‘AHHHHHHH!’ Then I stopped the recording because I couldn’t bear to listen to it anymore.

“I went to the door and saw him again. I ran as fast as I could and saw a car. Thank god that the keys were in it and the gas tank was full. I drove through the forest, and as I was driving I spotted the man in front of the car. I went in reverse and drove right out of those evil woods and went home to my family: my wife, Judy, and my daughter, Jessica, who was in bed.

“‘Richard, what’s in your hand?’ asked Judy.

“‘Just some cryptic paper I found in the woods.’

“‘How are you?’

“‘Fine.’

“‘Are you sure?’

“‘Yes.’ Right after that we heard scratching on the door. I looked through the peephole, and no one was there, so I went upstairs. As I was walking up the stairs, the scratching got louder, so I ran to the door and looked through the hole again. And there was that monster! I hid in the closet, and it was only three minutes before I heard the door open slowly. Then I heard footsteps, and through the holes in the closet I saw the thing standing. This time I got a better look at it, but I still couldn’t make it out. Then it started walking upstairs, so I came out of the closet and quietly went to the shack and got my shotgun.

“As I was sprinting toward the house I heard Jessica scream. I went to her room, and when I violently opened the door, there next to Jessica’s bed it stood. This time I could see all of it. I grabbed Jessica and woke up Judy. I grabbed her hand and ran to the car.

“As I was running I saw it. I unlocked the car door and put Jessica in the back seat. Judy asked, ‘Richard, what’s going on?’

“I said, ‘I don’t know.’

“Jessica asked, ‘Daddy, who was that?’ I didn’t answer.

“We went in reverse to my brother’s house. As we were driving, it stood in front of the car. My wife screamed, ‘What the heck is that!’ We drove forward as fast as we could go and hit it. Only it wasn’t there! Instead it was my brother Andy! He was bleeding out bad. We quickly got him in the car to take him to the hospital. As we were driving, he started coughing, and then he regurgitated blood and had muscle spasms. He took one more slow breath. At

that second we pulled over, and I was screaming and crying, 'Andy, wake up! Andy, please wake up!'

"We got the shovel from the trunk and started digging. When the hole was done we put him in and buried him. I started sobbing, and standing next to the car there it was. I yelled out, 'What do you do you want, you freak!' It pointed to Jessica.

"Judy ran in front of her. I pulled out my gun and started to shoot it until I ran out of ammo. It seemed like I hadn't hit him. Then Judy screamed and fell on the grass.

"The thing started to grow tendrils, and the thing reached out to Judy. She was floating, and then its tendrils went down her throat. They pulled out this mist that looked like Judy. I looked at it and saw its head start to crack. Then there was a mouth. It ate the ghostly substance, and then her corpse fell. I yelled out, 'NOOOOO!' I grabbed the shovel and hit its head as hard as I could. Its head was sideways, and then it looked up and went to its normal position, and it reached out to Jessica.

"I grabbed her and ran to the police. We heard Judy screaming over and over again even though she was gone. Jessica asked, 'Daddy, what's going on?' I thought, *'Funny, that's what I asked myself when I first saw it.'*

"After an hour of running, we finally arrived at the police. We ran in and reported that there were two killings. They said, 'Go wait in the bedroom. We'll get you.' They made us sit in separate rooms. I sat on the left, and she sat on the right. I waited for four hours.

"I heard Jessica scream, but the door was locked from the outside. I kicked it as hard as I could, but it was no good. It took about 40 minutes before two officers came in and told me that Jessica was killed. I said in anger, 'What!'

"One of them said, 'We couldn't find the body, only a lot of blood.'

"I said, 'Well, maybe she's ok.'

"The second one said, 'No human could lose that much blood and live. I'm sorry.'

"I should go to my house and rest for the night," I said. While I was driving, I couldn't bear to think that all of my family was dead.

"When I got home, on the door there was a note that said, 'You're next,' and there was a drawing of Andy, Judy, and Jessica, all dead, and the horrible thing stood behind them.

"I hid in my house for months. Then my friend Andrew said I should see a therapist, so that's why I'm here."

"But, uh, Richard, you haven't really given any detail of what this tall man looked like."

"He—no, IT!—appeared to be wearing a suit, but there's no way it was human! There's no way! Its arms were almost to the ground. I've never seen anything like it!"

"Could you please describe what the face looked like?"

"That...face—"

"What?"

"THAT HORRIBLE FREAKING FACE was just *staring* at me, except... NO, THERE WAS NO FACE! THERE WERE NO EYES! WHAT DID I SEE?"

"Richard, please calm down."

"No...no...I FREAKING SAW YOU, MONSTER! IT TOOK MY JESSICA! NOW IT'S COMING FOR ME! I CAN'T SLEEP! I CAN'T LIVE! AHFFF! OH GOD, IT'S RIGHT THERE BEHIND YOU! OH, HOLY CHRI—"

Richard and Felix were never seen again. All that was in the room was a note that said, "You will all die."

It Is a Magical Time

*An unimagined world is just a hidden portal away in **IT IS A MAGICAL TIME** by **Bridget Spilkin**. The challenge for our three heroes is to keep that world and this one from interfering with each other.*

“Come on, Sam, it is just the woods,” said Sara.
“I know, but can’t we just get another ball?” Sam replied. Sam thinks, *Maybe I just should go and try not to be afraid of everything.*

“Let’s just go in,” Abby exclaimed.

“Fine,” said Sam.

They walked quite a bit before any of them spoke.

“I found it. It is over here,” exclaimed Sara.

“Finally we found it,” replied Abby while picking it up. Then Abby said, “Think fast,” and Sam was tumbling backwards until he hit a tree, or so he thought. When Sam made contact with the tree, he passed through it. What Sam saw on the other side was amazing. Everything looked perfect.

When Sam came back over, he said, “Guess what, you guys? There is another land over there!”

“No way. I don’t believe you,” Sara said.

“See for yourself,” Sam replied.

Sara walked over to the tree and cautiously stuck her hand out. Her hand passed through easily, and when she brought it back over it was fine. Then she went through. A few seconds later she came back out and called to Sam and Abby, “Come on, guys. Get over here. This is really cool!”

“See, I told you,” Sam replied as he and Abby went to the other land.

The new land was amazing. Cars were in flight, animals were talking English, and it was more beautiful than anything the three of them had ever seen. Grass was green, the bushes had pink flowers, and the sky was such a perfect blue. To top it off, there was the most crystal clear water fall in the center of the land. The kids were so amazed they didn’t even see the bunny walking up to them.

“Um, excuse me, what are you doing here?”

“OH! We were just, um,” Sara tried to say.

“No need to worry. I’m not going to hurt you. Come on. I’ll tell you about this place.”

“No, that’s okay. We really should be going,” Sam exclaimed. Then he remembered what he told himself about not being afraid. “Actually, what harm can it do?”

“That’s more like it! Come on,” Sara said.

When the kids got to the bunny’s home it looked like a little cozy cabin. There was a chimney with a little smoke, and the whole cabin was made from wood. When the children entered they smelled a mixture of things: carrots, chicken, and the burning of a small fire. The children went around scoping out the place. The bunny went to sit down and eat a carrot. The one thing that interested the children the most was the wall full of potions. There was a sleeping spell, a switch spell, a cozy spell, and many more.

“Hey, Mr., um...”

“Oh, right, my name is Mr. Mittens.”

“Okay, Mr. Mittens, we were wondering if you could tell us about this place,” Sara asked.

“Sure, but before we start do any of you want a carrot?”

“NO thanks,” Abby said, “and I think that I speak for all of us.”

“Yeah,” Sara and Sam exclaimed.

“Oh, well, I go crazy for them. I love them,” Mr. Mittens said, “So let us start. The name of this land is Crystal Falls. It is named after that waterfall that you saw. Crystal Falls has many magical elements, like the potions you saw, the crystal clear water, and the way that Crystal Falls always looks perfect. Well, that is about all that I can come up with. Do you guys have any questions?”

The kids each had their own thoughts. Sam was thinking, *This land is so weird. Why are there so many weird, magical things?* Sara was thinking, *Wow, Crystal Falls is so cool. I bet we are the first humans to ever be here. I should ask him that.* Abby was thinking, *This is so cool! But the only thing that is weird is those potions.*

Finally Sara asked, “Are we the first humans to ever come here?”

“I think that you guys are the first humans to come here,” Mr. Mittens said.

“I was wondering what all those potions are for,” Abby said.

“Well, they have many uses,” Mr. Mittens said as he walked over to the potions. “Here is one that will put you to sleep, and this one makes you feel good about yourself. This one switches things. Oh, and never touch this one. It will make you go crazy,” he said. While Mr. Mittens was talking he picked up the bad spell and accidentally dropped it all over himself. The kids were in shock. They were staring at Mr. Mittens. His eyes were turning red. His paws were shaking, and then he hopped right out the door into the portal and disappeared.

“Um, guys, we just let a magical evil bunny enter the human world. What do you think he is going to do? I don’t know, maybe destroy the world! We have to go stop that bunny,” Abby explained.

“Where do you guys think Mr. Mittens would have gone?” Sam asked.

“I don’t know,” Sara replied. “Well, let’s think back to what we know about him.”

“Well, we know that he liked carrots,” Abby said.

“Also that he is larger than other bunnies and he can speak English. I mean, how many bunnies can do that?” Sam replied.

“Well, any of you have ideas? Because I am thinking of nothing,” Sara said.

“No,” Sam replied.

Abby was silent for a second. Then she said, “I know where he would have gone. You know how he said that he loves carrots and that he would do anything for them? I think that he must have gone to the farmers’ market so that he could have carrots before he starts going all evil. You know!”

“Abby, that is so smart. Now there is only one problem. How do we get him back into his regular self?” Sara asked.

“I know! Why don’t we use the switch potion on him?” Sam replied

“Great idea,” Sara said. “Now come on, let’s get going.”

When the kids got to the market they saw that they were right. Mr. Mittens was at the carrot stand. He was holding the man to scare him so that he did not have to pay. The man was terrified, but he would not give up his carrots. To the kids’ relief the man was in the back of the market and behind some plants, so no one could really see what was happening. The kids hid behind some bushes before they went to Mr. Mittens.

“You guys, how are we going to get Mr. Mittens to drink the potion?” Sam asked, feeling so brave right at that moment.

“How about we take a carrot and pour the potion over the carrot and give Mr. Mittens the carrot?” Abby said.

“Great plan. Stay here. I’ll be back with a carrot,” Sara said. She sneaked around the back and hid behind a plant.

Mr. Mittens said, “Give me those carrots or you will be sorry.”

The salesman replied, “No. Not unless you pay for them.”

“Like I said, give me them or you will be sorry.”

Sara thought, *I have to do something before this gets out of hand.* She grabbed the carrot and ran back to Sam and Abby before anybody could see her.

When Sara got back, Abby handed Sara the potion, and she poured it over the carrot. They then headed toward Mr. Mittens.

The kids walked up to Mr. Mittens, and Sam said, “Here, have this carrot instead. It is much better.” With that Sam finally realized that he does not have to be afraid. He can stand up for himself. Mr. Mittens let go of the worker and gratefully accepted the carrot.

At first nothing happened. Then Mr. Mittens spoke. He said, “Why am I here? I am not allowed in the human world! What, how did I get here?”

“It is a long story. We will explain it to you on the way back,” Abby said.

Before they left, Sara spoke with the carrot seller. “We are sorry that we disturbed you. Is there any way that you won’t tell anyone?” Sara asked.

“I won’t say anything if you get that thing out of here,” he said.

“Consider it already done,” Sara said.

On the way to the woods the kids explained everything. “Well now, this all makes sense, but sadly I have to go. I hope that you will stop by and say hi soon,” Mr. Mittens said.

“We definitely will.”

“Yeah.”

“Totally,” the kids said. Happy and sad at the same time, the kids grabbed their ball and headed home as Mr. Mittens hopped into the portal.

The Legend of the Fire Bird

*A strange disappearance leads to an epic search. Friends stick together in **THE LEGEND OF THE FIRE BIRD** by **Yanis Boussarsar**.*

“**H**elp!”
Fox was asleep and thought it was a dream.
“Help!”

Fox opened his eyes and recognized it was his friend Ruby the red robin. Fox and Ruby had become friends after the robin saved Fox from sinking into quicksand. Since that day, they had been living together in a hidden cave in Australia. The cave was made of limestone deposit and had lots of little holes that the bird was using as nests.

“Helllllp!”

Fox immediately ran and tried to find his friend in one of the nests. Ruby was gone! By the time Fox got outside the dark cave, it was too late.

Fox fought not to panic. He could not imagine his life without Robin. “What if someone kills him?” he wondered. “I have to do something!” He ran back and forth in the cave to pack some supplies and to make a plan to go and save his friend quickly.

At dawn, Fox left his cave and walked on the rough stone path. He found a red feather. He started to feel really scared, but he knew that his friend was a fighter. “Maybe he tried to escape and lost a feather in a fight.” He decided to go north, hoping he would find more clues. Fox knew he did not have a lot of time and had to find Robin before dark.

After a few hours of walking and thinking, he decided to take a short break. He was not very hungry, but he had to eat to keep his strength, so he fished some salmon. While he was eating his fish, he heard a noise coming from the bushes. Fox, who’s very brave, got ready to fight, but what he heard was a frog.

“Hi, I’m Froakie. I’ve never seen you around,” said Froakie.

“I am looking for my best friend Ruby the robin who got captured.”

“Oh, I saw a silver dog running away with a red robin. It might be your friend. I have never seen this kind of dog before. Maybe it was not a dog? I wonder if...”

“Just tell me where Robin is! Where did they go? Was Robin ok?”

“I would love to help you find him. I know all the rivers, lakes, and ponds. It will be quicker to travel by water. I am an excellent builder, too!” said Froakie. Fox accepted the offer.

Froakie built a raft. He used some oak wood and covered it with some vegetation to make it camouflaged. Fox started to trust Froakie.

At night, they took the raft and decided to sail south. After a lot of hours of sailing, they fell asleep. Although Froakie was very familiar with most of the waters around, he didn't know that the river led to the ocean. The raft slowly drifted over it.

When they heard the sound of the big waves hitting the shore, they woke up, not knowing where they were. Their eyes opened and they saw flat land. It was really cold.

“Where are we?” shivered Fox.

“I think...we are in Russia,” responded Froakie.

“Russia? How did we get here?” exclaimed Fox. They reached the land and decided to ask people for help. But when Fox saw the Russians, he hyperventilated because he had never seen a fur hat before.

“Let's get out of here quickly!” Fox said. They were running toward the raft when they saw an old German shepherd.

“Have you seen a silver dog nearby?” Fox asked. The German shepherd trembled and said that the only silver dogs she knew were the evil dogs of Madagascar.

“Have you ever heard about the old tale?” she asked

“No,” responded Fox. He was feeling more concerned. This did not sound good to him. His friend was really in danger.

“The old tale says that a witch haunts the Kingdom of Madagascar because she wants to find a precious crown that will make her invincible. She can turn you into a silver dog. If you don't break the spell before the full moon, you turn into a metal statue. You can see these statues standing in front of the Madagascar castle. Scary!”

Fox could not understand why a silver dog would kidnap Robin, but he knew what he had to do. He looked at Froakie, and they both knew it was time to head to Madagascar before the next full moon.

Back on the raft, Fox and Froakie sailed south. It was a long journey. The only way they had to keep track of the time was by

looking at the moon every night. Fox was very concerned because he knew something was going to happen on a full moon night. He kept looking at the sky thinking of all the great moments he had had with his friend. Robin saved him once. Fox owed him.

After a week on the sea, the weather became warmer. The air was humid. Fox knew they were sailing along Africa. Froakie used some of the vegetation on the raft to create some shade. Fox was really happy he was not on this journey alone.

They finally arrived on an island. The landscape was green with huge plants and exotic fruit trees. "I don't even know where we are," said Froakie.

After walking for hours, tired and thirsty, they were feeling discouraged. Suddenly they saw metal shapes in the distance. They looked at each other and screamed, "The metal statues!"

Although they were tired, they ran and arrived at a giant castle. The castle was made of white bricks, and the roof was all golden. Ten statues were standing in front of them, like guards.

They entered the castle quietly and saw a strange ceremony. A silver dog was holding Ruby, and a tribe was dancing around them. "They are going to kill him!" whispered Fox.

He wanted to jump to attack the dog, but Froakie stopped him. "Stop, or they will kill both of us."

"I will die for Robin if I have to! But I won't watch them kill him!" screamed Fox.

The ceremony stopped. The tribe stopped dancing and became silent.

"Fox!" exclaimed Ruby. "I knew you would never give up on me! But don't worry. They will not kill me. They brought me here to help the prince of Madagascar because a witch cast a spell on him. The old tale said that only the chant of a fire bird can cure the spell."

"Fire! I will never let them hurt you!" said Fox in a panic.

"The old tale meant a red bird. They don't have a red robin on this island." The bird started to sing, and all of a sudden there was a shiny light. Slowly, the silver dog became human. The tribe rejoiced and cheered the Prince's name. Fox, Froakie, and Robin joined the celebration.

After a feast, the Prince told his new friends that he could grant them one wish as a reward. They all asked to be back home.

Rain Drops Will Fall

*Life sometimes makes us stop and wonder what it's all about. Eve needs time to figure things out in **RAIN DROPS WILL FALL** by **Kate Karaskiewicz**.*

Eve Ivly was always different, but then again what do you expect from a girl with no parents? Eve was a 14-year-old, somewhat shy girl who loved poetry, the rain, old movies, books and CDs, and the beach. Eve lived with her grandparents, sister August, and dog boo. Eve's father had left her mom before she was born, and her mother had died in a car crash when Eve was six. Eve and August had been born and raised in Naples, Florida.

"Eve, come take care of the laundry," called the voice of Eve's grandma.

"Coming, Grandma!" Eve shouted down to her grandmother.

Eve walked downstairs and brought a basket of her clean clothes back up to her room. As she walked back in her room she saw her phone light up and buzz. She put her basket down and picked up her phone. She had gotten a text from her friend Peter. The text read:

hey I like u and will u go out with me????? ☺ .

Eve thought she had read wrong. She had no idea what to say. No one had ever asked her out or to her knowledge even, like, liked her. She needed to get some fresh air.

Five minutes later she was walking to the pier with Boo, her favorite book (*Pride and Prejudice*), and her phone. Her mind was going a million miles a minute. She and Peter had been friends since kindergarten. He was one of the only friends she had apart from her one other friend Amanda. August was a "popular" and Eve was not, so they never hung out together.

She didn't know what to think; it was so out of the blue! *I guess this is growing up*, but as she thought about it more and more, what was growing up? Was it going on dates and parties and being crazy like August? If it was, then she wasn't sure she wanted to grow up.

She sat down on a bench and tried to get into the book, but there was no point. All she could think about was Peter and

growing up.

Eve looked out at the ocean, hoping the mist and crashing sound of the waves against the sand would calm her like it always did, but it was like trying to tell a bunch of bees to stop buzzing with duct tape covering your mouth. Eve sat there and watched the sun make progress across the gray sky.

“Hey.”

“August?”

“Yeah.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Sightseeing.”

Eve raised an eyebrow.

“I was looking for you. You have been gone for hours. We were getting worried.”

“You were worrying about me?”

“Yeah, why wouldn’t I be?”

“Because you almost never talk to me anymore.”

“I do.”

“No, no, you don’t, August. You spend almost all your time now with your friends.”

August’s phone buzzed and rang. “Hold on a sec,” August said.

Eve rolled her eyes.

“May I sit with you?”

Eve turned around, startled “Of course, Gram,” she said in a weak voice.

“What’s going on with you, Eve? This isn’t like you; you have always been home in time to play cards or to cook dinner on Sundays.”

“I just...ummm, wanted to take Boo for a walk, “she made up wildly.

“You’re sitting down,” her grandma observed. “What’s really going on? You can tell me.”

“Well, first off, Peter asked me out, and then I thought it is a part of growing up, but what is growing? I don’t know. I’ve been trying to figure it out, but it doesn’t make sense to me. What do I say to Peter, and what do I do for the rest of my life? Who am I? I don’t know. August is no help. It’s just too much to think about, and I can’t outthink any of it.” Eve said this very fast and then started to cry.

“Shhshh, it’s ok. It will be fine. It’s all ok. Shh, shh,” her grandma

said. "Eve, it's ok. Sit up." She wiped the tears from her eyes and look at her grandma. "Eve, you are special. Only a handful of people realize this stuff, but you just need to live and be free and not think that far ahead."

"That's good advice," Eve said.

"With age comes wisdom," she agreed.

"But aren't you sacred of...dying?"

"I never think about it because I know when it is my time I will go where I am supposed to."

"Go where?" Eve asked.

"On," she answered.

The sky rumbled. "Looks like it's going to rain. We should go to the house," Grandma said.

"You know I like the rain," Eve said.

"Don't get soaked," Grandma told Eve.

Grandma went over to August and started down the pier with her. The pier cleared of people, and the rain started. Eve has always loved the rain because of the serenity she always felt when she was in the middle of it.

I think about that day a lot. I ended up gong out with Peter, and it so easy to talk to him. It's almost like nothing changed. August is slowly coming back to me, but it's slow. I know she is.

It's not right to think too far ahead because if we do we will miss what is going on right now, and what's happening right now is amazing.

Road Trip

*Don't let the title fool you into thinking this story is about a Sunday drive. Survival is the name of the game in **ROAD TRIP** by **Jordan Broomfield**.*

We were on a plane to California and then *BOOM*. The plane jerked to a stop, and it felt like we were falling out of the air! The pilot got on the speaker and said, "The engine has blown. Hold on to your seats because this might a little bumpy."

Jonah took his skateboard and tucked it in close to his chest. Zack did the same and said, "Jordan, why aren't you tucking your skateboard?"

"Because I—"

The plane hit an island between California and Hawaii. Everyone on the plane was hurt and would not wake up, except me. The passengers on the plane had blood dripping from their heads, so I took them out of the plane and propped them up against a tree.

I thought, *I have to survive to get my friends to safety*. The island seemed to be pretty small because I could see the other end of it through all the trees.

The first thing I did was look for food. I wandered around, and immediately I saw a tall banana tree. I climbed the tree, and with my hand I hit the bananas down. I took the bananas and ran back to the broken plane.

After eating I dug in everybody's pockets to find a cell phone. The first person I checked was Joey. He had an iPhone 4s in his pocket...but it was toast. Jonah had the same kind of phone, and it was still intact somehow, so I took it. Sadly, the signal wasn't strong enough. I was really scared, and I wanted us all to go home. I had to do this for my friends.

I was trying to think how I could make a cell phone with a stronger signal out of what we had in my phone and Jonah's phone combined. I automatically thought of my skate board tool. I could take parts from the plane and rewire my phone to call for help. I thought a plane would have the long range capability, so that is what I used. I got to work. I grabbed my bag and dug in it for the tool that took out the trucks on the skateboard.

It was almost night time, and it was getting dark, so I found a seat deep in the plane away from the entry and got comfortable. I ate a banana and tried to go to sleep. I couldn't stop thinking of my injured friends, but I was so tired I had to go to sleep.

In the morning when I woke up I was determined to make a legit phone to call 911. Jonah woke up that morning and I felt like the happiest man on Earth. He agreed to help me with the phone.

I looked at my watch when the phone was done. It was about one o'clock. Everyone else was up by then, and it wasn't half bad being around all my friends on a deserted island.

We fixed the phone. It was up and ready to go. I let Jonah call 911, and the Coast Guard came to the rescue in a helicopter. It took us back to a California hospital where I told everyone the awesome, but scary, story.

Showdown over New York

*Wouldn't you think it would be the best day of Eric's life when he found out he had superpowers? It might have been if hadn't been for all those giant robots. Read about it in **SHOWDOWN OVER NEW YORK** by **Aidan Citko**.*

I'm sitting in my chair looking up at the clock, not caring what my teacher is talking about. The clock reads 3:07, one minute till summer vacation. *Brrrrriinnnggg!* The bell rings. I jump out of my seat, burst through the Southfield Middle School doors, and run outside.

"Eric!" I hear my name, I turn around, and I see my best friends Bob and Joe come running over. Then we walk home together.

I came home, flicked on the TV, and started watching the news. They were talking about New York City getting taken over by robots. I was thinking, "Wow, just some more fake news." But then my parents came rushing in and sat me down and started to tell me about the invasion. I was shocked. Then they told me something weirder. They explained to me that I had superpowers and that my superpowers are heat vision, super strength, super speed, and flying.

I did not believe them. Then I remembered in gym I could throw the football harder than other kids. In dodge ball, I seemed to fly over balls. Then it hit me: I do have superpowers. So I asked, "Okay, are we going to go save New York and the rest of the world?"

My dad said, "We're going to fly to New York and try to stop or destroy the robots."

We went outside, and Bob and Joe and their parents pulled up in their red Lamborghini. I said, "Hey, guys, what's up?" Then we started to talk about the news and if the robots were going to destroy the world. I looked over, and my mom and Bob and Joe's parents were whispering really quietly.

"Eric!" my mom yelled, and I came running over.

"Huh," I said. She talked to me about how Bob and Joe's family all have the same superpowers we do. I didn't catch most of it because I was so astonished that my friends have superpowers, too.

I asked Bob and Joe if this was true. Bob said, "It is, and sorry we kept it a secret." I forgave them because everybody has secrets of

their own. I also asked them if they have the same powers that I do or if they have different ones. They said they have the same exact powers I have.

Then my mom told us that were going to go to New York and save the world. I said, "How are we going to get there in like ten minutes?"

My mom said, "We can fly, remember?"

"Oh yeah," I say, "right. I just have one question: How do you fly?"

My mom said, "It's easy. You just jump to go up and lean to turn." So with one jump we went zooming off into the air.

While we were zooming through the air and going in and out between buildings I noticed that everybody was freaking out even when the robots were across a lake. Then I heard a low rumbling that started getting louder. I heard my dad yell, "Move!" so I moved, and at that very second an army plane flew right by me.

My dad stopped us around 200 feet back from the first couple of robots and told us the plan. My dad said, "Eric, I want you, because you're the smallest of us, to go behind the robot and cut a hole with your heat vision. Then crawl through the metal tunnel to his brain. There you will find a fat yellow cord that you can cut using your heat vision. The robot will start falling, so you need to get out before the robot hits the ground and you die."

After we all got our duties, Bob, Joe, their parents, and my parents all went zooming in different directions. They started distracting the robot, and I quickly flew behind the robot's humongous head. Once I got safely behind the robot's head I did what my dad told me, and I used my heat ray vision and cut a hole in the robot's head. Once I got the robots head open, I noticed the tunnel couldn't fit me, so I used my super strength to pry open the tunnel so I could walk through it.

After I got the tunnel wide enough, I began walking through the tube and finally remembered I had super speed. I used my super speed to run to the brain.

When I got to the brain I saw all different types of wires. Then I remembered my dad told me to cut the yellow fat wire. I found it, and I cut it with my laser vision, and then used my super speed to get out of the robot just in time before it hit the ground.

I had to do that for over 100 robots before we realized that more robots would show up every time we killed one. I flew up and

looked around. The robots were all surrounding us, letting one go at a time. I came down and told my family this. We had a plan to find the source where they were making the robots and destroy the source. We all split up, and while I was flying my way I noticed one building, the Empire State Building, was the only building standing. I used my binocular eyes to locate any human activity.

I located the human activity on the roof. I flew around it twice and spotted a person with a remote controlling the robots. I went behind the strange person on the Empire State Building and hid behind a crate and surveyed the area to see if there were any booby traps or weapons I could use. Then I saw it. A rope was sitting on top of the crate in front of me. I jumped and grabbed it and hid.

After I had my rope I used my super speed to tie him up to the lightning rod. He started yelling at me and he said, "Tell your family to get out of here because I accidently hit the self-destruct button! All the robots will blow up!"

I wish I had believed him, but I didn't. I hit "Stop" and called my parents with my cell phone, but I never reached them. While I was capturing the bad guys, I didn't notice the robots all around the building.

The robots blew up, and we all fell 102 stories and got knocked unconscious for an hour. If you think I'm dead, you're wrong. I broke 14 bones and have a full body cast, but I'm not dead. In the end my friends and I saved the world.

Epilogue

After Eric and his friends saved the world they became world-famous icons. If you're wondering what happened to the bad guy, I will tell you. His name is Victor Smith Cruz, and he is now spending 90 years in jail thanks to Eric and his friends and parents.

The Three to the Tree

*The danger from an inhuman foe threatens an entire society. There is only one way to succeed in **THE THREE TO THE TREE** by **Lake Everett**.*

John (an average-sized seventeen-year-old who didn't like to work) woke up to the sound of rustling...lots of rustling. When he opened his eyes he saw Rick, the oldest of the three (that is, eighteen, and not really tall but not short), repacking all of their stuff. He saw Scott (a pretty short, skinny fourteen-year-old who can run really fast) out of the corner of his eye carrying buckets of water.

As he was getting up off the ground, he said to Rick, "You know, if you got me up earlier I could help more."

"I tried waking you up five times, John," he replied. "Take the water from Scott and put it in the bottles, please."

"Yeah, yeah, I know what to do. I did it yesterday, and the day before that, and the day before that. Oh! I think I did it the day before that, too," he said as he took the buckets from Scott.

When everything was ready, Rick picked up the bag with their food and tossed it over his shoulder. He also picked up two bags with the food for the soldiers who were at the spot they were trying to get to. John had the rest of the soldiers' food (three bags), and Scott took their cooking supplies.

"Everyone ready?" Rick asked.

"All set," replied Scott. And a "Ready" came from John. They all started running toward safety, to the men at the tree that shed the special stone from its leaves in a tear-drop form whenever it rained. The leaves changed the water. Whenever it touched them it would instantly turn into an almost clear stone with black parts and bronze and purple specks that lit up on the black. There was a golden spot, and it sparkled. There were yellows and oranges and whites, and it all swirled together in a spiral.

All three of them had a short sword strapped to their sides made out of this stone. It was also the only stone able to kill the monsters that were coming after them.

“Where did they even come from, the creatures?” Scott asked the other two boys by the fire they had just built. It had gotten dark, so they stopped for the day.

“They—”

“People back in town have a story they keep telling,” John interrupted Rick.

“Go ahead and tell him,” said Rick.

So John told him. “They say the creatures are the ones that died when the old mines collapsed. The rock they were trying to get, people said it poisoned the dead bodies. Turn them into what they are today. The ghostly creatures. If you look hard enough you can see their bones, they say. I’ve never been that close to them, though,” John continued. “You have to look through that stupid green mist anyway. That stuff is like armor for them.”

“When did they first appear?” Scott asked.

“Hmmm, I don’t know this one,” said John.

“I do,” Rick said. “There was a kid about my age, from a different town, closer to the tree. Anyway he was walking through the forest. This was about ten years ago. He saw the green on either side of him, and he also saw some behind him. He started to run. He ran into this area with no trees except for a really tall one. There was a mountain cliff in the back of this area, and with the creatures coming in he was trapped. So he backed up against the tree. The creatures were closing in on him, and when they got maybe ten feet from him, he saw something out of the corner of his eye. A shimmering coming from the ground. He picked it up and saw that it was a stone that looked like a tear. He threw the stone at the nearest creature. The creature turned into green mist, and it was gone. He found more around the tree and kept throwing them at the creatures. He made his way out. He was able to go back and warn his town of the monsters. But when they came for their town the soldiers’ weapons wouldn’t work. They would just keep breaking. The town was ruined. There were only a few survivors who hid from the creatures. They came and warned everybody else. Since there is no town closer to the tree, people have to go out and get more resources to the soldiers.”

“Why isn’t there an actual name for the creatures?” Scott asked.

“Don’t know, nobody came up with one,” Rick replied.

“You guys go to sleep. I’ll watch,” said Rick.

The next morning they got an early start. They had to make it to the tree today.

They ran through the forest that they were in. Most of the day they were running. When they were not running they would be trying to catch their breath and drinking their water. They got to the tree a day before the enemy did. When the enemy arrived they were ready. There were maybe eight hundred men ready to fight.

They had men with big shields (that had a big stone in the middle that is supposed to keep the monsters away) and swords in the front. Behind them were men with spears that they stuck between the shields of the people in front of them. Behind them were men with swords, and joining them were Scott, Rick, and John. Behind them were archers. All of their weapons were made from the stone from the tree. They were all surrounding the tree. They had to protect it because it was the one thing that protected them. It was the only tree like this in existence, and they could not lose it.

The monsters came in one great mass as they tried to wipe out the humans. They rammed into the shields, and the humans kept trying to keep them away. When the monsters hit the shields they would just turn into mist, but there were so many of them, and it was hard for the ones with the shields to stand there and push all of their weight into the shield that each one of them had. During all of this the archers in the back were firing over and over again. They killed a creature with every arrow.

Back in the front things were not going so well for one person in the defense. So many monsters were pressed against this one shield that it soon fell to the ground on top of the man that was trying to hold it up. Monsters ran over him into the army of men. People who had not drawn their swords already were doing so as more and more of the creatures came rushing at the defenders of the tree.

Everybody fought as hard as they could to protect the one thing that could save human kind. They kept on fighting until one side achieved victory. That one side was the humans. They lost many lives, but they had won.

Everyone was tired and most were injured. But everybody was taken care of, and they had won. They were all so happy that it was all over. They had won.

They all laughed and cheered until the women and children came. So many of them were gone. The soldiers believed that their

town was not in the way of the creatures. They thought that everything was fine, but they had been wrong. Many families were just ripped apart with only one or two people surviving. But they had still won. It cost lots and lots of human lives, but it was done.

Scott, John, and Rick were all okay. Their families were still together. None of them had died.

They built a new town right there where the tree was just in case there were still some creatures out there. If there was ever another attack, they would be ready, and they would win.

Together but Alone

In TOGETHER BUT ALONE by JBUCK, three siblings face down the elements in a battle for survival. At the same time, a much deeper issue waits to be confronted.

“Come on, kids. Let’s go. Wouldn’t want to be late for our big annual summer trip, now would we?”
“All right, we’re coming. Just give us a second.” Sam, Joe, and Sean came rushing down the stairs. “It’s not like if we don’t make it to our own boat we’re going to be late.”

Later...

“Wake up, Joe! Wake up!” Joe’s brother Sean said, trying to get his brother up from his deep slumber. Joe woke up, shocked, looking at his brother. It was like he could see the fear in his eyes. After looking Sean up and down, noticing that his brother’s musky dark brown hair was almost covering his eyes, he saw he had a life jacket on and carried his emergency pack and the clothes he went to sleep in.

Joe managed to get two words out. Shakily he asked his brother, “What happened?”

Sean grabbed his brother, lifted him up, and told him, “Grab your pack and put on the life jacket. The ship is sinking, and we have to get out of there!”

Before Joe could get another word out, his 15-year-old sister Sam walked into the room with her auburn colored hair flowing across her face as she ran toward them. She dragged them out the room while telling them, “Mom and Dad said we have five minutes to come on or they’re leaving without us.

Suddenly Sean jerked away from his sister and told her to look at their little brother and his life jacket hanging from his hand with his pack still in the other room. Sam made a big huffing noise and said they had one minute and they have to go. Sean immediately told his brother to put the life jacket on and go. Joe, Sam, and Sean all headed for the deck, only to see that their parents had already taken the only life boat there was and left them behind.

Joe went into a frantic panic, panting and almost shrieking. Sam told him to shut his cry hole so he could help them think. Joe might have been the youngest, but he was just as smart as the other two—maybe even smarter.

Joe stood there and tried to think of the best possible way out, but everything he thought of would take too long to do or possibly involve one of them losing their lives. He thought his sister would not have any problem doing that for them. She may have been the middle child, but she took care of the boys like she was the oldest.

Finally Joe came to the conclusion that they had to jump. His sister looked at him with confusion on her face. Obviously he said it out loud and didn't know it. Joe told them to grab six life preservers, two for each of them, and told them to jump into the water because it was their only chance to get off the ship.

His brother looked at him like he was crazy. There was awkward silence for a moment. Then Sam finally said, "Joe's right" under her breath.

Sean looked over to his sister and then back at Joe and asked them both, "Are you sure you want to do this?" Sam and Joe both nodded in agreement.

Sam asked Sean, "Are *you* sure you want to do this?" Sean gave a slight nod of the head indicating yes. Without them saying anything else, they grabbed their packs and life preservers, looked over the edge of the railing, and jumped.

They were in the air for about five seconds before they hit the water hard. If they hadn't had their life preservers, all of them would have gone down. Sean grabbed his brother and sister and told them to stay close and swim as far as they all could away from the storm and the ship. Sam and Joe stayed close to their brother and did as told.

All three of them swam for a long time. Sometimes Sam or Sean had to drag Joe by the wrist because he couldn't swim as fast as the other two could. After a while they all stopped swimming and lay on their orange life preservers.

They all knew they couldn't float in the middle of nowhere forever, so they thought for a while. Sam finally came to the conclusion that they could swim to Hawaii. Both boys looked at her to see if she was being sarcastic, but seriousness on her face was clearer than ever. "What? It's where we were headed anyway. Dad

said we would be there in two hours if we kept heading south," Sam said, looking at the boys.

"Yeah, but two hours on a ship is a day of swimming at the pace we're going," Joe said with a little doubt in his voice.

"So what if it's a day of swimming? I'd rather spend a day swimming than forever out here!" Sam yelled out.

"She's right, you know," Sean said, a little quietly. "We have to do it. It's our only chance." After a great time of silence, Joe agreed to it.

They came up with a schedule: swim, sleep, and float. The floating was for night, just in case there were any sharks around then. They all took turns watching while some were sleeping. Some watches were shorter because Joe could only stay up so long while watching other people sleep.

After a while they all realized that they weren't tired and it was just best to keep moving. For the rest of time they just kept swimming, taking short breaks at a time to give their limbs a rest.

Finally saw an island only a half a mile away. All of them swam so fast it only felt seconds away from them. Once they reached the surface all they wanted to do was to lie out on the golden colored sand and stay for ages, and they eventually fell asleep on the sand.

When they woke up they were greeted by what looked like tourists poking them with sticks to see if they were dead or not. Once the tourists realized they weren't dead, they gave a sigh of relief and left them where they lay.

All three of the kids jumped up right away and followed the tourists back to the beach where they were staying. There they were greeted by their mom and dad!

It didn't look like the kids cared. After all, their parents did leave them behind. After a while their parents explained that they bought five plane tickets to home and they'd be leaving soon.

"But see, that's the problem. Where is home exactly?" asked Sam. "I don't want to be where I'm not wanted." Before their parents could say anything, Sean and Joe moved to stand beside their sister. It was clear that there was much more to be decided.

Too Late

*A boy finds himself at the center of a real-life nightmare. **TOO LATE** by **M. Davis** just might have you looking over your shoulder.*

“**W**here am I? Somebody help!” I yelled.
“Nice to see you’re finally awake,” my captor said.
He was holding a knife.
“Let me go!” I scream.
“Why would I do that?” he asks with a devilish grin. I spit in his face.
“Because I said,” I yell in reply.
He turns around and hits me, knocking me unconscious.

* * *

“I can’t believe I am actually going to go to a REAL concert!” I said to my friend, Marley, as we walked down the hallway at school. Marley was a small kid, about roughly the same height as me with black curly hair. I, on the other hand, have light brown hair.
“I know!” he replied. “I can’t wait to go either!”
As we walked down the hallway, the school bully walked up to me and slapped my books on the ground. “Oops, didn’t mean to do that.”
“I’m really getting tired of you picking on me.”
“What are going to do about it, shrimp?”
I punched him in the face. He turned back around slowly.
“You shouldn’t have done that.”
“Just like you shouldn’t have been born,” I replied. As I said that he shoved me up against a locker. A crowd started to form.
“What’d you say?”
“I said ‘just like you shouldn’t have been born.’”
“You don’t know how close I am to beating your butt!” he said.
“I don’t care,” I said.
“You should ‘cause I can easily have someone come and kill you.” With that, he threw me to the ground.
“Then I might as well then!” I shouted back.
“Yeah, you should, I think it might actually make me happy. But just hope you don’t get in my way again,” he said as he walked away.

“Hey, Michael, you all right?” Marley asked as he helped me up. “Yeah, come on, we got to get to class.”

After school, I was walking home with Marley when he asked me a question. “Did you really mean you were going to kill yourself?”

This took me a little by surprise. “Of course not, I was just angry, that’s all,”

“Good, ‘cause you’re like my best friend,”

“Thanks.” I couldn’t find any other words to say.

At the intersection of our subdivision, I turned right and Marley turned left. “See you at the concert,” I said before running to my house.

As I walked in the door I saw my step-dad. “What you doing home so late!” he asked when he saw me.

“Nice to see you, too,” I said dryly.

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“I was talking with Marley,” I replied.

“Didn’t I tell you not to talk to him?”

“Why not?”

“‘Cause he’s a bad influence, I mean just last week he made you get a zero on your test because you let him cheat.”

“Well, Mom said that I could, and besides, he’s my friend.”

“Well ‘Mom’ isn’t the man of the house, now is she?”

“No, but still, she—”

He cut me off. “Mom isn’t the man of the house, now is she?” he asked again.

“No.”

“No, what?”

“No, sir.”

“Good, now go upstairs and do your homework.”

“I HATE YOU SO MUCH! I WISH MY REAL DAD WERE HERE SO I WOULDN’T HAVE TO LISTEN TO YOU!” I scream before stomping upstairs.

A few hours after my confrontation with my step-dad, I hear the doorbell. “See you later, Mom; going to the concert with Marley!”

“Okay then, have fun and don’t talk to stranger or leave Marley’s mom or—”

“I get it, Mom.”

“Love you!” she calls as I rush out the door.

In the car we start passing by places I’ve never been before. They looked like there hasn’t been any life in here for years, although you could see some people walking along the sidewalk. “Marley, are you sure it safe around here?”

“Oh yeah, it’s fine. Isn’t it exciting though?”

“Yeah,” I said shakily before turning back to the window.

The concert was at a big abandoned warehouse that looks like it used to be a toy factory. It had huge holes in the wall and ripped posters all along the top. I automatically see a big white van that has no windows. The driver looked equally suspicious as his van. He had a mustache with dark glasses even though it was night. I turn to Marley. “Hey, why is this concert in an abandoned warehouse?”

“Oh, the police shut down the last place because people said they were making too much noise.”

“Oh.”

When we were walking over to where we were going to sit, the man followed a little ways behind us. I told Marley’s mom my concern, but she just brushed it off, saying that maybe he was just near the same place we were sitting.

Near the middle of the show, I had to use the bathroom. I asked Marley’s mom where the bathroom is, and she pointed just out the warehouse.

I walk out of the warehouse and walk into one of the porta-potties. As I was opening up the door, the man with the sunglasses grabs me and puts a towel with chloroform against my mouth. I struggle, but the chloroform starts taking effect. Everything starts getting darker and darker till I can’t see anything anymore.

I wake up in a cold, abandoned house.

“Where am I? Somebody, help!” I yelled.

“Nice to see you’re finally awake,” my captor said. He was holding a knife.

“Let me go!” I scream.

“Why would I do that?” he asks with a devilish grin. I spit in his face.

“Because I said,” I yell in reply.

He turns around and hits me, knocking me unconscious.

I wake to my phone ringing. The man with the sunglasses comes over and reaches in my pocket for my phone. It was my mom.

"Listen, whoever you are, the police are already on their way to come arrest you and if I see a single one of his hairs misplaced, I swear I will personally come over and kick you to next month." I heard authority and panic in her voice.

"You're already too late." With that he takes the knife he was holding and stabs me in my chest.

As I felt the warm blood running down my chest, I faintly see the broken wood door be knocked down and police rush in. I look over at the man that had kidnapped me, and I see a scowl on his face like he didn't do something right. I look back at the busted door and see paramedics rushing toward me, followed by my mom. I'm lifted on the gurney and rushed to the ambulance. There is a flash of blurry lights with a loud piercing noise of the ambulance. In the ambulance I could feel my mom brushing my hair with her fingers whispering "Stay with us. Please stay with us."

A few hours later my mom comes into my hospital room. "The doctors say that you are going to be fine and should be up and moving in a few months. Turns out the man that kidnapped you is named Jeff Cunningham. He is a contract killer. He makes deals with anybody, even kids."

"Oh, wow, that's crazy."

"I know; what kind of person would do that?"

"Obviously Jeff Cunningham."

"Yeah. I should let you get your sleep, so I'm going to head out."

"Ok. Love you," I say before she closes my door.

So that bully wasn't bluffing. He really hired a guy to kill me. He is so gonna pay when I get out of this hospital.

Too Many Dogs

*He was only trying to help abandoned animals. But just what had Bill gotten himself into? **TOO MANY DOGS** by **Brooke Anton** is a story of good intentions and unexpected consequences.*

One summery day, late July in Michigan, there was an old man named Bill living on a farm. Bill grew up on a farm with his mom, dad, his brother and his two sisters. His siblings' names were Amy, Emma, and Scott. Bill had a good childhood growing up. Then Bill and his brothers and sisters all went to college. Amy got a degree for becoming a nurse, Bill became a veterinarian, Emma became a marketer, and Scott started a fruit market.

Bill LOVES dogs. But he only had one little dog named Mr. Meaner. (Mr. Meaner is a very nice dog despite his name.)

All that changed when a horrible tornado hit Michigan. Everybody moved out of town because they thought that Michigan was dangerous now, but not Bill and 36 other people. Bill felt bad for the dogs because they were locked up in houses, where the owners left them. So he broke into the people's houses and took their dogs.

One of the few people that stayed behind to help Bill was named Shelly Harmwood. Shelly helped Bill rescue all of the dogs that were left in Michigan. Shelly took the cats and the other animals that were left in the houses. Shelly and Bill just took the lower part of Michigan because he and Shelly heard from another person that the Humane Society was taking care of the other dogs in the upper peninsula in Michigan.

Bill gave the animals medical attention as soon as possible because he studied at veterinary school. After a month he was broke and had used all his life savings just to feed 1,398 dogs that had been left in the houses of Michigan. Shelly had just enough money to feed her animals that they rescued, but Bill did not have enough money to feed some of the dogs. Shelly couldn't take in any more animals, or she'd be broke, too. Bill didn't know what to do because he was broke. But Bill knew a guy and that guy knew another guy and that guy's father is a billionaire, so Bill asked him for help.

Unfortunately the billionaire said no. What would Bill do?

More people started moving into town. Soon there were 57,364 people in Michigan. Bill got so attached to the dogs that he did not want to start adopting them out. Because he had to feed the dogs, he started to feed the dogs dead cows that had died on his farm. The dogs' living conditions were terrible.

After the dogs had been living like this for about ten months the ASPCA stepped in. The ASPCA is the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. First, the ASPCA gave Bill a warrant for keeping these dogs in such terrible conditions. The warrant said if Bill didn't feed the dogs real dog food and upgrade their living situation, then Bill would have to surrender his dogs or the ASPCA would take them away.

Bill tried to upgrade the living conditions, but he just couldn't afford it. After three weeks, the ASPCA took the dogs away one by one, loading them into the crates. They even took Mr. Meaner. Bill was ordered to appear in court in six days because he had to pay for what he did.

It was a Tuesday when the day came for Bill to appear in court. It was a gloomy day. The clouds were out; it had just started to rain. As Bill was walking toward the courtroom, he had to walk down a long, narrow, dark hallway. He finally entered the courtroom and found police everywhere. The judge was seated toward the back of the room.

The ASPCA showed how Bill was treating the dogs. Bill tried to explain that he was trying to help them.

Bill was sent to jail for three years instead of nine years in jail. When he was in jail walking with the police officer he looked back from the rusty cells and saw Shelly Harmwood looking gloomy. He tried to wave to her, but the handcuffs were so tight that he couldn't even lift his hand a few inches because it hurt so bad. Bill never saw her again.

Trapped

*It isn't unusual for people to wish their lives could be different. In **TRAPPED** by **Hunter Stabile**, a few high-schoolers go to great lengths to change the trajectory of their lives.*

“**W**hy is everything the same?” says Nick. “Life, for example. You live, then you die.”

Amanda, the spoiled cheerleader looked puzzled, but when doesn't she? Caleb sits in his natural habitat—the back row of the classroom—while eavesdropping. He looked interested in the topic that Nick brought up, but not interested enough to make a remark about it. While we, Sasha and I (Dylan), stared at the group, we wondered how they got their detentions. What did they do? What was their reason?

Sasha and I used to be best friends since third grade, until she started to go a little crazy. She used to be kind of shy, very funny, and over time she became fearless and always has rage. I feel like her mom's death affected her a lot. She couldn't handle her dad anymore, so one day she convinced me to run away with her. We ran to beautiful Salt Lake City, Utah. We knew no one would find us there.

It was kind of hard to find a home and a school considering we were only fourteen.

On our first day of school, Sasha and I decided to skip. That happened about once a month, and then once turned into weeks. Eventually the devil, Principal Walker, caught up with us, and that's how we landed here, in detention. The others, though, do not make sense. The shy kid? The unintelligent cheerleader? The nerd?

Suddenly the door creaks open slowly. “Listen y'all,” Mr. Walker says in his annoying accent, “I gotta run. You stay here and don't move! I'll be back in a jiffy!”

“Where to?” Caleb questions Walker.

“None of ya business,” he responds quickly, and then he is out of the door.

It wasn't even three minutes later that there was a smash. Sasha turns to me. “What was that?” she mouths.

“Maybe someone dropped a glass,” replies Amanda.

Caleb, being the smart one replies, "Not a chance. According to how thin the glass sounded, it ought to be a window."

Sasha stands up and slowly walks to the door. A few second go by, and Sasha slows to a stop right before she is face to face with the door. You could tell she was analyzing the glass pane in front of her. Her hand reached to the knob. It very gently turns it. Right when it was turned all the way the glass pane shattered and a pipe came out, hitting Sasha's head.

The only thing left is the man standing at the doorway with a gas mask. "One, two, three," the man chants repeatedly. Everyone (already out of their seats) makes their way to the back of the room to try to get as far away as they can from the horrid man. When they reach the back they turn around only to see nothing.

"She isn't there anymore," Amanda remarks. Everyone stares at my jaw as it quivers up and down, and I am very aware of it.

Without thinking about anything, I sprint. I ignore the other half of the door and push it out of my path. Pretending to know where to go, I turn right, then left, and another right. I hear a soft call in a room to the right, a creepy, old, rusty, door barely on its hinges. I open the creaky door, and Sasha and Mr. Walker stay on chains on a wall next to each other. I feel better that Sasha was now conscious. I knew she would be.

The door behind me slams to a shut, so I know Gas Mask lingers right behind me. I know he won't attack me just yet, so I decide to walk toward the chained Sasha and Walker as if I didn't notice the man was behind me.

When the man finally mumbles something I stand still. At this point I am in the middle of Walker and Sasha. I know we won't all get out of here, but I don't know who to save. Sasha is my best friend, but Walker has a good background of being a former professional wrestler.

I see both keys on a small desk to the right of Walker. I start to do a walk, then it picks up to a jog, and then I'm there. I only pick up one , and I run to Sasha. As I try to open the lock I look up at Sasha's face, but the key won't budge. At this point I know that I grabbed the wrong key.

I quickly run to Mr. Walker's chains and unlock them. Instead of helping me fight he goes back to the small desk and picks up another key. I watch him sort of in amusement knowing that he can save Sasha. But then I feel a cupped hand around my mouth and

throat. As the hand leads me I don't even fight back because they have full control of me.

When we enter another unfamiliar room I look at the figure, and then the door opens to reveal another figure, Caleb; and then another person, Amanda. Feeling as two was not enough another, figure enters the room, Gas Mask. He pulls off the mask and his short brown hair pops up. I feel ashamed that I don't know him like the others, but he is definitely my age.

"Thank you for joining us, Matthew," says Caleb.

"Anytime. I would love to see this school gone," Gas Mask—revealed as Matthew—spoke.

"Amanda? Caleb? Why you guys?" I softly say, stiffly.

"You think we like this school!?" Amanda snaps. Suddenly I feel deceived by Amanda.

"I've been waiting to get out of here forever," Caleb adds.

I know it's all over for them when I hear a shuffling of loud footsteps. Police, I hope. I also hope that Walker wasn't a part of this.

"Open up now," a low loud voice commands. But they disobey. "We are all giving you guys ten seconds," but it is unneeded when they finally open the door with their hands up....

SASHA'S PERSPECTIVE AFTER DYLAN'S:

I feel a pain aching in my stomach, I feel my torn jeans on my knee, and especially, I feel my life slipping away. I look up, and I am suddenly alone. No Walker, No Gas Mask, and no Dylan. I scream. Pain goes through my brain like an electrical bolt, but I don't care. I scream again, this time louder.

The door quietly creaks open. "Sasha? Is that you?" a low recognizable voice ask quietly. As soon as the door opens and I see the man I want to die.

"Dad?" I say. "I'm so sorry!" Tears now rush down under my eye. "How did you find me?" I speak louder, but at this point I feel he is not listening. He just walks forward to the table with keys. He picks up my key, the one Dylan failed to grab, and unlocks me.

As he does so, he answers my question. "I didn't want to see you get hurt, and I knew I couldn't stop you, so I have been following you and Dylan since you left. "

“Follow me now!” I insist to my father as we walk out of the rusty door room.

When we turn left we see a small-looking boy, not confusion on his face, but more worriedness. When he looks up I notice who it is; Nick. But he doesn’t notice us, and for a second we see his face before he turns off sprinting, horrified.

My father takes out his phone from his back left pocket and dials 911. But I elbowed him a little to be quiet because I heard voices. Soft ones, little hushes.

I walk more to the left and I hear my dad whisper. “Sasha, they are outside, the police. They told me to tell them to come in when we are ready.” Instantly I bolt into the room I was next to (where I suspected the voices were) and my eyes glance from Amanda to Caleb to Dylan and lastly to an unknown boy. The last word I hear until I get swung at by a metal pole once again was my dad saying, “Now.”

I am unconscious. I am alive. Why am I not dead? I hear them, the police. I hear the scared voice of Caleb begging for mercy and the angered and defeated voice of Amanda. Then Walker. He doesn’t say anything, but gives a gasp of surprise.

I feel tired. I slowly close my mind. Then altogether I’m drifting away, silently.

The Unknown Shadow

*Are the kids simply scaring each other, or is there really something strange happening when the lights go out? In **THE UNKNOWN SHADOW** by **Madison Newitt**, you'll learn the truth.*

It was my tenth family reunion. We had just returned from a busy but fun day in Harbor Springs, Michigan.

We drove back on the hilly road that curved through the mysterious woods. The condo was dark when we arrived, but with one flick of the light switch the room was flooded with light.

We brushed our teeth, changed into pajamas, and filled glasses of water before we settled down in sleeping bags in the living room. My older brother Tyler and my cousins Josh and Caleb were on couches. My little sister Caroline, my younger cousin Ben, and I all took the floor. It was late in the evening, so the adults all went to their own rooms. My grandparents were right next door. They switched the lights off, said goodnight, and shut their door. That's when things got frightening. I became terrified.

I heard strange noises. I whispered, "What was that?"

Caleb said, "I thought I heard a noise, too."

Ben said, "This is cool and creepy."

Even in the dark we saw shadows swooping above our beds. Caleb thought he heard a soft swoosh coming from high in the air. Terrified, we hid under our covers, while Josh, Caleb, Ben, and Tyler ran into Grandma and Grandpa's room. When Grandma turned on the lights, she disagreed. She thought there was nothing there.

She warned us, "You settle down and go to sleep."

It happened again. Grandma thought we were playing a joke on her. She thought it wasn't funny that we were playing jokes on her when she was so tired. Grandpa came out, turned on the lights, and searched the ceiling for the shadow and noise. The shadow was playing hide and seek, and there was nothing found. Grandpa told us, "You kids get to sleep!" So we slowly and cautiously crept back to the sleeping bags in the living room.

The third time we saw a shadow and heard a *swoosh*. It started a big commotion. We all ran upstairs to my parents' room. With all the noise everybody was up.

"It's still out there," I told my mom.

She said, "Guys, stop acting up and get to bed!" And then my mom wondered out loud, "Could it be a bat? They are nocturnal. They live in the woods and sometimes come into houses."

Without hesitation, Grandma exclaimed, "Don't be silly. You're just feeding into their imaginations!" and turned and went back to bed.

Uncle Dan and Grandpa investigated further. *Swoosh*. The shadow of a bat flew above our heads! "You mean, I wasted sleep for stupid bats," my oldest cousin remarked. I was alarmed that bats were in the house and could have crawled into my bed. I just stood there with the rest of the family in shock.

My grandpa got a broom. We saw another bat and tried to get it with the broom. What we didn't know is that there was a third one. Grandpa swished two into the back room and slammed the door shut, but the third one got away. *Swat!* Grandpa trapped the bat with a broom against the wall and killed it while I covered my eyes. Then he took the bat out of the cabin and buried it in the woods. Uncle Dan emailed the management company. My grandpa checked all of our sleeping bags and blankets to be sure there were no more bats.

The management company came out the next day to get rid of the bats.

Everybody felt bad for the bats, but we had to do something, because we heard from our doctor that these bats carried rabies, and none of us wanted to get shots. It was a terrifying night, and not one person got a wink of sleep, but at least it was finally peaceful and quiet. It was a relief that there were no more swooshing shadows in the air.

What Did I Do Last Summer?

*Summer time for a kid shouldn't be like this. In **WHAT DID I DO LAST SUMMER?** by **Roderick Niles**, a stay at camp becomes an unbelievable nightmare.*

I got up onto my knees and looked over the rubble that nearly took my head off. There was something that blew me off my feet, but what was it? I looked around at the destroyed building. People were scrambling everywhere. I wiped my face with the sleeve of my shirt—there was blood all over it! I touched my forehead with my hand, and I felt two or three deep cuts. I looked at the floor to see what cut me, and I quickly discovered the deadly toy: my bloody playing cards. I peered over the rubble. My eyes widened, and my jaw dropped.

30 minutes earlier

I was at Crystal River Summer Camp, probably named after the river's bare rock bottom and shiny sediment. The camp was a large island split by a river. I picked up my hoody and almost left, but then I realized I had forgotten my life and soul—also known as playing cards.

I rushed around the cabin trying to find these cards! I had two minutes to get to lunch according to my watch. I found them on the rafter; why they were there I don't know. My camp has a policy where if you're late, you and your cabin have to sing "Father Abraham."

I jumped out of the hilltop cabin and down the hill. The earth hurt my toes. I rushed straight through the woods. I stepped over sticks and leaves, ignoring my bleeding bare foot. I came across the river that split the island in half. *The river!* I realized that by cutting through the woods I missed the bridge. I jumped in, and I was instantly hit with pain. I scabbled across the rushing river.

I arrived at mess hall on time, but I had some explaining to do. I was barefoot, soaking wet, and my feet were bleeding. I sat down with my cabin and gobbled up the food on my plate.

"Hey, Donnie, did you grab the cards?" my friend Richard asked me.

“Yep,” I replied.

“Let’s play some yoika,” said Richard in a funny voice.

“Euchre?” I asked.

“Yois,” said Richard in the same funny voice.

“Who wants to play some euchre with me and Rich?”

“I will,” said Doug.

“Ditto,” said Mick.

While Doug divided the cards, Richard and Mick went to get food. I split the deck, giving half to Mick. I started to lay down a nine of hearts when it happened.

BOOM!

I got up onto my knees and looked over the rubble that nearly took my head off. There was something that blew me off my feet, but what was it? I looked around at the destroyed building. People were scrambling everywhere. I wiped my face with the sleeve of my shirt—there was blood all over it! I touched my forehead with my hand, and I felt two or three deep cuts. I looked at the floors to see what cut me, and I quickly discovered the deadly toy: my bloody playing cards. I peered over the rubble. My eyes widened, and my jaw dropped.

Fifteen armed men with masks came rushing through the woods. I spotted where I thought Richard and Mick were. I poked my head back over the rubble I was using for cover. The men with guns had not approached the building yet. I reached the food table and saw the scarred, dirty hand of the one and only Richard Camera poking out from under a table. I pulled the table off him, and he got up slowly. I hushed him as his mouth opened.

“Main lodge at sundown,” I whispered. And I peered over the tables. And I saw the men. They had big guns and masks. “There are terrorists here. We need to split up. See you at dusk.” His eyes began to tear up. We had been friends since first grade, and I didn’t want to never see him again. I split to the kitchen, and Richard went to the rear door.

“Come on, Richy, come on,” I mumbled as I sat in the lodge doorway. Two short figures appeared in my shadow. I turned around, trembling.

“Brought a friend,” said Rich with a smile. Mick smiled at me and stuck his hand out.

“We meet again, Mick,” I said taking his hand.

Later that night we sat huddled in a bathroom with a locked door. "I say we get off this island," I whispered.

"Donnie's right, but how?" said Mick.

"The trolly's too big; how about the fishing boat?" I said.

I saw the fishing boat in all its glory resting on the beach. I crept over to the shed next to it. I slowly opened the door, and the creaking noise it made as I opened it was loud. I reached for the buckets of fuel tucked behind an axe. I hauled the fuel container over to the boat. Richard and Mick were already trying to push it into the water.

"Stop; I have to put gas in it," I said in a hushed voice. They stepped back, and I unscrewed the rusty valve. I poured in the clear liquid until the engine was overflowing. I put the top back on and helped haul the boat into the water.

I looked over the edge of the boat. I saw big boats coming off the lake onto the island's beaches. "Hey, guys," I said in a voice too relaxed for the situation we were in.

"What?" asked Mick as the two of them looked at me.

"Whoa," they both said as they looked at the large boats.

"What the heck is this crap?" yelled Mick, sounding irritated. "We should check those things out," suggested Mick.

"Bad idea," said Richard. I was beginning to wonder if he even still had a voice.

"Look, we can't just leave Doug and Kara."

"Doug's dead!" I said loud enough to get the point through. "And who is Kara?" I asked in the same tone. Mick shut his mouth. Maybe he is right and we should go back and help the others. I mean, the least we can do is check out what those large boats are doing here. "All right, fine. I'll go," I said to my own surprise.

Ten minutes later I was swimming to the boat in my boxers. About 30 feet from the ship we were swimming mostly underwater. I poked my lips out for air. I noticed that I was moving without swimming. "The ship sucks in water!" yelled Mick, who was some 20 feet to my left.

I started swimming frantically to the nose of the ship. I got right up against the ship, and the current sucked me back so much I could hardly stay above water. The ladder was 10 feet away and

coming fast. 3,2,1. I used all the energy I had left to swing my arm around the ladder. A sharp pain shot up my arm. I pulled myself up and over the water and clung to the ship for my life. I turned around and saw Mick struggling to stay above the water up ahead. I reached down just above the water. His body slammed into my hand, and I hoisted him up. I looked out and saw Rich and our small fishing boat getting smaller and smaller.

I grabbed the wet and rusty metal rung above me, careful not to slip. I was halfway to the top when I saw the top of a large mining drill on board. I rushed up, carelessly climbing the ladder. The rung above me snapped off when I grabbed it. I lost my balance, and I threw my body higher. Luckily I caught the ladder with both hands. I decided that the ladder rung could serve as a good weapon. I slowly peeked my head over the edge of the boat.

I climbed onto the deck of the ship and darted behind some boxes. I could see the control tower from here. Mick crawled over to a staircase and went below to see what these men were up to. I scaled the large machine to the top. I read the faded writing on the drill:

DANGER
USE PROPER SAFETY EQUIPMENT WHILE USING THE DRILL
IMPROPER USE COULD RESULT IN SERIOUS INJURY OR DEATH
ONLY DRILL ON YOUR OWN PROPERTY

What did they need a drill for? I put together the random holes all over camp, the way there is no vegetation by the river, and lastly the fact that the bottom of the river is pure rock. There must be a rare chemical in the water! That also explains why the soldiers were set up right by the river bed.

I saw a couple of men with guns walking across the deck of the ship. I rolled over on top of the drill so they could not see me. They walked up to the door, and one of the men put his hand on some sort of a scanner. The door beeped and slid open, allowing him to enter the control tower.

Another man walked by. He looked young and he was alone. I waited till he walked past the drill before I slipped down the drill. I came up behind him and slammed his head into the door. He fell to the ground silently. I put his hand up onto the scanner and dragged him inside the tower.

The door closed behind us, and there was another door in front of us. I took his jacket off; he was fully loaded. I took a scary-looking explosive and slipped it into my pocket. He also had a silenced FMG9 submachine gun. I picked it up and took one of the magazines.

I opened up the next door. There was a winding, steel staircase. I slowly walked up, careful not to run into an “unwanted visitor.” I got up onto my belly and looked into the control room. There were three guys sitting in chairs playing what they did not know would be their last game of cards. I aimed the small gun at their chest level and held down the trigger and sprayed them down with lead.

I walked up to them, making sure they were dead (as if someone could survive 10 bullets). I unscrewed one of the heating vents with a pocket knife. It slid off the wall and hit the ground loudly. I shuddered and took the explosive out of my pocket. I read the back, which told me it was actually a gas bomb. *Lucky me*, I thought. I threw it down the vent and crossed my fingers that it was not too loud.

I got up and stared at the control table. It had more unlabeled buttons than I imagined. I spanned all the buttons and slid my arms over them while I sickly laughed. The sirens started wailing, and my mind went numb. How could I have been so stupid? Mick is in the belly of the ship where the gas bomb went off. He doesn't even have a clue that he could potentially die because of me!

I looked to the window; I saw three staircases leading down. There had to be dozens of other ones. I have no idea which one Mick will come out of, assuming he gets out at all.

I saw him run out of the closest staircase. He was slightly limping, and then he collapsed. I couldn't hear anything over the sirens, but by the way the blood spilled all over the deck, I could see he was gone. I picked my submachine gun off the floor and used it to smash the window. The glass shattered and hit the deck with a crunch. I jumped as far to the left as I could hope to fall off the side of the ship.

I closed my eyes and scrunched up my face. I slammed into the side of the deck; it must have hurt so bad I could not feel it. The deck suspended me in coldness. *I must be paralyzed*, I thought. I was so confused I couldn't even breathe. I opened my eyes so I could at least see my own death. It was like I am underwater.

No, I *am* under water.

I kicked my legs and paddled my arms. The boat, to my shock, did not suck me down. The ship had stopped moving. People were jumping off the sides like lunatics—like me.

I paddled with all my might away from the soldiers to Richard and the boat. I can see the boat from here. He must have heard the sirens and come over to get me.

“Let’s get away from this bloody island,” I panted as I climbed up onto the boat.

“Shouldn’t we wait for Mick?” asked Richard.

“He’s not coming...” I trailed off as I sat down.

We safely reached another island by sunrise the next day. We waited for a couple of hours on the beach in our ragged clothing. The first boat arrived around noon. I got up and waited for them to come ashore. They were a couple of younger men with a cooler. “Can I please borrow a cell phone?” I asked.

The largest man responded, “No problem, Bud, here ya go.” He handed over a black scratched flip phone. I punched in my mother’s number. She responded on the first beep.

How It Looks
From Here

Analand

A world hidden from view has magical properties that are hard to resist in ANALAND by Hope Tushman.

Ever since Sasha and Brody's dad went missing a year ago, the kids haven't been the same. The kids thought one day a road trip would be just the thing to make them feel better. They figured going to Kentucky was a perfect place to take the road trip. Kentucky was their father's last destination. He always loved it there.

Brody looked to see how much gas was in the car when the car came to a complete stop. "Ugh, Brody, what's going on?" Sasha asked, worried.

"Um...we aren't out of gas. I have no idea," Brody answered.

"We are in the middle of nowhere! What are we going to do now?" Sasha screamed.

"Calm down, Sasha! Give me a second, I'll figure it out." Sasha took a deep breath. Brody got out of the car to see what was wrong. He popped open the hood and looked inside. "Sasha, there is nothing I can do about this."

"Well, I guess we should go look for help," Sasha said. Sasha and Brody started to walk.

"Brody?"

"Yeah?"

"That looks just like dad's car over there in the bushes near that cave," Sasha said. As they got closer, they noticed their dad's license plate. "#1 Dad," Sasha said.

Brody said, "Maybe his car broke down here just like ours!"

"It obviously did. Wow, I really miss Dad. I hope we are on to something," Sasha said.

All of a sudden, it started to pour. It came down as hard as a thousand hooves pounding against the ground. "Oh, great!" Sasha said.

They ran to the cave for shelter. The cave was dark and cold, but as they walked deeper into the cave it got warmer and lighter. The kids were wondering where the light was coming from, so they followed the light. The light led to a beautiful land that was warm and sunny.

Sasha and Brody were shocked by what they saw. There were all sorts of animals. But they weren't the normal kind of animals you see every day. They were combinations of all sorts of animals. There were two-headed cats and creatures that were part chipmunk and part bunny. They even saw what looked like a part bear, part bird. There were so many more that you couldn't imagine.

"Hi!" a voice shouted out.

"Who said that?" Brody said.

"Look up," the voice responded. The kids looked up and were shocked to see a flying bunny! The two of them stared at each other and said at the same time, "Did you just see that?"

"Huh!" Sasha said.

Brody looked at the creature and said, "What are you and how can you talk?"

"I'm a Binny. I can talk because you're not in Kentucky, and you're in ANALAND!"

"Analand?" Brody said, confused.

"Yes, Analand!" the Binny said. "Oh, I'm sorry. I haven't even told you my name! I'm Pepper!"

"Um.... Hi, Pepper. Uh. I'm Brody," he replied, "and that's my sister Sasha...."

The Binny looked at them with a puzzled look and said, "Wait...you look just like my friend. He is somewhere around here. You should meet him! It's his second time here, only this time he can't leave."

"Wait, does that mean we can't leave?" Sasha screamed.

"Well, I'm not very sure," said Pepper.

The kids followed Pepper through the beautiful land. As they walked by the rivers, the water glowed a rosy pink color. It smelled like roses, and all of the other rivers smelled good, too, but they were all different colors and scents. The mountains were covered in green and blue flowers, and at the very top was a big bright rainbow!

After walking for what seemed like miles, the kids reached a tiny little village. The village was small but very colorful and covered with flowers. Pepper said, "We are at my friend's house, you know, the guy I said that looks like you." Pepper knocked on the door.

The door opened and a man walked out and said, "Hey! Pepper! You brought some friends!"

Brody and Sasha look up and confusedly said, "Dad?"

The man stared at the kids for a moment as if he was as shocked to see a human as much as they were shocked to see the strange creatures they had seen. After that awkward moment, he recognized the kids and shouted, "Brody! Sasha! How did you find this place?" He grabbed his kids and hugged them. The three of them broke into tears.

While the father was hugging his children that he hadn't seen in a year, he told them how much he missed them and how proud he was of the kids growing up the way they did without their father over the last year. The father looked over at Pepper and said, "How did you find them?"

Pepper told him that he ran into them as they were walking along the pink river. "They looked funny like you, so I knew you belonged together."

The father sat down with his kids in the house and talked for hours. The father explained how when he was a little boy he found this place, and became friends with Pepper when he first arrived in Analand. When he went back home and tried to tell everybody about Analand, no one believed him. He went on to tell the kids that he went back as an adult to see if it was real, and when he went in, he couldn't come back out. He searched for a year to try to find a way out. But there wasn't. He said that only kids could go back home, not adults. If adults come, they can't go back. Their dad later found out the cave opened up because of the storm, but doesn't know what happens after or why.

Their dad told them that they needed to go back home to take care of their mother and tell her how much he loved her and missed her. "Pepper and I will take you to the rainbow. That's how I got out when I was a kid."

The kids and the father walked to the mountain and climbed up to the rainbow. While at the top, they hugged their dad goodbye. Pepper walked away and told their dad that he would meet him back at the house. Brody slipped and grabbed his dad and Sasha's hands, and they all fell down the rainbow together.

When they reached the bottom they found themselves at the opening of the cave they had originally gone in. The father jumped up and hugged his kids and shouted, "That must have been the

secret all along! Kids can go in and out, and bring an adult with them!”

When they got out of the cave, Sasha said, “Dad, isn’t it kind of weird how our car broke down in the same place yours did? It’s almost like we were meant to find this place and get you home.”

“Yeah, it is Sasha. It is weird. I guess we will never know why, and it will always stay a mystery,” Dad said.

“Mom is going to be so excited to see you! I’m so glad we were able to get you out of the cave. I know you will miss Pepper, but you get to come home with us,” Brody said.

“I can’t wait to go home,” said the father.

The three of them took one more glance at the cave, but it had closed like it had never been open.

Average Life of a 6th-grade Girl

*Friendships have their ups and downs. **AVERAGE LIFE OF A 6TH-GRADE GIRL** by Taylor M. Powell considers the social side of starting middle school.*

It was first hour. Taylynn had two minutes to get to Mr. Jackson's band class. She had just gotten her new flute. It wasn't the same dirty one from the year before. "Please sit down, class. I have a lot to announce!" said Mr. Jackson. "This year in band, we will have four concerts, one for every season. Therefore we have to look good in our concerts, which means we have to work hard. I have zero tolerance for misbehavior." The students were surprised that Mr. Jackson was being this strict on the first day. "Okay, now let's begin."

During band they did basic warm-ups, such as b flat concert scales and note procedures. When the bell rang, Taylynn was happy to leave. "Geez, that class was horrible," said Taylynn.

Taylynn liked middle school, but not the eighth-graders. As she walked down the hall, she saw it was trashed and reeked of must and sweat with a mix of perfume. As she approached her second-hour class, which was science with Mr. Bruyneel, she was pleased to see him greeting every student at the door. "Good morning, what's your name?" said Mr. Bruyneel.

"I'm Taylynn Reese. Nice to meet you." Taylynn loved all of her teachers, and she liked to treat them well because not all of them get thank-yous for the things they do.

In Science students introduced themselves by sharing their name, what school they went to, their favorite color, their favorite subject, and their birthday. It was Taylynn's turn. "Hi, I am Taylynn Reese. I went to Bingham Farms Elementary School. My favorite color is blue, and my favorite subject is math. I was born on March 21st, 2002, and I am 11 years old."

Taylynn was interested in other students' sharings. One kid shared that he never celebrates his birthday because it's on leap year. When everyone stopped sharing, the bell rang.

As Taylynn walked to her third hour, which was Language Arts, she took a sip of cold water. “Gulp,” said Taylynn. “As we found out in Science we are 70 percent water.”

She walked into Language Arts, her least favorite subject. Mr. Fish came in and gave a quick speech about himself and his life. All the students got to share a nice little paragraph about themselves as well. Of course, that took up some time. “I’m glad that’s over,” Taylynn said.

As Taylynn was walking to fourth hour she thought about something. “I haven’t even made any new friends. But we still have three more hours plus rec, so hopefully I’ll find someone,” she said.

It was fourth-hour math. Taylynn walked in the room. She saw that there was a basic skills test. She listened for her name to be called for the seating chart so she could start. “Taylynn and Brooke, please come and sit at these two seats in the front,” said Mrs. Tucker.

She sat in her seat. Brooke waved at her, but she didn’t know what to do back, so she just started a conversation. “Hi, I’m TaylynnW what’s your name?” she said.

“I’m Brooke,” she said.

Taylynn could tell that Brooke was uncomfortable because she had a weird look on her face.

After Brooke and Taylynn took the quiz, they both started talking. Taylynn found out that Brooke dances just like her. They had a lot in common. Who would’ve thought they would have become best friends?

It turned out Brooke and Taylynn had the same fifth-hour and sixth-hour rotation so they could see each other all the time.

Everything was fine for a while until Brooke got a boyfriend. Then Brooke wasn’t talking to Taylynn, and things changed for the worst. Whenever Taylynn talked to her it wasn’t, “Hey Tay”; it was, “Hello, Taylynn.” Taylynn was determined to figure out what had happened and why her best friend was acting differently. Taylynn walked up to Brooke and asked what was up.

“According to my other friend Layla, you have been talking about at lunch time,” Taylynn said. Layla was lying. It wasn’t true what she said Taylynn did.

And after all they’d been through, Taylynn was surprised that Brooke would totally drop her without asking her side first.

Taylynn slept on the situation, and the next day she hung out with her friends Adrienne and Bella.

After the whole situation, there was total silence. Taylynn and Brooke weren't talking for about two months! Taylynn said to herself, *I'm upset and surprised that Brooke would drop me. But there's nothing I can do.*

Brooke said to herself, *I can't believe what happened. Why would she do that? I thought she was my best friend.*

Layla was talking to Jasmine in the hallway. "I know Taylynn didn't say that, but Brooke did call me a bad name, so I think she deserved it." said Layla.

"Maybe, but that affected their friendship. They used to be BFF. Now they hate each other. You're my friend, but you took it too far," said Jasmine. With that said Layla was really confused, so she thought about it and slept on it.

When she came to school the next day she told Brooke what really happened. "Brooke, Taylynn didn't say all that stuff about you. She just called me a bad name so I said that to get back at her. I'm really sorry."

That same day Brooke went to Taylynn and apologized. "I'm really sorry, Taylynn," said Brooke.

"It's okay," said Taylynn.

The two were best friends again. With Bella and Adrienne, Brooke saw Taylynn at dance class every Saturday and at school. They were always there for her, even when no one else was.

So at the end Taylynn lost friends and then gained them back. She also kept the ones that were important to her. Together the six of them, Taylynn, Brooke, Layla, Jasmine, Bella, and Adrienne, all walked together in unison to their classes.

Beautiful Little Liars

*There are friends, and then there are true friends. A group of girls finds one of their own is in trouble in **BEAUTIFUL LITTLE LIARS** by **Megan Weiss**.*

There were five girls. One of the main girls was Alexis. She's really nice to most of her friends, but sometimes she can be a little mean to people she's not friends with. The four that followed her like a team were Kylie, Sydney, Aria, and Riley. They all loved being friends because they felt like a team. They did everything, and I mean everything, together.

There was one night, and that one night all the girls would love to go to the shed. The shed is a place where the girls feel like they can do anything they want away from their parents. The parents never thought the girls would go to the shed because they never knew about the shed in the first place. Anyway, the girls would party, do things they're not supposed to, anything! They went there to be free from everything and just to be together as a group of friends.

There was one night where something went wrong. To back this story up, there is a person named A. A is out to get Alexis and, soon, her friends. Alexis won't tell anyone because she doesn't know exactly who A is. Alexis wants to keep it between her and her friends. She also doesn't want to tell the police because A gave her a note saying if she told anyone about A that she and her friends would die. Alexis doesn't want to take that chance, so she's going to try to ignore it and try to let it go.

Anyway there was a night where Alexis and "her team" went out to the shed. They ended up partying all night until they went to bed, and that was at about 3:00 in the morning already. When they were trying to go to bed there was a huge storm outside. It was so loud that none of them could go to bed. They tried earmuffs and pillows over their heads, but it was way too loud.

At one point of the night they heard a person calling Alexis's name from outside the shed. Very slowly someone started to call her name louder and louder every second. They all woke up by the scary sounds of the wind and the trees, and soon they heard it again. "Alexis, Alexis."

Alexis stood up, scared, and looked out the window to see if she saw anyone outside. She didn't see anyone outside. All she saw were the trees shaking and branches falling because of the huge storm that was going on. She walked back to her spot in the room and lay back down. Then the voice they heard started screaming her name. "ALEXIS, ALEXIS."

Alexis jumped out of her bed and opened the shed door and walked out there to see if anyone was there. Still she saw no one. Alexis looked at the girls and looked scared. But then the doors slammed! The girls got scared and tried to open them, but they were stuck and wouldn't open. They all screamed, "Alexis, Alexis! Are you out there?" The doors finally opened, but there was no sign of Alexis.

They all went back in the shed thinking Alexis had gone home. But they weren't positive. The girls thought they would stop by her house first thing in the morning and check. They all lay down and went to bed.

In the morning when they all woke up, they jumped in their clothes and rode to Alexis's house to make sure she was there. When they got there they banged on the door. Alexis's mom opened the door and looked surprised. The girls said hi, and Kylie explained what happened. Alexis's mom was worried when she found out Alexis was not with them because Alexis was not home, either.

That morning Alexis's mom and all the girls made a report to the police saying there was a girl missing. The police were asking a lot of questions to the girls knowing that they were the only other people with Alexis the night she went missing. The police had lots of unanswered questions for the girls that they didn't know. The police started to go out looking in the woods by the shed for Alexis that morning. It took around seven hours, but they found a body in the woods. It was Alexis's body, the police said.

A few days later there was a funeral for Alexis. Her friends were all devastated to know that Alexis was found dead. That day at the funeral the girls decided to take one more good look at Alexis and say goodbye to her even though she was already dead. They were dead inside. They opened up the casket. They didn't even know whose body was found dead inside the casket. They closed the casket and ran away.

All of the girls started to chatter. 'Is Alexis even dead?' Kylie said.

"No, no she can't be," Riley responded. The girls didn't have any clue of what they should do. But then they thought they could look in the shed because Alexis always told them if she was in trouble she would be there.

They ran as fast as they could! Their legs were starting to hurt as they ran faster and faster each minute. They ran and ran and ran till they finally got there. They barged into the shed and saw Alexis sleeping in her sleeping bag on the floor.

They all woke her up and started to cheer and everything. They were so happy to know that Alexis was not dead. Alexis was hiding from everyone because of A, she explained. Alexis told them to quietly tell her own mom and no one else so "A" wouldn't find out.

The girls spent the night not caring about what their parents thought and had a good time knowing that she was okay. Alexis was still the only person worried in the group of the girls because she still knew A was out there. She also knew A would not stop till he finally found her.

Bloville Road

In BLOVILLE ROAD by Brina McCurry, a puppy has a hard start in life. What are the chances that things will get better?

One sunny evening, the Olmsteds took an extremely long drive to their new home. The Olmsted family is the dad, mom, son, and their puppy. The puppy is a young male beagle with brown fur and white spots.

The Olmsteds were driving down Bloville Road, an old, abandoned dirt road. The dad was focusing on driving, the mom was sleeping in the passenger seat, the son was sleeping in the back, and the puppy was wide awake next to the son with his head out of the window.

The dad made a huge mistake. He left the car window open too much for a little puppy. When the puppy leaned closer to the window he fell out! The dad didn't even want the puppy in the first place, so he just kept on driving.

The Olmsteds didn't notice the puppy was gone until they finally arrived at their new home. None of the Olmsteds really seemed to mind or care that their puppy was gone. The parents didn't even want it. They just got it for their son as a Christmas present.

The puppy was stranded, all alone on his own. He had no clue of what to do. With nothing around, he just waited there. Every now and then he would sniff around the two-lane dirt road, but he never wandered off too far from where he had fallen.

After about an hour, he got really tired. So the poor thing looked around for a soft place to rest. He took a couple of steps to the side of the road and lay down on a patch of grass on the edge of the wheat fields on both sides of Bloville Road. Shortly, he fell asleep.

The morning came. The puppy had slept so peacefully the previous night, except for being bothered by the annoying grasshoppers and other animals that the puppy couldn't resist chasing around a bit. Luckily, the puppy wasn't harmed by some other animal.

There isn't anything to do when you're a stranded puppy on Bloville Road, so the puppy just sat there and frequently barked

hoping that his owners (or at least somebody) would come and rescue him. The puppy started to get hungry, but there was no food in sight, so the puppy just ate grass. It wasn't the healthiest choice, but the poor thing was starving. He even tried to catch some grasshoppers with his little paws, but failed.

Hours passed, and still nobody came onto Bloville Road. But nobody ever goes there, unless they're lost. However, the puppy saw something glowing in the distance. It was a car, driving down Bloville Road! The puppy frantically started jumping up and down on his hind legs and barking. The car came to a stop, and the parents of the family got out and examined the lost puppy.

The family that helped the puppy was named the Watzmans. The Watzman family includes Marcus (the dad), Jenny (the wife), and Jacob (their four-year-old son). Marcus and Jenny got out of the car to examine the puppy, while Jacob stayed in the car.

"This little guy doesn't have a collar on," Marcus stated.

"I see, but what should we do to help the poor puppy? Maybe we could bring him home to find a nice animal shelter for him," Jenny told Marcus.

"That sounds like a good idea," Marcus replied.

On the way to their house, Jenny noticed how much fun Jacob was having with the puppy. "I'm gonna call him Handsome!" Jacob happily screeched.

When the Watzmans arrived at their home, Jenny talked to Marcus about adopting Handsome. "I mean, look how much fun they're having together, and it's also good for Jacob to learn how to deal with an animal.

"Well, first let's take Mr. Handsome over here to the vet and see if he has all of his shots and vaccines. If he does, then we can adopt him," Marcus told Jenny.

"Yes! Jacob will be so happy!" Jenny replied.

"Hehehe haha tee-hee!" Jacob giggled as he rolled with Handsome across the living room carpet.

"Could you please call up the babysitter while I try to pry Jacob off of Handsome?" Jenny joked to Marcus.

"Sure thing" Marcus replied to Jenny.

"NO! I wanna stay wif Handsome!" Jacob screeched to Jenny.

"I know, but guess what?"

"What?"

“While we take Handsome to go get his shots, you can stay here with Maria!” Jenny knew how much Jacob loved playing board games with Maria, Jacob’s babysitter. She used her as a distraction so Jacob wouldn’t be so upset, it worked. Jenny purposely didn’t tell him that if he was a clean puppy they would adopt him because if they could, she wanted it to be a surprise.

Maria arrived at the house to watch Jacob for an hour or so while Marcus and Jenny took Handsome off to the vet. “I wonder if they’ll even have to give him any shots,” Jenny said as she and Marcus got into the car.

“Hopefully not, but we’ll see,” Marcus replied.

“So does he have any disease or anything wrong?” asked Marcus.

“Actually, Handsome here is already fine and all set. But would you two care to buy him a collar?” asked the vet.

“Yes, please,” Jenny confirmed.

Marcus and Jenny got back into the car to tell Jacob the good news about the official new addition to the Watzman family.

Crazy Cooks

*Isabelle is certain that she has what it takes to be a great cook. In **CRAZY COOKS** by **Megan Zacharias**, she puts her skills to the test on a nationwide television show.*

“**Y**ou need two cups of sugar and two and a half cups of flour,” I said out loud. I grabbed the sugar from the pantry and measured it into a bowl. I have been cooking since I was five. I am getting pretty good. I even make my own recipes sometimes.

“What are you doing, Isabelle?” my little brother Freddie asked.

“I’m making cookies. Do you want to help?”

“Sure!”

Freddie and I continued making the cookies until they were ready to bake. “Ok,” I said, “they need to cook for about ten minutes.”

Right after I took the cookies out to cool, my mom came home. “Isabelle, I have great news!”

“What?” I asked.

“You are going to New York City to try out for *Crazy Cooks*!” she said.

“Are you serious?” I asked, stunned.

“Yes! Now let’s get packing!” Mom said.

I’m going to New York, I said to myself. “Oh my gosh! I can’t believe it!” I screamed.

Screeech. The train stopped one last time at New York City. We got off and caught a cab to the *Crazy Cooks* studio. I slowly walked in, noticing how many people there were. We all were waiting to get called in for the audition. If we made it in we were going to LA. I felt sick waiting for my name to be called. It felt like I had a million bees in my stomach.

“Isabelle!” Gary, the judge, finally said.

I grabbed the cart with all of my ingredients and went into the cooking room.

“What are you making for me today?” asked Gary.

“I am making strawberry shortcake,” I said nervously.

“Ok, show me what you can do,” he said.

I started by making the cake part. I stumbled at first when I was measuring the ingredients. But soon after, I wasn't so nervous. I realized that this is a recipe I have been doing forever, so I couldn't mess up. When I finished it off with whipped cream, that's when I got scared. What if he didn't like it? Or worse, what if he hated it and threw it away? I carefully brought my strawberry shortcake to him. He didn't say anything until he took a bite.

"It's good. There could have been more strawberries, and the whipped cream you made was a little bit overly whipped. But I think you have potential."

I was feeling sick again. He didn't love it.

"Because this recipe was so complicated and you made it happen, you are going to LA!"

I screamed and jumped up to get my plane ticket. "Thank you so much!" I said out of breath. Then I ran out to tell my family.

My mom, my dad, and my brother got plane tickets to LA. They were all there to watch the show live. The whole time there I thought I was dreaming. Everyone seemed happy for me, but they might just be happy that they get to go on vacation.

When the plane landed we got onto a bus to go to the official *Crazy Cooks* Studio. Everyone in my family had to leave except for my mom so she could take me back to our hotel.

"Hello, everyone," said Gary. "Let's get started! I want you guys to cook any kind of soup. All of the ingredients are in the back room. You have an hour starting...now!"

I ran into the giant pantry and grabbed what I needed to make potato soup. I noticed that it took me the longest to get my ingredients. I ran back to my station and started cooking. I stirred the broth with the potatoes, and I added some seasoning. It was going well. Then I realized I forgot an ingredient. I started toward the pantry, but Gary locks the door after the 30-minute mark.

I ran around frantically asking people if they had onions. Finally a very nice girl gave me her extras. I looked at the time, and there were only two minutes left! I tried cooking them as much as I could. There was thirty seconds left. Oh no! I didn't cook it at the right temperature! I don't have time to cook everything!

I tried to turn the heat on higher, but I bumped the pot with my arm and accidentally pushed the soup off of the counter! I jumped back in horror as I watched the pot fall. Everything seemed like it

was in slow motion. It hit the ground with a loud *clank!* and then it spilled. It spilled out all of my hard work. I was devastated.

Even before Gary judged everyone he put me in the bottom two. I waited, hoping that the other person had terrible food. But then everyone else was safe except me. I was confused. Who else was in the bottom two? Then Gary broke the news.

“I’m sorry, Isabelle. I have no choice but to disqualify you. I didn’t get to taste your soup, but you do not work well under pressure.”

“Thank you,” I managed to say. I was upset, but I’m not going to cry over something I barely started.

So I decided to cook. I looked and looked, but I couldn’t find a recipe that wasn’t something everyone used. I decided I would make my own. I started writing and testing. I couldn’t stop my imagination. I still love cooking, I thought, but maybe I should try writing, too.

I didn’t wait. I started writing right away.

Dog Cat

In DOG CAT by Madysen Williams, there is a society of dogs and a society of cats. They don't mix—and then Danny comes along.

In present day New York, a pack of stray dogs lived a happy life in the old and abandoned Shining Star hotel. It was a very old hotel that no one came to anymore, so it was closed down. It seemed empty because its walls were so thick. The 50 dogs that lived there could make all the noise they wanted and get no attention. They chewed the doors to make their homes in the rooms. The old furniture left there from when it was a hotel was used as beds and toys and anything they needed.

Their only danger was a group of cats that wanted that part of New York to themselves. The cats hurt and kill young dogs to discourage the pack to get them to move away. But the dogs refused to leave because the cats did not know how to find the home. They could only attack when the pack was away from home looking for food.

On a windy summer afternoon a female English setter named Maxine was in the park with her friends looking around for scraps of food to bring back home. The park was very large with a snack bar, a playground, and walking paths. Suddenly she heard the yowl of a young kitten and the yelling of a human behind some trees.

Maxine quietly crept closer and hid under some bushes. She couldn't believe what she was seeing. A grown human who was wearing a long, white skirt was beating a kitten with an umbrella. The woman yelled, "Take that, you good for nothing twit." The kitten whimpered.

Maxine wanted to try to save the kitten, but she hesitated because he was a cat. Maxine looked closer to see a tiny muddy paw print on the woman's skirt. The kitten must have stepped on that woman's skirt. "So that's why the woman is so mad at that kitten," she thought. The woman pulled out some green ribbon from her bag and wrapped the kitten's feet, tail, and neck with ribbon. Then she used the remains of the ribbon to tie the kitten to a tree and stomped off.

The kitten struggled to get out of the ribbon, but the more he struggled the more he was stuck. Maxine went back and forth in her

head trying to decide what to do. She could tell that he didn't have the scent of the mean cat group, but he still was a cat. Even if no one should be treated like that, he still was a cat.

Maxine slowly approached the kitten. It shrieked and said, "Please don't hurt me. I'll do anything," it said.

"I won't hurt you, but I can free you," said Maxine. She chewed through the ribbon, and in no time the kitten was free.

"Do you have a name?" asked Maxine.

"No," replied the kitten, "I have no family because my parents were kidnapped by humans."

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Five weeks." Maxine knew now the kitten wasn't dangerous. So she brought him home to the city. Maxine's family was shocked when they saw the kitten. After all the time cats had attacked them, why would she bring one home? At least they knew he was not from the pack of cats that had been attacking them because he did not have their scent.

After a while, Maxine's family seemed to love the cat. They made him part of the family. Maxine named him Danny.

A lot of time passed, and Danny grew up. He was an important and well-loved part of the family. To protect him, Maxine kept Danny hidden from the other cats. But one day as they hunted for food, the worst possible thing happened. The cat group appeared and attacked. All the dogs ran away, but Danny couldn't escape.

"Where do you live?" roared the leader.

"I won't tell," said Danny.

"But kid," some other cat said, "you're a cat. You're one of us. You are not a dog."

"Just because I look like you doesn't mean I am like you," Danny said bravely. Angered, the leader told the other cats to take him prisoner in their home and walked away.

The cats made their home in an old restaurant, and the smell of fish drifted from every window. Danny knew if he just tried to run he would fail because there were too many guards. He was in a Dumpster in the back of the restaurant surrounded by guards.

Meanwhile, Maxine was very worried and got the whole town together to find his scent. His trail led to an abandoned restaurant. The dogs had finally found where the cats lived. They were happy

for a moment about finding the cats' home but soon focused on rescuing Danny.

The dogs surprised the cats by attacking from all angles until almost all of the cats were cornered. Danny wanted to take care of the leader himself. The fight raged back and forth. They seemed evenly matched, but then suddenly Danny was down on the ground, the cat's leader on top of him.

He was about to lose, and tried to struggle free. Then he remembered when he was little how struggling got him nowhere. He remembered what Maxine had done for him those many years ago and bit down on the leader's paw right before it hit him. The leader growled in pain and fell to the ground. Danny had won. His family ran the cats away from New York.

Danny turned to the dogs and said, "Thank you for coming to save me."

Then Maxine said, "Thank you for not telling the cats where we live."

Danny smiled and replied, "Thank you for saving me all those years ago. You taught me what family is."

Maxine and Danny raced each other back home to the Shining Star hotel.

Doll Drama

In DOLL DRAMA by Sarah Kefri, twins—a boy and a girl—find two dolls—a boy and a girl. Coincidence? Yes! Still, these are no ordinary dolls.

“**W**ould you hurry up already? Faster!” said Addison as her brother Xavier was heaving dirt onto his shovel. Addison and Xavier were out in the afternoon, digging for worms in the forest for fish bait. “Mom says we have to be home at 8:00. Do you know what that means? We don’t have very much time to go fishing,” said Addison.

“All right, all right, digging is hard. Would you like to tr...” Xavier stopped and heard a big thud come from the ground as he was digging.

“What did you find? Treasure?” said Addison.

“Let’s check it out!” said Xavier. He shoveled and shoveled around the object. It was a box.

“Huh. Who would put a dumb old box two feet into the ground?” said Addison, hoping there would be something valuable inside a crappy box.

“I don’t know. But we won’t be able to open it. That’s for sure,” Xavier chuckled.

The box was nailed shut, literally. There were old, rusty nails sticking out of the box, not even hammered well into the box. “Well, most likely we would get splinters. I wouldn’t open it if I were anyone dumb enough in this universe,” said Addison.

Xavier took out a fisher’s knife to open the box. He put the knife in between the lid and the box and lifted the lid off. There were two dolls inside, one male and one female.

“AHHHHHH!” screamed Addison. “The treasure is creepiness!” Addison exclaimed.

“Whoa. Scary,” said Xavier.

“What kind of weirdo would put dolls in a box?” said Addison, confused.

“Let’s take them home!” said Xavier, “and see what might happen.”

“Excuse me? Are you crazy!” yelled Addison. “Who would take such hideous dolls, nailed into a box, buried two feet into the

ground?" said Addison. After all, the dolls did look extremely hideous. The dolls' hair was so old and worn out, the hair started falling out all over the dolls' plastic heads!

They took the dolls out and observed them. On the back they had little tags that had a name on them. But the twins couldn't figure out what the name was because the writing had faded away.

There was a silence for a moment. They heard their mom call out so they could come back home. "Let's take it home," whispered Xavier.

"I don't feel safe about taking them home," exclaimed Addison.

"We'll be totally fine," said Xavier. They put the dolls back in the box and headed home for the night.

When they got home, they decided to keep the dolls in Addison's room. It was a deal. "I'll keep them right here on my shelf," said Addison. "This is going to be the creepiest night of my entire life." As Addison went to bed, she couldn't stand how the dolls looked like they were stalking her, staring with their gigantic plastic eyes right through her eyes. "I'll put them in the drawer where I feel safer." After she put them away, she fell fast asleep.

The next morning, Addison woke up to the chirping of the birds in the early morning. "Good morning, creepy dolls..." She hesitated. The dolls weren't in the drawer where she kept them last night. Then she heard bumping and knocking from her closet. It might have been Xavier trying to scare her. "Xavier?" she said weakly. "Is that you?" No one answered. She opened the closet, and there they were, lying on the closet floor.

"WHAT! Xavier!" she yelled.

Xavier came in like a lazy person. "Why did you wake me up?" he said.

"Did you put the dolls in my closet last night, because the dolls were in the drawer," she said.

"No, I was in a deep, deep sleep last night. I would never do anything like that anyway," he said.

"Then...Then how did they get here?" she exclaimed, worried. "Uh-oh, we're in bad luck."

"What do you think we should do with the dolls?" said Addison as they were walking around the neighborhood.

"I think we should put them back," she said.

“But how are we if the dolls already started to cause so much chaos?”

“They are going to keep on doing creepy stuff. I just know it,” said Addison.

“You’ve got a point. We’ll keep an eye on them for a few days and try to put them back when they aren’t doing any creepy actions,” said Xavier. “We wait for a few days and when they are not doing anything, we will put them back in the box and back into the forest.” Addison agreed with the plan.

They waited for the next few days. The dolls did no actions. “Do you think it’s time?” whispered Xavier. Addison nodded. They went back to where they left the dolls, but the dolls weren’t there. “NO!” said Xavier. It was too late.

Then they both heard sounds come from the attic. “What’s that?” asked Addison. They started walking slowly toward the stairs.

Once they got to the top, there were no more sounds. They slowly opened the attic door. They didn’t see the dolls inside. They saw only attic junk. “Wait! I think I know where they are!” said Addison.

They could see the reflection of the two dolls from the window. They were both sitting on a rocking chair staring at a picture. They suddenly dropped the picture, and it came right toward the twins. Addison grabbed it and closed the door very quickly.

She held a picture of a girl carrying the two dolls. “Who could that be?” said Xavier.

“Whoever that is, we need to find her and ask her about them,” said Addison. The twins suddenly heard noise again. They slowly opened the door, and the dolls were giants! They started to walk toward the twins, but the dolls couldn’t go through the door because they were so big. They slowly got smaller and smaller until they got to their normal size.

The next day, the twins asked one of their friends about the picture. They asked their friend Henry. “Oh, I know that woman! She looks very familiar. You know what? She lives in my neighborhood. She lives in a creepy-looking doll house,” said Henry.

“We should go there!” said Addison.

“Can you possibly show us the way to her house?” asked Xavier.

“Sure,” said Henry.

The next day, Henry took them to her house. It looked like a real doll house, but in human size. Addison and Xavier went to the door and rang the doorbell. "Do you have the pics?" asked Addison. Xavier nodded.

A tall lady answered the door. "Well, hello there. I'm Mrs. Snoops. I'm glad to meet you. What are your names?" asked the woman.

"Oh. My name is Addison, and here is my brother Xavier. Nice to meet you, too," said Addison.

"Do you have any clue about this picture we found?" asked Xavier. He handed her the picture.

"My worst nightmare!" said the woman as she suddenly dropped it to the ground. Addison picked it up. "You guys MUST return them by tomorrow. They are dangerous creatures," said the woman.

"We will do as we are told, ma'am," said Xavier, and they headed home.

Once they got home, they took the dolls very quickly off the attic floor and put them back in the box. Then they headed straight to the forest to return them. They found the hole that they dug into that other day and buried the dolls again so no one would ever find them or dig them back up again. "Mission accomplished, soldier," said Addison. And they shook hands.

"We are the most dangerous twins ever," said Xavier. They both chuckled on their way back home for the night.

Endless Love

In ENDLESS LOVE by Zuri Howard, one girl learns all she needs to know about her boyfriend's feelings. It's the way she learns it that matters the most.

There was an artsy teenage girl named Blair and a sporty teenage boy named Chuck. Blair and Chuck were at the court yard at school. Blair forgot her school ID, so therefore she could not get lunch. She asked Chuck to buy her food.

Chuck said, "No."

Blair didn't know why he said no because he can get free lunch. He can get free lunch because his dad, aka daddy Bass, owns the school grounds.

Blair and Chuck went to sit down. Blair was constantly asking him for food. Blair's brother Eric was in middle school, but since Blair goes to a prep school she gets out later than Eric. Since Chuck didn't get Blair food, Blair got mad and decided to skip school and go home.

Blair was walking home and realized her gorgeous big house was on fire. She didn't know what to do. She just knew she had to save her little brother Eric.

When she tried to get in to the house, the door was locked—as locked as a safe. She looked so hard trying to find a way into the house. She took her shoe off and banged the window as hard as a car would. Finally she got into the house. Running up the stairs, she saw her brother calling 911.

"HELP, HELP!" Eric said.

"We have to get out," said Blair. Her brother Eric ran down the stairs as fast a bullet. Blair got trapped in the flaming fire.

When the firefighters got there they realized they couldn't get in because the fire was too big, almost as big as her house.

Chuck found a fire suit that he quickly dressed up in. Even though he cared about his appearance, he knew he had to save his sweet, beloved girlfriend.

When he got up the stairs, doors were burning and steps were falling. When he got in the room he sealed the door up behind him and locked it. He held her tight, kissed her, hugged her, and then said that he LOVED her forever and ever and ever. Blair asked what

was wrong, and Chuck said that he was going to die. Blair's eyes got so big as she began to cry. He even began to cry.

He picked her up and jumped out of the four-story house and landed on his back with her on top of him. Chuck died instantly, as fast as a race car.

His parents were so furious that he was willing to die for Blair, but at the end Chuck DIED to save Blair's life.

Escape from Mars

There is nothing routine about space travel. In ESCAPE FROM MARS by Stanley Ossyra, getting to Mars is the easy part.

Year: 2017
“Welcome all to the launch of the *N.C. Odyssey!*” announced the President of America’s space program in his booming voice. He was a famous man, and many had come to the *Odyssey*’s launch just to get his autograph. “This ship represents all that the United Federation has done to get us one step closer to populating distant planets,” he continued. “It contains all the necessary supplies and machines that are needed to create the first settlement on Mars!” he concluded. The crowd erupted in cheers.

Meanwhile, the scientists and astronauts onboard the *Odyssey* were preparing for flight. “So, where do you think we’ll crash?” Henry Davis jokingly asked his copilot, Jacob. They had known each other for years, for they had been in the same squadron in the Air Force, until they got pulled out and put into space preparation.

“I don’t know, the Moon perhaps?” Jacob replied.

“Okay, stop messing around, Juan is getting worried!” said the Commander as he entered the shuttle. The Commander was a tall, red-faced and quick tempered man who went through life drinking coffee and terrorizing the workers at Earth Command. “We can’t have our main scientist chicken out right before the launch!”

“I heard that!” said Juan Lee, who was shivering in the corner with fear.

“Get up and put your pressurized suit on, you fool. That’s the only chance you have got to survive in the ship!” yelled the Commander. (It was not really the reason they had to wear the suits. It was just that they had the logos of the space program’s sponsors who said they would sue them if their logo wasn’t on a suit.)

“Fine, but get this: I’m only doing this for the opportunity to research outer space!” Juan said.

“Fine,” said the Commander silently, “Now put your suit on.” Then he left the shuttle.

“Now look what you’ve done. You’ve upset the Commander, and we didn’t even get to hear the President’s speech,” exclaimed Henry.

“What a fine mess,” Jacob muttered. “If you continue, he might purposely land us on the wrong planet!”

Suddenly, the Commander’s voice popped on over the intercom. “Strap in, boys, even you Juan, and be prepared for the launch. Remember, the air sickness bags are in front of you, and you have a stress ball in your backpack that’s in the luggage compartment.”

As the transmission ended the ship began to rumble and vibrate. Then the thrusters began to give all their fuel.

Juan looked out of the window. For a few seconds all he could see was smoke, and then he saw his home planet Earth spinning farther and farther away from him. He began to sob.

Year: 2020

Juan frantically hit the send transmission button with no success. He began to panic. He slammed his mouse on the tabletop. The computer was the only thing that provided light in the dark, metal room. Juan had hidden himself in the connections room that sent transmissions to Earth Command.

Outside he heard a faint knocking on the door. Slowly it changed from a knocking to a pounding. Then, the door creaked open.

Juan shivered. He stared at the entrance but saw nothing. He gulped. Out of the corner of his eye he could see a shape moving in the darkness, trying to find him. He whimpered. That was his terrible mistake.

The creature noticed him. It pounced near him. Juan finally got a good look at it. It was wearing the jumpsuit that Henry used to wear until he got psychological issues and got put into a containment pod. Juan began to sob quietly. The creature began to sniff the air.

“Where are you?” it rasped.

It crawled on all fours. It suddenly spun around at him with white, blank, eyes. Then it pounced on him. It gnashed its teeth at him. Juan got a good look at its face. It was the face of Henry Davis.

Year: 2020

“Sir, I just received a transmission from Mars!” a worker at Earth Command yelled excitedly as he ran toward the Commander.

“Good for you,” the Commander replied grimly, dismissing the idea by thinking it was a practical joke from the workers who were trying to get back at him. He took a sip out of his “ALL SMILES” coffee cup and frowned. “That is some bad coffee,” he said, off topic.

Trying to be helpful, the worker said, “Maybe some creamer would help.”

“Nah, my wife won’t let me. The last time I tried to put some in my coffee, she spiked it. She’s vegan,” the Commander replied.

“Okay, back to the subject,” the worker said, sighing.

“Fine” said the Commander in an amused voice.

“It’s a transmission sent from a person named Juan Lee. He said that some sort of bacteria was causing psychological problems in his crew,” the worker said in a proud voice.

“Okay, if this transmission was just sent, we need to rescue anyone on the planet,” said the Commander in a business-like voice. “Send the EA-71-B rocket.”

The EA rocket was a small, prototype rocket the United States had developed to rescue any survivors if the ISS command module collapsed. It was programmed to land on its target and send a signal to any survivors. If there were any that got into the rocket, it would return to Earth Command; if they didn’t get there in time, the rocket would implode and create a vacuum of air that would destroy all debris.

Year: 2021

“Sir, the rocket is ready for launch,” a voice said over the intercom.

“Requesting launch approval.”

“Fine,” the Commander replied over the intercom. “Fire away.”

Year: 2023

The EA rocket opened its landing gear. As it hovered over a spot on the lunar landscape, it identified several remains of old buildings and some ape-like skeletons. Then with a high-pitched whine, it cut its engines and landed with a thud.

Juan woke up, startled. He had been sleeping for a few hours after his last meal in the dining pod, which was slowly running out of food. He hadn’t heard a sound on the extraterrestrial planet for years. At least, not since Henry had attacked him and knocked him out cold. But, somehow, that sound had returned his hearing. He

got up cautiously. He knew that one wrong move in this settlement with Henry nearby could kill him.

He slowly crept, careful not to make any noise, to investigate the sound. He was astounded by what he saw. Twenty yards away stood a modern escape rocket, welcoming him. Then, he made a huge mistake. He took off running, trampling on the metal bits and pieces of some old supply shed, toward the rocket.

Henry was alerted by the clanging. Always in search of a good meal (for food on the planet was scarce), he, too, started running in the general direction of the noise. At his last encounter with Juan, three years ago, Juan, who was as fearful as ever, had slammed the mouse in his eye, which then damaged the cornea, making him partially blind. He ran for a few minutes. Suddenly he saw Juan. He started chasing after him. And, since he was more athletic he caught up with poor Juan. He pounced on him.

"I have you now, food," Henry said in a raspy and quite creepy voice.

"Get off me!" Juan yelled and punched Henry in the face.

Henry hissed and took Juan in a headlock.

"You cannot escape me now, food!" said Henry with wild eyes and a twitch in his face.

While Juan was in a headlock, he had grabbed a sharp piece of metal. He poked Henry with it. Henry yowled in pain. As Juan and Henry were grappling with each other, the rocket initiated its countdown to implosion. "NOOO!" cried Juan.

Suddenly Juan got an adrenaline rush. He grabbed Henry by the neck and flung him over his shoulder with superhuman strength. Then he started sprinting toward the rocket.

Nine seconds to implosion: 20 meters away.

Five seconds to implosion: 10 meters to go.

Three seconds to implosion: Juan finally reached the rocket. He sat down and closed the hatch. As he settled down in the seat, he saw Henry desperately galloping on all fours toward the hatch.

One second to liftoff: Henry was now frantically clawing at the hatch in despair. He started to sob. The engines suddenly ignited. The rocket lifted off the ground

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!" cried Henry as the rocket thrusters kicked in and his last chance of escape and survival was eliminated.

Juan stared out the window, silently pondering the word that would haunt him the rest of his life.

During those years in the rocket, he was put into a small cryopod, which froze him in a slab of ice and provided nutrients for him to survive.

Year: 2025

Juan once again landed. The pod shocked him to awaken him. The hatch opened with a pneumatic hiss. What he saw made him black out: thousands of cheering people, the entire Earth Command team, and what looked like half of the country's EMSs. He, while blacked out, was given an antibacterial drug and a lot of extra antibodies.

Juan continued to live and prosper until an old age. But he would remember those years of space exploration forever.

The Evil Cars

In THE EVIL CARS by Eric Spencer Adelson, a police officer questions whether the evidence of his own senses. Cars just can't do what he thinks they are doing—can they?

On a rainy, cold night in September, I was sitting at my desk doing paperwork. All I could see from my window were big gray and blue raindrops hitting the pavement. The raindrops hit the ground with so much force that the pavement shook.

Suddenly, I saw a shadow shaped like a man enter my neighbor's house. Then I heard alarms from their house going off, and lights started to flash. I decided to check to see what was going on. I grabbed my grey coat so fast that my coat hanger went crashing onto the floor, causing me to almost trip and fall.

When I got over to the house, the other police were already there. I knew a lot of them because I am a police officer from a nearby town. I said, "Excuse me. What's going on?" to the officer named Jerry.

Jerry said, "There was a break-in at this house and other houses in the community." He told me they had no suspects at this time. The only evidence was broken windows and car keys. Luckily almost nothing was stolen. The only thing missing was a 1987 Macintosh computer.

"Ok, thanks, Jerry. I will keep my eyes open for anything suspicious."

The next morning I got up and went over to get a better look at one of the houses that got robbed. I walked up to the door and found a flash drive underneath a rug. I wondered how it got there; I hadn't seen it the night before. It was probably because it was dark out. That must have come from the computer.

I went to the station and told Jerry about the clue that I had found. Jerry said he would check out what was on the flash drive.

The next night I thought it would be smart if I went driving around looking for anything suspicious. At one of my neighbor's homes, I saw a shadow again of a man. It looked like the shadow I had seen the previous night. The man looked to be about six foot three inches and about 250 pounds. I thought that it would be a

good idea to see where the man was going, so I followed him. Finally the man stopped.

I got out of my car and walked toward him. I couldn't believe my eyes: The shadow disappeared. And where the man was standing now was a black Chrysler 300.

I heard voices coming from the car. A deep voice was saying, "Dr Goofy." I just remember Mr. Goofy, the evil scientist. He made all cars come to life and transform into humans. The black Chrysler 300 sped away, leaving skid marks on the pavement.

The only thing I could remember was the make and color of the car. I tried to catch the car, but it was speeding so fast I couldn't find it. I didn't know exactly how to explain what I saw to anyone, especially to Jerry. I decided to go back home and try to make some sense of what I saw and heard. I was so tired that I fell fast asleep.

The next morning I woke up early and went down to the police station. When I got there I asked Jerry if I could have the flash drive back. I thought it might explain some things to me. Jerry gave me the flash drive.

Once I was home, I got on my computer and plugged the flash drive in and opened up the files. There was one folder that popped up that interested me. The folder was called "transform." I clicked on the folder and saw a picture of Dr. Goofy. There was a caption underneath the folder that said "Creator of Transform Cars." Underneath that caption was a whole article about how to change cars into humans.

I was shocked by what I read.

After reading the article I learned some things that were very important to stopping all these problems. The article said you must get into the Chrysler 300 and press the red button, which stops the cars from turning into human forms. I decided to try again to look for the car.

I waited until the evening and watched out my window. When I didn't see the car, I decided to go walking around looking for the car. I was walking around the neighborhood for hours.

Right before I was about to give up I heard the same noise that had come from the car the previous night. I hid behind some bushes and waited till the car stopped. I saw a human form that looked like a man get out of a black Chrysler. Then the car disappeared.

I watched the shadow slowly walk up to a door, and I made a loud noise and startled the form. I watched the shadow start to run back to the street. Just then the car reappeared. I ran as fast as I could and grabbed onto the handle of the car. I pulled with all the strength that I had and was able to get into the car. It looked like I was inside a computer. There were buttons all over and screens where the dashboard should be.

I remembered about the article I read from Dr. Goofy. I looked all over the car and could not find the red button. I was about to give up when I found a button underneath the driver's seat. I looked, and sure enough, it was red. I pushed the button and closed my eyes, not sure what was about to happen.

I slowly opened my eyes, and I was sitting in the middle of the street.

The shadow and black Chrysler were gone. I walked back to my house and was so confused. Did that really just happen, or was I dreaming? I took the flash drive out and threw it away in the trashcan and got into bed. I just want to forget about black Chryslers, shadows, and Dr. Goofy.

Fire vs. Water

FIRE VS. WATER by *Marcie Thierry* takes readers to a land where flying unicorns fight evil dragons in an epic battle to save the world from destruction.

I was running, running away from Veronica, the Queen of the land of fire. She was too fast, and I was running out of breath. Natasha and I stopped to catch our breath. We turned around, and Veronica was gone.

“Where did she go?”

“I don’t know!”

“Whatever. Let’s just get out of here before she comes back.”

“Okay.”

The Sword of Wind had been hidden in a special hideout in the woods. We got to the land of nature and dropped off the sword. Queen Nadine was happy we dropped it off after we had retrieved it from the woods. If this sword got into the wrong hands, it would explode the whole world of Saturn. Annabella wanted us to drop it off at her castle so that she could lock it in her second-most secured chamber in her castle. The castle was giant and floating twenty feet off the ground, and there were humongous stairs to walk up to the front entrance.

We gave it to Queen Annabella, and she locked it away safely. The chambers are protected by some of the best guards in the castle. The most protected chamber has the Sword of Nature in it. The Sword of Nature is what the land of fire is trying to get. If they got their hands on it everybody would be in danger.

Queen Veronica sent a bunch of fire guys over to try to get to the Sword of Wind. The flame guys have spiky flames on the head that shoot out lava and fire. Luckily we had two of our water people there, and they made a water ball and threw it at them. The flame guys vanished right away.

We figured out where Veronica had been earlier. She just stopped, hid, and thought she could get the swords later. Now that we know that they can get through our guards, we put our most experienced guards in front of the chambers.

We walked out on the porch of the castle and saw the biggest fight between the Fire Dragons and the Water Unicorns. The fire dragons have big red wings and can breathe fire. The unicorns have rainbow horns, and some of the unicorns have big, white, sparkly wings. The animals listen to certain people's commands.

While all the guards and everyone were outside trying to stop the fight, Veronica and some of her people stole the sword without anyone seeing. Veronica was not in the fight. They got the first chamber open using a key that a guard dropped during all the commotion. They opened the chamber for the Sword of Nature by using the Sword of Wind to open the security lock system and removing it with its gemstone.

We were standing in the back watching the fight when I saw them sneaking around all the commotion, and I right away knew something was up. I started following her with Natasha. Natasha and I both have the duty to guard the sword and keep it safe. We saw both of the swords peeking out of a bag.

They got on their dragons and flew away. They were too fast for us to catch them with our flying Unicorns.

"Lexi, what are we going to do?"

"I don't know, but we better figure something out!"

"Queen Annabella is going to be so mad!"

We had to get that sword back! That's all I could think about. We knew where the land of fire was, so we got two of the ten flying unicorns and headed toward the land. Natasha had an idea to get some guard outfits that she saw lying on the ground in the woods. We had an old friend make fake IDs to get in and through the security system. She also hacked into the system to make sure we got through just fine.

We fit in perfectly with all the guards. The security system was really hard to get through, but we got our way through. We opened the one chamber using a key that a guard gave us when we told her that the queen ordered her to give it to us. We grabbed the swords and put them in our bag that we brought with us.

It was quite hard to find our way through without getting caught. It was quite easy to get out again, but it wasn't easy to get out with swords. Still, we got out. We found our flying unicorns and took off with all the speed that we had.

Queen Annabella was so pleased, and so was Queen Nadine. All the swords were back where they were supposed to be, and Veronica was locked in a chamber for the rest of her life. Our queen, Queen Aria, was very happy with us, and for a while there wasn't going to be much of a problem.

Furgus and the Donut Cops

In FURGUS AND THE DONUT COPS by The Ark Builder, the heroes are both the two- and four-legged varieties. And they owe a debt to a certain type of pastry.

It is a half day of school when 11-year-old Jack Slate steps off the bus onto Auburn Road. His house is at the end of the block. As he walks up to the door, he notices that Furgus, his Border collie dog, wasn't barking like he usually does.

His sister, nine-year-old Kate, comes up behind him and says, "Where's Furgus?"

"I don't know," Jack replies. Jack goes up to the door, opens it, and steps inside. "Furgus!" Jack calls.

Kate steps in after him. They look around the house. "Let's check the backyard," says Kate. They walk out the door and start looking for Furgus.

Jack spots a hole under a fence in the corner. "Come over here, Kate," Jack calls.

Kate rushes over. "What!" she says.

"There's a hole under the fence," replies Jack.

"Kids!" says a voice coming from inside.

"Coming, Dad!" Jack yells. After they get inside Kate tells Dad about Furgus.

Then Dad says, "Kids, I have some very bad news."

"What is it?" asks Jack.

"Mr. Jeff, our mailman, got mauled. The one we knew and loved," he says sadly. "It was on the radio. He was attacked by dogs while delivering mail near here."

"What?" says Jack.

After their lunch everybody went straight to their rooms. After a while Furgus comes back through the doggy door. No one comes down to dinner that evening.

The next day Jack realizes that Furgus is home. Then Jack notices little red dots on Furgus's fur. When he looks closer he realizes that it is blood. "Hey, Dad, Kate!" calls Jack. Kate and their dad come.

"What?" says Kate?

"I think there's blood on Furgus's fur," Jack replies.

“Dad, you said the mailman was attacked by dogs?” Kate asked.

“Yes, I did,” the dad replies.

“Could it have been Furgus?” Jack wonders aloud.

“That’s a good question. We’ll have to keep an eye on him.”

Jack is sitting on the couch staring out the window. He’s been sitting there for a while, and then he notices something. Furgus is crawling under the fence. “Kate,” he says.

“What?” says Kate. She’s sitting in the chair next to the couch.

“Furgus is crawling under the fence,” says Jack. “Want to follow him?”

“Sure,” replies Kate. They go out the door and climb over the chain-link fence. Furgus is on the other side of the block and heading toward the park. When they catch up with him in the park he’s barking and growling with two other dogs, a German shepherd and a St. Bernard. Jack and Kate hide in the bushes and watch.

There is a distant bark. All the dogs stop and turn toward it. Then, they all suddenly bolt toward the noise.

“Come on!” says Jack “I wonder what they’re doing.”

“Me, too,” says Kate. They run after the dogs and toward the barking. They do not see anybody else because they all work. They arrive at the corner of Evans Street and Dogwood Lane, four blocks away from their house.

There are five dogs attacking a middle-aged woman: a Rottweiler, a pit bull, a bull mastiff, a terrier, and a bull dog. The dogs are barking and snarling savagely. The poor lady is screaming and hollering. Then she notices Jack and Kate. “Please, help me, please!” the woman yells out. She has half her leg bitten off, and there is blood gushing all over the street. It is a gruesome scene. Furgus and the two other dogs are defending the woman being attacked.

“We have to do something!” says Jack.

“Like what?” asks Kate.

“Like get the police,” replies Jack.

“I’ll go get them. It’s two blocks away. You stay here and make sure no one dies,” says Kate. She starts off running on Evans Street and turns down Main Street.

On the other end of Main Street is the police station. She runs up the front steps and rushes into the police station. There’s a desk sergeant. He’s the young man sitting behind the front desk eating a jelly-filled donut.

“Dog attack at the corner of Evans and Dogwood Lane,” blurts out Kate.

“I’ll get somebody on it right away,” says the sergeant through a mouthful of donut. Then he turns around and yells something into the back room. Two cops run out eating more donuts. One is carrying a briefcase labeled “Danny’s To Go Donuts.” They ask Kate to show them where it is.

While they’re running the cops hand her a donut and Kate tells them about Furgus and the two other dogs that are defending the woman.

When they reach the scene the dogs are still fighting. The woman is on the ground gushing blood and crying. Jack is on top of a car throwing rocks at the bad dogs. The cops immediately rush in and carry the woman away from the dogs and call an ambulance and animal control. One of the cops stays with the woman and does first aid. He opens his briefcase. He offers her a donut, but she’s in too much pain, so he just eats it.

The other cop asks Kate to identify Furgus and his friends so he knows which ones to shoot and which ones to give doggy donuts. The officer runs in and throws stale donuts at them. The dogs scatter, but some of them circle back to eat the stale donuts off the ground. He launches jelly bomb donuts in their faces. The jelly gets in their eyes and blinds them.

Animal control shows up to take the bad dogs that are still there to the pound. Jack and Kate watch with open eyes and donut-filled mouths. The ambulance has arrived, and medics are putting the woman in the back of the vehicle. The police have to write their reports and eat more donuts.

“You said you followed your dog here,” the cop asks.

“Yes,” says Kate. The donut cops ask them for more information.

“Well, that was an eventful day,” says Jack.

“It was, and a donut-filled one, too!” says Kate.

Three days later, they receive a knock on the door. “I got it,” says Jack. When he opens the door an official looking man is standing there with a small donut lapel pin.

“I’m Agent Baker with the federal government. Can I talk to you and your parents about the dog attack?” he asks.

“Ok, fine,” says Jack. They all sit down in the living room.

Agent Baker asks some questions like: “Your dog wasn’t attacking the woman? Your dog went to the other dogs attacking the woman, right. Can we follow your dog to more dogs?” Then the man explains what they’re going to do. “The donut cops will come in and follow your dog. They will strategically place bacon-flavored donuts laced with memory serum that will make them forget their violent ways. Do we have your permission to do that?” asks Agent Baker.

“Ok,” says Dad.

“In a couple of days, I will return with the donut cops,” he says.

“Ok,” says Jack. Later Jack tells Kate about Agent Baker.

Two days later, Agent Baker returns. “Is your dog still here?” Agent Baker asks Jack.

“Yes,” says Jack. “What’s the plan?”

“We wait till your dog leaves, and then follow him,” he says. “All we have to do is wait.”

For a while everybody’s just staring out the window waiting for Furgus to crawl under the fence. Before long Furgus goes. They silently follow him to the park where Furgus meets up with the German shepherd and the St. Bernard. The donut cops are there, but this time one is carrying a modified potato launcher. The other has a backpack full of donuts. They pass out powdered sugar donuts to everybody, including the dogs.

Jack, Kate, and the others hide in the bushes and watch. The dogs head down Dogwood Lane. They follow them half of the day before they find the bad dogs. They are all huddled in a group eating a dead rabbit.

Furgus and the other dogs growl at them. The donut cops load the modified potato launcher and take aim. Then **POP**. There’s a flurry of bacon and jelly as the donuts explode on impact. The dogs eat it up viciously. The good dogs have been told “No!” to the donuts so they won’t eat them.

The bad dogs start to walk in circles with a dazed look in their eyes like the jelly on their muzzle. They were friendly that way, and easy to catch.

Agent Baker congratulates everyone on a job well done. They use this method across the country to peacefully tame savage dogs. The dogs and the donut cops get to be in the newspaper.

The donut cops open a new donut shop with three other cops and call it the 5 Cop Donut Shop. Furgus and his friends get a year's supply of bacon-filled donuts.

Jack, Kate, and Dad adopt Furgus's homeless friends, the St. Bernard and the German shepherd. Furgus and his family spend many a happy afternoon eating donuts together.

Haunted Hallows

*The neighborhood haunted house holds a surprise for three daring friends. In **HAUNTED HALLOWS** by **Terri Swift**, three girls find the last thing they expected.*

“Guys, come here,” Sarah says.
“What?” reply Hannah and Nina.
“Let’s go on an adventure.”

A black ugly house sits on 35th Street. It looks like some old lady lived there or either the house was empty. It will be the first time someone is going in the black, rusty house. The house was thought to be empty.

Hannah, Nina and Sarah are all in for a ride. Little do they know they are going on a haunted adventure.

“It’s a legend that the house is haunted starting at a certain time at night when above the house it starts to thunderstorm,” Sarah says.

“No, we should go to the ice cream place,” Nina says.

“No, Nina,” Hannah says. “Ok, so it’s a deal. We’re going to the house down the street,” Sarah says.

“I usually don’t let people know I’m a scaredy cat on some things, but on this one you can call me whatever you want,” Hannah says.

“People, you said you wanted to go on an adventure, so here it is,” Sarah says.

“What if we die?” Nina says.

“We won’t die,” Sarah responded.

“You guys didn’t hear those stories,” Nina says.

“Ooohh, those scary stories about people dying, those are probably make believe. I saw the guy who made up the story at the store the other day,” Hannah says.

“Ok so here we go. We’re not going to die. Ok guys, let’s just go, please, pretty please—for me,” Sarah says, begging.

“Fine,” Hannah says doubtfully. “Ok, but you owe me ice cream afterward,” Nina says.

“OK,” says Sarah in an exciting way.

They break in a window with a bat and climb through very slowly. "Ok, guys, we're in," Sarah says.

"It is actually not that scary. It seems like a regular house," Hannah says.

But at the loud sound of thunder, everyone says, "OMG!"

"Let's go upstairs," Sarah says.

"What are you talking about? Let's leave," Nina says.

"Just come, Nina," Hannah says once the noise settled down.

"Ok, guys, we have to make a plan to get out of here" Sarah says.

"Why do we need plan to go downstairs?" Nina replied.

"This is dangerous. We don't know what we are doing," Sarah says.

"This is our plan. First, Sarah is going to do spy tricks down the stairs quietly. Next, Nina is going to roll down the stairs, then, I'm going to tiptoe down the stairs," Hannah says.

"Are you crazy? We are all going to tiptoe down the stairs and then leave. Ok, got it? Good. Now let's go," Nina says. They walk down the stairs, and on the fifth step they all slip on Nina's extra ice cream.

"Ouch! Really? You just had to bring extra ice cream. I thought I told you we were going to get ice cream on the way back," says Sarah.

"Just in case you may not know, we are not going for ice cream after we leave here," Nina says.

"I guess you got what you wanted, Sarah," Hannah says.

A few seconds later they hear this voice. It's an old lady's voice. "What the heavens is going on? Are you children ok? Why are you in here?" the old lady asks, frightened.

"We are people," Nina replies, also frightened.

"We broke into your house for an adventure, because we thought your house was scary. But it's really not what we expected when it started to thunderstorm," Sarah says fast.

"Sorry, we're just going to leave now," Hannah says while pushing everybody to the door.

"No, stay. I have to say something to say to you young ladies really quick. Just because my house is painted black doesn't mean it is scary. Don't break into a person's house or any house. My house

is not haunted and not a house that the street can talk about," the old lady speaks about.

"We understand. Thank you for not calling the police and for what you said. I'm sure it affected all of us," Sarah says with sympathy.

"Thank you," everyone says as they walk out the door.

"Thanks, guys, this really felt like an adventure," Nina says.

"Also a lesson for the broken window that we have to pay for," Hannah says.

Little Secret

*A brother and sister make a surprising historical discovery. It leads to a mystery from the past they are eager to solve in **LITTLE SECRET** by **Andrew Palmer**.*

It was a hot June day with a sun that has sweltering on Adam and his sister Abigail. "It's hot out here," Abigail said with an ugly expression.

"Stop complaining," Adam exclaimed. "It is only two more blocks until we get home."

"Well, I wasn't the person who forgot his water bottle!" Abigail yelled.

"Geez, calm down."

"Next time just don't forget to bring your water bottle to football practice."

As the twins walked home they saw a paper object half buried in the ground. When Adam was digging out the object, he asked, "What is this?"

"It's a notebook, duh," Abby said with a dumb look on her face.

"I mean, like whose notebook it is. It looks like it's one hundred years old. Duh," Adam mocked.

Adam dusted off the front of the cover, and right there on the cover of the book was a big black and red Nazi sign. Abby felt a lot of fear when she first glanced at the feature. Adam just stared at the book with hatred in his eyes.

"We cannot tell Mum or Dad," Abigail said with fear.

"Why not?"

"Because they might make us stop looking for the other pages."

"Hey, look, it looks like there was a single paper in the notebook," Adam said.

"Well, why don't we look for the paper in Belgium?" Abigail suggested.

"Why Belgium?" Adam asked.

"Because it is the closest Nazi occupation from where we live. Remember we live in Oslo, not Egersund. We went there for a two-month visit. Maybe we can go ask Mum and Dad if we can go to Belgium for a vacation," Abby said.

“Man, we better get home because Mum and Dad are probably worried sick,” Adam said. When Adam and Abigail got home it was about 21:00 hours, and football practice had ended at 20:45 hours. So they were home at about the right time.

Their mum was making *Røkt Laks* (smoked salmon), their favorite meal. Adam and Abby thought that their mum was in a good mood with good news.

They were right. During dinner their mum announced that the family was moving to Belgium because of her new job there. The family started packing that night due to the excitement.

When Abby was packing she thought, “How will I make new friends?”

Adam must have read her thoughts because right after she thought that, Adam said, “It’s ok, Abby, you will find new friends in Belgium. I have to quit my football team, and now I’m looking for another team.”

“Well, what are you trying to say, Adam?” Abby asked.

“I’m trying to say that moving to Belgium is going to be ok,” Adam explained.

The next morning Adam was up at 05:00 hours looking on his MacBook for more information about the Nazis. He found a lot of stuff that he had already learned about like the Holocaust and the invasion in the city that he is moving into called “Operation *Weserübung*.”

In Belgium there was a place where the entire Nazi officer’s notebook of battle plans were stored. Adam thought that the notebook was from a Nazi officer.

When he was done searching the web he examined the book again. He found some faded numbers, but he couldn’t find out what the numbers were. He woke up Abby to help him. “Adam, why are you waking me up at 06:00 hours in the morning?”

“Because I need help. Can you read this writing?”

Adam and Abigail were going to move tomorrow, and it was a big day. “I can’t wait until we get to Belgium!” Adam exclaimed.

Belgium was about three hours away, so it wouldn’t be that long of a drive. When Adam was in the car he had been looking at the notebook, and he figured out what the numbers were in a glare of sunlight. The numbers were 19784 McGee. He thought about the

numbers. Adam asked his mom, "Mom, what's our address to the new house?"

"It's 19784 McGee Street."

With that he had figured out the puzzle. John McGee was a prisoner at one of Hitler's camps, and his number was 19784. That means that the other papers are somewhere in the house.

When the family was at the house Adam took all of his boxes and went straight to his room. He dropped his boxes on the ground and heard a huge crack in the floor.

He moved his boxes out of the way so he could see the crack in the floor. In the crack were notebook papers. They were all shushed together except one. It lay lightly on top of the papers. It was a rather short note that read:

Dear Finders of this book,

My name is John McGee, and I stole all of the Nazi records to try to mess up the system. If you find this during World War II, use it against the Nazis.

Sincerely,

John McGee

Adam told Abby about the discovery, and they read everything. It was like a Hitler to-do list. Adam looked at the bottom and read that Hitler would kill himself if his plan didn't work.

Later that night Abigail and Adam found an old safe in Adam's closet to put the notebook in. They never told anybody about their little secret.

Lost in the City

*It's a great, big, cold world out there, especially if you're a kitten who is usually never far from your owner's side. **LOST IN THE CITY** by **Maggie Kewley** tells how Lola's absence affects Alicia and her family.*

“Come on, Lola! Let's go outside!” Alicia was taking Lola outside to play. Lola came running to her. Lola followed Alicia down the stairs of her apartment building.

It was a warm, fall morning in the city of Manhattan. The sun was shining bright in the clear blue sky. They were going to a nice park that they loved to play in together.

“Where are you?” Alicia looked around the bushes and flowers for Lola. She turned around and saw her kitten sitting with her head tilted to the side. Alicia ran over and tackled Lola, holding her tightly in her arms. Lola nudged her head into Alicia's.

“I love you so much!” Alicia mumbled to Lola. Alicia picked Lola up and went inside.

The day went by, and it was now night. Alicia took Lola up to her room. She had to go to bed early because she had school the next day. She turned off the lights, snuggled up to Lola, and fell asleep.

Alicia's alarm went off. Her eyes shot open. She quickly got dressed and went to the kitchen where her mom was waiting for her.

“Good morning,” her mom said. She had her breakfast bar and her lunch for the day ready.

“Good morning,” replied Alicia. She grabbed her breakfast and lunch. She ran to the door where Lola was waiting for her. She gave Lola a quick kiss and ran out the door.

Alicia had a normal day of seventh grade. When the end of the school day finally came, all Alicia thought about was getting home to Lola.

When the school bus pulled up to her stop, she ran off to get home. She ran through the door, dropped all her stuff, and rushed to her room to see Lola. When she got to her room, she paused for a second. She looked around, but she didn't see her.

She decided to check the kitchen where her food bowl was, and she didn't see her. Alicia's heart started to race. She looked around

the whole house, and there were still no signs of Lola. She ran to her mom, her eyes swelling up with tears.

“Mom! Mom!” Alicia had a nervous tone.

“What’s wrong?”

“Lola! I can’t find her!” She started to worry. She was so in love with Lola that she couldn’t imagine her being lost.

Alicia’s mom got up and walked over to her. “Calm down. She can’t be missing. She was with you just this morning,” she said.

“She must’ve gotten out the door this morning,” Alicia mumbled. Her mom looked at her. “She must’ve followed me out the door this morning. We have to go look for her!”

“We can’t now. It is going to get dark soon, and you have school tomorrow.”

“We can’t just let her be alone out there in the cold night! My poor kitten is probably hungry and freezing!”

“Ok, you and your dad can go out later and look for her.”

“Ok.” Alicia ran up to her room.

A few hours later, Alicia heard her dad walk through the door. She was so worried about Lola.

They got bundled up and went outside. They searched all over for Lola. Alicia thought it was hopeless. Tears started coming from her eyes.

“Lola!” Alicia was shouting for her. “Maybe she is in the park that we always play in!”

Alicia and her dad walked to the park. It was surrounded by apartment buildings. They looked around all the bushes and trees. Then Alicia heard a rumbling in the bushes. She turned the corner and there she was, her kitten with her head tilted. She ran over to Lola and hugged her as tightly as she could. She was never going to let her go again.

They all walked back home. Alicia gave Lola some food and took her up to her room. They got all snuggled up, and both fell asleep.

Mission N.W.H.D.

*When the fate of the country is at stake, the CIA is on the case—but so are a couple of determined teenaged brothers in **MISSION N.W.H.D.** by **Nolan Kamoo.***

“Access granted,” read the door. Nick Sales stepped through the door only to be greeted by his secretary. “Hello, Nick. Is that a new suit? It really goes well with your eyes,” Ms. Fuller said with a beaming smile. Nick’s taste in clothing certainly suited him, and she approved.

All Nick ever wanted was to be in the CIA. And here he was entering the office of the CIA—well, to be more specific, the office of the director of the CIA. Nick shut the door behind him and walked to his desk. As soon as he sat down he froze. On his desk was a folder marked “FOR CIA EYES ONLY.” Whoa, this could be something big.

Nick only dealt with semi-big investigations. But now this was something big. Nick picked up the folder and slowly opened it, cautious of its contents. The heading read “Nuclear Weapon Hard Drive Stolen!” Nick’s eyes darted down the paper. As he skimmed he read that a mysterious figure was spotted by security cameras entering the high-security vault where the hard drive was located. He had stolen it and then escaped unnoticed. The suspected figure is a man named Victor Sanchez. The CIA supposedly thinks he has the stolen hard drive in his laboratory for testing. The laboratory is in Venice, California. Victor has a son, Cal, who attends Burlington High School.

With that, Nick stood up, headed for the door, and thought about his pursuit of finding this hard drive.

The screeching sound of wheels came from the runway as the plane landed in California. Nick’s nose, buried deep into magazines about Victor Sanchez, bumped as the plane landed. He grabbed his carry-on luggage and headed toward the airport.

The chauffeur waiting for him was holding a sign labeled “Rick Fairly.” This was Nick’s code name from now on. He walked toward the chauffeur. “Hello,” said Nick. The chauffeur said nothing, but

grabbed Nick's bag and started toward the car. "Well. So much for greetings." Nick hopped into the car.

The chauffeur drove toward the hotel. When Nick got out the chauffeur said, "Have a nice stay" with a smile.

"Thanks," Nick said. Nick just needed a little sleep. He checked in and walked up to his room. Exhausted, Nick collapsed on the bed and fell into a deep sleep.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, soon-to-be-very-important sixteen-year-old brothers Sean and Daniel were getting ready for bed. They brushed and hopped into bed. Off went the lights.

The next day when the boys woke up, they got ready and headed off to school. Daniel and Sean attended their classes as usual. At lunch Cal, their seventeen-year-old best friend, walked past them. All he said was, "Meet me at my house today after school."

At two o'clock sharp, Sean and Daniel biked over to Cal's house. Daniel and Sean had told their mom they were going out for ice cream that day. As soon as they got there, they knocked on the door.

Cal let them in and took them to his room. "Hey, guys, I wanted to talk to you about my step-dad. I overheard him talking about how he stole a nuclear weapon hard drive and has it being tested in his lab. The nuclear weapon has the power to crack a nuclear weapon or plant's code so you can ignite any weapon. My step-dad is trying to crack another code to get access to the hard drive to be used. I think he said his first target was the Fermi power plant. He is going to try to ignite the reactors! He stole a nuclear hard drive a few weeks ago from the CIA, and I don't know what to do. I don't want to go to the police because they won't believe me."

The boys turned back and whispered to each other. "Should we help him?" said Daniel.

"I think we should, He is our friend, and he was there when we needed help," said Sean. The boys turned back.

"We will help," said Daniel bravely. Sean nodded his head.

"You would do that for me?" said Cal, surprised.

They walked back out to the front of the house and outside to their bikes. They pedaled home. "There are a lot of people counting on us," Sean said.

“Definitely,” Daniel replied.

When they got home they finished their homework. They ate dinner and talked about their day with their family. Of course, neither Daniel nor Sean mentioned the secret meeting with Cal to anyone.

After dinner they hung out, and by then it was ten o’clock. They got ready for bed and hopped into their beds. Both were so exhausted they just fell right asleep.

In the morning, the boys quietly got ready. They left a note for their mom saying they were going to the water park all day. They rode their bikes to school, making sure they had the decoy hard drive. They stepped into Cal’s car. Cal drove them to the cliff of the beach. Below you could see Victor’s laboratory had guards around it. Cal said, “Follow me.”

Both Daniel and Sean slid out of the car and started following down the cliff. The overview of the laboratory looked very secured. When they came to the edge of the laboratory, before them stood a metal door. Cal slid his access card into the key holder, and the door whooshed open. Cal walked through the multiple hallways with Daniel and Sean creeping every step of the way. Each step brought them closer and closer to where the hard drive was held. When they came close to it they heard voices from Victor’s office. “The hard drive has finished its process, sir.”

Another voice said, “Go check on it and prepare it for access.”

“Yes, sir,” the first voice replied.

“Yes, this is our chance!” Cal said. Sean and Daniel nodded. They waited slowly for the guards to pass. Cal, Daniel, and Sean proceeded toward the lab and came to its tinted glass door.

Cal slid his access card into place once more and then told the boys, “If you get in trouble there is a door on the left side of the room that holds the hard drive. Simply run out it if you are in trouble. You get the hard drive because I can’t be seen here. It will compromise everything.”

Daniel and Sean walked through the lab. The lab had many things including weapons in testing. The lab was filled with all kinds of technology, and in the back was a concealed room. The laboratory looked like it was used to hack many things before, and now, the hard drive.

The boys walked into the room where the hard drive was. Before they touched anything they got the decoy out. When Daniel

pulled the real hard drive out, an alarm went off. "Oh, no!" said Sean. They quickly slipped the replica into place and ran toward the exit Cal told them about. They pushed the door open and ran out. There stood three guards and Victor Sanchez himself.

"Well, well, well," said Victor. Daniel tucked the hard drive into his pocket. "Why don't you hand over the hard drive, kid?"

"I don't have the hard drive," Sean said, which was totally true, because actually Daniel had it.

Just as Sean said that, four sounds of voices yelling, "FREEZE!" rang out. The guards looked behind them and froze. Three SWAT members had just arrived with a CIA member behind them. Just then Cal came out. The guards, including Victor, raised their hands behind their heads. "How could you!" said Victor.

"You're a criminal," replied Cal.

Behind the SWAT members was a man. "Mr. Sanchez," said the CIA official, "you're under arrest for stealing government property. Hi, I'm Nick. Do you have the hard drive, boys?" asked Nick.

"I have it right here," Daniel said, handing over the hard drive.

"Thank you so much," said Nick.

When the whole ordeal was over, and Victor was put in cuffs, Nick took Daniel and Sean home. "Again, thank you so much," said Nick.

"Well, all we can say now," Daniel and Sean said together, "is mission accomplished!"

The Mission

*Astronaut training involves many kinds of knowledge. In **THE MISSION** by **Tony Bachour**, members of a team will need all their skills once training gives way to unexpected active duty.*

One day at the space training academy Carly was learning how to arm bombs.

“You need to turn this dial exactly one hundred eighty degrees around or the pressure will be wrong,” informs bomb expert Lisa.

“Ok, ok, I got it, don't worry,” replies Carly.

“Don't worry,” Lisa says sarcastically. “If this wasn't a fake bomb we would have been in a crater by now.”

“Really,” Carly says. “I think I am doing a pretty good job.”

“Yeah, well, training's over, so you can stop,” says Lisa.

“Ok, I'm tired anyway,” replies Carly as she gets up and walks toward the door next to Lisa. She reaches for the doorknob, turns the handle, and pushes the door open, revealing a big training hall, where many cadets are training to become some of America's best astronauts.

“Hey, Lisa,” Carly says.

“What?” replies Lisa.

“I was wondering, how are you so good with handling bombs?” asks Carly.

“Well, my dad was the best, and he taught me everything he knew,” informed Lisa.

“Oh, he must have been really good then,” Carly said with a laugh.

“Yeah.” Lisa also had a laugh. “Come on, time for our daily workout routine.” They walk up the steps to the workout room. They walk into the room, and are surprised to see three men already there.

“Whoa, look at these guys,” Carly said.

“Hey,” Lisa said with a loud voice, “we have this room reserved for twelve thirty,” Lisa told them.

“Oh, sorry,” one of the men got up and said “My name is James, and that's Tyler.”

“Hi,” Tyler said with a smile.

“And this is Mathew,” James informed.

“Hey, I’m Carly, and this is Lisa,” says Carly.

“Hi,” says Lisa as she smiles.

“I guess we lost track of time,” said James. “C’mon, boys, let’s go.” James and Tyler got up, and Mathew put his weights down and went with them as they walked out the door, which left Lisa and Carly to their workout. Lisa was lifting dumbbells, and Carly was sitting on the bench wiping her face from sweat with a towel.

“Lisa,” Carly said.

“Yeah?” Lisa said.

“I think we should have let those boys stay. We could have trained with them,” Carly said.

“Why?” Lisa asked.

“I don’t know. I mean, they looked kind of cute,” Carly said.

“Hey, our time is up,” Lisa informed “C’mon, let’s go.”

Lisa put down the dumbbells, and Carly put her towel down and got up off the bench. They both headed for the door. Lisa opened the door. They both went up the stairs to the corridor of rooms. When they found their room, Lisa used their card to unlock the door. They both went to their bedrooms and got ready for bed and went to sleep.

It was the next morning. “Hey, Lisa, what are we doing today?” Carly asked as she was eating her bowl of cereal.

“We have a class in ten minutes,” Lisa replied.

“Oh, yeah, I forgot,” Carly said while putting her empty bowl in the sink. They gathered their things and walked down the corridor.

“Hey, Lisa, what’s that class about?” Carly asked.

“It’s about how to plant coordinates,” Lisa explained.

“Oh,” Said Carly.

When they reached the classroom they were surprised to see that James, Tyler, and Mathew were already there. “Hey, are you guys here for the class?” asked Lisa.

“Yeah, are you?” said James.

“Yup,” replied Lisa.

When the teacher walked into the room they started the class. He told them that they need to find the place where they want to plant the coordinates. Then they need to press the blue button, and the coordinates will be set. Right when he had finished what he was saying, the alarm that signals class is over went off, so they all got

their things and left. When the five astronauts went outside, a voice on the loudspeaker caught their attention.

“Will astronauts Lisa, Carly, James, Tyler, and Mathew please report to head command center immediately,” the loudspeaker squeaked.

Soon they all met up at command center. “Were here,” informed Carly.

A man approached them. “I am the chief, but you can call me John,” he proclaimed. “I called you here because there is a meteor heading toward Earth and we need you to stop it,” John informed. “Are you up for the job?”

They all accepted, and John told them the plan. “Lisa, the pilot: You are to steer the ship. Carly, you are the copilot. If anything were to happen to Lisa, you steer the ship. James, you are the navigator. You are to make sure where the meteor is and that there’s no danger in the way. Tyler, you are to deploy landing gear upon approach to the meteor. Finally Mathew, you are going to prep all the ground gear and the bomb for when you land. Everyone got that?” John asked. “Once you land you need to plant the bomb and set the missile coordinates!” John exclaimed.

“But, John, why do we need a missile and a bomb?” Lisa asked.

“Because the meteor is so big that a missile or a bomb by itself would only take away half the meteor. We need both at the same time for a big enough blast!” he explained. “So did you get all that?”

“Yes!” they all yelled.

“Then get up their and GET RID OF THAT METEOR!” John yelled.

They prepped up and launched. They were in space when Tyler sighted the meteor. It was hurling toward Earth faster than ever. Lisa quickly but gently got close and lowered the ship onto the meteor. At that time James hit a button and deployed the landing gear. As soon as they hit the ground, they immediately got off, and got to the position where they needed to place the bomb.

“Ok, guys, plant it here,” informed Lisa.

They set the bomb down, and Lisa took over. She hooked it into place, linked the bomb to the trigger, and turned the pressure dial exactly one hundred eighty degrees around. “Ok, it’s set,” Lisa informed. “Now let’s go plant the coordinates.”

When they got to the spot, Carly moved up and used her coordinating machine to set the coordinates. “Coordinates are set,”

Carly informed. And with that said they all got back on the ship and started heading toward Earth.

When they were halfway there they called the chief. "Chief, launch the missile to the coordinates," James said.

"Ok, launching now," the chief replied.

Then Tyler chimed in, "Ok, Lisa, detonate the bomb on my signal."

"Got it." Lisa said.

"Not yet, not yet," Tyler was waiting so he could detonate the bomb at the exact time as the missile hit. "NOW!" Tyler yelled, and Lisa detonated the bomb.

The missile and the bomb blew up, turning the meteor into a thousand pieces of rock that hurled out of Earth's orbit. Everyone was cheering because the world didn't end, all thanks to five brave astronauts that will be forever remembered.

Lisa proudly steered the spaceship to Earth. When they landed they were praised by all the people at base who were thankful to have astronauts like them.

The Night

THE NIGHT by *Te'Ray Rayford* reveals an evil presence cloaked in darkness. Will an unlikely band of heroes save the day—or, rather, the night?

It was a good and fun night in Las Vegas when things started to go wrong. People were dying. “Hey, Brady, what’s going on?” said Andrew. “People are just lying on the ground dead?”

After walking through the city to find whatever was killing everyone, they were walking through the streets, when they saw LeBron James. Andrew asked him what he was doing there. He said, “I am trying to find the alien that is killing everyone.” Brady and Andrew decided to try and capture the alien. LeBron was in on the plan, too.

After walking some more through the streets of Las Vegas, they finally found an alien, but it was dead. Who could have killed it? Brady heard a sound coming from one of the buildings, so they went inside to investigate. LeBron took the lead. They entered the building. There they found Dwayne Wade. Now they had enough people for the plan to work.

When they all were in the building they saw an alien. Surprisingly, the building they were in had guns in it, so they got them. It was going to take a lot to kill this alien. Dwayne Wade stayed in the building with a sniper rifle. Brady had an M16, Andrew had a machine gun, and LeBron had a knife.

Andrew and Brady shot at the alien to distract it. Then Dwayne shot the alien in the head, and finally the alien was weakened. LeBron came in with the knife and stabbed the alien in the back. He was finally dead.

After he died, people started getting up off the ground. It turns out, the people were only dead temporarily. Everyone was surrounding the alien. They got rid of the alien and continued with their lives.

Brady and Andrew did get labeled as heroes when they got back home. They became really famous and rich and lived a really nice life. Dwayne Wade and LeBron went back to their nice lives in South Beach, Florida playing for the Miami Heat in the NBA. Their fans were happy that they were okay.

After a few months, Andrew and Brady met up with Lebron and Dwayne Wade and had a party in Las Vegas together. This time there were no aliens to worry about. They all had a great time. After the party Andrew and Brady decided to move to South Beach with Lebron and Dwayne Wade.

Overboard!

*There is fun to be had both onboard and ashore in **OVERBOARD!** by Jenna Ringler. Then there is that unexpected exit from the ship....*

“**F**inally I get to go on a cruise!” Paul said. Paul has never been on a cruise before. In fact he has only been on a vacation six times in his life. This was his “lucky 7” vacation. He was too caught up in thought. He forgot to get ready before work that morning, and when he got there, he was still in his pajamas. He worked at Mickey’s Pancake House in Detroit, Michigan.

“I can’t wait to go on my cruise,” Paul said. “I have never been on a cruise before, and each day I get more excited and excited.”

Finally a week before, Paul started packing his bags and going shopping. Paul got to fly to Mexico where his cruise was.

The plane ride went really well, thought Paul as he got off the plane, especially for it being the first plane Paul has been on.

When the next day arrived, he got to board the ship. He took all his stuff to his cabin and got settled. Then he decided to wander the ship. There was stuff like malls with candy shops and clothes stores, basketball courts, ping pong tables, a pool, a bar, game room, and a rock climbing wall. Paul liked them all. There were also lots of workers and a dining room. Then the ship set sail to its first island.

Paul did most of the things and went in all the shops. There was a lot of cool stuff. “The ship was really cool and had tons of stuff to do,” Paul said. “It is really late, so I think I will go to bed,” said Paul.

Paul had a great night’s sleep. When Paul woke up that morning they were at their first island on the cruise, Key West. He went on the island and was there for most of the day. He went to the beach, and he went to a lot of shops. He got lots of candy and a few shirts. He had so much stuff he could barely carry it all. He was having tons of fun because he doesn’t go shopping for clothes a lot. If he does go shopping, he only gets a few things.

Paul had to board the ship again before it left. He went to eat and then played some games. *I think it is time for bed now. I had a long day.*

When Paul woke up they were still going to the next island Coco Cay in the Bahamas. The ship got there at 8:30 A.M. He spent most of the day at the beach. There were water slides, rafts in the water, and, of course, a sandcastle contest.

That was so much fun, Paul said to himself. It's time to board the ship again, so we can go to the next island.

Now it was Paul's bedtime.

When Paul got up, they were at the next island, Nassau. He got off the ship and went shopping in the stores. He got tons of fun stuff. He got Nassau t-shirts, a shark tooth necklace, and a snow cone! He went to eat at Honey Hollies, and the food there was great. He went shopping more and got gifts for his family. Then Paul had to get back on the ship so they could go back home.

When it was dark outside, Paul decided to go for a walk around the edge of the boat on the path. He was looking over the edge at the water and fell in!

As he was falling, he was hoping that he didn't get hurt from hitting something, and he was wondering when he fell in the water how much it would hurt.

Once Paul was in the water, all he could think of doing is screaming for help and staying above water so he didn't drown, but that was hard even though he's a good swimmer.

Paul was swimming after the boat, but he saw no hope. Then he kept asking himself questions like, "Are there any sharks? Would they eat me? Are there any jellyfish? How long will I be swimming? I'll never make it. This is so tiring, I'm going to drown."

He started swimming to his left, and then when the sun rose he saw an island and started swimming there. It took him forever for him to get there. When he got there, he knew he had to get some water.

Paul walked around and found a little stream. Paul had some water and started calling to see if anyone was there. There was no one there, and Paul thought that was a bad sign. "I don't even know why I swam here. I'll never make it!" Paul said.

Is that an animal? Yes, I think it's an iguana! I think iguanas eat grass or vegetation. That must mean there is something near here.

That gave Paul some hope. But then he started asking himself all sorts of questions. "What am I going to do? How far away is the vegetation? How can I warm up? Oh, I know what I can do. I can

attempt to make a fire! But what do I need again, wet wood or dry wood? I think it was dry wood. I'll try that."

After a while, Paul got the fire going even though he hadn't thought he could. *But now that I'm warm, I'm hungry*, thought Paul. "Are those berries over there? Yes they are. Can I eat them? I think so."

Paul had the berries, and they were fine. They were actually really good, considering he hadn't had food for a few days. Then Paul saw a different kind of berry, so he went over and tried those. Those were not as good. They tasted horrible actually.

After about three days, there was a plane flying overhead. The pilot and passengers saw Paul's fire. Paul had made the fire for two reasons: one was to stay warm, and two was to get someone's attention. He knew they saw him because they looked out the window of the plane and gave him a thumbs-up. Then they called someone to come pick him up.

Once Paul was on the plane, the people on the plane kept asking him questions like, "Where do you live?" and "How you are feeling?" and "Do you need food or water?"

"Can I have some water? I am so thirsty!" Paul said. Paul had some water and no longer felt so thirsty.

After that the people on the plane asked him what happened. Paul told them the whole story. That took a long time.

It took a day or two to get back from the island and home, but he did make it. When he got back home everyone was wondering where he had been, and Paul had to keep explaining it over again and again. This was definitely a vacation of Paul's life, but not the kind he expected.

After Paul had been home for a while, he got his job back at Mickey's Pancake House. He worked as a cashier, and then a waiter. After seven years of working there, he became the restaurant manager.

This definitely changed Paul, and he would remember it for the rest of his life.

The Plague

*Cassie has done nothing wrong, but her government has exiled her to a harsh existence with little hope of survival. **THE PLAGUE** by **Kurt Mirafior** paints a picture of a society that is out of control.*

Cassie awoke in an unfamiliar place, with a blinding sun and bile-colored sky.

Her head was pounding, a mess of jumbled thoughts and memories pushing against her head. The horrible ache kept her guessing what had happened.

Simple, short flashes helped her remember: her body being dragged across the backyard and being thrown into a helicopter; the sounds of her family screaming behind her; the rough motion of being slammed into the hard, cracked earth.

She was chosen; she was one of the fifteen. She was in the Wasteland—the painful reminders of humanity's dark past.

Weakly, Cassie pushed herself up to survey her surroundings.

Hints of trees lingered in the background. The ground was hard, cracked; it looked like a barren desert. She felt different in this odd landscape. It was like she did not belong.

But Cassie was not one to easily give up. Pushing all thoughts of fear, she sprinted toward the dead trees, determination in her eyes.

Dying was no choice. The sounds of her brother's screaming resonated in her head.

Survival was the only option.

* * *

Vanessa's heels clicked on the white floor as she made her way to President Cyprian Variola's office.

She pushed the office door, seeing Variola at his desk, rapidly clicking away. She took a short while to compose herself. "Hello, Variola," she said sharply, not even trying to disguise the anger in her voice.

He gestured for her to sit. Pulling his computer screen away, he faced her, a sinister emotion on his face.

"Drop the act, Vanessa," he said, viciously sweet.

Vanessa took no more hints. She crossed her arms, and, looking

at him aggressively, said, "Why have you called me here?"

Putting his glasses down, he stared up at the ceiling, as if about to start a speech.

"Do you know why we send fifteen people out each year?" he asked her.

"To die," she responded bluntly.

He gave a dangerous chuckle. "Partly, but that is far from the point. To properly rule a city, especially this one, Vanessa, you have to give the people some form of hope. Feed them lies disguised as truths. Give them peace when you want war. Act wisely when, really, you act deceitful. We send fifteen out not to control the population, but to control the people. To make them act peacefully, so they won't want to get into the Wasteland. So they won't get chosen," he finished gracefully.

Vanessa huffed. "Of course I know *that*, Variola. I'm not stupid. I'm not the people," she said, trying to get the point.

"Ah, but do you? Why would I tell you something you already know?" he asked, a strange tone in his voice. It was like he was a snake, hissing, almost daring her to fight.

Vanessa did not respond. For the first time, she was truly afraid of him.

"Believe it or not, I made the plague. The one that destroyed the world, the that started wars, you know that plague. But that is not the point, either. I wanted to give humanity a new beginning. I wanted to know what a fake start would do to them, what effects it would have when they finally found out that all of this was fake. This is a new start, Vanessa. For *all* of us," he said.

Vanessa stood up, shocked. He was a genetic scientist. He was trying to jumpstart a new evolution of humans, all by expanding upon the aggression they would have when they found out that the peace was fake.

"If any of those fifteen people get out this year, they'll be the first models," he said happily, but it sounded more like sadism.

"Variola, I don't know what game you're playing, but I assure you it's the wrong one. You saw how genetic experiments went back then," she tried to argue, but she already knew she had failed.

"It will be great, Vanessa. These new humans will not be able to experience happiness, peace, hope. They will know that those are simply figments of human imagination, that those beliefs are fake. They will believe in war, destruction, and violence, because that is

the only way to forge a proper society," he said to her.

Vanessa quickly got out of the door. She always knew there was something dark, something inhuman stirring in Variola's mind.

She never expected him to go that far.

She needed to get to the Wasteland.

* * *

"And that's all you need to know," William finished. Dirt and grime still covered his short blond hair, even as he tried to wipe it off.

He had saved Cassie when she had tried to drink out of the river. After taking her to his underground base, hidden by leaves, he had explained everything about the genetically-altered forest.

The sap of the trees were poisonous, and the rivers were all acidic. The only safe food was wheat and fruits in the trees and plants, and the only water was from the rain (although sometimes it rained blood). Mutated animals, like bears, deer, and crows, also roamed the forest.

"So, wait, how do you get the ammo again?" Cassie asked, holding a shock gun in her hand. It was basically a small pistol that shot electricity. Her mother would not have approved. Cassie quickly shook the thought away. Thoughts of family were still too painful.

"Guards patrol here sometimes. Foreign ones, from another place, but I don't really know," William said quietly, his head down.

Cassie understood and shivered. Killing someone had never occurred to her, not until now.

"We need to get more food," he said, and suddenly stood up.

She also stood up and saw he was right. An apple and a bundle of blueberries wouldn't last them long.

William walked out of the tunnel and thrust himself up in order to escape the underground base. He reached his arm out, pulling Cassie along with him.

They were barely out, when suddenly, a blast of electricity smacked the ground around them.

"Mason, you're a complete jerk!" William screamed, jumping sideways. Cassie was startled, and almost fell into the ground. The boy, Mason, grabbed her before she fell. He laughed at her expression, and she slapped his arm away.

"You two know each other?" she asked.

"Yes! He's the annoying jerk-face I've kept up with for over three weeks!" William said sarcastically. Judging from his expression, Cassie knew he wanted to say a stronger word.

"Please, Will. You've fallen for that prank three times. Anyway, I've got the food," Mason said, holding up a bag of fruits and berries.

"Whatever. Throw it in the base," William said.

"And who's this?" Mason asked William after exchanging more insults.

Cassie cut Will off before he could answer. "Cassie. I just awoke three hours ago and I'm fairly new here." She blushed, shaking his hand.

Will suddenly shushed them. There was a strange noise, something different about the air.

Cassie was confused. Before she could say anything, Mason clamped her mouth shut with his hand. He gestured for her to go into the base.

But it was too late.

The crows came upon them like a storm, talons and wings whipping around them in the form of a tornado. Their horrible cawing filled the air, guttural screams that sounded so unearthly they sounded alien. Bloody red eyes surveyed their prey.

The trio screamed, but Cassie was the most terrified. She screamed and flailed her arms. *This is not real. This cannot be real!* she screamed inside her head.

Mason swiftly pulled his shock gun from his belt and began firing. Electrical pulses filled the air, crimson blood spilling on the group.

The birds retreated as quickly as they had come. A final shriek filled the air, and then the crows were gone.

Cassie was on the ground, crying, blood on her shoulders.

Mason and William quietly pulled her up, not saying a word as they pulled her underground.

* * *

"George, stop right here!" Vanessa instructed the pilot. She got out of the copter and sprinted across the forest. There had to be a survivor here.

And then she found them.

There were two boys holding up a broken girl, struggling to keep her up. There was desperation in her face, a hollow, deep sadness. Vanessa went cold with anger. She had only begun to understand Variola's sadism.

She pulled them into the helicopter, quietly stuffing them into the backseats.

"Will, Cassie, keep alert. She's working with Variola," Mason whispered, but Vanessa still heard.

"Variola means nothing to me," she said, a rigid tone in her voice. George was sleeping, so she quickly administered a drug into him to keep him that way. George was Variola's best asset. She couldn't trust him. Pulling him into the second seat, she took control of the cockpit.

In the early morning, if you squinted, you could see the faintest light signaling the arrival of a helicopter.

* * *

They had sneaked into one of the government buildings during the afternoon. *The peace and trust thing must be going very well*, Vanessa thought. She guided them around the building, stopping at Variola's office door. She motioned for them to listen.

"You must not tell them about this, listen to me. If they find out about this genetic experiment, they will rebel," Variola's muffled voice shot through the door.

"Yes, sir."

"Now, please go outside and go into the Wasteland and find any survivors. Also, please bring this shock gun. The group beside the door forgot about the security camera installed into my door," Variola said, whispering so they couldn't hear.

BOOM!

A large blast of electricity, almost like a lightning bolt, struck Mason in the chest.

"Mason!" Cassie screamed, trying to rush over to him, but William and Vanessa pulled her back into another hallway. Mason fell on the floor, spasms sparking over his body, the scent of burned flesh entering the air.

"He's gone, Cassie. Variola will kill him," Vanessa said quietly, small tears forming in her eyes.

"He's not gone! He's right there!" Cassie argued weakly. Mason

had saved them. You didn't just turn your backs on people who reached out to you.

William sighed, clapping Cassie's back.

"You can't save him, Cassie. I knew him, if only for three weeks. He spent *five years* in the Wasteland. He's going somewhere better." William pulled her back, out of the building and into the city.

William tried to be strong. But eventually, he also broke down, silent tears streaming down his face.

Cassie turned around, facing her back on the building. She felt hollow, empty, like nothing mattered anymore.

Vanessa grabbed her shoulders. "Look, I'm sorry. There's no inspirational quote, no beautiful rhyme, or amazing speech I can give you to make his death less striking. But I will say this—no one dead would like to see anyone they love walking around all sad and depressed, like they're dead too. It took forever for me to learn this. Especially since my brother died," Vanessa consoled her.

Cassie, nodding, slowly lifted her head up.

She was not dead. She was alive.

* * *

EPILOGUE

Cassie's essay on the Wasteland as requested by her therapist

Dear Mrs. Oxford,

The Wasteland is a horrible place for me. It is not because of the rusty-colored sky, or the poisonous forest. It is because of what I have experienced.

That place changes you. It breaks you, and it takes every piece of your humanity away. It forces you to grow up too fast. And it molds you into a person you never wanted to be. For William and Mason, it made them kill.

And for me? It made me almost die.

I'm not talking literally, like that moment with the crows. It shattered me on the inside, tore away my innocence. It made me feel like nothing mattered anymore. When Mason died, I think I almost died too.

But you helped me through it.

We do not break when life throws something our way. We break when we let the pain lie there and don't try to push it away. It's an endless battle, I would know. I never stopped hurting from the memory of Mason's death, and I never will.

It's just on some days, the pain seems bearable. On some days, I can deal with it. On some days, I feel something that is almost, *almost* happiness.

And on others, I feel like I want to die.

But I can't die, not for Mason. I'm not dead, I'm alive.

And I thank you for teaching me that.

Thank you for helping me.

Thank you, Vanessa.

Sincerely,
Cassie

A Quest for Redemption

In A QUEST FOR REDEMPTION by Adrienne Konopka, life and death become intertwined. Are two children and a young man clever enough to earn a second chance from Hades himself?

Stephen opened his eyes. There was absolute darkness. It was so dark it seemed to be pressing up against his eyes. As his eyes slowly got a little more adjusted to the darkness he could just make out swirling mist and sulking shadows. Where was he? The last thing he remembered was a large pain; then, darkness. Reflectively he looked down at his chest. To his amazement he saw a large, dark wound closing up and healing before his eyes.

Stephen lived his life as a crook. He knew it wasn't right, but he felt it was his only option left. He had dropped out of school and then had never gotten himself a job. He had dropped out in order to take care of his sister who had gotten grievously ill. None of the healers had known what to do. She had a red tongue and throat, fever, headache, rash, and swelling. They had tried to make her as comfortable as possible, but nevertheless she died. His mother became thoroughly depressed, and he then took care of his mother for a time.

He lived in a rather poor neighborhood in Greece. They lived in small, wooden shacks along a long, dusty road. It was about a mile walk to any of the nearest big cities. Stephen needed money to help support his mother, father, and self, so he took up stealing. He stole everything from everyone. He stole precious jewels and metals, cotton, wool, food, everything that they needed. He was extremely good at what he did and had never gotten caught—except for once, and he had paid with his life.

He was trying to steal from the home of Pericles, who was the leading politician, or the leading governor, and he had had his eye on a certain diamond necklace that he owned. Stephen had watched the house for some time and was sure that the house was unoccupied. When he entered Pericles' house he was amazed at the riches that were inside. He had a throne, which was a type of stool only the wealthy in Greece had. It was decorated with precious stones such as rubies, diamonds, and peridot. He had a rich, lush, red carpet that ran all through the house. There were portraits of

various relatives and family. The couches around the room were made with feather down and had an animal hide covering.

Stephen wasn't sure exactly where the necklace was, but he was fairly certain it was somewhere in the back of the house. Just as he was reaching that conclusion he heard a small creak to the left of him, where the bathrooms were. He froze and waited anxiously, straining his ears trying to hear any other noises. Mentally he belittled himself, cursing that he wasted so much time admiring the décor. He heard another creaking step that someone was taking.

Forgetting all pretenses he called out, "Who's there? Show yourself!"

A sly voice answered, "Certainly." Heart beating wildly Stephen looked around, trying to identify if the voice was indeed coming from the bathroom.

"Thief!" someone shouted as they leapt before Stephen.

Stephen remembered feeling faintly surprised as a javelin appeared in his chest. The last thing he remembered before he succumbed to darkness was the leering face of Pericles.

As Stephen was remembering the occurrence of those facts he concluded that he was probably dead. Growing up he had heard all of the stories about the Underworld: all of the stories about Hades, Persephone, and Charon, although somehow it had never really sunk in. This must be the afterlife, so cold and lonely. And why else would his wound have healed up? It was obviously some sort of magic.

He suddenly became aware that he was being watched. His eyes had become accustomed to the lack of darkness when he noticed two fuzzy shapes hiding behind a juniper bush. He started to walk toward them, deciding that nothing bad could happen to him. After all, if he was dead he couldn't die again, right?

As he approached the bush the two shadowy figures suddenly stepped forward to meet him. Stephen could see that they were a boy and a girl. The girl had long auburn hair that was put up in a high ponytail. Her hair was the same colors as the leaves in fall. The boy had short blonde hair. His hair was in a buzz cut.

Stephen looked warily at them, wondering if they posed a threat. They were both wearing tattered clothes, and looked dirty and tired. Deciding to make the first move Stephen went to

introduce himself. "Hello, my name is Stephen. What are your names?"

The boy introduced them both. "My name is Calix, and this is Iris. We met up just a little while ago and decided to stick together."

Iris looked at Stephen and blurted out, "How did you die?" Realizing that was rude she blushed crimson and looked down.

Stephen didn't mind, though, and said, "I was impaled by a javelin. How about you guys?" Iris and Calix looked at him like he was joking. "Really!" Stephen said defensively.

Calix then said, "I drowned in the Mediterranean Sea trying to save a sheep." He looked at them like he was silently daring anyone to contradict him, or laugh at dying to try to save a sheep.

Iris said, "Now my death seems not as dramatic. I died while trying to harvest grain, and accidentally got hit by my mother with a sickle."

"That's still pretty dramatic." Stephen conceded. "I used to be a thief. But now, looking back at my life, I do feel really quite remorseful about all that I have done. I think that if I just had one more chance to live I would change my ways. I have hurt my family even more now that there is less income coming in." Stephen sighed and looked away into the distance at the River Styx and where he could just make out Hades' palace. He looked back to see the others exchanging a look.

"What is it?" Stephen asked.

"Well, Calix and I were talking about that before you came along. Both of us are very sad that we died as well. We were talking, and we were wondering if Hades could maybe give us a second chance to live." Iris looked at him, waiting for him to respond.

Stephen scoffed at the idea. "Hades would never give us a second chance to live. That guy is cold-hearted." Iris looked let down at Stephen's response.

"We might as well try; we really have nothing to lose. We're going to spend the rest of our miserable existence here otherwise. I know we're just postponing the inevitable, but why not?" Calix said, coming to Iris' aid with his quiet response.

Stephen looked at him and shrugged. "Fine, then. Why not?"

Iris motioned them to follow and turned toward the outline of Hades' palace. "We might as well start now." Grudgingly Stephen and Calix followed her.

As they grew nearer and nearer to the palace Stephen was amazed and somewhat frightened by the palace. It was huge, nearly eight stories high. The palace was as black as midnight but seemed to be strangely darkly illuminating the gardens. The light seemed to be coming from within the walls themselves. The garden around the palace was absolutely dead. Short, yellow grass came up from the ground with black roses and flowers made of jewels. There was fire underneath the palace making everything stifling hot. It was beautiful but also absolutely chilling.

The trio walked up to the great black doors and knocked. On either side of the doors there were skeletons keeping guard. They leered at the kids as they anxiously waited for the doors to open—or not. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the great doors opened.

“Hades must want to see us!” Iris said excitedly. Together the three of them entered the palace, on a quest to find Hades and change their luck.

When they entered the palace Stephen was blown away, almost literally. Strong gusts of frigid air were blowing straight at them. It was sub-zero in the castle. It was so cold that all of them could see their breath in the air. “I thought maybe it would be a little warmer, ‘cause, you know, we’re kind of in the Underworld. There’s a giant fire under this palace. Wouldn’t that warm things up?” Calix said through chattering teeth.

“Come on, suck it up,” Iris said, although she too was shivering. “Let’s go find Hades.”

As they walked toward Hades’ chamber, because they knew where it was from stories, Stephen was drinking in the scenery. The walls seemed to be made of obsidian, yet there was something unearthly about them. They seemed to be glowing. The floors were made of granite, and there was a blood red carpet running along the hallway. The ceiling was domed and high, making the illusion of being in the bottom of a deep, dark well. There were various pictures of Hades, dead bodies, spirits, and the vegetation, topography, and water of the Underworld on the walls.

“We’re here,” Iris said, breaking his train of thought. Sure enough, Stephen recognized the symbol of the Helm of Darkness on the doors in front of him.

The Helm of Darkness is a helmet that makes the wearer invisible. Hades was known for using it to sneak around and cause mischief.

With a long, drawn-out groan of wood against metal, the doors began to open. As Stephen walked in the first thing he noticed was the unnatural chill and darkness. A large throne dominated the scene, in which Hades was seated. On either side of the throne a pair of skeletons stood at attention.

Hades was a tall, dark man, with a neatly trimmed goatee and curly dark hair. His skin was very pale, and seemed almost waxy, like a vampire's. But it was his eyes that chilled Stephen the most. They were absolutely black, with no pupils or irises. When Stephen looked into them he saw horrible events and terrible things that had happened to him in his life. He saw his sister dying, kids making fun of him, his grandfather's funeral, and other terrible things. They also were full of mischief, and Stephen felt all of a sudden, very surely, that Hades had only wanted to see them for his own amusement, though Stephen wasn't sure where the amusement would come from.

"What brings you here to my home, my realm, the Underworld?" Hades asked in a voice like frozen fire.

"Umm...." The children were lost for words, stuck looking in Hades' hypnotizing eyes, stuck looking at the terrible images from their past and others that were happening right now. Stephen snapped out of the daze they were all in first and managed to lower his eyes from Hades' and form a response.

"We were...we were hoping to have another...another chance at life," Stephen mumbled, scared to look at Hades, fearful of his reaction. Instead Hades leaned back and laughed. It was bone-tingling, spine-chillingly cold, and made all of the hairs on Stephen's neck stand up.

"And why do you think that I would let you mortals have another chance at life, especially you, the thief?" Hades said with a nod in Stephen's direction.

"Because, sire, we're willing to do anything, and I know that Stephen feels ever so remorseful about what he has done," Iris said earnestly.

"Anything...." Hades said thoughtfully. "Well, now that you mention it, I do need something fetched. Someone stole my Helm of

Darkness, and I really do need it back. If the boy and the girl, not the thief, fetch it, then maybe I'll let them go back."

"What about me?" Stephen asked, disheartened.

Hades sneered and said, "Why do you think I'll let a thief go back into the world and continue doing harm?"

"I'll change my ways, really, I promise," Stephen pleaded.

"Promises mean nothing here. You must swear on the River Styx. Any oaths made in the name of the River Styx cannot be broken. If you do break your oath you will die."

Stephen gulped and then said, "I swear on the River Styx that if I do get to go back to Earth I will no longer be a thief."

Satisfied, Hades gave a curt nod. Relieved, Stephen made to step back, but Hades stopped him. "There is one other condition. You must eat a pomegranate from Persephone's garden."

Stephen gasped, "But, lord..."

Hades stopped him. "That is our agreement. Either accept it or forever be stuck in the Underworld."

Stephen silently fumed. Hades gave a small, dark smile as if he was enjoying Stephen's turmoil. "You give me no choice, but nevertheless I agree, my lord"

Stephen was angry because once you eat a pomegranate, or any food, from the Underworld, you have to stay there forever. There was no way he could eat a pomegranate and then leave the Underworld and try to lead another normal, living life.

Calix and Iris exchanged sympathetic glances with him and then turned to face Hades. "May we leave?" Calix asked, somewhat eagerly. Hades gave a curt nod and a pair of skeleton guards came to escort them out of Hades' chamber.

As soon as they left the castle the talk started all at once, planning for these quests. "I'm really sorry that Hades struck such a raw deal with you," Iris said sympathetically, "I had no idea that he would do that."

"I don't think any of us did." Stephen said bitterly.

"I have an idea," Calix said suddenly.

"What now?" Stephen said, somewhat downcast.

"It's just the start of winter, right?" Calix plowed on without waiting for a response. "That means that Persephone, Hades' wife, goddess of spring, has just returned from Earth. Maybe she has a few pomegranates she brought back from Earth. Stephen could eat those and not have to stay in the Underworld, and Hades would be

none the wiser. I've also heard that Persephone has a soft spot for heroes."

Stephen was slowly starting to grin. "I like that idea. When did you become so smart?" he jokingly teased Calix.

"I have my moments," Calix said with a grin.

"Okay, we have one problem mostly solved, but we still have another problem. How are we going to find the Helm of Darkness?" Iris asked.

The three of them stopped to think, momentarily stumped. "Maybe we could go back and ask Hades for help," Iris offered.

"No way. That place gives me the creeps. Especially Hades," Calix said, shuddering slightly.

"Who does Hades quarrel the most with?" Iris asked.

"His brothers. Zeus and Poseidon. At least that's what all of the stories say," Stephen said.

"How could we get a message or some information from them?" Iris prodded.

"Hermes! The messenger of the gods!" Calix said, catching on to what Iris was getting at.

"Yeah, but how do we find him?" Stephen asked the question they were all thinking.

"We could make an offering," Iris suggested.

"I suppose it's the only option we've got," Calix said. They started the task of starting a fire. They got a fire started using dead branches and twigs lying around. Once the fire was blazing merrily they started debating what they had to offer to the god.

"We could give them some of our clothes," Calix said halfheartedly.

"Are you crazy? There is no way," Iris said.

"Hold on," Stephen said, and reached beneath his shirt. Out he pulled a golden, ruby-studded pendant on a long, golden chain.

"Where in the world did you get that?" Iris asked, eyes wise in amazement as she looked at the riches.

"I, um... stole it a while back," Stephen mumbled sheepishly.

"Well, never mind that now. Let's just make an offering!" Calix said. Stephen slipped the necklace off and Iris placed it in the fire, which was closer to her.

"O, god, accept our offering. Please guide us on our quest and come to us for assistance," Iris said.

"If you need to find us we'll be with Persephone," Stephen put in.

The others gave him a look, wondering why he said it, but the offering had been accepted. The necklace turned into a hazy fog and drifted into the air. It smelled faintly of strawberries.

"Why did you say that we'll be at Persephone's garden?" Calix asked.

"Because we will be," Stephen explained, "We can go to Persephone's garden while we're waiting for Hermes. That way we won't waste our time."

"Doing what?" a voice boomed. All three kids turned at once. In front of them was what could only be Hermes. He had short, neatly trimmed blond hair and was wearing a pure white toga with gold clips holding the toga up at the shoulder. On his feet were tall, brown sandals. "I believe I was requested?"

"Ye...yes, sire," the three of them said.

"What was I needed for?"

"Well, Hades gave us this task," Stephen said. "He wanted us to find his Helm of Darkness. You see, sire, it's our ticket out of the Underworld." He was gaining speed and confidence as he was speaking. "We were wondering if you knew anything about where it could be."

"And why should I tell you?" asked Hermes, suspicious.

"Well, my lord... we really need to know, or else we'll be stuck here for the rest of our existence, and that's no way to live," Calix said.

Hermes eyed them for a minute as if considering them. "And what will you give me in return?" Hermes asked.

"This." Stephen took a ring from his pocket and offered it to Hermes.

"And where did you get this." Hermes asked, amazed.

"I... acquired it."

"Well, then." Hermes took the ring and put it away. "As it happens I do know where the Helm of Darkness is. Persephone currently has it."

"Persephone has it?" Iris asked. "Why would she have it? Hades could just get it from her."

"I do believe that Hades wanted to trick you. It was getting a little boring in the Underworld, and he always likes setting mortals

on extremely hard, confusing, or impossible tasks. By the way, you didn't learn this from me." With a pop he disappeared.

"Okay. We need to go to Persephone's garden. Calix and I will try to find the Helm of Darkness. You try to find a normal pomegranate," Iris said, laying the plan out.

"How do I know if it's normal or not?" Stephen asked.

Iris paused, debating this.

"Can't we just ask her? Do we really have to go through all of this sneaking around?" Calix asked.

"Good point," Stephen said, "but let's just get there first. Anyone know where it is?" They were on the other side of the River Styx, and Hades' palace was just to the left.

"I think it's just to the right of Hades' palace. To the right and slightly behind," Iris said.

The boys looked at her in amazement. "How did you know that?" Calix asked.

Iris blushed and said, "I saw it when we were going in."

"And you didn't tell us when we were leaving! We could have been almost done by now!" Stephen said.

"But we didn't know Persephone had everything," Iris said, defending herself.

"Come on, guys, stop it. We'll just leave now," Calix said, stopping the argument before it escalated too much.

And so they set off back across the Styx, back toward Hades' palace and Persephone's garden. As they approached closer to Hades' palace, they could see the skeleton guards and quickly veered more toward the right, toward Persephone's garden. As they approached they were stunned at the beauty in this dark, desolate place.

There was bright green, lush grass. There were daffodils, roses, poppies, lilies, pomegranates, and, for some reason, mint. They all were pulled toward the pomegranates and their delicious smell. Stephen snapped out of it first and tried to pull the others back. The pomegranates had lured them over with their delicious smell, which was what they were there for, but if you ate even the smallest bite you would have to stay in the Underworld forever more.

A voice called, "What are you doing in my gardens?" The three of them turned to face the speaker. She had dark, loose, wavy hair

and a kind face. At the moment, though, she looked stern finding people in her garden.

“Please, my lady,” Stephen called. “Do you have your husband’s Helm of Darkness?”

“And why should I tell you?” she said. “For he has always told me in the strictest sense not to give it to anyone.”

“Please,” Iris said, “he told us to bring it to him. If we do he said he’ll give us a second chance at life on Earth.”

Persephone looked at them as if deciding whether or not to trust them.

Stephen saw this and said, “Please, my lady. We only speak the truth.” Persephone’s gaze softened, and she motioned them to come forward.

“If I gave you this Helm of Darkness, what would you do with it?”

For a moment the children said nothing, slowly comprehending everything. In fact everything seemed a little slow. Persephone suddenly had a very stern look on her face. Her entire body suddenly crackled with blue light, and the children felt the strange, blue light wash over them, and then in an instant it was gone. Again Persephone asked them, “If I gave you the Helm of Darkness, what would you do with it?”

Iris looked baffled and answered, “Well, we’d give it to your husband, of course.”

Persephone smiled and then said, “I believe you.”

The children look at each other, mystified as how they had achieved such absolute credibility, when Persephone said, “I put a truth charm on you so you could only speak the truth.” The children nodded in understanding as she led them into her private courtyard.

There, front and center, was the Helm of Darkness. She lifted it off the marble column holding it up and handed it to Iris. “Is that all you’ll need?” she asked.

“Actually, we need one more thing,” Stephen said. “Is there any chance you brought back a normal pomegranate from Earth?”

Persephone hesitated and then said, “Yes. I bring one back every year I return as a reminder of why I have to stay here.” She crossed the courtyard to a gazebo where there were golden plates piled with food. From one of them she grabbed a pomegranate and handed it to Stephen.

“Thank you.” Stephen said. “I really needed that.”

Persephone smiled at them and shooed them out of the courtyard. “I hope my husband lets you go. He doesn’t always keep his word.”

On that less-than-happy note, the three of them left Persephone’s garden and prepared to enter Hades’ palace again.

“We should have made Hades swear on the River Styx that he’d let us go. Persephone is right; he might not keep his word,” Iris said, worried.

“We’ll just make Hades swear to it before we give him anything,” Calix said.

“Let’s hope he will,” Stephen said.

The three of them trudged back toward the palace, tired, but still hoping that they could get one more chance at life. They approached the front doors again, and this time they opened almost immediately. They quickly walked inside the palace, into the freezing temperature. They followed the hallway, left, right, and right again, took the middle fork, went left one last time, and again they found themselves in front of the great oaken doors with the Helm of Darkness. They knocked and the doors slowly opened.

“Well, back again,” Hades said. He looked at them and seemed slightly surprised that they had actually gotten the items, though he quickly covered it. He leaned forward, stretching out his hands in preparation for them to hand the things over. They didn’t.

“Before we give you anything, my lord, we must ask that you agree to one term,” Stephen said.

“What’s this?” Hades asked, slightly confused.

“We need you to swear on the River Styx that once we give you what you want, you must give us another chance at life on Earth.”

“And we can’t be ghosts or something,” Iris interjected. Hades scowled at them.

“And if you don’t agree to our terms, we’ll just leave with the Helm. You’ll never find us. We’ll just disappear,” Calix put in.

Hades scowled even more, but they had got him. He had to agree, or he’d lose his Helm of Darkness. “I swear to all of your conditions,” he muttered.

“Great!” Iris said.

They handed the Helm over to Hades, who took it grudgingly.

“I do believe that you need to eat a pomegranate,” Hades said, nodding in Stephen’s direction. Coolly, Stephen held up the pomegranate.

“From Persephone’s garden?” Hades asked.

Stephen nodded. “Well, then, don’t be shy, pop a piece in your mouth.” Hades watched in satisfaction as Stephen put a section of pomegranate in his mouth. Hades seemed determined for something to go right. “Very well, then, you may go,” Hades said smiling smugly. The three of them looked at each other in confusion, but then Hades muttered something, and with a pop they disappeared, all three of them.

“Where are we?” asked Iris, confused.

“Uh, oh. I think I know where we are. Are we in the line to enter Tartarus?” Stephen said weakly.

“Not Tartarus, the place of eternal pain, mayhem, fear, and danger,” said Calix weakly.

“The one and only,” Stephen said grimly.

Iris gulped visibly. “How are we going to get away this time?”

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than Persephone appeared in a swirling of robes. There was a look of fury so strong on her face that the three kids cowered in fear, afraid that she had followed them to make them feel her wrath. “Come with me, you three,” she said, beckoning them forward. The kids followed nervously, unsure of what was to come. “I am so sorry that my husband didn’t follow your wishes.”

“But how was he not forced to follow them?” Iris asked, still slightly in shock.

Persephone looked a little uncomfortable at this question. “Well, he managed to find a loophole in your instructions—well, requests really.”

“What loophole?” Stephen asked, confused.

“You see, right now you’re not ghosts. People always are when they come to the Underworld, but for some reason you’re not, even though you died.”

They thought about that for a little bit and then realized that she was right. They could still touch and hold things and interact with their surroundings, and people could interact with them.

“You see, my husband realized that and thought of something clever. Evil, very evil, but still clever. You said that you wanted

another chance of life on Earth. Technically you're still on Earth, and you're still alive. And you're not ghosts."

The children stood there as it dawned on them how deviously clever Hades was, and how foolish they were to overlook that.

"Does that mean we'll be stuck here forever? We'll die here and then spend the rest of our death here?" Iris asked with a note of fear in her voice.

"You see, that's why I came to find you. I'm going to send you back home." Persephone smiled at Iris with a twinkle in her eye.

"Thank you! However can we repay you?" Stephen asked, overjoyed at their achievement.

"Just think of me now and again," Persephone said. And with a few well-chosen words, the kids disappeared.

Just as suddenly as they disappeared they reappeared in Stephen's village.

"Where are we?" Iris asked.

"We're in my village," Stephen said, happy and relieved. "Look, I see my father at the market. You guys can stay with me. I promised myself, and Hades, that if I was able to be brought back into the normal world that I would change my ways and stop being a thief. You guys can witness that I kept my word. Not only that, you guys are my friends, too. You can stay with me until you know what you're going to do and where you're going to go."

Iris and Calix looked at each other and shrugged. Neither of them wanted to leave anyway. They walked with Stephen toward his father, ready to start life again.

Ski Trip

A joke on a ski slope turns out to be more dangerous than funny in
SKI TRIP by *Shelby Whitelaw*.

You are about to hear the story of how my friend Brina survived a concussion. I'm Megan. Brina and I have known each other since first grade, and now we are 11. We decided to go skiing together at Little Mountain Valley Ski Resort. Now there is one issue. Brina doesn't know how to ski, and I am a professional skier.

Brina and I get onto the ski lift right after we went on a little kid hill. Brina is talking to her mom on the phone because the parents wanted to stay at the lodge. I am telling Brina about how she has to go to the right when we get to the top. If she goes left then she will hit the really hard hills, and the only way to go back is to have ski patrol come and get her.

I go right just like I told Brina to, but Brina decides it would be funny to go the other way. She goes left and realizes that there is a sign, that says "Experts Only." And worst of all, she sees the hill was called "Danger Drop"!

So Brina gets scared for a second or two, and then decides that she is an expert, even if this is her first time skiing. She looks down. The hill is steep and icy. Brina goes and turns ones or twice so she can look over the hill, and she sees me at the bottom. She shuts her eyes.

Brina opens her eyes like it was a second. Brina looks at her feet, and her skis aren't on. Brina looks to the side, and the snow is closer than usual. Everything around her is blurry. The next thing she notices is I'm there, and I'm talking to someone else. The next thing she experiences is two people coming and putting her on a stretcher. She told me later that day that she had never felt that much pain and she could have fallen off a mountain and it wouldn't have hurt as badly.

It turns out Brina had a concussion. When she was looking at me, she slid on ice and hit a tree branch. And she slid right by me. I saved Brina's life when I quickly called ski patrol and they came and took Brina. The doctor says that if she had not arrived at the

clinic this early, Brina might have to have been rushed to the hospital.

Brina ended up being fine. We agreed that skiing really wasn't Brina's thing. Brina and I may never go skiing together again because of what happened that day. I'm still a happy skier, except I do not like going on the hill where Brina fell down and hurt herself. Finally we had to talk about how she shouldn't have done that mean joke on me and how the joke's on her. This ends the story of how Brina survived a concussion!

Zombie Ballin'

*Can something be called "the game of a lifetime" if not everyone involved is exactly...alive? **ZOMBIE BALLIN'** by **Kobe Siler** brings some frightening fans to courtside.*

It was a late night, January 21, 2016, at a New York Knicks's-Cleveland Cavaliers basketball game, when zombies started eating people.

Throughout the game you could hear an occasional scream, laugh, or someone screaming, "Nice prank, bro!" No one really cared, and the game kept going.

With twenty minutes left in the game, several people started to scream as a bunch of dark, shadowy figures crawl over the stands and onto the court. Right away the security rushes in to get the several figures off the court so the game can keep going on.

"What are those people doing?" whispered basketball star Kyrie Irving to basketball star Carmelo Anthony.

"I really don't know," Carmelo whispered back.

As the security started pushing the figures off the court, five more joined. The refs blew their whistles, and the game paused.

"BAISKITBOOLGRUH..." one of the figures scream. Right away a bunch of the fans started screaming and ran toward the exits. Some of the players and refs took the fans' lead and ran into the locker rooms. But most of the fans thought it was some sort of a prank, so they stayed.

One of the security guards fell to the ground with a bite mark in his arm. This sent about two hundred more fans running. There were around sixty percent of the fans left, so Carmelo and Kyrie decided to stay.

As Tyson Chandler (who plays for the New York Knicks) ran toward the locker rooms, he warned Carmelo and Kyrie that something bad was happening. There was a crash in the locker room as soon as he runs in and a bunch of basketballs pour onto the court.

"We need to do something!" yells Kyrie to Carmelo.

"Let's throw something at them! Oh, give me one of those basketballs!" replies Carmelo. Kyrie quickly grabs one of the basketballs and passes it to Carmelo. Carmelo instantly throws the

ball at the figure like he's trying to make a last second across-the-court shot. The ball hits the figure like it was magnetized. The figure falls to the ground. It gets back up right, away but this time it starts rubbing its head. As he was doing this his hood fell off and he looked perfectly normal.

"What's wrong with you!" yells Kyrie.

"Where am I? Who are you? What year is this? Oh, you guys play basketball. I really love basketball. What are you talking about—AHHHHHH!" the man gets cut off as the security guard that got bit bites him on the leg. The man's skin starts to change from a tannish color to more of a gray color. This matches the skin of the new-looking security guard.

"I think I know what those things are," Carmelo says.

"Zombies," they both say at the same time.

"We know how to change them back, though. Get all the basketballs you can find and throw them," says Kyrie.

They grab two basketballs at a time and start throwing them. *THUD! BAM! BINK!* was all that could be heard on the court. One by one the zombies turn back into human beings. But more keep on coming.

"I have an idea. I can get the rest of the players." says Carmelo.

In just one minute Carmelo comes back with all the players including Tyson Chandler and C.J. Miles. They all start throwing the basketballs at the zombies. The basketballs were flying so fast it looked like they were zipping by at the speed of light! The fans that stayed now "knew" this was just a prank, and they cheered after every successful hit.

Finally in about one hour all the zombies were gone and the players were tired. The fans that didn't leave the stadium went back, and the game continued. No one will forget that night in New York when zombies almost took over the city.

Picture This

An Icy Threat

AN ICY THREAT by **Zavier Innis** spans a thousand years—sort of. The blame goes to a museum exhibit that turns out to be more interactive than anyone planned for.

It was a fine and brisk Tuesday morning in Nord, Iceland, a cold island in the North Atlantic Ocean. It was a quiet and peaceful place. Nothing much happened out of the ordinary.

On the edge of town lived a respectful and very caring couple, Mr. Johnothon and his wife, Martha. It was June 17, 1994, and Martha was away on a business trip for a whole week. Mr. Johnothon missed his wife, but he was glad that he could at least have the whole house all to himself.

It was two days after Martha left. Nothing exciting had happened, just the same old, same old day. Mr. Johnothon was driving his car around town after work. He was bored with nothing on his mind, and he needed something to do. After 15 more minutes of wandering from place to place, Mr. Johnothon was still bored! But soon he came upon The National Iceland Museum's grand re-opening and decided to check the place out. He thought it would be a nice way to just to pass the time. He soon spotted the museum's most prized possession, the frozen Viking, an ancient discovery.

He had so much facial hair that he looked like a ginormous blond beard with arms and legs. He was pale and flaky with scars and scratches covering his body. Mr. Jonathan stared at the Viking's beady eyes and snagged teeth. He felt like he was in a death-trance. He got extremely anxious feeling like this hideous beast would haunt him forever.

Mr. Maxwell, the museum's curator, walked up next to him. "Is that a real frozen Viking?" Mr. Johnothon asked, fascinated.

"Yep! Officer Joe found it for us last year in the Iceland Ocean."

"Well, that was nice of him," said Mr. Johnothon. "But how does the iceberg and the Viking stay frozen?"

"Oh, see those air vents? They release cold air. We keep the Viking in a glass case so the cool air stays inside," explained Mr. Maxwell.

Suddenly, the air motor started grinding! The air vents shattered, and the ice was melting fast.

In about ten minutes, the ice was gone and tragedy struck. The Viking was ALIVE! He started banging on the glass case. *Slam! Bang! Whack!* The glass cracked. The Viking hit harder and harder. He was determined to escape from his prison. And then...the Viking was free! He screamed with furious anger, "Shalcap, DESTROY!" Shalcap, the Viking, was crushing anything that caught his eye.

Innocent people screamed and ran for their lives, especially Mr. Maxwell. Mr. Johnothon was paralyzed in shock. Then he got an idea about how to fix this devastating situation! All he needed was Shalcap's attention.

"Mr. Maxwell! Mr. Maxwell! Mr. Maxwell!" shouted Mr. Johnothon as he slapped him. "Get ahold of yourself. I'll get everything under control. Just get someone working on fixing those air vents and that glass case."

"Oh...ok, g-g-got it!" Mr. Maxwell exclaimed with fear.

"Hey, Viking boy!" Mr. Jonothan exclaimed as he snatched away Shalcap's battle hammer and whacked him in the chest. The furious Viking glared at Mr. Johnothon grabbing for his weapon. Mr. Jonothan ran toward the door. Shalcap's face turned raging hot red, and he let out an unbearable screech. Shalcap raced toward him with an unspeakable look in his eyes.

Mr. Johnothon ran as fast as his legs could carry him. "Think, Mr. Johnothon, think! How can you stop this abomination? Ah, ha! Antonio's Café!" Mr. Johnothon raced into the café and warned everyone about Shalcap.

Suddenly, *BOOM!* Shalcap kicked down the door, searching anxiously for Mr. Johnothon and his beloved hammer. Then Mr. Johnothon popped out from behind the counter. He ran right toward the meat fridge. Shalcap dashed after him. As soon as Shalcap reached the door, Mr. Johnothon opened it as quickly as he possibly could. Then he purposely spilled a water pitcher on the ground right in front of the door. Shalcap slipped, and right into the meat fridge he tumbled! Mr. Johnothon slammed the door behind him, locking it from the outside!

After an hour of devouring a very satisfying dinner from Antonio's Café, Mr. Jonathan took a peek at Shalcap. He was frozen once again. The people from the restaurant helped Mr. Jonathan drag the Viking ice block back to the museum. Moments later, Mr.

Maxwell had the ice case fixed, and Shalcap was put back into it. Because of Mr. Jonothan, everyone and everything was safe once again. For his heroics, Mr. Maxwell rewarded him with five thousand dollars.

Two days later, Martha came back from her trip. She asked her husband, "How was everything?"

"Let's just say, it was very cold and dangerous," said Mr. Johnothon, smiling.

Andrew and the Genie

ANDREW AND THE GENIE by *Henry Berthel* sends Andrew on a wild ride fueled by wishes and plenty of candy.

Andrew woke up from a dream. He was dreaming about meeting a genie and making three wishes. He didn't know that that was about to happen.

Andrew went downstairs to get ready for school. He didn't want to go to school, but he thought that he would go downstairs anyway, because he was really hungry. He looked around and didn't see his parents. He was thinking, "Should I call them?" but he had a better idea: run back upstairs and stay home! So, he ran back upstairs.

When he got to his room, he tripped over an awkwardly placed power cord, which knocked the bookstand over, which his blue lava lamp was placed on top of. Then, with a loud *BANG* and a big cloud of smoke, a genie appeared!

As soon as the genie appeared, Andrew fell on the floor in amazement. He knew he received three wishes from the genie. He also knew he wanted to travel to the moon! (He also wanted a pony...)

"I WISH I WAS ON THE MOON AND I HAD A PONY!" Andrew screamed.

"Wait, what?" the genie replied. "Why would you want a pony?" The genie wasn't going to let Andrew wish for that. "Okay, kid, I'm just going to let you know something now. If you wish to be on the moon, then you will not have a spacesuit or a rocket ship. Also, you might want to wish for something better than that, because that is just lame."

"Why would I want to not have a pony? Is there something wrong with that?"

"Well...never mind."

"Ok, then, I WISH I WAS ON THE MOON WITH A PONY AND I HAD A SPACESUIT AND A ROCKET!"

The next thing he knew was that he was riding a pony. On the moon. He was super excited about being on the moon and having a pony. Then his pony died. He forgot about a spacesuit for the pony!

He got a little scared, so he went inside the spaceship that he had wished for.

Inside the spaceship he was less afraid. "Boy, being in space makes me hungry!" He went to go grab some food. All he found was air-dried gross stuff. Andrew was a picky eater, and NO way was he eating that. He knew he had to eat something, so he needed to find the genie.

He tried yelling for the genie. He tried kicking a wall. He even tried going outside the spaceship and looking around, but nothing worked. He was starting to get scared when he saw something glowing near where he was sitting in the rocket ship. It was the lava lamp! He rubbed the lava lamp, and out came the genie.

He needed food and water, so he wished that he had an unlimited supply of anything that is edible.

"I WISH FOR UNLIMITED AMOUNTS OF ANYTHING THAT IS EDIBLE!" yelled Andrew.

"Okay, kid," said the genie "Whatever you want, but make sure you keep watching your calories. You're already sort of fat...."

"I'M NOT FAT!" said the chubby 13-year-old.

He tried to just ignore the genie and go on to eating. Now he would never go anywhere without food and water! He was wondering how to get the food, when exactly the food he wanted just appeared right in front of him. He was about to grab the food when he had a thought.

"UNLIMITED CANDY!" This might have been the best idea of his life. He didn't even need to use his last wish, either! Candy is something you can eat. That means he would have unlimited candy for life.

He enjoyed about an hour of candy before thinking about his way back to Earth. He had one more wish, a rocket, and a lot of food to get home. So what does he use to get home? The food, of course.

You are probably thinking, "Why would he use the food to get back to Earth when he already has a rocket?" He would use the food because he doesn't know how to drive a rocket. He was really bad at almost anything, other than building stuff. So he would use food to build another rocket to get home. So, he built, and built, AND BUILT.

About a year ago, he learned how to engineer and build. He used that knowledge to build the spaceship.

When he was building, he didn't realize the spaceship was disappearing. "Who is destroying the spaceship?" Then he realized that he was eating his spaceship! That set him back, but he still built it the best he could.

After about three days of building, the genie came out of its lava lamp. "Oh man, it is so boring in there," the genie said.

The spaceship looked like a life-sized gingerbread spaceship.

The genie walked around and went outside of the rocket. That is when he saw Andrew. "OH MY GOSH, KID! YOU BUILT THAT OUT OF CANDY! You could have just wished for a way home!"

"Well, I didn't want to use my last wish. Plus, this is cooler. How often do you build a rocket ship out of candy? It is also really durable!" About five seconds later, the entire rocket ship broke apart.

"Ok, let's make a deal," said the genie. "I will give you a working rocket ship out of candy, and it doesn't even cost you a wish. You don't have to do anything else because you have worked on that for such a long time," the genie said.

"Okay!" replied Andrew.

He now had an awesome ride home, and one more wish. His journey back home took six days, but he still did it. Don't underestimate the power of candy! At least don't underestimate the power of food until you go through the atmosphere. Anyway, he got to Earth's atmosphere and the ship exploded into a million flames. He was plummeting toward Earth's surface.

He knew he had to make his final wish. He could have wished he could teleport and then just teleport home. Instead, he wished it was one week ago. That was a big mistake. One week ago was the day when he was building the rocket! So he just made a wish that would last a LONG time.

The last-week-wish made it so that the last week would repeat itself a lot of times until he wished to teleport home. Every time the week ended, he kept wishing it was one week earlier.

Seventy-one Last Weeks Later...

Andrew has finally become smarter and wished to teleport to safety. Things aren't normal, like the gingerbread house down the road that he had made out of candy, or the ice cream snow days. Does Andrew care about it not being normal? Not at all.

Back to the Past

*Two sisters are given a chance to undo actions they regret in **BACK TO THE PAST** by Paige D.*

POP! Sophia was sitting in the kitchen finishing up her homework when she heard a strange noise coming from outside. She quickly glanced out the window to see what was going on. She couldn't see anything, but she definitely heard a loud, annoying popping sound. Sophia tried to ignore it, but she couldn't. It was driving her crazy. Sophia's twin sister Bella stomped down the stairs and into the kitchen.

"Can you stop making that noise?" Bella yelled.

"It's not me!" Sophia said. "It sounds like it's coming from outside."

Bella opened the door and walked outside into their backyard. She looked around. It had been a rainy morning, and the raindrops on the grass glistened in the sun. The tall oak trees were swaying in the breeze.

Bella was surprised to find a small hole in the ground, about the size of her fist. She nervously bent down and peeked inside. She noticed something sparkling in the hole, but she couldn't tell what it was. "Sophia, come here!" Bella hollered.

"What?" she asked anxiously. Then they heard the pop again. The sound seemed to be coming from the hole.

Sophia looked into the hole. The girls were puzzled. They had no idea what they were seeing or hearing.

All of a sudden, a blue squirrel fell out of the tree above them and right into the small hole. Sophia screamed! Immediately, the hole began to shrink until it completely vanished. The girls exchanged confused glances.

"What should we do?" Bella asked.

"I'm not sure," Sophia replied.

"Do you think we should tell someone about this?"

"I don't think so. Maybe we should just ignore it."

The next day at school, the teacher called on Bella to solve the math equation on the board. She was horrible at math, and had no idea what to do. "Um, well, you like, um, um... divide?" The class began to giggle. Bella's face turned bright pink.

The teacher frowned. "The correct answer is 432. You need to pay better attention in class," she said sternly. Bella nodded quickly and looked down at the floor. *I wish I would've known that answer,* she thought. She sighed deeply and glanced quickly at the clock, hoping that math class would be over soon.

At the same time, Sophia was on the other side of the middle school getting back her science test. She was excited to see her grade because she had studied for hours. She was shocked to see a giant C- in red ink at the top of the page. When Sophia looked it over, she realized that she had gotten all of the questions right; however, she hadn't noticed that there were more questions on the back of the paper. Sophia was really angry. *I wish I could just re-take that test,* she thought. *I know all of the answers.*

As the girls walked home together after school, they told each other all about their horrible day. Suddenly, a giant red truck came by and went right through a huge dirty puddle in the road. The girls were sprayed with filthy water. Sophia screamed. They squeezed out their clothes the best that they could, and shook out their hair. They stomped home with sour looks on their faces.

As they walked through the backyard, they heard the loud popping noise again. "Ugh! That noise is so annoying!" Bella said. She covered her ears. Then, out of nowhere, the hole that had been by the oak tree reappeared. Bella turned around and found Sophia was gone. "Sophia?" Bella called out. There was no response.

As Bella was trying to figure out what had just happened to her sister, the ground beneath her feet opened up. Bella fell right into the hole. She screamed the whole way down. She finally fell on the dirty ground and hit her head. "Ouch!" she said while rubbing her head. Sophia was in the small dark hole, too... and so was the little blue squirrel. The girls realized that the blue squirrel had been making the annoying noises all along. *It was probably just to get our attention,* Sophia thought.

"Now, let's do this quickly. No questions," boomed a voice. The loud voice was coming from the squirrel. "You two have been selected to visit the past. You may change anything that you want; however, you only have two hours. If you do not return to the magic portal by then, you will be stuck in the past forever."

"Wait, hang on, I don't understand what you..." Sophia began.

“I said no questions!” boomed the squirrel. “Good luck!” Then he pushed the girls through the magic portal, and they were sent to the past.

To their surprise they had only traveled back 33 hours in time. Everything was going exactly the same as the day before until Bella was asked to solve the math problem. This time, she answered the problem correctly. Bella was relieved that she avoided the embarrassment from the previous day.

At the same time, Sophia was on the other side of the middle school getting back her science test. Of course this time she knew about the problems on the back of the test. She smiled as she saw a giant A+ in red ink at the top of her test.

The girls were excited to share their good news with each other when they ran into each other in the hallway. They changed all of the bad things that had happened to them to great things! On the way home they made sure to stay far away from the road, and they successfully avoided the truck. When they arrived at their house, they sat down on their patio.

“Okay, I’ve had my fun; I’m ready to go back to the present,” Bella said.

Sophia agreed. “So what do we do now?”

They sat there for a moment. It was then that Sophia realized that they had been in the past for an hour and 52 minutes. Their hour was almost up! The girls had only eight minutes to get back to the magic portal. Without stopping to think, the girls ran to their backyard and began searching frantically for the hole. Finally they heard the squirrel’s voice. “You have an extremely important decision to make. You can choose to stay in the past, and keep reliving your perfect day over and over, or you may choose to return to the present where life will not always be perfect but you will have the ability to learn from your mistakes.” There were only two minutes left to make a decision. The girls quickly decided to stay in the past and relive their perfect day.

As they waited for the portal to close, the girls realized that living a perfect day over and over again may not be as fun as it seems. With only seconds remaining, they asked if they could return to the present. The squirrel said, “You’ve made a wise decision. Learning from your mistakes will only make you a stronger person.” The magic portal appeared, sending them back home to live a normal life.

The Big Birthday

THE BIG BIRTHDAY by *Arielle Bauer* finds Bradley anticipating the attention of family and friends. How could they have forgotten?

“Yes!” Bradley Benner exclaimed as he woke up. It was May 18, 2013, which was Brad’s birthday. He jumped out of bed with a huge smile on his face. He got his clothes on, brushed his teeth and hair, and raced downstairs.

“Hi, Honey!” said Mrs. Benner.

“Hi, Mom,” Bradley said with a big smile on his face. He was expecting to get a whopping “HAPPY BIRTHDAY!”

“Well, isn’t today your special day?” exclaimed Mrs. Benner.

“Yes, it is,” Brad replied.

Mrs. Benner nearly cut him off. “You get to present your big project today at school!” Bradley’s smile instantly faded as his mother turned around to get his lunch for school.

Bradley began eating breakfast when the house phone rang. His mother answered it. Shortly after, his mom said, “Bradley, your dad wants to talk to you.” Brad picked up the phone with anticipation.

“Hi, Dad!”

“Hello son. I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you this before I left this morning, but I need you to take out the garbage when you get home.” That did it for Brad. He was becoming extremely frustrated. He started to feel like a deflated balloon. Why was nobody remembering his birthday?

Mrs. Benner walked outside with Bradley. His bus then arrived. He walked up on the bus and saw his best friend, Jack Gray. His face lit right up. He knew that his best friend would never forget his birthday. He sat more and more, just waiting and waiting for Jack to remember his birthday. Jack began talking about a brand new video game he was getting for *his* birthday next month! Bradley thought he was going to throw himself right out of the bus window! *Seriously, you’re talking about your birthday?* he thought.

Bradley was hoping that when he saw his friends in first hour they’d all say “Happy Birthday!” Brad was wrong. The same

thing happened second hour. Bradley thought, "It's okay, it's okay. Third hour is my favorite class with all of my favorite friends. Surely at least one of them will remember." Brad thought about saying something to his friends about his birthday, but he decided he didn't want to be disappointed again. He didn't want to hear that yet another person didn't remember his birthday. Sadly enough, none of his third-hour friends said anything even related to his birthday. He went through the whole school day depressed as could be.

When he got home, he kicked off his shoes and threw his backpack on the ground. All he really wanted to do was go up to his room and play on his phone. "Mom, I'm going upstairs," Bradley said.

"Okay, sweetheart," she replied.

When he walked up to his room he slammed the door and ripped all of the covers off of his bed. Bradley sat there thinking about his birthday. He was trying to figure out why nobody was remembering his birthday. *What a great birthday this was*, he thought. He suddenly began to hear some noise. "Mom, what's that noise?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing, Honey. I'm just watching television," Mrs. Benner yelled upstairs.

This noise went on and on and on. Brad really didn't think that it was just the television. He heard talking and laughing. He heard doors opening and things being set down on the tables.

He walked downstairs. All of the lights were off. "SURPRISE!" All of Bradley's friends and family jumped out to greet him.

All of his friends told him about what they got him for his birthday. He was so delighted and joyful. "So this is why none of you said anything about my birthday? I thought you all just forgot," he said happily.

"Oh, Honey, we could never forget your birthday," Mrs. Benner replied.

They partied all afternoon. Bradley ended up having the best birthday he could imagine. He had everyone he wanted at his party; his best buds and even the girl he liked was there! Brad opened all of his presents and loved them all. His mom handed out party hats to everyone.

A couple of hours later they had a cake decorated like Bradley's favorite movie, *Despicable Me*. He had a ton of fun. They had pizza, listened to music, sang "Happy Birthday," and played Bradley's favorite game, sardines. It was the perfect ending for his birthday, except for the fact that his dad wasn't kidding when he'd asked him to take out the garbage.

Bilbo vs. the Dragon

*One man is called to defend his home kingdom in **BILBO VS. THE DRAGON** by **John Cook**. It is a task he accepts despite not being confident that he is the right person for the job.*

In a town called Crelillan there was a much-needed warrior named Bilbo. He was strong, talented, and skilled in many areas. He was an amazing archer. He was a well-known warrior in Crelillan, and the best at protecting the village.

One day, Bilbo was working at the forge making a new sword he called "The Dragonbane." Bilbo was making the Dragonbane because he damaged his old sword the day before in battle. While he was pounding out the sword, one of the King's messengers came to tell him that the King wanted to speak to him. Bilbo quickly finished "The Dragonbane," and went to the King's castle.

The King thanked Bilbo for coming to see him. Bilbo was curious about the reason the King wanted to talk to him. "For what reason do you need to speak to me, Sire?" Bilbo asked?

"Follow me. My people do not know what I am about to tell you," replied the King. Bilbo followed the King into a back room of the castle. The King now spoke, "We have a dragon that has attacked a village five miles from here, and we need you to kill it. You are the only one that has enough strength and skill to make sure the dragon is eliminated."

Bilbo was very hesitant. He had never seen a dragon, let alone fought one, but he agreed because it was his duty.

Bilbo went to the town sorcerer to find out how to fight, hide from, and kill a dragon. When Bilbo entered the sorcerer's den, the sorcerer said, "What do you need? I am a very busy man."

Bilbo replied, "I need to learn to slay a dragon."

The sorcerer said very fast, "You need to duck, hide, shoot your arrow, and then attack with your best weapon."

Bilbo left the sorcerer and tried to keep a straight face as he walked by the people of Crelillan. He traveled to the farmhouse where the dragon was last spotted. When he arrived, he spotted it, sleeping in the middle of a field.

The dragon was large and green. He had scales, big wings, and giant teeth. He looked fearless.

Bilbo drew his bow and shot a few arrows at the dragon. The dragon awoke, looked around, did not see anything, and fell back to sleep.

Bilbo was hesitant to shoot again, but he did. This time, the dragon got up and made an ear-piercing roar. Bilbo hid behind the dragon, so the dragon could not see him. The dragon breathed fire, and Bilbo got very scared, but fought through it. He hit the dragon with "The Dragonbane." The blow from "The Dragonbane" almost killed him, but not completely. The dragon was bleeding, and Bilbo could tell the dragon was in terrible pain.

The dragon chased Bilbo. Bilbo ran away, but the dragon caught up with him. Bilbo grabbed his bow and shot the dragon one more time, which turned out to be the fatal blow.

With the dragon dead in the field, Bilbo dashed back to the King to report that the dragon was no longer a threat to Crelillan. The King was very pleased with Bilbo. The King was so happy and relieved, he stepped outside the castle door and said, "People of Crelillan, Bilbo has killed a vicious dragon that could have been a terrible threat to our village. We will honor him as our fiercest warrior!"

Everyone clapped, and the King gave Bilbo the Axe of Crelillan as a reward. When Bilbo was walking home he received a few weapons, lots of flowers, and a new helmet from the town. He was a very happy warrior!

Birmingham, September 12th, 2058

In BIRMINGVILLE, SEPTEMBER 12TH, 2058 by Dorian Campillo, an infection threatens the lives of everyone in one small town. It will take a band of brave citizens to get the key to the cure from the lair of a savage beast.

An infection spread unknowingly around the small town of Birmingham. The Thomas family containing four people—Lilia, Zach, Christian, and their mother—watched its neighbors and fellow citizens fall to the ground or head to the hospital. They were worried, and then the fever hit their mother.

“What do we do?” Zach asked Dr. Nade in the Saint Joseph Hospital. “Our mom is sick, and so are our friends! There’s no cure! We have to find something, ANYTHING!” yelled Zach.

“I think there may be a cure...” the doctor said. “It’s a flower called Noteopodia. A doctor from a nearby city told me how to cure the people of Birmingham, and that flower is the solution! It’s found in the mountain called Mountain Moon.” He continued, “You’d have to prepare to fight the challenge of this mountain, The Mighty Dragon of Fire. It’ll take some time to get ready to fight it and reach Noteopodia.”

“Ok... let’s start.”

Training started with a sword, machine guns, and a bow. Zach and his family all participated in the training to accompany Dr. Nade and Zach with the challenge. The practice was kind of like how anyone fought The Mighty Dragon. They had to cover different sides preparing for any attack.

After days and days of work the Thomas family was ready to rescue the town of Birmingham. “Good luck to all of you,” said some of the civilians. Others called, “Best wishes!” or “May god praise you.”

The Thomas family’s journey started at the foot of Mt. Moon. “You guys ready?” Lilia asked. “I know I am.” They all huddled and said in chorus: “For Birmingham!”

Christian studied the map. "According to the map we have to head west to the Stairs of Darkness. I wonder what it means by 'Darkness.'"

"Guess we'll have to find out," Dr. Nade replied.

About half an hour later, the family and doctor reached the Stairs of Darkness. The stairs looked dangerous, creaking because of the wind. The stairs looked as if they started from the mine in the ravine. "Ladies first," Zach told Lilia.

"I'll test it out," said Dr. Nade. "NO ONE GO ON IT AT THE SAME TIME AS ME! WE MAY ALL FALL TO OUR DEATHS."

The stairs weren't too long, but you had to go slowly in order not to fall down. As the doctor finished, he told the family, "It's strong enough to hold one of you at a time. Zach, you want to give it a try?"

"Sure," Zach mumbled lowly in an irritated tone.

The whole family went, and they reached the end of the Stairs of Darkness. They heard a small roar. "We're getting close," Zach called out as the crew followed the map's guidance. "We're getting close to the Dungeon of the Dragon. Get your guns, arrows, bows, and swords ready." Another roar wasn't as faint as the one before. They were close, very close.

They entered the Dungeon of the Dragon. Right in the middle was the flower, Notepodia. The Dragon of Fire awoke to the footsteps of the group. It spat out fire, aiming directly at the family and Dr. Nade.

Zach threw his sword right at the head of the dragon. The Dragon, full of rage, launched fire at Zach. "Get down, Zach!" shouted Lilia. Zach got behind a rock and got his bow and weapons ready.

"Everyone get out your light machine guns and start aiming at the dragon. I'll tell you when to shoot!" Christian told the crew. "5...4...3...2...1! SHOOT!" A couple fires missed and a couple hit the dragon. The dragon's roar rang in the ears of Lilia, Christian, Zach, and Dr. Nade.

Christian told the family once again, "5...4...3...2...1! SHOOT!" Bullets bounced off the walls and rang in their ears until they heard a loud roar: "ARRRRRRRGHHHGHHGGHHGGHGH!"

The roar made everything shake. The dragon painfully screamed. It had taken a bullet to the head. The ground started to

rumble. "GET THE FLOWER AND RUN!" Zach yelled. Rocks came off the walls as Dr. Nade took Notepodia.

They took the emergency zip line from the doctor's backpack and ziplined their way out of the mountain. Behind them the mountain exploded like a volcano.

They reached Birminghamville successfully. Citizens cheered for them as they saw them fly-drive back to the hospital. Doctor Nade got the medicine ready and spread it around the town with the heroes of the town.

"Thank you so much for curing our mother, Dr. Nade. We owe you a bunch," Christian said.

"No, that won't be necessary. Without your help, I would've been dead." Dr. Nade replied.

A couple of days later, Mrs. Thomas and the other civilians woke from their comas. Birminghamville's government started back up, and other businesses did, too. This infection has been cured and is no longer a problem for the citizens of Birminghamville.

The Climb

*It's Alex's birthday, which means he will finally be able to pursue his wish of doing some serious mountain climbing. Once he has the right equipment, all he needs is skill, perseverance, and luck in **THE CLIMB** by **Charles Seidel**.*

Streamers hanging from the walls and a big sign that said "Happy Birthday" in huge letters stood right in front of him as he opened his eyes. For a second he thought that he was dreaming until he remembered today was his birthday, but he still checked his phone just in case. It said "December 10, 2014."

Alex Dobring was turning 16 this year, and he remembered exactly what he had asked for. This was the year he got his mountain climbing supplies. When he was nine, his parents promised that he would get him mountain climbing supplies when he turned sixteen. He just hoped they remembered.

He left his room and found his parents holding a great, big present wrapped in chrome blue wrapping paper. He was almost positive that it was what he was promised. His parents gave Alex his present with great, big smiles on their faces. He opened the present and nearly fell to the ground with excitement because as he opened it he saw "BEAR GRILLS MOUNTAIN CLIMBING SUPPLY KIT." As he opened it further, he saw three plane ticket to Colorado for him and his family.

They were boarding the plane to Colorado, and he asked his parents if they were going to go climbing with him. "No," they told him, "we are going to stay at the hotel," said Alex's mom. Alex felt a bit unsettled by that, but that wasn't going to keep him away from his life dream.

They finally got to Colorado and were unpacking at the hotel. Alex felt a little tingling inside him. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to go mountain climbing all alone, just him and the nature surrounding him. Alex asked his parents if he was going alone or with a group of other beginner mountain climbers. "Of course you are going with a group. We wouldn't let you go alone your first time," his dad said. "You will be with a group of other beginners and an expert. You will be meeting at 9:00 A.M. tomorrow."

Alex woke up, and his parents were standing there. His mom said, "Rise and shine. You've got a big day ahead of you!" and his dad just nodded.

"Why did you wake me up so early?" said Alex.

"Son, it's 7:30 in the morning," his dad said.

"Oh, well, I guess I should get ready then," said Alex as he got out of bed and started getting his supplies together.

When Alex got to the lobby where the group was meeting, he was the first one there, but not for long. Soon after, a girl arrived and asked him if he was doing the group mountain climbing, and Alex said yes.

"My name is Kelly Weis. What's yours?" she said.

"My name is Alex Dobring. Nice to meet you," said Alex.

Just after that another kid walked in and asked them if they were doing the group mountain climbing. They both said yes.

"Well, then, I'm Brendan Hershey," he said.

"Hello, Brendan, I'm Alex."

"And I'm Kelly."

Then they all started talking. Momentarily the expert came and called attendance, and they were all there. She introduced herself. "Hello, everybody. I'm Jen, and I will be instructing you through the basics of mountain climbing," she said. "And we're off!" said Jen.

They walked out to a rock climbing wall to practice before they went out into the mountains. They looked at the rock climbing wall. It looked pretty difficult. None of them thought they would be able to do it.

"Okay, Kelly, how about you go first," said Jen.

Kelly stepped forward to get strapped up. She started going up and was doing fine. But then she got to the point where she started to tilt outward, and when she tried to grip another rock she slipped and fell. She went to the back of the line.

"Now how about Alex," said Jen.

Alex stepped forward, strapped up, and started climbing. He slipped halfway up, but regained his grip and looked up and saw the slant. He tried to remember what he learned from YouTube and repeat what they did. When he started to hit the slant he stayed on, concentrating on what he saw. The next thing he knew he was hanging from the walls like a spider. Once he realized that he was hanging he kind of freaked out, slipped, and fell. "Nice job, Alex, now all you have to do is not lose your focus," said Jen.

“Okay,” said Alex.

“Now we have Brendan up,” said Jen.

Brendan stepped forward, strapped up, and started to climb. He messed up at the same place as Kelly. “Okay, I understand that you all are nervous right now about going out, but we only have today, so we need to get going,” said Jen.

They all stepped outside and walked to the mountain they were going to climb. “Okay, this is a mostly gentle mountain. There will be climbing, but we won’t be climbing upside down,” said Jen. “One thing: If one of us does get lost, even though it probably won’t happen, follow the north star and it will bring you here. Got it?”

“Yes,” said Alex, Kelly, and Brendan.

“Okay, then we’re off!” said Jen. And they headed to the mountain.

When they got to the mountain it was quite easy even though it is only a slope. The walk up the slope was quite boring and tiring because it lasted for at least two miles, and they were three-tenths up the slope. Finally they got to the actual mountain where they actually needed to start climbing even though it was only about two meters high.

First went Jen. Then Alex, Kelly, and Brendan followed. They kept doing small climbs for a while, but then came the big climb, the one that could actually get them injured. They all started to climb it, and all of them made it to the top with a little slip every here and there.

Then Jen whispered, “Right here, you guys must be quiet.”

“Why?” said Brendan in a normal tone of voice. The ground started to shake, and snow started to move. An avalanche was forming!

“That’s why Brendan!” said Jen.

The snow kept falling. They all ran to try to escape it, but it was too powerful, and they all were thrown down the hill with the avalanche. Alex landed on his head and got knocked out and Kelly fainted, while Brendan and Jen were wide awake. They held onto each other so that they couldn’t lose each other. But they lost Alex and Kelly.

When the avalanche ended, Brendan and Jen started yelling out for Alex and Katie. Jen might have known the mountain pretty well, but not well enough because she had no clue where they were. “There are some trees. Let’s get a fire going,” said Jen. They went

out and got some branches. Jen started the fire, and only minutes later a helicopter showed up and got them.

Suddenly Alex woke up, eyes squinting because of all the white. He couldn't believe he had survived the avalanche. He called for Kelly, Jen, and Brendan but didn't get a response. Then he heard his name called by someone. He followed the voice. It sounded like, "Alex, Jen, Brendan! Please help me! I'm stuck in the snow and can't get out!"

Alex ran to that voice to help and then saw Kelly stuck in the snow only showing her head and nothing else. Alex found her and began to help her out of the snow.

"Thank you so much, Alex," said Kelly

"What? Did you think I would just leave you out here to die, or what?" said Alex, shoveling her out with his hands. After a while he finally showed enough of her to allow her to break free from the snow.

"So should we wait for night to come to find the north star? What else can we do to survive?" said Kelly.

"We could do that, but something else could happen during the night, and I lost my flashlight in the avalanche. We could try to find some trees and cut down branches for a bonfire" said Alex.

"How about we look for some tree branches for a bonfire, but if we can't find any, I still have my flashlight, and I have a machete just in case," said Kelly.

"You have a machete!" said Alex

"Yup. Well, either way we should get moving to try to find some trees," said Kelly.

They walked for miles trying to find trees and any type of city, town, or any other thing that meant people. During their journey they finally found trees, and Kelly and Alex split up to cut down branches. A couple of minutes later they met back up and created a bonfire. When the branches were laid Alex and Kelly both found their flints and grabbed their knives and created sparks to light the fire. Finally the fire lit. There was a huge flame that couldn't be missed. They felt that surely somebody would see it.

Hours went by, but there still no rescuers. The fire was dying out, and their joy that they might survive was ruined. They had no beliefs that they would live. They both fell to the ground, sad because they knew they wouldn't make it. They fell asleep for a few minutes.

Then a rescue helicopter flew over their heads. They had seen the bonfire, but Alex and Kelly had been so far away that it took them a while. The pilot spotted Alex and Kelly waving their hands and lowered the copter to the ground. Kelly and Alex ran to the helicopter, so happy that they would live. They had never felt so alive.

When they got into the helicopter and saw Jen and Brendan, They were happy to see them, even though they are the ones who nearly got them killed.

The rescuers got Alex to his home first, and as he got out he said goodbye to Kelly. He went into the hotel and went into his parents' hotel room. His parents hugged him as tightly as they could. Alex felt like a new person, and his parents said that next year all he's getting for his birthday is a book.

Dragonite

*The war between dragons is brutal and deadly. In **DRAGONITE** by **Evan Rosenthal**, three leaders will try to end the conflict victoriously.*

Boom! Knightfury's fire and lightning bolt hit another dragon. Quickly Knightfury's fire and lightning bolt runs out. "Come on, we've got to go," says Zippleback to Gronckle and Knightfury.

Quickly all three of the friends fly through the dense forest in search of their attacked village. Finally after searching and searching to find their village, Gronckle says, "There it is."

All three of the friends land and see their houses burning, their stores burning, and their fellow dragons burning because of the Knightfighters. "Why would the Knightfighters do this?" says Zippleback.

"They're seeking revenge on me," answered Knightfury.

"But how do you know?"

"I know because I was one of them." Quickly Knightfury leaps off the ground heading toward the battle.

His friends coming toward him. "What are you doing?" says Gronckle.

"I'm going to that battle," Knightfury says.

"But you will die here. Come back to the village, and we all will sort things out," Zippleback says.

"Fine."

They all rush back to the village to make a plan. The three friends go to Zippleback's charred house and gulp down some coal. "Ok, what's your plan?" says Gronckle. The three friends make a plan of how to save their whole village and the rest of the world.

"Finally we are done," says Knightfury. They all race out of Zippleback's house and show their whole village what they have written. The whole village speeds out of the village and heads to the battle.

"I can already feel the hotness of the flames," said Gronckle. The whole village dives to the ground and starts shooting fire and lightning at their opponents. The whole village goes to find their allies.

“Finally the war has begun,” says the Knightfighters. Both villages race to the battlefield and start the war. Knightfury kills someone, then Zippleback, and Gronckle, and soon everybody is participating. These two villages are kicking butt. But then the last dragon standing is the king of the Knightfighters—Thresh.”

Quickly every dragon in sight swarms him while breathing fire. Finally Knightfury shoots him with a fire and lightning bolt, and Thresh is dead.

Three weeks later...

“Wow,” says Gronckle. “I can’t believe we have already rebuilt half of our village in three weeks.”

“I know,” says Zippleback. “I’m just glad Thresh is gone.”

Earth's Last Hope

*Aliens land. Is there panic in the streets? No. It gives the people something to watch on TV, though. Oh, and there is also a choice to be made with dire implications for life as we know it in **EARTH'S LAST HOPE** by **Diego T. Suazo De la Rosa**.*

The device started flashing red, and yellow fumes were escaping the machine extremely rapidly. His eyes were turning green and becoming swollen. He started coughing, and his face turned purple. He fell to the ground and bellowed, "*I curse, you Diego T. Suazenburg Denal!*"

Then I thought, *Well, what do you know, I am going to die on May 30, 2076, at the age of 12. Then it all went black....*

It was May 26, 2076. I was the age of 12 when it all happened. It was a Sunday morning, so I asked my dad, "Hey, Pops, what's on TV?"

"What do you care?" he asked. "Aren't you supposed to be going to Peter's house, Diego?"

"Right!" I stated. "I was totally going to go there, Dad!"

"Yeah, sure you were..." he mumbled.

"Hey, I heard that!" I shouted at him as I ran toward the door.

"Oh, just get out of here!" he insisted.

Peter was my best friend; we had known each other since preschool. I was dashing through the street, but found a body lying in the middle of the road. Then I realized something simply horrific: The body that was lying in the middle of the street was Peter's!

"Peter! No!" I shrieked. "Peter, are you all right?" He didn't answer so I grabbed a tree branch and poked him.

"Ow..." he mumbled.

"Peter," I asked him. "What happened to you?" He mumbled something.

"What?" I asked him.

"GO PUT CHANNEL 7 ON TV," he barked at me. "IT'S ABC NEWS!"

“Wait a minute,” I stammered. “You want me to not help you, let you die, and go watch television? That doesn’t seem right for a situation when you’re about to die.”

“Yes.

“No,” I stated. “I am going to help you and call an ambulance.”

“No, please let me spend my last moments alone,” he mumbled. “You’ll see me on the news...the only channel with news is ABC News. You’ll find out what’s going on. Now go!”

“Umm...okay...” I stammered, “I will go and leave you to very, umm, happily die alone here.... Have a nice day!” I ran back to my house.

I went to my house, and realized that my dad was nowhere to be seen.

“Oh no!” I realized. “They got my dad!”

“Who has me?”

“Da—da-d-dad,” I muttered. “You- you’re all right!”

“Of course I am. Did you think I was dead? Why are you not with Peter?”

“Well, you see....” Then I explained everything to him.

“Are you serious?” he asked. “I can’t believe that happened. Well, turn on the TV!”

We turned the television to channel 7, and realized what happened. The setting was the White House. A large crowd surrounded the president and a large screen, all at the entrance to the White House. The president was on, and said he had something very important to discuss, and put on a video.

This is what was on the video. There was a colossal disc, a huge one, hovering above the White House. The disc was shining silver and, again, huge. It had flashing lights, and was just like the ones you would see in the old black and white alien movies, except there was no way Hollywood could afford to make one this size, even if it was made out of cardboard. A platform came out of the right side of the ship, carrying a man and a large machine. The platform got closer to the camera. I could see the machine and the “man” a lot closer. The machine was very large. The “man” was probably seven feet tall, and the machine at least five times taller and at least fifteen times wider than him.

“Hello, humans,” the man greeted the crowd as he got closer. “My name is Kechokotl-Tangeraded, and I come from the planet Ursa. We have visited and watched you many times, and have seen

you grow. We saw when you discovered the wheel, and the show ‘I Love Lucy.’ Some of your creations are quite sad, while others disgusting.

“Your disgusting creations are your fuel resources. Your fuel resources have polluted your planet to a point where it will most likely destroy it. That is where this machine comes in. This machine has fumes that will release when pressed with the correct button. One fume has chemicals that will poison all of you and kill you. The other fume has chemicals that will combine with the rain and with the atmosphere. This will make it so that this world will be cured of all its horrible things.

“Well, goodbye. It’s been fun messing with you.” Then he disappeared, along with the disc/spaceship. Everything except for the machine had disappeared.

“As you can see,” the president stated, “this machine will kill us or heal us. The greatest scientist alive, Steven Hawking, will help us solve the problem of releasing the correct fume. Another thing that happened was that the Martian, or Ursian, or whatever he was, told me that he accidentally ran over a boy named Peter. So due to this, the alien told me to invite the boy’s best friend, Diego, to watch the rise or downfall of the people of the world. Together, he and Dr. Hawking will be alone, watching the grand rise or heart-breaking downfall of the world. There will be no one with them for security reasons. Imagine if someone sneaked inside and pressed a button that kills us all! Due to that, no one beside the scientist and boy will be here. I really don’t want to invite him, because I have a feeling he is going to mess up my schedule to watch *The LEGO Movie* because he will probably want to watch it and be asking me questions, but because I don’t want the alien to kill me, I am going to let him come. So if you are watching this, Diego Tanner Suazenburg Denal, come to the White House at 12:00 A.M. on May 30 at my own home, the White House. Now then, I have to go watch *Frozen*, so excuse me.”

It was May 30, 2076. I entered the White House. Some weird-looking, big guards took me to a room in the White House. For some reason every time they took a step, they made a screeching sound. Then I realized that they were robots, and that they were quite oxidized. Anyway, when I entered the room that they led me to, the machine was there, along with a guy in a fancy, robotic wheel chair.

"Hello," he announced to only one person. "My name is Steven Hawking, but please just call me Steve."

"Hello, Mr. Steve," I proudly, while still amazed that I was talking to him, stated. "I am Diego T. Suazenburg Denal." After we greeted each other (and after I was mesmerized by his amazing intelligence), I studied the machine. It was probably about one-hundred feet long and forty feet high. It was amazing that it even fit in this room. It was painted a very dark gray, with red and yellow stripes. It had blue radioactive signs. I noticed two large spheres in the middle, one being yellow, and one purple. I saw two buttons, a red one and a green one. It had all sorts of other gizmos, switches, gadgets, and buttons, some blue, some yellow, and some purple. There were so many, it almost appeared that the Ursians wanted to trick us.

Why were they helping us, or trying to trick us? Why were the Ursians playing this game? Then I realized why we the people of the world were willing to do this, even though there were many great risks. The economy was falling, along with many other things. As I was thinking more about the Ursians, I slipped over a puddle of water, and while trying to stop myself from hitting the ground, I pressed something.

I had pressed the red button, and a tube stuck out of the machine with a hissing sound. It released the yellow gas. Then I started coughing. Oh no. I pressed the wrong button. It was curiosity that killed the Earth. The device started flashing red, and the yellow fumes were escaping the machine extremely rapidly. Steve's eyes were turning green and became swollen. He started coughing, and his face turned purple. He fell to the ground and bellowed, *"I curse you, Diego T. Suazenburg Denal!"*

Then I thought, *Well, what do you know, I am going to die on May 30, 2076, at the age of 12." Then it all went black....*

"Please wake up." I woke up to the sound of my dad demanding me to wake up. "Come on, you," he demanded.

"Huh?"

"Diego, you're all right!"

I look around me. "Am I in my room, Dad?"

"Yep."

"What happened?"

“Well,” my dad explained, “you were knocked out by the yellow fumes, a paramedic rushed over there and pressed the green button, and with that, the purple fumes were released and you were cured, along with all the effects the alien man said.”

“What about Steven Hawking?”

“He’s dead, but don’t worry: The movie *The Nut Job* is on.”

“Ok, let’s go watch it!”

As soon as I sat down on my couch, I was relieved that everything was over. Just then, I noticed a note on the door. It said, “The president has sued you for 3.6 billion dollars.”

“Wait, what?” I stammered.

“What’s up, Diego?” my dad asked me.

Eve Mollison, Alien Defense

A government supervisor may not understand her worth, but our hero is the first to leap into action when danger rears its ugly head in **EVE MOLLISON, ALIEN DEFENSE** *by* **Jana Dinkeloo**.

“**M**ollison! Eve Mollison, come back here right now!” My name bounced through the halls of the A.A.I.S. HQ as my boss yelled at my retreating back. I had just turned in a late paper with my usual coolness, but that didn’t impress the Advanced Alien Investigation Society’s new boss, Agent Wolffe. I sighed and turned around.

Wolffe ran out of his office. “Mollison, this was due an hour ago! All the other alien fighting facilities are waiting around, wondering what to do when Tick-tocks attack, and you just come sauntering in without a care in the world! I won’t accept this anymore!” Wolffe glared at me, obviously waiting for me to blow up on him. I did just the opposite. Sporting a nonchalant smile, I looked at him.

“You haven’t read it yet. It took me an extra hour to finish it because I was at the Addleson’s party, on your orders, sir.”

The boss clenched his fists, ready to fire me, but he didn’t have a reason to. He had sent me to the Addleson’s party to take care of a few nasty shape-shifters hoping to snag some of the Addleson riches. “Fine. I’ll let you off the hook this time, Mollison, but next time something’s late I’ll fire you.” Wolffe shot me a look, and then stalked off to his office. I turned on my heel, and walked right back to mine.

I sat down, putting my heels up on the table. I started to type up my next paper for Wolffe, when a blur of red and black burst into my office. I casually looked up, fake-scowling. “Danielle Mills! How many times do I have to tell you to knock before entering?” Danni looked alarmed as I stood up. “Sorry, Danni, I’m just kidding.” Danni was a new recruit and my best friend since kindergarten.

“Eve, I’m quitting.” The words flew out of Danni. I looked at her. “Wolffe thinks I’m too weak to go out on the field, and he doesn’t let me do paperwork because I haven’t fought any aliens apparently.” Danni had fought some Drones with me when the old boss, Agent Chase, betrayed us and was converted into a Head Drone. She was

seriously hurt in the battle, and Wolffe didn't want to strain her healing wound.

A while later... "Mollison, you're fired!" Wolffe was not impressed with my paper that I had rushed to finish.

"Fine," I said coolly, "but you'll lose your best agent. And firing Luke also? Bad move, Wolffe." Luke was my other best friend, and Wolffe had fired him for a bad paper a week ago. I turned on my heel, and walked out of the office.

I sauntered into my office and picked up my pistol, which was the only thing that I truly owned in the office. I walked past Danni, grabbed her arm, and said, "Last time to quit with me here."

Danni looked puzzled, but then her eyes darkened with knowledge. "All right, I'll go quit." She walked into the room, yelled something, and walked out. "Done." She smiled, and walked over to me.

"*Allons-y!*" she said, and ran out the door, me trailing her. I hailed a taxi, and then Danni hopped in.

"Apartment 317, please."

Luke's apartment was a small place with dirty windows and creaky stairs. He used to be minimum wage, but then he was fired. I tried to have him take some of my money, as I worked high wage, but he always said no.

I strode into the building, slipping my pistol in my pocket. The taxi driver hadn't noticed it, but I'm sure that the doorman would notice, as the greasy little man was looking at my turquoise ring on my right hand. The man spoke up. "Evelyn Mollison. I've been awaiting you." His voice sounded oddly metallic. He rose, morphing into a metal shape. He was a drone.

The doorman drone creaked over to where Danni and I were standing. I braced myself, ready to run, when the drone let out an earsplitting shriek. All of the doors on the first floor opened. Drones filed out the door, poised to attack us. I looked at Danni, who had been frantically texting Luke. "Luke will meet us at the fire escape. Let's go!"

Danni raced out the door, red hair flying. I followed suit, sprinting toward the black rickety staircase that was the fire escape.

Luke was halfway down the steps when a Drone blew the door open a floor above him. "Luke, run!" I yelled, terrified for my friend. He looked at me, blue eyes sparkling with fear. Luke didn't fight. He

liked to negotiate before killing, and if the Drone caught him, that's exactly what he'd do.

I pulled out my pistol, aiming for the metallic beast behind Luke. I knew my old gun would only stun the alien, but it would buy us some time. Shooting for Luke's life, I hit the Drone just as Luke reached the bottom of the steps. "My car is down the street. If we can get to it, we'll be safe for now," Luke said, gasping for air. We started to sprint down the road, toward the blue truck that was Luke's.

As I reached for the handle, Danni screamed. She had fallen behind to grab her phone, which was now lying on the pavement. A metal hand was clamped over Danni's mouth, which only made Danni scream even more. The Drone cackled. I recognized something in that laugh. Someone that I hadn't seen since that awful night when Danni was injured. It was Ex-Agent Chase.

"Chase, I-let D-danni go!" Luke stuttered. He and Chase had been good friends before he betrayed the agency.

"Ah, ah, ah. Surrender, or the girl is decimated." I pulled out my pistol, and shot at his metal hand. He let Danni go, and we jumped into the car and sped away. "We need to go to the A.A.I.S. now!" I yelled.

"They have the weapons to kill Chase," Danni explained. Luke didn't fight the last battle with the Drones, so he had no clue what weapons to use. Since Danni and I fought in the battle, we both knew that the Drones' only weakness is electricity, and a strong bit of it, too.

There were lots of Drones in the streets now, so Luke ended up driving over them. At the A.A.I.S., we parked behind the abandoned building. I peeked in a window. "Looks like the Drones have been here, too," Danni said, taking the words right out of my mouth. The front door was ajar, so we walked in.

The lights were flickering, and offices were ruined. The whole place looked deserted. I left Danni and Luke to look around while I went to the weapon room. I pulled out the key that I had secretly taken, and inserted it into the keyhole. The door opened. I walked into aisle 13-B, where the Drone fighting guns were. I found a big one for me, another big one for Danni, and a small but efficient one for Luke. I grabbed lots of ammo, and ran. I re-locked the door, threw the guns casually to Danni and Luke, and then walked out the door.

“So where do you think Chase is?” Luke asked nervously.

“Oh, I’m closer than you think,” a voice sounded in the shadows, and then we heard the clunking of metal feet as the voice of Chase grew faint.

Drones emerged. I grabbed my gun, cocked it, and prepared to shoot. “Danni, Luke, you guys stay here and fight off the Drones. I’ll go find and take down Chase,” I said, blasting a nearby Drone.

“All right,” Danni said, “but if you aren’t back in fifteen minutes, I’m coming to find you.” Luke nodded in agreement. I blasted a path for myself, and set off to find Chase, gunfire sounding behind me.

The alleys behind the A.A.I.S. were like a maze, and I was sure Chase was in the center of it. Occasionally I heard an evil laugh, so I followed the sound. The occasional Drone popped out at me, but they went down before they could make a sound.

A while later, a shape emerged out of the shadows. It was Chase. I raised my gun, ready for fire, but Chase fired first. I rolled, dodging the first deadly blast. Chase scowled, and said, “I used to be able to beat you in a fight, Eve.”

I smirked. “Didn’t everyone, honey?” I said in my silkiest voice. I shot at him, hitting him in one of the legs. He fell to the ground, trembling.

“I’m down. Why don’t you just kill me?”

I bent down. “I should, shouldn’t I? But I’m not going to.” I pulled out my electric handcuffs. “I’m going to arrest you,” I said. I strapped the electric handcuffs on to him. Thinking that he had gotten the easiest way out of the situation, he smiled. I put on a cool smile, and poured water from my water bottle on his hands. The shock was quick; just a spasm, and then stillness. I turned around, and strode back to where Danni and Luke sat waiting and panting.

Luke ran up to me and kissed my cheek. Danni then ran up, too, hugging me. “Dead,” I said.

“Really?” Danni asked.

“Yes, he is. I electrocuted him.” Danni smiled, and then walked back to the car.

“Luke, you missed,” I said, smiling.

“Oh,” Luke said, grinning also. “Then we’ll just have to fix that.” Then he kissed me. For real this time.

The Forest of Wonders

*Two girls with extraordinary powers take it upon themselves to do what others cannot in **THE FOREST OF WONDERS** by Kierstin.*

In a forest deep in time lies something so big it could destroy the world as we know it. Now what is this secret, you ask? Well, the beginning to the solution is two little girls in the small town of Kona, Hawaii. So I bet you're thinking, *How can two 12-year-old girls save the world?* These are no ordinary girls.

"Pass me the ball!" shouted Liv.

"No way," said Arie. "I know what you're doing. I can see it."

"Oh?" said Liv.

"Un huh," said Arie.

"Oh, right. Did you get the weekend off so we can go to the forest?" asked Liv.

"Yeah, it took some work," said Arie. "Liv," said Arie, "do you have the stuff?"

"Yeah," she replied. "Plus I've been practicing my wind in case we need it."

Long ago someone had been flying an army plane over the volcano and accidentally dropped an atomic bomb into the volcano. So the plan was set. They would go into the forest to destroy the volcano that could destroy the world and send it into eternal darkness. The next day the sisters were off.

Now you may wonder how or what Arie's powers do, or just what they are. Arie has the ability to see the future with her mind. Liv can control the wind and the weather. They only have these powers because they were born on the moon. The moon also gave them heat powers. They can withstand any amount of heat, and they can even walk on the sun. No one knows what kind of alien they are, but no one knows that they are aliens.

"Liv!" Arie shouted "I found it!" They both knew the volcano would erupt today because they could hear it rumbling and see it rising.

"Coming," said Liv.

The volcano was rising. They only had a little time before it would erupt. They knew they had to hurry.

With Arie's ability to move things with her mind, they lifted the bomb out of the volcano. Now the world wouldn't end. But the lava would destroy them and the town.

With the fate of the town in their hands, Liv and Arie tried to push down the lava. Instead of going back in the volcano, it started springing out lava. Liv was determined to stop the lava. She used her wind powers to build a trench leading into the ocean so that the lava would make the island bigger and not destroy it. The task was so difficult Liv almost passed out.

The island and the volcano are still there today. Thanks to Liv and Arie, the island is still growing. Now it is just as beautiful 209 years later. No one knows what happened to them. I think they went back to the moon. Wherever they are, the Hawaiians are very thankful to them.

"Liv," said Arie.

"What?" said Liv.

"I'm so glad we did that. It was the most challenging thing I've ever done, but it was worth it."

Kid, You Are 50...

In KID, YOU ARE 50... by That Awesome Writer, a boy wonders why everyone but him has a special skill that makes life more interesting and just plain cooler. The truth of the matter surprises him.

Mac found school interesting on most days but for all the wrong reasons. Mac was a bit of an odd kid. He only enjoyed school on the days that he experienced what he referred to as a “glitch” in his eyes. He later discovered what he thought to be a glitch was actually the beginnings of his super hidden power. Everyone on Mac’s planet has superpowers. Mac does not know that he has superpowers yet.

Mac lives on a planet called Galvaxon. Mac is 12 years old but has the imagination of an adult well beyond his years. Mac does not enjoy the routine life of school and homework. In fact he gets quite bored with it very easily. He always finishes his work well ahead of time and can never reach the ending of a story or math problem without seeing the answer already in his eye. It is like Mac can predict things before they happen or solve problems before getting to the end. Mac connected to school work, adult conversations, problem-solving, and stories, and always knew how things would end. He considered this ability to be a connection he had only with grownups.

But Mac really likes it when he talks with the other kids. He loves getting lost in their conversations. Unlike his ability to finish a story or thought with grownups and school work, he can never see when or how kids’ conversations or stories are going to end. Mac could never predict what a kid was going to do or say, or how things would even end.

Mac actually found it fun to get lost in kids’ stories and conversations, because it was during these times only that Mac experienced the “glitch” in his eyes. It was a non-stop blinking of his eyes up to 50 blinks in five seconds. Mac did not understand why the glitch occurred. The glitch was weird to Mac, but he enjoyed it, too.

One day in school, Mac wondered why all of the kids around him had superpowers, but he did not. All he had was a glitch. He

began to wonder why he did not have superpowers. So in school, instead of doing his work, he drew superheroes.

A classmate glanced over his shoulder. She began to shout, "Mr. Clips! Mr. Clips!"

The teacher flew over to her desk.

"What is the problem?"

"Mac's drawing in class!"

Before the teacher could do anything, Mac had already seen how things were going to end and saw that he was not going to get in trouble, so he let things play out the way he saw them.

The teacher approached Mac and hovered over his desk. Mac tried to crumble up the paper and toss it in the trash can behind him, but it was too late. The teacher was already hovering at his desk.

"Is this true, Mac?"

Mac grunted and made no eye contact with Mr. Clips. Mr. Clips pulled out a green piece of paper. Mac had seen one of those before: detention slip. Mr. Clips put the slip on Mac's desk. "See me after class," he said in a flat voice.

Mac really wanted to tell the teacher that he was not going to stay for detention, because he was going to meet up with his dad instead, but he decided not to tell Mr. Clips.

When school was finally over, Mac's dad approached Mr. Clips and told him that Mac could not stay after school today because of their plans. Mac smiled at Mr. Clips as he walked away with his dad and murmured toward Mr. Clips, "I could have told you that I was not going to stay here."

Mr. Clips replied, "What did you say, young man?" Before Mac could answer him, another kid walked by and stood next to Mac to return his book. Suddenly Mac began to blink rapidly and non-stop. Mac's dad excused Mac from the school and began to walk Mac away. Immediately Mac's "glitch" problem came to an end. His father observed Mac and patted him on the head as they continued to walk away.

Mac and his dad went out to eat at a restaurant. The waiter came to take their orders. Mac and his dad ordered a steak and side order of turnips.

Mac's dad asked him when he started experiencing the fast blinking in his eyes. Mac told him that he experienced it whenever he was around kids and trying to figure out something the kids

were saying or whenever he was trying to predict how their stories or conversations were going to end. But Mac was puzzled because he recalled that he was not listening to a kid's story or conversation when he started to glitch around Mr. Clips.

His dad explained to Mac that his glitch was the result of his inability to connect with kids and do funny and fun kid's stuff. He reminded Mac that he is always so serious and so used to being around all of the grownups in the family that he never really had a chance to be a kid. Mac asked his dad why he never played with kids before.

But what was revealed next made Mac's head snap. His dad told Mac that he has been keeping this secret from him for a very long time.

"Mac, you were born with a different kind of superpower. A power that is not like any other on this planet all because...I am not from this planet."

"What?" Mac replies angrily. "I thought you and mom were native to our planet like everyone else."

"I am actually from planet Earth," Dad replied. "When I was living on Earth, I was an astronaut. I was known back home as the 'wise one.' I inherited great wisdom from my grandfather and great-grandfather. It is not a 'superpower' as you know it here, but it is a great characteristic and gift to have. It developed over years of experience and comes from within. My grandfather told me to always feed my wisdom with turnips because they are a good food source for the brain. So, I have been eating turnips ever since I can remember, and my brain gets stronger and stronger. Wisdom is actually pretty cool. And your mom, well, you know she has the super power of x-ray vision. When you combine my gift of wisdom with your mom's x-ray vision super power, it results in your ability to see the future, solve problems and predict things that will happen."

Mac said, "Oh, I think I get it now. Is that why I always seem to know what is going to happen at home or in school whenever I am dealing with grownups? But I don't understand why I'm always suffering my 'glitch' around kids and during their conversations and stories, and I can never ever figure out where they are going with their stories. I get completely lost in their conversations all the time."

Mac's dad explained, "Son, wisdom tells me that you cannot relate to the kids or figure out their stories, and always glitch around them, because you have no experience with being a kid yourself. Ever since you developed your wisdom traits, you surrounded yourself with adults and only wanted to talk to and be around grownups. It was like you were a little sponge soaking up everything they had to say. It soon became very easy for you to wisely figure things out and apply your vision to see into the future."

"So can I fix this glitch? Will I ever be able to relate to kids?" Mac asked.

"Sure you will, son. All you have to do is start participating in the silly, funny and sometimes waste-of-time activities that kids always do, and you will start beginning to feel like one. But son, you cannot apply your wisdom to situations when you are with them. You must remember that these are kids, and kids like to do things that are silly and that do not make sense all the time. If you apply your wisdom you will prevent yourself from becoming more like them and less like a grownup. Do this, and soon you will see your glitch go away and you will be predicting things, solving problems and seeing the future of kids in no time."

"So, Dad, what's up with the turnips? I notice that only you and I eat them."

"People here just don't like them much, son. They have no effect on people from here either way. I eat them because they nurture my brain, and that's why you eat them, too. They feed the wisdom trait."

"Ok, D, whatever you say. I just know that I love turnips."

Mac became very curious about how it would feel to actually play with another kid without applying logic or wisdom. He wanted to unlock the door to his unknown superpower on kids. He decided to troubleshoot to discover what his superpower would be. Mac went to his friend Cal's house but left his serious thinking and wisdom at home. Mac even pulled out a brand new unread *Big Nate* book from his basement to get his mind free and clear of grownups before going.

"Hey, Cal!" says Mac.

"Hey, Mac!" Cal says. "What's up?"

"I need your help."

"Okay. Let's go up to my room and we'll talk then."

They walk upstairs into Cal's room. Mac tells Cal how he cannot realize or control his power because he looks at everything from a grownup's perspective.

"Weird. I think I know how to fix that," Cal says confidently.

The two of them played Xbox the entire afternoon, followed by pizza and Sprite. Later, they went to see a movie and meet up with some of their friends from school. Mac learned to tell jokes and laugh at funny stories like never before. In fact, Mac became a true comedian and had a lot of jokes locked up about how dull and boring grownups can be. The grownup jokes were his best yet.

After that it was late and, Cal flew back home to his house before his parents discovered he was gone. Meanwhile, Mac walked back to his own house. Mac laughed the entire walk home. He never even thought about unlocking his power with the kids and actually focused on having a good time. As he walked away from Cal's house, he walked with his head up high. Mac had a completely "glitch-free" afternoon. He wondered why he hadn't discovered this kind of fun before. When he got home, his parents were already asleep.

Mac lay across his bed while he smiled in relief to be in his bed after such an exhausting afternoon. After a couple of minutes, he got up and stared at the moon. Instantly, he had an image of Cal talking to some of the other kids tomorrow at school telling them how cool Mac was and inviting them over for games after school. Mac was so relieved and excited that for the first time he experienced a future image involving kids. Mac was even more excited to finally know what it felt like to be a kid. AWESOME.

Lucy the Cake and Cupcake Maker

*Successful businesses require more than inspiration and fancy technology. **LUCY THE CAKE AND CUPCAKE MAKER** by **Isabelle Jones** finds a baker learning the business end of her career.*

It was a beautiful spring morning, and sweet Lucy was eager to get her day started. She owned a local business called Bedazzle Dessert, which had been a passion of hers. It was located in the city where Lucy lives. Her business was open all year around. Her business is very popular, and because of that she was making a lot of money. Lucy's store sold freshly baked cakes and cupcakes with a variety of flavors to choose from, including chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, red velvet, and scrumptious mint chocolate.

As Lucy's business grew she came up with a brilliant idea...robots! She could build six robots! Each robot would have a specific duty. Scarlett, Dominic, Genna, Lance, Oliver, and Alexandra were the robots' names. One would be assigned to get all the ingredients. Another would add and stir them all together and then put them into a pot. The next robot would put them into the oven. The other one would take the cakes or cupcakes out of the oven and put the filling in each one individually. The robot after that would put the frosting and or the fondant on them and put them into the boxes or packages. Last but not least, the final robot would then put them on display.

In addition, Lucy spent money on redecorating her store. When Lucy was done beautifying her store and getting her robots, she said, "I don't have any more money. ,Now what am I going to do?"

Lucy realized that she needed more money to cover her costs, so she decided to pick up a second job at another store in the city called Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory. This is a place where kids can make their own chocolate inside the factory with a guider. That guider would be Lucy. It was toward the end of the summer when Lucy had the money issue so she just closed the store for the season. Hopefully Lucy would have enough money to open her business again, and everything would be the way things used to be. And that happened.

When Lucy was ready to open her business again she bought all the supplies ahead of time and stored it all. Lucy's customers were back and glad that her store was open again.

After Lucy was done working for the day she realized that the robots were what cost so much money. Lucy shut the robots down, returned them, and hired new people to help out (real people). Lucy learned that her business was going a lot quicker with real people instead of robots and that she was making even more money.

Oli the Alien

*We are not alone. In **OLI THE ALIEN** by Alex Moler, humans find out just how present aliens are on Earth.*

It was a dark and stormy Saturday night, and Jenn and Mack were all alone. Their parents had left for a business trip and wouldn't be back until the next week. Jenn and Mack were watching lightning bolts pop in the sky. They saw one last, quick flash, and then it was pitch black.

They were thinking they had lost power, when all of a sudden they heard a loud noise coming from the backyard. They pushed the red velvet curtains aside and saw a rusty UFO land in their yard. They stared at each other in confusion, and when they turned back to look, all that was there was a tiny orange alien. Jenn dragged Mack behind her as they went outside to meet the alien.

Jenn asked, "Who are you?"

The alien didn't reply. He just stood there, very shy and quiet. Jenn and Mack kept staring at him, and the orange alien had no choice but to tell the truth.

The alien spoke quietly. "I'm Oli. I'm not from this planet. I'm not supposed to reveal myself, but I need help."

The kids freaked out. They were screaming and questioning each other. Jenn and Mack started talking crazily. Mack said to Jenn, "Those are real?"

Jenn answered, "I guess."

Oli spoke loudly and explained why he was here. "I was kicked out of my tribe because I have three antennas instead of two antennas." Then Oli said dramatically, "If I don't get back in time I might never see my family ever again. We are nomadic, so they might move without me. I'm here to get a ruling signed by alien headquarters stating that anyone that has three antennas can live in my tribe."

Mack asked, "What is headquarters?"

Since Oli had already revealed his identity to the kids, he figured he might as well tell them about headquarters. "We have a base here on Earth." Oli could see they were nice kids, so he didn't mind bending the rules.

"Do you know where your headquarters is?" asked Mack.

Oli replied, "Yes," and then explained to Jenn and Mack that he had been there that day and had just been dropped off by the headquarters' UFO taxi. Oli went on and on about how he wasn't supposed to be dropped off at a human's house, but the taxi driver had gotten the wrong address.

Jenn then asked, "Why is headquarters on Earth?"

Oli explained, "It is on Earth because there is no more room for it to be in outer space. But here is why I need you to help. When I went to headquarters they told me to carry out a favor. If I complete that favor they will sign the ruling. The favor is to get a gnome dressed in a president's suit."

"Out of all the things in the universe, why would they want a gnome!" shouted Jenn.

Oli replied, "The headquarters wants a gnome because when they are off from work they like to garden. So anyway, I'm planning to do this all tomorrow because it is too late to start searching for a gnome today. Can I stay the night, and can you help me find a gnome tomorrow?"

Jenn exclaimed, "Of course, but first let's have some dinner."

Mack added, "We are having tacos. Do you like tacos?"

Oli stated, "They are my favorite."

They ate at the long dinner table, and when somebody talked it echoed.

After dinner and a game of Monopoly, Oli looked at his watch. "It's getting pretty late," he said. "We should go to bed." So all three went upstairs, climbed into their squeaky beds, and hoped to have sweet dreams.

It was bright and shiny the next morning. The sun was out, and they woke to the crowing of a rooster on the top of the roof. They freshened up and walked downstairs to grab some leftover tacos from last night's dinner.

Oli asked, "Where can I find a gnome?"

Mack said, "Well, there is a store called Build a Gnome."

Oli yelled, "Where is it?"

Jenn shouted, "It's at the mall!"

Oli was excited. When he finished his taco he yanked on Jenn and Mack and asked, "Do you have spare clothes I can borrow?"

Mack stated, "Yes, come with me."

Jenn replied, "I guess we are done with breakfast," and followed Oli and Mack up the stairs.

Mack pulled some clothes out of his dark blue dresser. He pulled out a shirt and jeans. He then went to the closet and got a sports jacket, a hat, and sunglasses. Mack said, "Put this on, and then we will all walk to the mall." Mack and Jenn walked out of the room to give Oli privacy.

Oli came out of the room, and they walked to the mall. As they were walking down the sidewalk nobody noticed that Oli was an alien.

They reached the mall, with the escalators, the shops, and the food court. They walked inside and looked for Build a Gnome. They didn't exactly know where the store was until they saw the flashing red and blue lights. They ran right to the store.

They walked in, picked out the gnome, and stuffed it. They then looked for an outfit like a president. They found one in the fancy outfit section and dressed the gnome. They went to the cashier and scanned the tag. Jenn took out her wallet and gave a twenty dollar bill to the lady. She gave back five dollars and the receipt.

Mack exclaimed, "Wow, this is so expensive. No wonder they make so much money."

"The headquarters is an hour away. Can we take a bus that leads somewhere close to headquarters?" asked Oli.

Jenn responded, "Okay, but this time Mack is paying."

The bus was yellow, and it smelled like fuel. They got on and went straight to headquarters.

When they got off, Oli led them to headquarters. He told them to wait outside. Oli opened the invisible door, and he was gone.

He walked up the long, red-carpeted hallway and opened the door that led to the courtroom. He saw all five of the representatives of his planet, and he gave the head alien the gnome. The aliens huddled together and decided that they would sign the ruling stating that three antennas are allowed in his tribe. All five members signed, and then the head alien gave the scroll to Oli and gave him a potion so he could get home faster.

Oli responded, "Thank you," and then he left the room and walked back to Jenn and Mack.

"Are you going to mention anything about aliens on this planet?" he asked the two.

Jenn responded, "No, we won't tell about aliens. If we tell, they might hurt you guys, and we love you too much to cause trouble."

Oli replied, “Thanks.” He paused for a moment. “This is goodbye,” he said. “I’ll never forget you, or how kind you were to help me.”

Then Oli drank his potion and—*poof!*—he disappeared.

Oli reappeared in outer space. He found his family and the tribe leaders. He showed the tribe leaders the ruling, and they accepted him back. Then he went over to his family and hugged them nearly to death.

Back on Earth, Jenn and Mack walked back home, waiting for another adventure to happen.

The Payoff

A half-court shot is the key to the future of a youth basketball team in
THE PAYOFF by *Ethan Weitzman*.

It was a cold, snowy day in Detroit, Michigan. Lamar and his friend Alex were stuck inside the house with nothing to do. It was the middle of February, and it had been snowing for three months. The boys were dreaming of spring when they could finally go outside and do what they love most: play basketball.

“I’m so bored,” Lamar said.

“Yeah, we should do something,” replied Alex.

“Like what?” responded Lamar.

“We should start a basketball team,” said Alex.

“Yeah, our uniform colors should be green and white, and we should play in that league in Detroit full of twelve-year-old kids, just like us,” said Lamar.

“That’s a great idea, but it costs money. Where are you going to get the money from? What will you call your team?” said Dad.

Lamar and Alex suggested different team names, but they couldn’t agree on anything until Alex came up with an amazing name: “The Detroit Ballers.” Then they discussed who should be on the team. A lot of their friends play basketball every day during recess, so it wasn’t hard to come up with a full roster. Before the boys knew it they had a name, a roster, and uniforms picked out. There was only one thing standing in their way. They needed to come up with the money to pay for the uniforms, tournament entry fees, and equipment.

The boys were going to the Pistons game the next day. They knew there was a drawing where the winner would attempt a half-court shot. If the winner made that half-court shot, the shooter would win \$1,500. That was just the right amount to enter the Detroit youth basketball league and buy uniforms.

The boys were thinking about the game all day long. The next day they wanted that \$1,500 more than anybody at The Palace of Auburn Hills.

“Look at how bad the Pistons are playing. We could play better than that,” stated Lamar.

Alex laughed, “Yeah, if we ever get the chance to play.”

“At half time, we will be selecting one lucky winner to shoot a half-court shot and win \$1,500 if you make it,” said the announcer.

Shortly after the announcement, the half time buzzer rang. The Pistons were down by twenty points.

The announcer said, “The lucky winner is in section 127, row 1, and seat 15.”

“Lamar, that’s you!” excitedly yelled Alex. Alex kept screaming, “Go, Lamar; Go, Lamar; you got this!”

Lamar went down to the court. He thought, *This is my chance*. He was so nervous because he did not want to let his friends down. They were counting on him to win the money so they could form their team.

The crowd quieted. Lamar did his two-step dance, and let the ball go. The next thing he knew Josh Smith, a Pistons player, was hugging him. The ball was in. Lamar won the \$1,500 they needed. The crowd went wild. Alex was screaming his lungs out. Alex screamed, “Yeah, Lamar!”

That winter the boys made the basketball team. It had green and white uniforms. The boys entered lots of tournaments, leading up to the big league. They made it to the final game of the big league and they lost. All the boys still said it was the best winter they had ever had. Being able to play on a team together was the best experience of their life.

Reality

Trust no one. Nothing is as it appears in REALITY by Madeline Mathias.

Annabelle sat on her living room couch, glancing out at the sunshine and green grass. It was always nice like this, and sometimes she wished it was different. She was also bored and thirsty, so she called for Tom, her twin brother.

“TOM!” she shouted.

“Yeah?” His reply bounced throughout the house.

“Could you get me a bottle of Pepsi?”

“I’m not your servant just because I’m younger than you by three minutes!”

“Just this once!”

“Fine.”

Tom was stubborn, but Annabelle still loved him. She grinned as he brought her the bottle, ice cold and dotted with droplets of moisture. She took it from his hands, watching him plant himself onto the chair across from her.

Annabelle watched the soda fizz as she unscrewed the cap, foaming and hissing. “Want a sip?”

“No thanks. Too many germs.”

“Suit yourself.” Annabelle took another sip.

Tom produced a piece of clay out of his pocket and fiddled with it. Annabelle set her bottle down and glanced around the room. The clock nearby ticked, slightly disturbing the silence. Tom broke the silence.

“Have you ever thought about...crime?” he inquired.

Annabelle almost spit out her soda, putting her hand over her mouth to contain any possible leakage of the beverage. “Crime? Nobody’s ever even heard of crime in the last ten years!”

“Well, it is possible,” he shrugged. He continued to fumble with the clay, producing it into a diamond-like shape.

Before they could continue their debate, the twins were interrupted. “Kids?” the voice of their grandfather resonated through the halls.

“Yes?” they answered in unison.

“Do me a favor and come over here.”

Tom and Annabelle exchanged confused glances. Their grandfather was always cooped up in his room, seldom exchanging any words with the siblings except for a quote from a famous person who had died many centuries earlier. However, orders were orders. Tom hurried after his twin sister, passing on hushed words and questioning glances.

Tom quietly opened the door. "Did you need something?"

"Of course I do. Now, the reason I called you here was for something very important, which you probably guessed because I barely ever talk to you." The older man smiled weakly. "Tom, come over here." He gestured to him with his hands.

Tom's grandfather gripped Tom's head, fiddling with something he could not feel. "What are you doing?"

"I'm taking something off of your head. You can't feel it, but I can." He continued to fiddle with the straps of the mask that Tom was incapable of feeling. "There we go...."

Tom heard a small click. Then he gasped. Everything was different. The sun wasn't shining, and everything seemed to have an industrial feel to it. Buildings nearby gleamed, and Tom saw microphones and loudspeakers attached to rooftops and telephone poles. The only people who looked the same were Annabelle and his grandfather.

"W-what did you do!" Tom was flabbergasted.

"Look here. I took your mask off." His grandfather was holding a large, black mask encased with several different kinds of wires and LED indicators.

"Annabelle! You should take your mask off, too!"

She was stunned. Shocked. She hadn't taken off her mask, but what she had just heard was convincing enough. Tom was always honest. He never lied. She had reason to believe him.

She shuffled over to her grandfather, watching his hands undo the straps of the mask. Even though she was incapable of feeling the mask as well, she knew in the back of her mind that it was there. There was a click, and the mask slid off.

Tom was right. Everything did look different. It looked odd and out of place. She looked outside. Signs reading "The USSA Is Watching You" lingered forebodingly on the streets. This wasn't her world.

"But...why? This doesn't make sense! Why do we all have to wear these masks?" Tom was downright confused and Annabelle

was frantic. The siblings had so many emotions weighing down on them it was almost too much to bear. “I’ll tell you. Come closer.” Their grandfather’s tone became hushed, worried. The twins shifted closer.

“The reason why is the government. They’ve set us all up. They want us to be perfect—flawless. Meanwhile, they’re committing murders behind our backs,” he sneered.

Annabelle was taken aback. Tom’s jaw was at the floor.

“And have you ever noticed you don’t see any other old people except me? That’s because they eventually wrap their heads around it. After many years, they finally figure out that something is off, and the government knows this. Then, they...*dispose* of them before they can tell anyone else about it.”

“But...how did you escape?” Annabelle’s voice quivered.

“I have my ways. Your mother may have taught you not to lie, but sometimes deception is the only route that can get you out alive.”

“Well, we have to do something! We can’t let people just be walking around like mindless sheep. We have to save them or do something without getting ourselves killed!” Annabelle was exasperated.

“Well, when I think about it, our friend Jay always said he had something to tell us but he wouldn’t do it until the time came or something like that.” Tom looked thoughtful.

“Hey, you’re right! He was all like ‘I have something super important to tell you, but you’re not ready yet.’” The gears in Annabelle’s brain started turning.

“Well, go out there and try to find him. He’ll see that you’re ready,” their grandfather wheezed.

Tom looked over his shoulder as he shuffled toward the door.

“Grandpa?”

“Yes, Tom?”

“Why did you tell us this today?”

“Today is the anniversary of your father’s death. He’d have wanted me to tell this to you today. Also, be wary of surveillance—”

Before Tom could reply, Annabelle grabbed him by the arm and led him out the door, bidding her grandfather goodbye as she tore down the hall, Tom stumbling behind her. He let go of her arm and skidded across the tile floor, flinging open the closet door. Two pairs of shoes tumbled out. One belonged to him, the other to his

mother. Annabelle tossed her mother's shoes back in the closet as she tore her own pair out of their holders, slipping them on with ease. The closet door was shut with a *BANG*, and Tom carefully unlocked the door before sprinting out, his sister close behind him.

He spotted Jay sitting on his front porch, alone.

Bingo.

Mud and grass was strewn across the street, adding variety to the drab asphalt and cloudy sky. Sneakers scuffed across the pavement and leaped over polluted ditches and in between surveillance posts, smacking onto the front sidewalk of Jay's house—a security camera lingering nearby. “Jay!” Annabelle strained, out of breath. He turned to face them.

“WE FOUND OUT!” Tom shouted.

“Well, well. It's been a long time since I've seen you guys. And it looks like you're ready for the secret. Just be a little more quiet next time,” he chuckled.

Tom drew closer.

“Listen up, you two. The secret is that I know a way we can figure out how to stop the government from killing people and keeping us in this delusional happy-land trance. We need to keep this a secret and stock up on weapons in case things go wrong.”

Tom's face drained of color. Annabelle let out a small squeak. “Well, what do we do?” Tom asked.

“We make a plan.” Jay muted his voice.

As the group exchanged worried glances and hushed whispers, they failed to notice the nearby security camera, recording everything it saw and heard. This would prove to be a very, very bad mistake.

A man clad in a government official badge and suit was teeming with rage. An executive sat nearby, nervously adjusting his tie. “Byus, I want these children *GONE!* We cannot afford to have a revolt when everything is going according to plan.”

“Well, sir, we could send a squad in—”

“And bring attention to the entire country? The masks may make things look different, but the national headlines will cause an outcry!”

“Have you forgotten about the Secret Service agents, sir? They'll take care of everything without drawing any attention to themselves,” Agent Byus commented quietly.

“Fine, then. Just have them do it and get it over with.”

"But what about the masks?"

"The Secret Service will take care of that too."

"Okay, Sir. I'll get that taken care of."

"Thank you."

The man in the suit and government badge walked briskly out of the room.

The executive reached over to pick up the phone on his desk. He dialed Secret Service and waited.

"USSA Secret Service."

"It's Executive Byus. We have a problem on our hands."

"And that problem is?"

"We've got a Code 4. Some bunch of juveniles found out about the masks, and they could start a revolt. We need you to take care of them as soon as possible."

"Can do, Mr. Byus." There was a click and a beep as the Secret Service hung up. Executive Byus leaped out of his chair, dashing to the next room.

"Sir, the issue has been taken care of."

The red-faced man turned and grinned "Excellent. Rebels disgust me."

"They disgust me, too...sir."

Annabelle and Tom and Jay were in for an interesting surprise. So was the Secret Service.

Annabelle and Tom had not returned for a while. Their grandfather was becoming concerned. He reached for the remote, watching the TV flicker to life. An anxious-looking woman holding a microphone appeared on the screen. The twin's grandfather leaned closer.

"Three USSA Secret Service Agents failed to return to government headquarters after responding to a call regarding a possible revolt against the agency. The three suspects involved are believed to be children. There will be more information on this case soon."

The elderly man gasped as he turned off the television with trembling hands.

They were going to succeed.

Rylie Rewind

*Rylie's life as a high-schooler includes many of the challenges that come to a girl of her age. But there is something different about her that adds another dimension to her existence in **RYLIE REWIND** by R.T. Seay.*

How should I start this? Do I go right to the action? Oh, you're here. Um...I guess I should start from the beginning.

My name is Rylie, and this is my story, I'm not the most popular girl at school, but I have friends—two, really: a girl named Angela, and a guy named Jay. We're all in tenth grade, and, like I said, we're not the most popular people in the group, but it's still something. And what I think is the most interesting part of my life is I sort of have the power to travel back in time. I like to believe that my powers came from a dying planet and I'm the last of its kind, but that story is already taken.

Prom's coming up in three days, and I've asked every guy except for Jay because he said he's not going. And nobody has asked me out. As Jay, Angela and I were walking to class, Trevor Cunningham asked me to prom, right in front of everyone!

"My lady, will you do me the honors of going to prom?" He said in a British accent (even though he's not British).

"Umm...sure...I guess," I said nervously (I only said that because Jay wanted me to).

"Hey, Jay," I said as I was packing my stuff to go home.

"Hey, Rylie," Jay said as he leaned against the next locker from mine. We always stayed at this spot until Angela came. Angela is usually late, and so Jay and I talk while we wait for Angela.

"Hey, Jay, can you keep a secret?" I said in a low voice.

"Sure, what is it?" he replied.

"Well...I sorta...kinda have the power to travel back in time," I said in a sheepish voice.

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!" he laughed. "You're always the comedian," he said while catching his breath.

"Yeah, I guess I am..." I said.

A few minutes later, Angela came and looked at the clock.

“Two fifty-three; Angela comes at two fifty-three,” I said in my mind. *FFFFFFFFFWWWWWOOOOOOSSSSSSSSSHHHHHH ZAP*

Five minutes ago...

“Hey, Jay, can you keep a secret?” I said in a low voice.

“Sure, what is it?” he replied.

“Well...I sotrta...kinda have the power to travel back in time,” I said in a sheepish voice.

“HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!” he laughed. “You’re always the comedian,” he said while catching his breath.

“No, seriously, I do. And to prove it, Angela comes at two fifty-three.”

Five minutes later Jay gave me a weird look. I guess he believed me.

Two nights after the reveal, at Angela’s house...

“MOM, YOU HAVE TO STOP DOING THIS YOU ARE HURTING YOURSELF!” Angela frantically yelled.

“I can do what I want! And you can’t take them away from me; ever since he left, I can’t stop!” Angela’s mom replied.

“Look I miss him, too.... BUT THAT DOESN’T MEAN YOU HAVE TO DO THIS!”

“YOU KNOW WHAT, I DON’T CARE ANY MORE!” Angela’s mom yelled in anger. Angela’s mom left the room.

That night Angela had left a note at her mother’s door.

*Dear Mom,
I’m running away from , and I don’t know
where I’m going. I hope you can forgive
me. I hope eventually I’ll see you again, I
hope.
~Angela*

“I have to save her from running away,” I told Jay frantically.

“I know, but what if she runs away again? What if you can’t stop her?” Jay said.

“No, this isn’t how it’s supposed to be,” I said in a sorrowful voice.

Jay sighed. "Ok, fine, but don't say I didn't warn you," he said with worry.

FFFFFFFFFOOOOOOSSSSSHHHH ZAP. It took me many tries to save Angela. I even had to chase her down and yell at her to wait. And I finally got it, when I was sneaking around Angela's condo when I heard them yelling the night she left. I found a way to break them up by giving good compliments to each other and saying it was from Angela or her mom.

Yeah, they call me Rylie the great, Rylie the time traveler, Rylie the rewinder. Rylie Rewind, naaa no old.

If you were wondering, Trevor and I actually get along quite nicely. He actually knew where Angela's condo was, and that helped me out to save Angela. He said that Angela and he were on the debate team before she quit. So we go along quite nicely.

So you could say that this is a happy ending, or everyone lived happily ever after. But I would say that these were just crazy days for Rylie Rewind.

Sneaker Boss

SNEAKER BOSS by *Devin Roberts* is a story of inspiration and perseverance, where the shoe of the century comes from the mind of an inventive genius.

“**L**adies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to Mr. Brian Rogers!”

As Brian slowly walked toward the stage, I saw that faraway look that sometimes comes to Brian’s eyes just before he starts to speak. Yep, it is the look all right! Brian took a deep breath, cleared his throat, and began...

“This has been a long, hard journey getting where I am today.” Brian did not like speaking in front of people. He is really shy, but he feels he must tell his story. If it can encourage one kid or adult, it is worth being a little uncomfortable. Brian continued, “Here’s my story.”

Brian Rogers told the mixed audience of 15- to 40-year-olds that he had been an unemployed 30-year-old with two college degrees. He continued as he got that look of “Why?” Most people wonder why he would have been unemployed. They usually never guess correctly. People love to judge before they get all the facts.

Brian explained he has severe ADHD and autism. He was not diagnosed until he was 13 years old, but he always knew “something” was different about him. I saw a lot of heads go up and down in agreement.

Brian’s résumé was always greatly received by the almost-new boss. It was full of ideas that showed Brian’s creativity. The résumé also told about projects he completed in college and how great they were.

However, Bryan’s interviews were another story. He told how the interviews started off pretty well. Everyone would be smiling, but the judgment-type questions would start, and he would go crazy, yelling and screaming. He was usually asked to leave. The employers didn’t want him.

After Brian’s last interview about six months ago, Brian went to the local pizzeria one day. He saw an article in a wrinkled newspaper that said, “Now hiring: Head Advisor, Head of Factory Development Division.” The article also said, “We want smart,

productive, and energetic workers!” Brian took the old pizza-sauced-stained newspaper and went home. Brian felt hopeful, a feeling he had almost forgotten.

One evening after he saw the job announcement, Brian was watching the basketball game. He was updating his résumé also and thought about what the article said about wanting creative people. His brain went to work. “Sometimes the ADHD works in mysterious ways. The medicine does seem to make my ideas clearer.” He thought about inventing something. He thought if he could come up with a creative invention, he might get the job.

The basketball game gave him an idea. What if your gym shoes could change colors based on your feelings? The basketball players show so many different feelings. The shoes and the game could be wild! He thought if he created these shoes he would get the job at New Gen Athletics.

He was determined he would invent the color-changing sneakers that are based on how you are feeling. For example, if you’re happy, your sneaker would be yellow, which is the default happy color or the color of your choice. Blue is neither a happy nor a sad color. But you can switch to blue if you want to. Brian wrote down as many details and notes he as could think of to research this idea.

He remembered his mom telling him about a mood ring that was around back in the day. His mom loved her ring. Brian made a note to definitely thank Mom and get all the information he could get from her. He also knew he had to find out everything he could about the mood ring! Brian carefully put his SPECIAL NOTES in a “SPECIAL” folder.

Fast forward. Brian was fast asleep one night when he heard the phone ring. It was a call from The New Gen Athletics CEO himself, Mr. Vince Belfort. Brian quickly woke up as Vince said, “Brian, we at New Gen loved your résumé and your ideas. You have the job. Congrats, your first day is tomorrow! The address is 39807 Richards Avenue in Richfield.” Brian had submitted 550 job resumes, and on his 551st try he got his first job ever.

When Brian went to New Gen Headquarters in Richfield, about 25 minutes away from his house in Mason, Vince introduced him to the rest of the team at New Gen. Vince began with, “Hello, it’s another day at the office, but not for our newest team member, Brian Rogers. Mr. Rogers has two college degrees, one in business

management and a second one in psychology.” Vince finally finished and asked Brian, “Do you want to tell us anything else about yourself or your ideas for our company?”

Brian slowly said, “Well, I have severe ADHD and partial autism. I know I have many challenges, but I don’t let them stop me.” Brian always talks about his issues very openly. He is not ashamed of his condition, so he always gets straight to the point. “I also think that we should make a color-changing sneaker that is based on your mind. For example, if you are happy your shoes will be yellow, because that’s the default color for happiness, but you can change it. Other emotions include Sad, Angry, and Okay. I would put the price at \$220 for each pair of sneakers for men and for youth the price would be \$175. For infant sizes it would be \$145, and for little babies it would be \$115.”

One coworker said, “So is this what people with ADHD and partial autism ‘THINK’ about, Brian?”

“Yes, it’s actually possible to get as far as I did and earn two college degrees.”

“From where? Richfield Community College?”

“No, at Roder University and at Bakers-Flood University, two of the top ten universities in the United States, for your information.”

“On what planet, Rogers?”

“Earth, that’s what planet, buddy! You know what, buddy, I entered five hundred and fifty job applications before I got this job. You’re no different than anyone else who doubted me. All those five hundred and fifty CEO’s didn’t want me, but this one does! He’s your boss, so you have to work with me! Next time you see me, you’ll see a color-changing sneaker!”

Brian brought in his boatload of technology “stuff” for this very special project. He had his prototype sneaker that plugs in connected to a human brain and had a sensor hooked up to the brain. The brain was happy and yellow so it played the song “Happy” by Pharrell. It goes “It might seem crazy what I’m about to say, sunshine she’s here you can take a break. I’m a hot air balloon like I go to space. Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof.” Then Brian switched the person’s emotion to a red, which is angry. The shoe turned red like it was supposed to.

This is the first time in Brian’s life he feels like he is an inventor. He put all these pieces of technology together for such a great

invention. He feels very proud of himself. When Vince saw his little invention, he said, "I know I made the right decision when I hired you. Great job, Brian. This will be on production tomorrow, and you will earn 100 percent profit on this sneaker. This is what happens when you shows courage and dedication."

"Well this is my story. To all the nerds out there: You will run the next generation."

Clap, Clap, Clap!

"REMEMBER: DON'T WORRY; BE HAPPY!"

The Social Media Dilemma

*It's a grammar war! Two former college roommates wage an online feud in **THE SOCIAL MEDIA DILEMMA** by J. Gray Mulligan.*

The clock struck 12:07, and the kids filed out of the class for lunch. Mr. Fisher was left in the classroom. He walked over to his computer to find he had a friend request on Facebook. New to the social media site, he accepted. That was a big mistake. The person was actually a fake profile by Dr. Selphie Von Yolo Swag, Mr. Fisher's egotistical archenemy who had been his college roommate. She and Mr. Fisher had some major disagreements about commas, and Dr. Swag was proven wrong. She dropped out and resorted to annoying the people of the internet with grammatically incorrect posts.

Later that day, Mr. Fisher checked his Facebook again to see a duck face captioned "Ime at the Starbucks i bet your jealous"

Mr. Fisher's teacher instincts kicked in, and he commented, "It's 'I'm' and 'you're.' It's like you don't even care."

Selphie replied, "we'll at least I got SWAG!"

"*Well*," Mr. Fisher retorted.

Mr. Fisher corrected so many of Selphie's posts that he was flagged for spam. Mr. Fisher didn't know the lingo of the internet and googled it to find out that he could face serious trouble. While Mr. Fisher's account was down, Selphie started plotting her revenge. Then Selphie tried to "hack" Mr. Fisher.

Later that day, Mr. Fisher was downstairs waiting for kids to show up for a lunch detention. Selphie illegally entered the building by posing as a substitute teacher and went upstairs with bad intentions. Her target was Mr. Fisher's Facebook.

In the time it took Selphie to get on Facebook on Mr. Fisher's computer and put up an incorrect post, Mr. Fisher had already gotten back with the kids from lunch.

"So we meet again," he said.

"Alas, we do, Dan."

"It's been years."

"But you will not win."

Then out of nowhere a street fighter-esqe proofreading battle commenced. Red pens went flying, and it was a very good

proofread on both sides. But Mr. Fisher emerged victorious because Selphie made a mistake on a semicolon. Selphie decided to leave with her dignity intact.

While this was going on, the kids saw the incorrect posts and unplugged the computer. But the damage had been done.

Mr. Fisher was torn.

But Selphie made a mistake: She had logged on to her own Facebook account.

At the end of the day, Mr. Fisher powered up his computer and saw Facebook. He clicked the “delete account” button on what he thought was his account but really was another account. It was “dan Fisher is mean,” a bullying account set up by Selphie.

Selphie was defeated.

Standing Up

*Once a bully, always a bully? **STANDING UP** by **Dylan Cohen** takes a look at the possibilities of change in people's personalities.*

I hesitantly woke from my stiff mattress, bouncing up and down on the springs. A piercing wind sent a chill through me as I pulled the covers off of my body. My feet froze as they touched the floor. I walked over to the calendar in the corner of my room: January 13, 2014, Monday. My eyes glanced at the alarm clock sitting on my dresser. The time was 7:35 A.M. I was late for the bus!

I swiftly threw on my clothes and grabbed my brown-bagged lunch sitting on the kitchen countertop before dashing out the door. A blanket of snow filled the streets, and a bitter wind blew, making it really feel like winter. I sprinted to the bus stop, luckily making it there just as the doors were slowly sliding shut. The Blue Lake Public School sign on the side was covered in snow.

Thankfully the bus driver had been expecting me to be late and watched for me to come running down the street. I took a big gulp, remembering what had happened yesterday when I had accidentally bumped into a large seventh-grader. In our collision, he had dropped his lunch on the ground. Towering over me with his freakishly tall height, he looked down at my frightened face with an angry scowl I'll never forget.

The thought of meeting up with him again scared me to my core. I took a deep breath and started up the black and yellow stairs.

As I entered the bus, the driver greeted me with an unfriendly, "Hello, Matt."

"Good morning, Miss Linda," I responded. I then took my place near the front of the bus.

As soon as I sat down I heard a thud in the back of the bus and a small yelp. I immediately peered back and knew that I was in trouble.

Dennis Whitehall, or Dennis the Menace, was now standing right next to my seat. Just by his nickname anyone could tell that this giant of a seventh-grader was a big, mean bully.

The bus had begun to move. But that didn't stop Dennis from lifting me up by my throat and dangling me like a rag doll. "I

thought I told you to get lost,” he said while spitting in my face.

“I guess I found my way back,” I replied, almost jerk-like.

That only made him angrier. With his one free hand he clenched a fist and punched me in the face. I felt a crack in my lower jaw and could taste blood in my mouth. The next punch came in like a speeding bullet and hit me square in the nose. Now blood was dripping down my face. He finally threw me into the windshield, cracking it slightly. My sore body rolled down the bus stairs. Dennis began to slowly pace over to my beaten body. This had all taken just a few seconds but had felt like a century.

At that moment Miss Linda pulled the bus over to the side of the road and hissed at Dennis, “Sit down right now if you don’t want to go to juvenile hall!” Even Dennis is afraid of her authority.

She helped me into a seat. The rest of the bus ride felt extremely bumpy, and I got a headache. Finally, after what felt like a decade, we made it to the school. Miss Linda helped me inside the office, while still keeping a close eye on Dennis.

Miss Linda handed me off to the school nurse. She then ran off to catch Dennis and bring him into the principal.

Immediately when the school nurse saw me she gasped and called an ambulance. Once the paramedics got to the school they put me onto a gurney and rushed me into the ambulance. I was very surprised they didn’t ask how this happened. They just wanted me to feel better. Seconds after I was in the ambulance, it sped down the street and to the hospital.

I could just barely see out the side window of the ambulance. All I could see were treetops and clouds. The next thing I knew the paramedics put a mask on me. There was some sort of gas in there. It didn’t smell like ordinary air. Suddenly I got very woozy and fell asleep.

I woke up in a hospital bed with an IV in my arm and an array of balloons scattered about the room. I had seen a television remote on a small table next to my hospital bed and decided to watch some TV. My arm felt so much heavier as I picked up the remote. I was surprised that doing the slightest tasks would be so hard.

I watched TV for about an hour and a half before the nurse came in. She gasped, seeing that I was awake. A few minutes after the nurse left, my parents came into the room. I was so happy to see them! “Sweetie, are you ok?” asked my mom.

“I’m fine,” I responded while sitting up in the bed.

“Do I need to talk to that kid’s parents, or will the school handle this?” questioned my dad.

Dazed and a bit confused, I told my dad, “I’m sure the school will take charge.”

For the next fifteen minutes we talked and talked about the little things to get our minds off the incident. Later, the doctor came in and handed my dad a note saying that I need to refrain from going to school and stay home to recover for about a week and a half. Plus, he recommended I do some physical therapy in the weeks after that.

For the next week and a half, that's exactly what I did. Lucky for me, all the assignments we were doing in school while I was gone instantly became 100 percent scores. I guess all my teachers felt sorry for me.

Once I finally returned to school, I felt like a whole new person. Everything was different. My body had healed with the help of doctors and physical therapists, but there was an extra bonus. Through the loving support of my parents and many friends I didn't even know existed, I had also managed to recover my self-esteem. Just like in the movies, though, that newfound confidence was about to be tested.

It was inevitable that Dennis and I would once again bump into each other. He was a hard guy to miss, even in a hall filled with rowdy, loud students. I spotted him at the far end of the longest hallway in the school walking toward me. Suddenly this hallway didn't seem so long to me anymore. I tried with everything I had inside to control my trembling.

When Dennis walked over to me, he said, “The principal says we need to become ‘friends’ and sort out our differences,” as a spray of his spit hit my cheek.

“When do we need to get together to do this?” I asked, a little surprised he wasn’t expelled.

“Only during lunch and recess,” he replied glumly.

I gave a little grunt of disappointment. Maybe this was the only way. In any case, it was an order from the principal, and there was no way of getting out of it. At least there would be a counselor close by to monitor Dennis' behavior.

During lunch that day I had to sit with Dennis. We barely acknowledged each other, much less talked. This wasn't going to be easy. He hated being there, and I thought of a million other

things I would rather be doing.

The next day, Dennis seemed a little more open to talking to me, and I found myself a little less nervous around him. Every day he got friendlier and friendlier until we found ourselves sort of forming a friendship. It amazed me that Dennis and I had anything in common at all, but we discovered that we both loved basketball. Obviously, Dennis was the better player since he was such a giant.

After the probation time was up, we agreed to still hang out and played basketball quite a bit at rec. One day while we were playing basketball on the school's main court in the gym, he said to me, "Why was I mad at you in the first place?"

I responded with, "Well, I think I bumped into you and knocked over your lunch or something. If anything, when I bumped into you I kind of saved you from having to eat what looked like a pretty lousy lunch!" We laughed and joked about that for the rest of the month. It seemed ridiculous now to Dennis that he'd gotten so angry over something so little.

After a while I introduced Dennis to my best friends Rory and Clara. Because of having to hang out with Dennis so much I never got a chance to see them. It had seemed like a millennium since I had talked to Rory or teased Clara. Other than the rare occasion we saw each other out of school, there weren't many times I physically interacted with my good friends. They were a little skeptical about how someone who was such a mean person could be so friendly. It's amazing how people can change.

After some time, they began to understand who Dennis really was. He wasn't such a big, bad guy, even if he had once wanted the whole student body to believe that he was. He had just been afraid like the rest of us, but for a different reason. He wanted to be liked. He wanted to fit in. He had gone about it all wrong, but now knew better. Dennis was actually very funny, and the entire gang would constantly bust out in laughter because of one of his jokes or harmless pranks. We all regularly hung out and played in the gym together. Finally, the Dennis storm was over.

I was extremely excited that something so spectacular could come out of a terrible situation. Now in our sophomore year of high school we all look back and laugh at that. Dennis really wasn't such a menace after all. And I found strength that I never knew I had.

Stranded

In **STRANDED** by *Kaitlyn Z.*, a girl's typical sunbathing routine in her sailboat just offshore turns into an unexpected journey to an unknown destination.

“**O**kay, Mom. I'm going for a ride on *Sally*.”
“Be safe, Kelly! Only for one hour! You better use the anchor, and bring your shoes.”

I was outside the door after she finished her sentence. From the corner of my eye I can see her waving out the window. It was a super nice day in Kahului, Hawaii. Today was the first time this week it didn't rain.

I plopped across the street. The street was burning my feet. With each step I took I could hear the heat burn my little, muddy feet. It was the perfect time to ride my boat my dad gave me as a birthday present.

I made it to the dock and hopped right on the hefty, old thing. The sail, anchor, and wheel all still worked on *Sally*. My grandpa had it when he was little. Not one thing is wrong with it.

I set the sail and started drifting out until it was about 10 feet deep. If I go out too far, I might get lost, so it's better safe than sorry. Last year a girl went missing for a week because she didn't use the anchor. I threw the anchor out as far as I could. I pulled and tugged until it was secure.

My legs hurt so badly from soccer today that I really need rest. I found the closest seat and threw my butt smack on the cushion. My legs feel like they are going to fall off. I threw them up from sitting into a lying position and slowly closed my eyes. The rocking of the boat soothes me and helps me fall asleep. The next thing I know, my eyes are shut. And I sleep like a rock.

BOOM. POW. RUMBLE. BOOM!

“Umm, hello?” I screeched as I opened my eyes. When my eyes were totally opened I saw that I was washed up on an island and the boat had just been struck by lightning! It's raining really hard. I don't know how I got washed up on shore. I looked for my anchor everywhere, and it's not with my boat. I need to pull *Sally* on the island and hope the tide doesn't pull it back.

This little, old boat is so heavy; I can't even tell if it's moving. I can feel the tide pushing my feet. Every wave helps me push the boat. When I pushed, I realized there was a hole in my boat. I guess the lightning made it.

After about 20 minutes of work, my boat is under a palm tree. The tree has many leaves, so I can just stay under the tree till the storm is gone

I walked around the island for a while. I was very tired, but I was desperate to know where I was, and my legs weren't very sore. After I searched about one-fourth the island, my eyes were closing, so I walked to my boat to sleep.

By the time I wake up, it's totally sunny out. Nobody is on the beach, which is unusual for an island. When I searched last night nobody was here, so I wasn't super shocked.

I got up from my boat. My legs are still hurting, even after my nap. I limp away from my boat to what looks like a mini cabin. Somebody has been here before me.

I step inside, and nothing is in there. The worn-out wooden window looked like it had been washed up by waves. Pieces of the wood have fallen off. The ceiling had holes in it, but it was under a tree, so not as much rain would get in. Suddenly, a bird comes swooping through the window and stands on the window sill.

"Hey there, little guy," I said.

"*Squawk*. Hello."

I was assuming he wouldn't talk to me, but I guess he just did! I stared at the little guy until he spoke again. "Hello."

"Hi. Where am I?"

"I'm Suzan."

"Suzan, where am I?"

I gave up, thinking she couldn't say anything else. I walked around the cabin, making sure I didn't see anything else. When I stepped one foot forward, Suzan flew off. Nothing else was in the cabin, so I left for now. I bet I will use the place for shelter.

"HELLO!" I shouted as loudly as I could.

I started to walk farther away from the beach and cabin, and nothing but trees and plants were there. At least I grabbed my flip flops when I left the house. I ran back to the cabin, when something hit me on the head.

“Who’s there?” I said when I woke up from what felt like a long sleep.

I looked over to see that a coconut was lying next to me. The coconut must have fallen on my head or something. I sprinted back to the cabin, and then lay on the hot, hard floor. I thought of anything I could use for a blanket. I went right outside and climbed up the cabin. I stood on the very top and grabbed a palm tree, and I saw a little monkey on the tree. I screamed in shock, and then the monkey leaped on the cabin roof and crawled onto my shoulder. *Stay calm, stay calm*, I said to myself.

“Hi, little monkey,” I said, trying not to freak myself out.

He stayed there for a minute while I pet him. I grabbed about ten leaves and hopped down from the cabin roof. When I walked in the cabin, the parrot was there again. I set up a mini bed in the corner of the room with the leaves I just grabbed. I sat down there from exhaustion. I lay there, staring up at the ceiling. I probably sat there for an hour. By the time I got up, it was very dark out. I sat by the beach, watching the waves hit my feet.

I wonder what my mom is thinking about me. I have been gone for about a day almost. Maybe she thinks I’m dead! Or that I ran away. As I started to think more about that, a tear fell from my cheek. *I mean, where even am I? I walked through the whole half of the island, and nobody is here.* Next thing I knew, I was bawling my eyes out.

With tears rushing down my face, I ran back into the cabin. I guess right now would be a great time for some sleep. My stomach grumbled, so I went outside and grabbed a coconut. I slammed it on a rock, and it cracked open. I drank the milk, and then slowly walked back to the cabin. I threw myself on the ground, and fell asleep.

When I woke up, I felt fully energized, and went to go drink coconut milk. I searched around for Suzan and couldn’t find her. Then I whistled and said, “Suzan! Hello.”

She flew toward me, and the monkey followed after her. I went into the water and splashed. The monkey came down to the water with me.

“Little monkey, I’m going to call you Pez,” I said to the monkey. He reminded me of the dog my best friend used to have. They both had soft and light brown fur. I decided to name him after Pez the dog.

Suzan flew over my head, and then hovered over Pez and me. Pez splashed me right in the face. I splashed him, but he missed. We played this little splash and miss game for about an hour, and then we ran across the beach.

ERERRRRR.

A moving object came closer and closer to the island. It took me a while to realize that the moving object is a boat. A boat! I might actually be saved!

"Suzan, fly out to the boat with this paper." I went to my broken boat and grabbed a pencil and paper. On the paper I wrote "follow me."

"Pez, follow me."

Surprisingly, both of them followed directions. Pez and I climbed to the top of the cabin roof, and grabbed palm tree branches. We waved them back and forth, while I screamed at the top of my lungs.

HONGGG! The boat was heading toward us! I dropped the leaves, ran to *Sally*, and started to push her to the ocean. As I was pushing, a man came out of the boat and walked up to me.

"What are you doing here, young lady?" the tall man said.

"I don't know. My boat washed up here and broke."

"I'll call someone to come get your boat. We can take you and your pets. Where are you from, young lady?"

"Kahului, Hawaii."

"I am heading there right now! You're in luck!"

I really wished I could call my mother and tell her I'm okay, alive and ready to come home. I was dying to see her.

When I got on the boat, I slept the whole ride without making one little peep.

I opened my eyes. My house isn't too far from where he dropped me off.

"You know, I can walk home. It's only a couple blocks away. Thank you for saving my life!"

"I'm going to drive you home after all you have been through! I'm sure you much rather would!"

I let the man drive me home. The ride is only two minutes anyway. We only talked mostly about what I did on the island. He's a really nice person.

"Thank god you're ok! I was so worried! I had no idea what was happening to her, and thought I could just die. Thank you for

driving her home and saving her!” Mom said when we walked to the doorstep.

“Oh, no problem! It’s my job anyway!”

I walked in the door and hugged my mom,

“I’m fine, Mom. I survived, and now I’m home with you.”

“I’m so happy you’re home!”

I went upstairs to bed, and then my mom woke me up. My story was on the news, and they named the island Vagues Bleues Island, which means “blue waves” in French. They said that there must have been somebody that lived there some time ago. They said that they are going to inspect the island for more clues.

Pez and Suzan are going to live in my basement for now. We have no idea what to do with them.

I felt weird being on an unknown island. I hugged my mom, and we kept watching the story they had about me. I felt like I did something outstanding, amazing, and even outrageous.

Swimming in the Future

*When Margaret comes up for air, her question quickly turns from “Where am I?” to “When am I?” in **SWIMMING IN THE FUTURE** by **Amanda H.***

When I hit the water, I feel like a bullet with crisp, clear water surrounding me. The water gives me a shock that makes me go faster when I hit it. I know it sounds weird, but it’s something that a swimmer understands. Today is February 2, 2014, and the time trials for my middle school swim team. I am swimming in lane 2. My time will determine whether I am on the A or the B team.

“It is now time for event 39, heat 12,” says the announcer happily. I dive in the water with confidence. “In lane 1, Shannon Thinkle; in lane 2, Margaret Lade; in lane 3, Carrie Shadow; in lane 4, Jane Hanki; and in lane 5, Lin Sonder.” When I hear my name called over the speakers, I always get a burst of excitement. When I turn my head to breathe, I see Coach Mez, my coach, screaming and cheering for me. I am swimming the fastest I can, and my legs feel like they are about to fall off because I am kicking so hard. I nail my turn, which will help me to get a better time.

My favorite part of swimming is looking up and seeing my time and knowing I have just swum my personal best. That time is almost mine. I will enjoy every moment of it. What is my time? What is it? It’s 19.7? It makes no sense. Where is Coach Mez? Why aren’t my best friends in the lanes next to me? What is happening?

I suddenly feel a tingle running through my body. I look up and see the Olympic trials banner hung on the wall. The announcer calls my name and says I have qualified for the 2024 Summer Olympics. I just discovered I have traveled through time!

I am scanning the stands to find my mom. I don’t see her until I hear her voice. Her hair is a little darker and grayer, but her smile is still warm and reassuring. “One moment I am at the middle school time trials, and the next I am the Olympic time trials,” I explain to my mom.

“I know, honey, I don’t understand it either. You are so grown up, and I don’t even remember your high school graduation. I feel the same way you do,” my mom explains supportively. “Let’s get

you out of your wet suit, into dry clothes, and then we will figure out this crazy puzzle.”

“Hey, Mom, check out this text...”

Hey Margaret, it's Shannon. Just wanted you to know I was cheering you on in the stands. Congratulations on achieving your dream of making the Olympic team! Remember that time at 6th grade time trials when you swam in lane 2 on February 2nd at 2:22. I remember it like it was yesterday. You were swimming in the same lane at the same time today. That's crazy, right? Your bff~ Shannon

“I only remember swimming the first half of that race. I also only recall swimming the second part at trials today,” I explain to my mom. “Maybe this text is a clue to our mystery.”

“It has been a weird day full of unexplainable events. I am not sure of anything right now. I'll call a cab and have them take us to our house, if it's still there,” my mom explains.

When we pull up to our house, it looks the same from the outside. We aren't sure if we still own the house, though. As we walk up the steps, I see my initials that I had engraved in the walkway when I was little. Now for the moment of truth, as we decide to try the key in the lock. The key doesn't fit. We don't own the house anymore. The cab is still here, so we decide to go to the Holiday Inn for the night. There is one just a few miles away, or at least we think there is!

Thank goodness we are able to get a room. We end up walking to the McDonald's across the street for dinner (not the healthiest for an Olympic swimmer). Once we get back to the hotel, I fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow. I feel like I swam in two meets today! My mom and I decide that we will figure this puzzle out in the morning.

The next day we awake ready to solve our mystery. “We have to try something to get us back to 2014. Remember how Shannon's text had twos for everything? Maybe because the numbers are all the same it is what made us travel through time. Don't think I'm crazy, but what if you swim in your middle school pool at 3:33 in lane 3 on February 3? You could even do an autograph signing or

something. Do you think it will matter if it's all twos or all threes?" Mom suggests.

"You know what? That is not a bad idea, Mom. Why don't we call the school and see if we can schedule that for tomorrow. Thanks, Mom, you are great!" I say thankfully to my mom.

"Hello, Mr. Stinger, this is Margaret Lade, the Olympic Swimmer. I was wondering if I could do an autograph signing and then swim for the school?"

"Will it just be you?"

"No, my mom will be there too."

"Okay, you may come at 2:30, and we can let school out earlier."

"Thank you so much. I will love to be there. See you tomorrow. Bye."

"Yes, Mom, I am allowed to go to the pool tomorrow!" I explain excitedly.

"Good for you, honey. Let's just hope it works!" my mom says. "I will be there with you!"

I can't believe how many people want autographs from me! Almost the whole school is here! I don't want the time to tick past 3:33 and miss my one and only shot at returning to 2014. I watch the time very closely. It is almost 3:33. The school pool looks just like I remember it. The smell of the chlorine makes me happy. All of the students and teachers are making their way to the bleachers. The bleachers are just as old and raggedy as they used to be, maybe even a little more. I am heading to block #3 on February 3. I am so honored the principal made this event so special for everyone. They even have an announcer to make my swimming appearance feel like a real meet. I feel so much pressure. Let's hope everything works as planned.

At 3:33, the announcer says, "Take your mark. Go." I can hear all of the students, parents, and teachers cheering for me. I see the wall close ahead and am getting nervous. The sounds stay the same, but when I turn my head to breathe, I see Coach Mez cheering for me. I suddenly realize that I am back in 2014 and am 12 years old again. When I look up at the scoreboard, I see a new personal record, 33.22 seconds. It is great to be back!

Techno City

*Daniel makes a discovery that seems like all he has ever wished for. But is he prepared for what it will cost him? **TECHNO CITY** by **Nahvid Z.** tells the tale.*

“**D**aniel!” his mom called. “What are you doing in the other room?”

“Just fiddling with some spare parts, Mom.”

Daniel, a young teenager, wished he could be a famous inventor. He just had never had the right parts. The parts Daniel was experimenting with had come from a broken computer he had found dumped next to the street. They were his most precious objects, which he called “compu-piece.” All his family had was a little house composed of two small rooms, a shed, and a working dishwasher that Daniel had ingeniously crafted using his creativity.

“You need to get some fresh air!”

“Okay, I will be right out.”

Daniel took a walk. There was a nice, quiet forest on the border of Jamestown where Daniel lived. Daniel soon found a nice place to sit in the shade on a big rock.

As Daniel was thinking, he saw a small hole on the edge of the rock. Daniel stuck his hand inside the hole. He could not feel the bottom. Daniel got excited. Maybe there was some sort of tunnel beneath the rock. Daniel quickly went back home to his shed, obtained a shovel, and started digging.

Within an hour, Daniel had made a human-sized hole. There indeed was a tunnel beneath the rock, a tunnel big enough for him to go through. But what was on the other side? Daniel, being curious as he is, quickly decided that he would be straight in and out.

The tunnel was old and looked like it hadn’t been used in years. Light bulbs every ten feet gave just enough light to convince him to continue on. The silver metal walls and floor looked like they had once been clean and shiny, but were now covered in rust. There was no other sound but his footsteps echoing loudly.

Daniel was tempted to turn back because his mother would be worried if he was gone too long. But after walking a few minutes

downward, Daniel saw a blinking light in the distance. He had to continue to see what it was.

The tunnel flattened out, and he later found a robot! It was made of newly cleansed metal as if it had been cleaned by somebody. The robot was balanced perfectly on one wheel and was about a foot taller than Daniel. The robot was blocking his way, and it seemed that he was a guard. Daniel had never seen such a robot and was amazed by the mighty-looking six arms capable of doing just about anything. What type of person or creature could create such a thing?

Although Daniel wanted to stay and learn about the robot, he was even more anxious to meet its creators. He was about to pass the robot, but when it noticed him it said: "Au-tho-ri-zed co-de please." He was startled by the automated voice. Even though it was taller than him and looked stronger than him, the robot seemed nonviolent.

The robot required a code to get past him. Daniel tried to think, but he couldn't get his mind off compu-piece. He said it aloud.

It just turned out that that was the key word. The robot said: "Wel-come to New Mi-cro-spot" and started moving along the tunnel. Daniel followed the robot.

What a surprise when after a short distance, a small city was before his eyes! The robot turned around and went back to his station, and there was Daniel, on his own, in a place that was filled with robotic creations he could have only dreamed of. A few people were walking around, being served by multiple robots. Their houses were made of flawless-looking steel. All had very different looks. Some were round, others were boxy, and there were some pyramid shaped.

As soon as he had entered the city boundaries, two robots caught his arms.

"What are you doing to me?"

"Non-au-th-or-ized per-sonnel."

Daniel struggled tremendously as the robots took him away. He was soon brought to a small room. The robots were still clutching him tight. After a short amount of time, a young man came up to him.

"Who are you?"

"D...Daniel"

"How did you get in?"

“Well, I know a few things about mechanics, and deciphered the code.”

“Interesting. You could help us out. You will work in lab 247. If anything goes wrong, ask for Erin.”

“Yes, sir.”

At that point, Daniel regretted coming into the tunnel at all. How would he escape with two robots guarding him intently? Would he ever see his mom again? What would happen to her if her only son disappeared?

During his conversation with Erin, Daniel had been thinking about how to escape. He spotted the emergency deactivate button on the robots holding him. If he could only reach it..

“What are you doing?”

As soon as he pressed the buttons he ran as fast as he could back to his entry tunnel. Erin quickly reactivated the robots and ordered them to capture Daniel. The robots and Erin were hot on Daniel’s tail when he managed to slip through the arms of the guard robot before it could get a good grip.

He ran as fast as he could. The tunnel seemed endless, and the chasers were getting closer by the second. Daniel saw the light at the end of the tunnel. That gave him burst of energy, and he took a few last steps, and then exited the tunnel. He got behind the rock and pushed with all his might. The rock moved. With a loud sound, it fell in the hole and blocked the tunnel entrance. Daniel looked at the blocked tunnel entrance in disbelief, took a deep breath and walked away without looking back. He would never open it again.

The Ultimate Paper Cut

*A daredevil performer knows how to bring a crowd to its feet with his complicated stunts. When all eyes are on him, he can't afford a mistake in **THE ULTIMATE PAPER CUT** by Alexis Kruntovski.*

“**A**nd here he is, the best of the best in stunts today, Mr. George Robinson performing the biggest stunt he has ever done in his homeland of California,” the speaker blared.

“That's right, Dave; this is going to be a show stopper. Now here's the stunt.”

Breathe, George, breathe, the voice echoed in George's head. *You are the strongest, George. You are the best. Now jump!*

He jumped off a 100-foot tall diving board onto the trampoline, driven by the roar of the crowd. He bounced off the trampoline over 15 full-sized cars. The crowd stared in awe.

“I'm on the edge of my seat, Stephanie. Will he make it?”

George felt his toes slightly touching the ground. Then he dug his heels into the dirt trying to slow down. Suddenly he came to a complete stop, wobbling back and forth. The crowd of thousands of people all came to their feet applauding and whistling.

“And he makes it!”

“Yes, yes! George Robinson is the almighty! Who is the best?”

The crowd chanted back with George, “George is the best!”

George left for his bus but could still hear the chant. George and his crew got on the bus and headed to the airport to go to Sydney, Australia.

When they arrived in Australia the blazing sun burned their faces with heat. Their ears tingled with the sounds of hundreds of fans screaming. “Hello, Sydney, Australia!” George said through a bullhorn. Then George said his signature chant, “Who is the best?”

The crowd chanted back, “George is the best!”

George and his crew stepped into the circus tent he was going to perform his stunt in. “Wow, not too shabby,” George said, looking at the huge tent. “Let's see if it's lucky.”

George was going to perform a huge feat. He would jump off a diving board that was 200 feet tall into a kiddie pool with a trampoline as a bottom; bounce out into a ring with an angry bull; get on the bull and control it for a while; and then throw himself off

the bull and land on his feet. It seems like a challenge, but it's nothing for George.

Sunlight fell rapidly, and it finally came to the time that George would perform his stunt. He ran out into the arena with an American flag jumpsuit. He went over to the diving board ladder, carefully placing his feet so they don't slip through the spaces in between the rungs of the ladder. When he finally reached the top he felt like he was in the clouds. He took a few seconds to admire the crowd. He snapped back to reality and took position to jump. George counted in his head, "1,2...3!"

He jumped into the air and started to fall. He spread his arms and positioned his feet straight down as he got closer and closer to the pool.

He sprang off the kiddie pool trampoline into the bull ring. They released the bull, and the bull went crazy, bucking and running, horns forward.

George came up to the side of the bull and jumped onto it. The bull bucked even more trying to get George off, but George pulled himself farther on the bull and sat up. He stayed on the bull for about a minute, and then skillfully jumped off, landing on his feet.

The crowd all came to their feet, clapping and cheering.

George left the ring to avoid the bull. He quickly took a bow and left the circus tent. He didn't want to be late for the bus to the airport where they would take a flight to Shanghai, China. George was most excited for this stop because it was a place he found fascinating. All of the history of China seemed so amazing to George. And he was going to do the biggest feat he had ever done in his career.

He was going to jump off an airplane, bounce off a trampoline into a pool of sharks, climb onto one of the sharks, jump off the shark onto another trampoline, and land on a stool.

For a second George was debating whether he should do the stunt. He realized if he didn't his reputation would be ruined. George looked out the window of the bus. Soon he would be in Shanghai waiting to take on the deadliest stunt he has ever done.

George and his crew arrived in Shanghai. They boarded the bus and traveled to the site of the stunt.

When they got off the bus George was uneasy about the location of the stunt. There was a Hilroy notebook factory to the right and a Post-it Note factory to the left. George's manager claimed that this

was the only place that it was legal to fly a plane over.

The day passed quickly, and it soon became time to board the plane. The plane was fairly small, but it had a platform for jumping off.

The plane finally got to the designated place in the air. The plane was hovering over the trampoline and the shark tank. George stepped onto the platform preparing for his jump. He took a second to admire the crowd and the camera crews set-up. Then he slowly counted in his head, like always.

“1...2...3!”

The plane jolted to the right as he jumped, sending him away from the anticipated route of the stunt. He was heading toward the Hilroy notebook factory.

He landed on the ceiling of the factory, almost hitting the camera crew, but fell through a skylight window. The crowd gasped.

George, still in shock, fell on a machine that produced paper, but fell off of it onto a moving belt. He tried to move, but he was in too much pain.

George looked up and saw five cameras pointed straight at him. He looked behind himself and saw a long line of machines. He thought he must be at the end of the notebook production cycle. George was in the part of the cycle where the sides of the notebook were smoothed.

George entered the machine, the sides of the notebook in front of him were chopped off and small scraps of paper flew to the sides.

George dodged the ones that flew backwards. When the blades came to chop off the sides of the notebook George dodged them.

He ran out of the machine and ran out the emergency exit. Suddenly an extra paper came shooting out of the machine and gave George a paper cut on his hand. George got on one knee and started crying.

He looked up and saw cameras pointing straight at him. He could hear cameramen laughing and suddenly heard the crowd laughing. The most famous stuntman in the world, the one who claims he feels no pain, is crying, over a paper cut.

Follow Me

The Accidental Adventure

*A well-planned vacation is something to look forward to. When the plans don't work out, you can be upset, or you can treat it as an opportunity. **THE ACCIDENTAL ADVENTURE** by **Audrey Wilson** puts a band of travelers in that position.*

There I was, stranded on the Samana Cay with my best friends Lauren and Ella. The whole trip flew downhill when we got on our plane to head to the Bahamas.

It all started when we asked our parents if we could go to the Bahamas and they finally said yes. When it was time to drive to the airport my mom dropped me off at Ella's house. Our parents surprisingly took it really well.

"Good bye, dear," my mom told me when I was in the car, and I said goodbye to them also. My parents were so excited for me, and I was excited for myself!

When I got into Ella's house we left after a while because we still had a little bit of extra time for Ella to visit with her mom and dad.

Once we got to the airport we all waited and waited for our assistant to pick us up from Ella's mom's car. She would be directing us around the airport and telling us how to get to our terminal to get ready for takeoff!

Once our assistant found us we all said, "Bye and thank you," to Ella's mom. We were so excited for our trip to the Bahamas!

Our assistant directed us to where we wait for our plane and told us, "Turn right, go straight, turn left." That's not the kind of assistant we thought we were going to have. She was kind of bossy, but we assumed it was a part of her job working at the airport. She gave us our tickets and just left. We hardly had to wait at all before the people on the overhead speaker told us to board the plane.

When it was time to get onto the plane, it seemed like we were the only people on the plane! We were all relieved, especially me, because we didn't have to sit by strangers.

Once we got on the plane the flight attendant said over the loudspeaker, "Hi, my name is Shirley, and I will be your flight attendant for the day." He informed us about what we can and can't do during our long flight.

“That’s an awesome name!” Lauren exclaimed.

After some painful long hours on that plane Shirley said that we would be landing shortly. Lauren was so relieved that the plane ride was halfway to being done.

“Yeah, I am also,” I said in relief.

Suddenly we heard a loud crashing noise and a *boom!* The next thing we knew we were falling!

“Everyone buckle up!” Shirley yelled over the microphone just in case we weren’t, but luckily we all were. I could hear the wind rushing and racing past me.

We crashed into the water, and our seats broke off of us! I crashed into the water! It felt almost like I was falling straight into hard cement.

I was under the water, trying to get up. I had salt water up my nose and in my mouth. When I finally got out of the water, I was trying to catch my breath and look for my friends and Shirley at the same time to see if they were all still alive.

“In salt water you can float!” Shirley reminded me.

At that moment I saw Lauren and Ella come up and out of the water, and they were breathing heavily just like I was. I told them that they could float.

“Well, that gives us one less thing to worry about, but where are we?” Ella asked Shirley.

“We are half a mile away from the Samana Cay. I can see it from here!” Shirley informed us.

We swam for half a mile, but it seemed like forever because we were all overwhelmed from the plane crash.

Once we finally got to the Samana Cay, the deserted island, we decided to settle right where we were. We were so tired! We used Shirley’s knife to cut down some palm trees and use the leaves for blankets. It was cold out there during the night.

While we were sleeping, Shirley stayed up and made a plan of what we would do tomorrow.

Once we woke up in the morning Shirley informed us what we will be doing that day. First we would look around the beach for things to eat and tools we could use to build a shelter. Next we would make the simple shelter. Then we would eat whatever we could find. Lastly after a long day of work we would get to go to sleep with our palm tree leaves.

We walked around the beach and looked for things to make a shelter. We used wood from the palm trees. We started to gather and collect all of the wood and bring it back to where we would build our shelter. Then we started to build.

“You guys are too young to build this!” said Shirley.

“No, we’re not!” Lauren exclaimed. I told her that we should just listen to him.

Shirley directed us to go look for food since we don’t have any extras from yesterday. We looked and looked, but all we could find were coconuts!

Suddenly we heard a loud yelping noise.

“HELP!” Shirley wailed.

“We’re coming, Shirley!” we yelled back.

Once we finally got back to our shelter, which looked like nothing now after it collapsed, we saw that Shirley was under all of our shelter. It wasn’t a lot because he hadn’t really gotten started, so he didn’t get hurt at all. He was so surprised he was speechless! He got a cut that was sort of bad, and he could not work for the rest of the day so he could feel better.

Shirley had this brilliant idea when he was allowed to work again. “I know!” Shirley exclaimed. “We can use the wood for poles and the leaves for rope!”

“That’s a great idea!” I said excitedly.

After we all finished making our home cozy and just big enough, we went to sleep for the night.

The next morning we were all depressed. We still hadn’t found a way back home!

The next thing we knew, we saw a tiny, little fishing boat. They were coming our way! We started waving and yelling to make sure that they saw us.

Once they reached our little island, they asked if we would like a ride to the Bahamas! We told them of course!

They dropped us off, and they were off.

We were walking for a long time and decided to ask someone if they knew where the closest airport was. Surprisingly it wasn’t very far away.

We walked inside to see when our flight left. It was going to leave in three hours.

“We better get going!” I exclaimed.

We arrived at the airport and bought Shirley a ticket so that he could ride with us all the way back to Michigan so we could be reunited with our family at the same time. Also we wouldn't have to be separated from each other and be worried.

While we were on the plane I started worrying about our parents. They were probably worried sick about us. They probably were wondering where we had gone and why we weren't calling any of them back. But before we knew it we got home safe and sound! We got off the plane and said goodbye to Shirley. We waved goodbye to him until he was out of our sight.

"Gosh," said Lauren. "I hope we get to see Shirley again sometime soon."

"Yeah," I said sadly.

"Well, I guess we have to go find my mom now," said Ella disappointingly.

"I think she just misses Shirley a lot," I said to Lauren.

We quickly walked down to the pickup part of the airport. Then we spotted Ella's mom. We started waving, and then she pulled up. We got in the car and Ella said to her mom that she missed her, and her mom said the same. When we got to my house I thanked her mom, and then she was off!

Once I walked into my house, my mom gave me a big hug. "I was worried about you!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't you call? Were you all safe?"

I tried to change the subject and said, "I'm so happy to see you, Mom. I missed you a lot!" I tried to say without sounding nervous about the whole incident.

"I'm happy to see you, too, honey! I'm thrilled that you are home!" She never brought up the subject again, and I was glad. If she did she wouldn't trust me with anything ever again, even though it wasn't even my fault!

Alone in the Dark

*Caves are dark, mysterious, curious places. A guided tour through a developed cave should be a relatively safe excursion. See if you agree after reading **ALONE IN THE DARK** by **Sevana Mailian**.*

“C’mon, Erik. If we don’t hurry we’ll be late for our tour!” My name is Sara, and Erik and I are best friends. For summer vacation this year our parents decided to take us to the amazing caves of Kentucky. Both of us live in Chicago, so you can imagine a few city folks out in nature. I mean, I barely knew anything about the outdoors. It was so embarrassing.

“Hey, I’m coming; wait up!” said Erik. “So, what *creepy* things do you think we’ll see?” He talked in a creepy voice just to try and scare me. It was not working.

“Ugh! Would you leave me alone for once, Erik?” Erik and I are best friends, but sometimes we don’t exactly get along. “Let’s just go, okay?” I say.

“Fine,” says Erik.

As we arrive at the specific area where we are supposed to meet the tour guide, I see a huge opening to a black hole. I wonder, *Is this really worth it?* “Hey, Erik, that cave looks pretty dark and scary. Are you sure we should still go through with this? I mean, it just looks like once you go in, you disappear and fall through an endless bottomless pit!”

“C’mon, what are you afraid of?”

“For the last time, NOTHING!” *Gosh, he is so annoying, I think. It’s like he is never happy unless you are mad!*

After what seemed like searching forever, we finally found our tour guide. It was so hard to find him, mostly because their nametags were really small and there were a lot of people dressed in the exact same uniforms. Personally, I had better things to do. It didn’t help that the entrance to the cave was not paved ground, so my feet were killing me! It was all grass and dirt, with a few tree stumps to sit on.

“Hello, everyone. My name is Mr. Marks, and I will be your tour guide as we travel through the amazing Stalag Cave today!”

We sit quietly as we listen to the tour guide talk for almost 30 minutes about safety rules, how to navigate through the cave, what

to do if we get lost, and how to put on the gear. All I heard was “blah blah blah make sure to stay with me, blah blah blah keep an extra set of batteries in your emergency pack for your helmet light and flashlight, and blah blah blah never touch the creatures that you encounter, and finally, let’s go and get our gear on!”

Yes! I thought, *now it’s time for the real fun to begin.* “C’mon, Erik, it’s time to go get our gear on,” I say.

“All right, everyone, get all your gear on and make sure your helmet light is working and your boots are secure on your feet,” said Mr. Marks.

“So, how exactly do we get these boots on again?” said Erik.

“I’m not helping you. You should have been listening,” I say.

“Sara, please help me!”

“Fine!” I yell.

“Whew! Thanks,” said Erik.

“Yeah, whatever, I am used to cleaning up after you,” I say.

“All right, everyone, it’s time to start our tour. You may now turn on your helmet light, and get ready to walk a lot,” said Mr. Marks.

“Yeah, we are finally going in!” said Erik. *Oh no, we are going in,* I thought. I knew this was going to be scary, but I didn’t know I would end up all alone in the dark.

“Nice and careful now as we squeeze through this tight space,” said Mr. Marks.

Are you kidding? I thought. This was like squeezing yourself under the picnic tables that are made for toddlers!

“Oh, and I almost forgot, you must be very quiet because we may encounter some bats, and if we’re loud we may cause a fuss and cause the bats to fly everywhere!” he whispered quietly.

“Hey, Sara, I say the next bat we see we talk really loudly to make them start going crazy and to start flying everywhere.”

“What? No! Are you kidding me?” I say.

“Fine, I won’t,” says Erik.

“You better not,” I say.

As we’re walking, we see some bats hanging from the ceiling, here and there. One time we saw a huge one, and I got so scared, I just wanted to run out of there!

As we walk deeper into the cold, damp cave, we encounter many creepy things, so while everyone went up close and tried to reach out and touch it, I stayed a good distance away from it. I

mean, who wants to even look at a millipede or a cave burrowing rodent thing? Of course, Erik was the one who got yelled at the most for trying to touch things.

We reach an area in which you could not see the ceiling of the cave. It was just pitch black. It almost seemed like someone had taken dark chocolate frosting and spread it all over the top of the cave. Then I see a bunch of eyes blink and hear a faint noise. I turn over to Erik and mouth, "What was that?"

He replies, "I don't know."

Then, I see him get out of line and throw pebbles at the ceiling and yell, "WHAT IS THAT, MR. MARKS?" Then, the only other thing I saw before the cave broke into a black blur was Mr. Marks ready to pop a fuse.

All I could hear was screeching and screaming, and all I could make out were bats and people. I tried to find Erik, but could only see a jumble of flying bats and running people, and unfortunately, I did not hear Mr. Marks yell, "Everyone follow me!" so I was left with the only other person who doesn't listen: Erik.

I was pretty mad at Mr. Marks. I mean, who just expects that everyone will hear him in a big commotion like this one! It was like the mall on Black Friday! Out loud I was yelling my head off now that Mr. Marks wasn't here.

"What is wrong with you? Do you even know how much trouble you're going to be in if we make it out of here alive!"

"Jeez, chill, I was just having a little fun," said Erik.

"Well, I hope you had a blast, because if we make it out of here alive I am never speaking to you again!" We could get killed out here! Worse, we could never make it out!" I say.

"Sorry," says Erik.

"Ok, look, all we have to do is turn on our helmet lights to mega power and retrace our steps. Luckily we aren't far into the cave," I say.

"Ok, wait a second; my helmet light isn't turning on. In fact, it's getting dimmer," said Erik.

"Hey, mine too!" I say.

"Wait, maybe we just need to put in an extra set of batteries," I said.

"Oh yeah! You're right," says Erik. "Wait, I don't have any. Do you?" Erik says in a frightened voice.

"No," I reply.

“Oh, man, we forgot to put them in our emergency packs!” says Erik. “Now what do we do?”

“I don’t know,” I say.

“Oh, wait, I have an idea, but you probably don’t want to hear it,” says Erik.

“What? I have to hear it because I don’t have an idea yet.”

“Well, I was thinking that maybe we should try and make out landmarks that we saw.”

“Erik, that just might be the best idea you have ever come up with. Oh, and Erik, I’m really sorry about blowing up in your face like that.”

“That’s ok.”

“Well, let’s get moving!” I say.

Everything is going to be all right, I thought, and the best part is, Erik’s plan was working. We were able to make out figures that we remember passing, like when we saw a stalagmite that had almost reached the ceiling! We also saw a column (that is when a stalagmite and stalactite connect). It basically looked like a big statue.

Oh wait! I just figured out why this cave is called Stalag cave! It’s because there are a lot of stalagmites!

We were able to see tunnels that we remembered going through. But then we reached a point where we couldn’t tell whether we went left or right.

“Erik, which way did we go?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Wait, why don’t we go both ways and see if we see anything familiar in the first couple of steps of each tunnel,” I say.

“Ok, I’ll go left and you go right,” says Erik.

“No, I don’t want to split up again because someone could get lost,” I say.

“Fine, let’s go right first.”

As we take our first steps into the tunnel we don’t see anything familiar, so we go into the left tunnel and we see a clearing. My heart skips a beat, and I immediately freeze asking if there is an actual clearing. He says that there is an actual clearing. Then I yell, “Erik, we made it!”

Erik is right behind me yelling, “We made it!”

I could not believe it! “Erik, your plan really worked! I am so sorry I ever doubted you!”

“It’s okay!”

But the moment immediately stops when we run out of the clearing, only to see a bunch of police cars and both of our parents there looking like they had been crying their eyes out.

We also see a policeman who says, “They have made it out, proceed out.”

“Where were you?” our moms say at the same time, and “Are you okay?”

“We’re fine,” we both say at the same time.

“Oh, good,” my mom says.

Erik’s mom immediately grounds him so he can’t get lost in any more caves, apparently. I try to say that Erik was the one who got us out of here, but it is no use. My mom says that I shouldn’t get grounded for something Erik did. It’s funny how she already knows Erik was the cause of this mess.

That night in bed I was so glad to be alive and still not stuck in the cave, cold and not having any hope of ever seeing the light again. Even if Erik’s mom was not happy with him, I sure was.

The Bermuda Triangle

Two boys decide on a course of action that they know they shouldn't follow. Before they know it, things get about as bad as they can get in
THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE by *Ryan Le.*

Kevin and I had just finished school near the end of June. Our school was named Michigan Middle School. When we were dismissed, Kevin said, "Hey, Ryan, guess WHAT!"

"What?" I replied.

"I just won two tickets on a three-day private cruise ship, with a professional boat driver," Kevin excitedly responded. "I entered a contest, and I actually won!"

"REALLY?" I yelled.

"Yeah, would you like to come with me?" Kevin asked.

"Well, I have to ask my parents first, but I'll meet you at your house tomorrow," I said.

As soon as I got home from school, I asked my mom if I could go with Kevin on the trip. My mom said, "NO, it's too dangerous!"

My mother's response made me very upset. Responding to my impulse, I wanted to do something exciting. Later when I went to Kevin's house, I explained to him that my mother wouldn't allow me to go on the trip with him. Kevin did not look so happy when I told him the news. But to my surprise, his mother had told him the same thing. Suddenly an idea rushed through my head.

"I have a plan. Tomorrow evening, sneak out and meet me at the boat."

I waited for Kevin at the port. Kevin came ten minutes later. I told Kevin that we are going to go on the trip secretly and that by the time we got back from our trip our mothers wouldn't have known that we had even left. Kevin looked a little unsure, but he agreed to go anyway.

We jumped onto the boat and gave our tickets to the professional driver. "Welcome aboard," the driver welcomed us. The boat was red and black and covered with painted flames on the side. I was really impressed. I thought it was one of the coolest things I had seen.

"So are you really a professional boat driver, or are you just an amateur?" Kevin asked.

“I just started this job today,” the driver answered sarcastically.

“GET ME OFF THIS BOAT!” Kevin yelled in horror. My stomach started to feel queasy.

“Just kidding. Here is my license.” Kevin and I felt a sudden relief after he admitted that he was only messing around. “HA HA HA HA. You guys should have seen your faces. Hilarious.” Kevin and I did not laugh.

I admitted to Kevin that I was actually scared about leaving my mom without her permission. Kevin felt the same way, but he reassured me that everything would be okay.

It was getting really dark, and Kevin and I drifted asleep. But as soon as we both woke up, we found ourselves stranded on an island.

“Where are we? Where’s the boat, and more importantly, where’s the boat driver?” I asked in fear. There was fog everywhere, and it was hard to find ourselves in the morning, but we could see ourselves in the afternoon and night.

“I don’t know,” Kevin replied, feeling scared while shivering in the cold.

“Well, wherever we are, we’d better find some food and shelter,” I said with a shiver.

“And a blanket, too,” Kevin whispered.

The island was huge, and we had discovered that it was filled with different types of species. The animals were not like the ones back home. They were very abnormal looking. I seriously thought I had seen a snake with a cat’s head, but it could just be me hallucinating due to hunger.

As we kept exploring the island, we found some coconuts, bananas, and berries from a berry bush. The berries looked brown, and I didn’t know if they were ripe or not, so I let Kevin try a berry first. He was dizzy and green. I wondered if he was hallucinating, so I tried one for myself. All of a sudden, I felt like throwing up.

When Kevin and I stopped hallucinating, the day was already around noon and we still didn’t have shelter. We decided to build one ourselves. It took about three to four hours to construct, but at least it had a roof made of leaves. The house, or what I call a hut, isn’t very much like a house that has clean carpeting or with a window. The hut was more like a one-person bedroom that is about four to five feet long. The walls were made of broken twigs, and the floor was sandy.

As the day had become darker, I wanted to go home. We were not able to go home ever since we were stranded on this island.

We tried and tried for weeks. We tried using boats and rafts we made ourselves, and we even tried swimming. Constructing them and designing them were hard, but it was worth a shot. All the floating objects we had built were made out of wood and were very complicated to put together.

Every single time we tried to leave, we always ended up in the same place. It was like we were going in a circle, but we never gave up trying.

Suddenly we heard something crashing into the island. It sounded like a helicopter. When we tried to locate the area, it wasn't there. It seemed like the island was messing with our minds. When I heard the sound of a helicopter, I really thought that we would be saved. I felt really hopeless after we tried to find any helicopter in sight.

While looking around for something, I started questioning the sequence of events: no way of getting back home, traveling in circles, mysterious sounds, fog? This could only mean one thing: Kevin and I were stuck in the Bermuda Triangle. When I came to this realization, I told Kevin right away. It took a lot of explaining, but he understood eventually.

After three days of carefully thinking of a way to get out of the Bermuda Triangle, I finally came up with an idea. I remembered reading a fictional story about how this boy and his friend came out of the Bermuda triangle after 90 days of being stranded. I wasn't sure if their plan would work, but we had nothing to lose. Kevin said, "Well, what's your plan?"

"I don't know if it's going to work or not, but it involves building a great, big fan," I replied with a great, big smile on my face.

"That's crazy, Ryan. How would a fan help us?" Kevin answered.

"Well, in the story, two kids get lost in the Bermuda Triangle by an airplane crashing onto a mysterious island. They kept on thinking and thinking, and then this friend thought of an idea. It was to build a fan made out of wood, powered by running on a bike. They got a little monkey to do the running for them by promising the monkey many bananas. After that, the fog went away, and they were able to get on a boat to get back home."

“Well, that’s not crazy at all,” Kevin sarcastically commented. I knew Kevin was being sarcastic, but I eventually got him to help out. It took two days to build the machine and an extra day to rest from building the fan.

“What do you think about the machine, Kevin?” I said with a thirsty attitude.

“It’s all right, but who is going to power the machine?” It was obvious that we both didn’t want to power the machine.

Out of nowhere we saw something pop out of a bush. After that our minds flipped in a quick second. We were so relieved that it wasn’t a giant spider that had tried to attack us earlier while we were collecting branches for the powered fan bike. Instead of the freakish spider, it was a monkey holding a banana.

“Do you know what I’m thinking?”

“Well, does it include the monkey we spotted?” Kevin said with confusion.

“Duh,” I said. The day was already getting darker, and I still had to help Kevin understand what we were going to do. “Ok, I’ll make a boat, and you find out a way to translate with a monkey. Got it?”

“I think so,” Kevin said in an unsure way.

“I’ll help you if you are still unsure how to communicate with the monkey when I’m done.”

It was the other way around actually. Kevin had a trade with a monkey. He traded 17 bananas with the monkey, and the monkey powered the machine for us. He got the monkey to understand by drawing bananas on the sand next to an equal sign that showed paddling on the powered bike. While Kevin was doing that, I had to lift the raft I created that was about forty-five pounds, and I did it all by myself. I felt very proud of myself at that moment. And I realized that he had been ready for 30 minutes before I was done.

As the monkey powered the machine, we hopped on the boat and left the island. We left the fan there in case anyone else got stranded on the island later on. After we took off, strange and scary looking-monsters of the sea rose from the ocean. A green, one-eyed creature dumped his huge hand into the water close to us. We soared through the ocean as fast as a speeding car. As the terror inside of us drifted away, we really wished to see land again. After an hour, we slept on the raft.

What did the monsters want from us? And why would they want to stop us from escaping the island? I wondered while I was sleeping.

Suddenly, hope occurred near us. We woke up on the side of the city beach, near our home town. We were happy and sad at the same time. We were happy that we escaped the Bermuda Triangle and we weren't hurt from it. But we were also a little sad, because we started missing our families.

We ran straight to our houses along the shore, and apologized to our family that we lied to them that we wouldn't go on the trip. We agreed we will never leave our homes again, unless it was a family occasion.

There was one thing that still made me confused about the trip. What happened to the driver, and why did he leave us stranded on the island?

I was scared over what happened, and I would never want to do that again.

The Cake That Was Alive

*Tinkering with a recipe is what sets the great bakers apart from the rest. Great bakers improve the results. As for the rest...let's hope they have better outcomes than Don had in **THE CAKE THAT WAS ALIVE** by **Chloe Rivera**.*

“I wonder what happened!” Don thought as he pulled out his cake, in his bakery, which was bubbling mysteriously. He had no idea. There were so many new ingredients he had used that it could be anything. It would take him days to figure out. He searched through the cake to find out what had been causing this, but he didn't find anything.

While he was looking and gathering all the ingredients he heard a noise, “Orghh.” He questioned himself when he heard it again, “Orghh.” Don was so confused he checked his phone, “Nope!” He heard it again. “Orghh.” This time he checked the cake, and he started freaking out! He started panting and pacing before he decided to call Samantha down at the lab.

“Did you put some type of flower in here?” Samantha said.

“Yeah, I put lavender extract. So what?”

“So what! Flower extract always alters the pastry. It can change the color, the smell, the look, and can even make life in it. I will try to do some tests.” She was very mad at Don. Why didn't he know these things? She would try to find out what happened, but she would have to do a lot of tests. If Don would have just listened in school this wouldn't have happened to them. *Why do we have to go through this every time?* Samantha thought.

Don was pacing back and forth waiting for the results. *RRRRRIINNNGGGG*. He picked up the phone.

Sam told him that when the lavender heated up, it had altered the cake. He told her to come over so they could fix it. She told him if they threw it away it would still be alive and it could evolve into something more. They had to cut it, burn it, and then throw it away so it wouldn't still be alive.

So they did just that. After they cut it and left it in the oven for an hour at 400 degrees, they let it sit for two hours to make sure it wasn't alive still. Then they put it through a shredder so that it was definitely not alive. They threw it away and threw away the lavender so they would never use it again.

Dear Diary...

*It's off to college! The trials and tribulations of this new chapter in one girl's life are the subject of **DEAR DIARY...** by **Gabriel Gamlin**.*

Jan 12, 2010

Oh Boy! I could not get any sleep last night, because I was busy writing my résumé for University of Phoenix. I had a really hard time trying to remember everything I needed for my résumé. If I could remember well enough, I finished at 12:00 P.M., and I started at 6:00. I probably fell asleep a few times in the process. That explains the drool...

Jan 14, 2011

Well, yesterday was the first day, and I had to suffer this long, boring ceremony. I think I fell asleep after "Welcome students...," because that's all I remember (dream on, Rikki!). I woke up when the students started talking, because they were LOUD! Thanks for ruining my dreams, guys! I then went to my dorm. It was pretty boring and white. I thought, well, time to decorate!

Jan 14, 2011 (9:00 P.M.)

Wow! I think I'll like it here! After I painted my room and decorated it, it looks pretty great! Last night was sound and dreamless. I guess college isn't so bad!

Jan 16, 2011

GAH! Yesterday was the worst! I had to go to my Computer Science class, and our teacher, Mr. Rorschach, read a little bit of our résumés in class so we can get to know each other! I felt embarrassed when he mentioned my love for My Little Pony. I guess college has ups and downs!

Jan 18, 2011

I'm thinking of joining a fraternity league. It's called Alpha Sigma Omega, and it's a unisex group. I hope there are no registration restrictions in the club, like having to be born in the USA (I was born in Japan.). I hope I can join!

April 23, 2011

It's been awhile! I have been having so much fun in college, I'm forgetting to write in my diary.

Anyway, I Skyped my parents back in Seattle, and they said I have not changed a bit. I was really concerned when they said that because I don't want to look underage! So I checked myself and I saw I had big, black, and spiky-ish hair and big blue eyes. I am five feet two inches in height, I wear a size 5 women's shirt, etc., and I was like "OMG!" But then I realized they were talking about my personality. I am happy and lively, I like skateboarding, the internet, and soccer, and I am really outgoing yet kind.

Huh. I guess haven't changed.

Food Battle

*The famous snack food named the Twinkie almost disappeared forever. Do you know the real reason? Read **FOOD BATTLE** by **Henry Panley**.*

Seattle Washington, November 17, 2012

The last delicious, creamy, beloved sponge cake known as a Twinkie stood on top of the Seattle Space Needle, 605 feet above the ground. Grasping the sharp antenna at the top, his hands trembled and slipped as General Sprinkles confronted him. Holding on to the edge of the roof, General Sprinkles stood in front of him and first kicked Spongy's right hand and then proceeded to kick his left hand, which sent him airborne. General Sprinkles laughed as Spongy plummeted to the ground.

The war between the Donuts and The Twinkies began in April of the year 2012. Sales profits for the Twinkies were double that of the Donuts, and the Donuts did not like that. The Twinkies knew the Donuts would strike, and they eventually did.

California Bay, Pacific Ocean, November 15, 2012

Three fleets of submarines secretly tunneled through the Pacific Ocean. People were on the beach relaxing, not knowing what was about to happen. Twinkie Headquarters (HQ), the target of the submarines, was located nearby the beach on a small island. Each submarine placed a bomb on the ocean floor and programmed it to explode at 11:00, just sixteen minutes from the present time.

A siren went off inside Twinkie HQ, when sensors detected a highly explosive bomb 167 meters away. General Cream was called into the room and took a look. He tried to disarm the bomb from inside Headquarters, but he was unsuccessful. General Cream then quickly placed a call to the Twinkies Navy.

In the basement of the Twinkie HQ, Lieutenant Spongy got into his aqua suit and jumped into the cockpit of the submarine. The submarine splashed into the water and submerged. It was 10:48 flat, with only twelve minutes before the bomb's timer would reach 0 and explode.

As Lieutenant Spongy's sub approached a glowing object twenty yards away, it halted. Spongy stepped out of the cockpit along with his partner, Lieutenant Twinkie. Spongy drew his gun and pointed it at a large object sailing by. The object read *Donut Forces*. It was the submarine that had placed the bomb. The sub stopped and emptied sixteen soldiers into the water.

Hiding behind a purple piece of coral and taking a deep breath, Spongy whispered, "One, two, three" and rolled out into sight preparing to fire. Before he could squeeze the trigger, he was nearly hit in the head by a bullet that instead hit his gun, knocking it ten feet down to the bottom of the ocean.

He floated down to his gun and landed on his back. He looked up at the surface of the water, but could only see darkness. Sensing trouble, he flipped to his feet and shot four Donut soldiers to the ground. Lieutenant Twinkie had shot eleven others, which left one soldier who was nowhere in sight.

"Lieutenant Twinkie!" Spongy shouted through his helmet's microphone. But before he could ask where they were, Spongy was grabbed from behind by the Donut. Trying to free himself, he pulled the soldier down to the ground and crushed the Donut's face in the sand with his boot.

The bomb started flashing as it read 19 seconds, then 18. Lieutenant Twinkie swam to the bomb as Spongy and the others climbed back into the submarine, closed the cockpit, and stormed away to safety. Looking back, Spongy saw Lieutenant Twinkie reach the bomb, but it was too late: 3...2...1....

Spongy opened his eyes and looked up into the bright California sun. He lay there among ruined pieces of metal, in the hot sand. His suit was destroyed, and all that remained was a piece of his pants and a portion of the glass from his helmet. He slowly got up from the sand, limped over to a piece of metal, and sat on it.

As he was trying to clear his head and remember what had just happened, he was suddenly thrown to the ground, and a bag was placed over his head. After this, everything went dark again.

Seattle Washington, November 17th, 2012

Lieutenant Twinkie and General Cream stood face to face in a small room with papers scattered between them on a long wooden table. Lieutenant Twinkie was bloody and bruised, but had

somehow managed to live through the bomb explosion. His friend and partner Spongy had no idea that he was planning to come to his rescue. A plan was sketched and General Cream grabbed the notebook and left the room with Lieutenant Twinkie. They reached the runway at the Seattle Airport and jumped into an empty jet, hoping that it wasn't too late.

Spongy woke again, but this time the bright lights in his eyes were from the city. As he looked around, he realized that he was strapped to the Seattle Space Needle. General Sprinkles appeared in front of him and said, "All Twinkies are gone except you. You are the last one." Spongy quietly took his pocketknife out of his pocket, and as Sprinkles looked away, he freed himself. He ripped off the fuzzy rope, throwing it on the surface of the roof.

Spongy got up while General Sprinkles was looking the other way. He grabbed him from behind, and flipped him over. They were now dangerously close to the edge. Sprinkles rose slowly, and as he regained his balance he proceeded forward. Spongy tried to punch him, but General Sprinkles ducked out of the way. He jumped up with force as he threw a punch at Spongy. Luckily, Spongy blocked it. He attempted to kick him, but General Sprinkles grabbed his foot, throwing him to the edge.

Spongy held on with one hand but pulled his other hand up, grabbing the side of the roof. All Spongy could see now was the dark night and his body dangling from the roof. General Sprinkles's boot flew past Spongy's eyes and crunched down on his left hand, causing him to let go. His other hand was holding on by just two fingers when they slipped off, leaving Spongy with nothing but 605 feet between him and the ground.

Spongy plummeted toward the cold, hard, concrete road. He could hear General Sprinkles's hearty laugh from the roof. But before he hit the ground he saw a swooping plane coming directly at him. The back of his shirt hooked onto the tail of the plane and pulled him forward. The hurling wind almost blew him back into the open air, but he held tight. He reached for the door of the plane and yanked it open. Sliding inside, he fell onto the floor of the plane and landed at the feet of Lieutenant Twinkie. "So where are we off to?" Spongy asked, staring up at him.

"Dunkin Donuts Headquarters," Lieutenant Twinkie answered.

Dunkin Donuts HQ, Beaverton Oregon, November 18, 2012

Tick...Tick... Tick...Tick. General Sprinkles was tied back on a pole in the Headquarters Basement of Dunkin Donuts. He was surprised to see Spongy's return and was no match for him and Lieutenant Twinkie.

A small time bomb sat ticking in the center of the room. "What's it going to be, Sprinkles, no more donuts or a truce?"

General Sprinkles thought about it for a minute and responded, "Fine, you win."

As General Sprinkles conceded, Lieutenant Twinkie had him sign a paper that would make all Doughnuts and Twinkies united as the most delicious treats for all mankind.

GAME

*A boy finds himself in an environment the reader may find familiar, but which is completely foreign to him. In **GAME** by **Matthew Weerakoon**, life imitates the art of the virtual world.*

When Damen heard the faint sound of a footstep, he turned and saw a cold-white skeleton of some sort of creature with six limbs and a tail, wielding a bow and arrow. For a second, he couldn't believe his eyes, but he started running, and tried to outrun the skeleton. Damen could have been making an Olympic record for fastest run, his arms covering his face from the outstretching branches of the trees. He grunted in pain, not used to any sort of injury in his life besides a cut. He hid behind a tree, his arm in pain from the trees. Damen was hoping the skeleton would lose track of him, and then remembered how much he was in pain

Ben knew to stay quiet and not give away their position. But he whispered, "When he comes around the bend, hit him from the back."

Damen could hear the skeleton approaching.... Damen was suddenly fueled by the cold-blooded will to survive, and when the skeleton reached the edge of the tree, Damen leaped out, came under the skeleton's arm, and right as the skeleton was turning, Damen roundhouse-kicked it in the ribcage as hard as he could. Damen ended the foe, but he figured more would be coming. He knew being in a forest at night would limit his sight, and he needed to get back to the house before he bled to death.

Fifteen Months Ago

"What the, where the heck am I?"

The lost boy's name was Damen. He was an average 13-year-old, wearing skinny black jeans and an A&F shirt and hoodie. He had sleek black hair and dark chocolate eyes. Damen had been brought to a whole new world. The last thing he remembered was going to sleep on February 29 in his bedroom.

He studied his surroundings. He seemed to be in a grassy flatland with dense forest surrounding and mountains off to what he thought was north

“Well, don’t just stand there, start getting some tools!” an unknown voice instructed.

“Where are you? More importantly, who are you?” Damen spun around looking for the voice. When he finally looked down at his feet, he saw a book. Damen picked up the foreign object and examined it.

“Umm, would you stop looking at me like th—”

Damen was startled. He flung the book in the air. It hit the ground with a loud thud.

“OW! It’d help me out a LOT if you could just NOT do that again!” the strange voice moaned. Damen was cautiously approaching the book, looking for the person talking,

“Are you a talking book?” he asked.

“No, I’m a yodelling pig...”

Damen looked around, “There is no pig...”

Oh, my god! Yes, I am a talking book! Now if you could just pick me up and dust me off, that would be wonderful.”

Damen did as he was told, and recalled something. “What do you mean by I should start getting some tools? Is there a Sears somewhere nearby?”

“You do know that you’re the only human in the world, right?” the Book said like it was an obvious fact. Damen would usually laugh and think this was a prank, but as he examined the landscape, there was absolutely no sign of human intervention.

Damen had turned serious at the book’s truthfulness about being the only human. “First of all, do you have a name?” Damen questioned the book.

The book pondered this for a while, “Well, I’ve never really thought about that, I guess I’d consider myself a helper book.”

“I think I’ll just call you Ben. Oh, and by the way, my name’s Damen.”

“Hi, Damen. I guess I have to teach you the basics of survival, out here in the world.”

Together, Damen and Ben explored their direct surroundings, and Damen learned not to question how he had come to this world or what it is. But he questioned his new companion.

“Hey, where’ve you been all of this time, and what kind of book are you, actually?”

“Well, I don’t really know about much before you came along. It’s like I was created when you appeared here, just lying there

waiting for you to wake up. Also, it seems like I'm supposed to be some kind of ancient tome about this world, but it seems I'm blank."

After their conversation, Ben suggested heading to the forest to get some wood. Damen waited to be instructed on what to do next. "Well, what are you waiting for? Start punching trees!" Ben said.

Damen could not detect one bit of sarcasm in Ben's voice, but he still hesitated. "Are you sure, I just punch this tree?"

"I'm as sure as cookies are good."

Damen started to punch the tree, and it surprisingly didn't hurt Damen at all. When Damen heard the log of wood break he thought about what would happen to the rest of the tree, and suddenly jumped back. Yet nothing happened. The tree did not move at all, but the section the Damen had been punching was lying there on the ground.

"Umm, is that supposed to happen?" Damen asked Ben.

"Yes, that's actually completely normal in this world. There is some really weird gravity to most of the land, like rocks or trees, but you and living things are an example of something that does have gravity."

"Unfortunately," Damen sighed.

As Damen kept collecting wood, Ben told him how to make a worktable, which would let him make tools like a shovel, pickaxe, axe, and sword. The makeshift tools looked like exactly how they were made, by a 13-year-old who had some wood and constructed them in the wild.

"So, what do I do with these tools?" Damen asked

"Well, why don't you store some of them in your backpack," suggested Ben, again saying it like it was obvious.

"What backp—woah," Damen said, turning around to see a black and white backpack, which he could have sworn was not there earlier.

As Damen and Ben explored a cave, Ben explained that he could find new material underground to make better tools. After exploring the cave, Ben suggested he farm some sheep to get enough wool to make a bed (with the cutting skills Ben taught him), because night would fall upon the two very soon. It was very hard for Damen to get the wool, leading the sheep to the makeshift area he had made as a base and cutting the sheep's wool to make a bed. After getting a bed, more or less a block of wood

with a blanket, Ben explained that Damen can collect chunks of material, like blocks, and build a shelter, just like the logs of wood, and put it into the backpack, which seemingly had infinite space. Damen had to head back toward the woods to look for a cave.

When Damen heard the faint sound of a footstep, he turned and saw a cold-white skeleton wielding a bow and arrow....

* * *

“Hey Damen, I think we’re running a bit low on stone. We should go out and get some more,” Ben suggested.

“All right. Hopefully we don’t get jumped by giant spiders and zombies again. Oh, and how is the farm doing so far?” Damen asked.

“Well, for a house garden, it’s not doing that bad,” Ben mocked.

Damen was now fifteen, still wearing the same clothes, that have magically grown with him. He grew a stubby beard aging, but refused to shave because it made him look manly.

“Hey, who knows, we could find a way to get you out of here, Damen,” Ben encouraged.

“Ben, you already know, I’ve given up on going back. This is my new life, new house, new friend; this is what fate did to me, and I need to accept that,” Damen explained.

“Hm, all right.... How about we make a cake after going to the cave?” Ben tried to lighten the mood

“That sounds nice. Hopefully the chickens will have laid an egg or two by then,”

Damen and Ben ventured into a cave that was darker than usual...until they stumbled upon what would’ve had to be manmade. There were tunnels of stone bricks with torches set upon the walls. Damen stood frozen, staring in awe at the structure. In about seven seconds, Damen dashed through the halls of the fortress. With great speed he did not know he had, he was ducking, sliding, making turns and jumping, only to find aged stone bricks, but still searching. “This might be the way out of here!”

And then he came upon one chamber... containing a book connected to a stand, both immobile. Behind it was a square-shaped frame made of metal. Damen approached the book cautiously, wondering how all of this got here when there had never been any humans.

“Hey, Ben, do you know anything about this?”Damen asked
Silence.

“Ben? What are you doi—” As Damen looked in his backpack, he didn’t see Ben. Damen figured that with all of the obstacles he’d passed, Ben must’ve been dropped. He started to head back into the hall, but the entrance to the chamber was sealed off.

Damen knew he had no choice but to examine the book. Damen saw some foreign words, but written using English characters. He tried to pronounce the words the best he could, and after finishing the last word, the metal frame started to glow. Soon it was filled with the image of his bedroom from a year ago, in the real world.

Damen was crying out of memory and happiness. Damen had finally reached his home. As he walked through the portal, his clothing shrunk to its past size, as did he. He lost the “manly” beard and his backpack. He had come home, back to his thirteen-year-old self.

As he looked back at his wall, he saw his 2005 MSU poster scrolled up to show a tiny corner of the portal that saved his life, and allowed him to have a sense of adventure when life got boring.

Jason's Adventure

*A lone traveler in a strange land meets an unlikely companion. Thus begins a series of events that will thrust our hero into the role of warrior in **JASON'S ADVENTURE** by **Zach B.***

*I*t's strange. . . I see a boy who looks like me, fighting a man whose skin looks as bleached as a bone in a desert with eyes as red as rubies. As I look around; I see a sight that chills me to the bone: the platform that my doppelganger and the ghost-like man are on is floating above lava. I search and search, yet I can't find a single thing that is supporting the platform. Then everything goes black.

I feel myself being dragged through mud by my pants. Opening my eyes, I see an average-sized...pink...pig. Yes, that's right, you heard me: An adorable pig is dragging me through mud. It appears I am in a forest full of spruce and birch with what appear to be apple trees.

The pig senses I am awake because it head-butts a tree and catches an apple on its head and carries it to me.

"Thanks, little buddy," I say, but all the pig does is nuzzle me. Just then I know that I need to name the epic pig that helped me. I go through names in my head: Matthew, Oinkers, Truffles, Billy, Bobby, Generik, BobbyG, and finally Jeffery.

Then I ask the pig, "Hey, do you like the name Jeffery?"

Then Jeffery does the disco with his head.

"So you like Jeffery, huh?" I say. "It'll get dark soon. Come on, let's find some shelter."

It is five days later that we find a small village that is empty, consisting of a weapon smith, three houses, four dirt hovels, and three farms. Jeffery and I are glad. The last thing we ate was two carrots that we found in the wild. When we found the village, little did we know at the time that mutant spiders roughly a yard across were lying in wait for us behind the farms.

Luckily I choose to search the weapon smith for a weapon because of some killer bees we found in the forest. In the back of the shop, I find two chainmail helmets, a chainmail chest plate, chain leggings, and a pair of high-quality leather boots. Giving

Jeffery the extra helmet, I equip myself with the armor and a yellowish sword. The sword was hidden behind a secret panel that I wouldn't have found if I hadn't leaned back on it while putting on the pants. As we leave I see a broken sign that says ' r us We o s a d m r' above the weapon smith.

As we search the farms, the mutant spiders are preparing to ambush us.

The crops the villagers are growing seem to be carrots, potatoes, and beets. While Jeffery is munching on his third carrot, I taste the raw beet thing, and it tastes like a warm chocolate chip cookie fresh from the oven. Then right as I gulp down the beet, the mutant spiders attack.

Jeffery's carrot is destroyed by the mutant spiders' spit. As Groucho Marx and Bugs Bunny say, "This means war!"

I swing left and right, attacking the mutant spiders like they punched my grandpa in the stomach. They only sent five because they underestimated Jeffery and me. There will be more next time, I'm sure.

After the fight, I notice an inscription on the sword that says "Thy wielder of thee sword, Excalaju, of thy masterful blacksmith Darius, shalt liberate thy people of thy lands under the rule of Israphel thy Tyrannical." My dream must have been a prediction of me fighting the ruler of this land.

We're in a cave, hiding from the mutant spiders. They've been chasing us for more than a week. There were more, and I've poked the wasps' nest now.

It's so dark that even just a millimeter away from your eyes, you cannot even see light (not very smart in general). I've fallen more than a clumsy elephant with one leg (imagine that). As I trip for the tenth time in about five minutes, I notice (with my face...painfully, too) that there's a small crack in the wall. Because most cracks in random places mean 'PUSH ME!' I push the crack with Jeffery behind me. I fall into the wall, and to my surprise it rotates. I fall into a room with strange torches on the wall. I see a man gripping a pickaxe and then lowering it when he notices Excalaju unsheathed.

"So, you've found Excalaju in our old capital, eh?" the strange man asks as he leans on his pickaxe.

"That town? It's only eleven buildings!" I protest.

“What do you mean eleven buildings? Last time I was there, there were a thousand buildings.”

I do the math quickly in my head and reply, “Well there are nine hundred eighty nine buildings fewer now. By the way, when did you last see it?”

“I saw it last year on Mead Day. Then again, there is the annual Destroy the Town Day the week after.”

“Really? Destroy the Town Day?”

“Dwarves have weird holidays, ok? By the way, I’m Rob Willakers, Major in the Dwarven Army, 4th Division, 13th Battalion, 9th Company, nickname OldMan. Your name is?”

“My name is Jason. Also, who do I need to defeat to liberate this land?”

“How did you know?”

“I found an inscription on the sword...”

“Why in the world does Darius make inscriptions on his swords?” OldMan asks rhetorically.

I interrupt his thoughts. “So, who is it?”

“His name is Israphel.”

“Let me guess. He has pure red eyes and pure white skin in a general’s uniform?”

“How do you know this?”

“A dream.”

“This creeps me out.”

“Figures.”

“There’s a portal in the back of the room that leads you to the citadel where Israphel resides,” Rob tells me. “Once in, you need to find my partner, nickname Unpause. He leads a large, yet unnoticeable, resistance against Israphel. He works as the head of guards,” Rob says, pointing to a purple shimmering part of the wall.

“Yes, Sir!” I say. “Stay here, Jeffery. I don’t want you to be turned into bacon.”

Oink! Jeffery replies, scared.

“Wait!” Rob calls out. “Israphel can die only from lava and will duel anyone who challenges him to show he can never be beaten. Be careful, Jason.”

As I walk into the portal, it feels like my body is cookie dough being rolled by a firm and inexperienced hand. This feeling only lasts a few seconds, though.

Suddenly, I land in what can only be a palace garden.

“Who goes there?” a man dressed in heavy armor demands.

“Who are you?” I ask.

“What’s it to you, buster?”

“I’m looking for the head guard.”

“Well, that’s me.”

I whisper, “Unpause, I was sent here by OldMan.” Unpause reacts as if I am a ghost.

“Tha-tha-tha-that’s impossible. OldMan went missing in action.”

“Trust me. I know him.”

“Oh, well, if you say so. I’ll show you the place where the resistance gathers. They all live really close to here, but they spend most of their time here. They sneak in through the sewers so that Israphel’s spies don’t see them. Be careful, though. The resistance doesn’t trust people as easily as I do. But it’s for a good reason, you see. There once was another resistance against Israphel’s hangings, sacrifices, enslaving, imprisoning, and whippings. But a spy was let into it, and all the members of the resistance were imprisoned, then whipped, then hung, sacrificed, or enslaved. It took a long time until anyone was brave enough to form another resistance.”

Five weeks after learning my way around the citadel and getting the members of the resistance to trust me, Unpause is fired for giving his rations to the slaves who were starved by Israphel’s council and got only one small piece of hard tack a week. This is the last straw. No longer will anyone suffer Israphel’s tyranny except for the devil, I vow. Today I shall challenge Israphel to a duel to the death. Soon there will be liberation!

The duel is set for Friday at 1:30 P.M. or 1330 military time. I’ve practiced my swordsmanship with the resistance’s new leader, a skilled archer and knight only known as *Lord Of Blades*. *Lord Of Blades* knows that the only way I can defeat Israphel is by pushing him into molten lava.

The duel is today, and I have requested a circle of stone above lava as the field. Just like in my dream, the stone is unsupported by anything and molten blue lava is below. (Blue is a hotter flame than red or orange.)

Just before the duel, Israphel shows me his sword. Cackling, he says, "This sword has been blessed by the devil and has been named 'Mercurius.' No one has ever defeated Mercurius or me."

The first hour of the duel is thrust and parry. Thrust and parry.

Hour two: I draw first blood, meaning I hit him first.

Hour three: Israphel makes a strong sweep meant to decapitate me, but by ducking, I get a well-needed haircut.

The fourth and last hour finally brings the end of Israphel. I am at the end of the stone. Israphel, thinking I am exhausted, does an all-power-in-the-strike thrust. Strafing left, I hit him with the pommel (the bottom part of the sword). Israphel falls into lava shouting, "Lla uoy llik lliw enirboreh!"

The day of liberation has come! The Dwarven army (or what's left of it) creates a celebration that most likely outdid Mead Day by more than one thousand people. Making sure to keep this land safe and sound, I create a government where you are able to vote on what happens. The leader and the two advisors are all elected by the people. Being the liberator, I am elected to be the leader, with OldMan and **Lord Of Blades** elected as my advisors.

Jeffery also becomes the main symbol of the land, which from now on will always be known as Asgard. Jeffrey now resides in a nice cozy house with his wife, Joanne, and three kids: Barley, Twig, and Clay. But no wolves have blown down their house.

Lost in Paris

LOST IN PARIS by *Kiran* deals with every parent's nightmare. It's no picnic for the children involved, either.

“**N**ikki!” my parents screamed. “Hurry up. I don’t want to lose you again! It is crowded, and you don’t know how to speak French. How do you think you are going to communicate?” She is referring to one time when I was four (now I am eleven). I wasn’t paying attention, and my parents walked off without me. They had to call the police and everything. Don’t you think that that was really their fault? Well anyway, we just landed in Paris, France.

“Mom,” I say, “I just can’t help it.” This airport is so cool. They have tablets and music pods. I wish we could stay here longer. I have been to many places and airports, and never ever have I said that. But we can’t stay here any longer. My parents and I are here with my best friend Clare and her family. Our dads own a business together, and they have a very important meeting.

I look up to see my mom is yelling at me to get into the taxi and to stop daydreaming. “Nikki, don’t daydream. Paris is a huge city. The last thing I need is for you to get lost,” she says when I get into the car.

“Sorry,” I say, not really meaning it. In my opinion she is way too overprotective. Anyone would have noticed if their kid was missing. It is not like it’s a big deal.

The ride to the hotel is really different then from what I expected. First we have to take the highway. While we are driving down the highway I see graffiti all over the walls. I thought that someone would have cleaned that up, but whatever.

We arrive at our hotel, which is Hotel Arc de Triomphe. It is on the Avenue de Wagriam, which is one of the streets that the Arc de Triomphe connects to. We check in and go to the room. If you look down the road you actually can see the Arc de Triomphe.

We went down to the lobby to meet Clare’s family. Since it was only eleven o’clock in the morning our parents decided we should go wait in the line to go up to the top of either the Eiffel Tower or the top of the Arc de Triomphe. Clare and I decided on the Eiffel Tower.

We take the subway to the Eiffel Tower. It was kind of like the highway. I thought that it was going to be a lot nicer than it was. There was a lot of graffiti everywhere. But there were lots of people selling really cool things like mini Eiffel Towers.

The train jolts to a stop. Everyone gets off except Clare and me. We get stuck in a rush of people coming onto the train. We finally get to the doors of the train. We are about to step off when the doors close in our faces and we are left by ourselves.

My mom and dad always told me that if I ever get lost on a train I should get off at the next stop. That is exactly what we do. We wait for about an hour for our parents to come. I finally say, "I think that maybe they thought we would have gone to the Eiffel Tower. That was where we were going to go next."

Clare just nods. I can tell that she is on the verge of crying.

We get back on the train and go to the Eiffel Tower, and I see Clare can see that she cheers up a little when she sees it. It is good. If she were to start to cry I would probably fall apart.

We get there and search for a half hour, but we can't find them. I figure we should eat soon, so I decide to tell Clare.

Once I find the right time I say, "Well, we might as well go and eat. I have some money."

"Okay," she says, "we might as well."

We start walking, and as soon as we start walking I see a place and say, "Hey, there is a place. Why don't we eat there?"

"No," she says, and I am wondering why not. "It is a tourist trap. They charge more, and the food is not as good as if we go to a place a little farther out."

"Okay," I say slowly. It is weird for her to be so picky, especially under the circumstances.

We find a little Italian restaurant to eat at. We look at the menu very carefully, making sure we have enough money.

While we are eating a girl a little older than us with brown, long hair comes in with another lady who looks about forty or fifty. Clare stops sniffing just long enough to whisper, "I think I might know that girl. She looks really familiar, but I just can't remember who she is."

We finish about the same time as the girl and that lady she is with. They start to walk over, and Clare suddenly remembers who they are, "I remember them now. They used to be my next door neighbors."

They are now at our table and say to Clare, “You look like a girl we used to know. Is your name Clare Zeigler?”

“Yes it is. I remember you. I just can’t remember your name.”

“Oh, my name is Julia, remember?” As soon as Julia tells Clare that, I can tell she remembers her better now.

“Oh, yeah, I remember now,” Clare says, excited to have met someone she knows.

“Where are your parents?” the lady who turned out to be Julia’s mom, Annie, says with a worried look on her face. We explain everything to her. She tells me she’ll call my mom. With that news Clare and I get so excited. I give her my mom’s phone number, and she calls, and Annie offers to drop us off at the hotel.

We get there, and our parents start giving us hugs and kisses. We tell her we did what she always tells me to do (get off at the next stop), but they weren’t there. Once she is done telling us that she got so worried that they didn’t even think to look at the train station and just went to the Eiffel tower and then left when we weren’t there to call the police, my mom tells me that she should have gotten out after us. But I tell her she was right, I need to pay more attention. And I thank her.

The Mystery Man of the Bronx

*It's all too easy to look suspiciously upon someone who acts differently than those around him. Two kids figure out more than just the story of their neighbor in **THE MYSTERY MAN OF THE BRONX** by **Alexander Andrews**.*

The story of the mystery man all began when the Stewart family moved to the Bronx in New York City.

The daughter, named Madison, was 12 years old in the summer of 2012. It was the month of June, and since moving to New York, Madison had met quite a few new friends on the block. One of the first people she met was Cameron Baker. Cameron was known as the neighborhood sleuth. Even though he was a little kid, he loved to solve mysteries.

After school Madison went to visit Cameron to get to know him and her neighborhood better. She asked, "Why are you known as the neighborhood sleuth?"

Cameron said, "Because I'm very curious about the mystery man and what he's all about."

"Who is the mystery man?" Madison asked.

Cameron replied, "I know that he moved here in 1999 after something happened to his family."

Madison said, "What happened to his family?"

Cameron replied, "I'm still trying to figure that mystery part out." Cameron said to Madison, "It is good that you moved here. There aren't that many kids on this block. What made you move to New York?"

She said, "My dad's company, Google, relocated him once he received his promotion to Vice President of Human Resources."

As they walked the neighborhood, Cameron pointed out some of the neighbors whom he considered strange. He pointed out the house of Marcus Smith, who is the bully of their school and who teases Cameron. As they walked the street they came upon the mystery man's home, and Madison said, "Who is that, Cameron?"

He said, "No one knows who he is. He is only known as the mystery man. The neighbors don't have any information on his present or past family life."

The next morning Madison went to Cameron's house to help solve who the mystery man of the Bronx was, but Cameron did not have that much more detail to reveal to Madison. But there was one small important bit of information. Cameron told Madison that Ms. Potter, who is also the neighborhood watch sleuth, knows about everything that goes on around the neighborhood

Madison and Cameron knocked on Ms. Potter door and asked her if she had any more information on the mystery man on their street. She said, "His name is Mr. Bean, and he moved to Pembroke Street after his family was killed in an airplane crash in 2002. He went into a state of shock and became very depressed. He was very non-communicative with the neighbors and just kept to himself, so people began to call him the 'mystery man!'"

The day after Madison and Cameron talked, Madison went back to his house. She said she realized that the trash was gone from the mystery man's house. Cameron said, "So what does that mean?"

"It means the mystery man walked out of his house. We would have to go on a stakeout to see what time he comes out of his house."

"Let's do it. We will start a 12:00 P.M. See you then."

At 12:00 P.M. they headed to the mystery man's house. They hid under the bushes. As they waited they heard a door creak open. They picked their heads up to see an old man that looked like he was in his fifties. They could not see his face too much, but after he took his trash back he got in his car and left the house.

Since Cameron is known as the neighborhood sleuth, he said to Madison, "Look through the window at the mirror on the bottom right corner. There is a picture. Do you have the binoculars?"

Madison said, "Yes, do you need them?"

Cameron said, "Yeah." He used the binoculars to look inside the window to see the mystery man and his family. They looked so happy in the photo.

Madison said, "Let me take a look." She realized the same thing Cameron did.

They turned their heads to the sound of a car driving. It was the mystery man. He had come back. They knew they didn't have much

time before he came back, so they hurried up and left the house.

They still felt they needed to get to know him on a personal level. They decided to not sleuth around, but to just be good neighbors. They decided to knock on his door with a nice plate of chocolate chip cookies to introduce Madison and her family to the neighborhood.

He opened the door with such a huge smile and introduced himself as Mr. Jim Bean. He welcomed Madison and Cameron into his home for some cookies and milk on the back porch.

They laughed and talked for hours about his past life, including how he had quit his job because of his deep depression. Every week he had to go to a therapist to talk about his past life and to help him get back on his feet. The therapists would ask him question like, "What made you sad?" and "Why did this happen."

The kids realized that he had a hard childhood. They just loved to hear what he had to say. They soon began to really enjoy his company and didn't consider him the mystery man any longer. It just goes to show you to get to know a person. You never know what story lies behind their past.

Peanut Butter

*Peanut butter is not just a sandwich ingredient anymore. Just ask the lucky dog in **PEANUT BUTTER** by **Leila Duval**.*

We just finished grocery shopping. We were actually checking out. “Wait, we forgot the peanut butter,” I told my dad.

“Oh, I forgot it, I’ll go grab it,” my dad said. He lightly jogged over to the section where the peanut butter was. He came back a couple of seconds later and threw it on the conveyor belt.

After packing the trunk with groceries, we all hopped in the car ready to spend the day in Detroit. On our way, we saw many stray dogs lying down in the warm weather. It was a good thing it wasn’t really hot or really cold. It was really sad, though.

We were almost there, about ten minutes away, when this dog just really stuck out to me. His thin, white coat was glowing like a bright light to the face; he was also thinner than others.

“Dad! Look, that dog!” I screamed. He noticed him.

“Yeah, Lay, he’s really cute,” he replied.

“Pull over! You know you like pit bulls!”

“He could have diseases, and he looks very unhealthy.”

“Please!”

He pulled over right before we passed the dog. “I’ll call animal control,” my dad told me.

“Okay,” I agreed. He dialed the numbers into his phone.

While he was calling, I climbed to the trunk and took the peanut butter and untwisted the cap. I put my finger into the peanut butter and spread it all over the cap. My dad unlocked the car door, and I swung it open.

There was the dog. I set the cap on the ground and slowly walked away so the dog could have some peace and quiet. It sort of seemed like it was the first spoonful of peanut butter he’d ever had. It probably was.

“Lay, come over here!” he screamed while I was slowly running over to the car. “Animal control wasn’t picking up!” he exclaimed. “We will just have to leave him there.”

“No! Call Mom!” My mom is a vet, so I knew she would say yes.

A couple of minutes later my dad got off the phone. "What did Mom say?" I asked.

"She said yes."

"Yes!"

"But, there are some boundaries. First, on the way home we take him to the vet and leave him there until he is clean. Second, you are responsible for cleaning up after him, taking him out, and feeding him," he exclaimed.

"Yes, yes, thank you!" I said.

We drove home and wrapped the dog in an old blanket in the trunk. We dropped him off at the vet, for 1 to 2 weeks. The vet said that she would call back once he is ready.

Two weeks later there was a call. "I'll get it!" I yelled.

In the moment of silence I answered the call. I screamed for joy as the vet told me he was okay. She said we could pick him up now. My dad ran downstairs to see what the scream was. He laughed; he was in on it, too. "Let's go pick him up now!" I screamed.

"Okay!" said my dad.

On the way home, we were thinking of names to call him. "Let's name him Peanut Butter! I mean, that's how we got him, by peanut butter."

"That seems like a great name!" my dad said.

I loved Peanut Butter, and I just couldn't imagine all the wonderful things he would do for us in the future.

The Ring

THE RING by *Keller Kanat* takes two friends on a quest for a stolen item of great worth. How far will they go to help their queen?

Gia and Mio were right there, face to face with the ring. It was shimmering from the ray of light peeking through a tiny slot in the ceiling. They looked at each other as if they were talking through their eyes, trying to decide if they should take it back to Queen Kate III or not. Gia and Mio both were deciding what would happen. If they took it back to the Queen, she might think that they stole it for the money, but if they didn't take it back, then she might never find it.

* * *

Gia was the kind of girl who LOVED adventure. Mio had the smarts to get himself out of ANY situation. Together they were the perfect team.

One day they were in town square when a newspaper blew into Mio's face. When he took it off (as Gia was giggling), he saw in bold print on the front it said "Queen's Ring Missing: Reward £10,000." They look at each other and ran to their houses to pack their things and ask their parents if they could go look for the ring. Mio called Gia after dinner to ask when they should meet, and Gia responded, "Meet me by the clock tower at midnight."

When they got there it was so dark that they could barely see each other. When Mio pulled out his flashlight everything lit up. They heard some rats scampering off in the distance, and they started out.

At around 1:30, they both agreed that they were tired. They went on a little longer and found a small hole in the side of a mound of dirt and decided to rest there for the night. Mio rolled out his sleeping bag right next to Gia's. Mio pulled out his book and turned on his flashlight.

At about 3:30 A.M. Gia woke up. When she couldn't go back to sleep, she decided that she was going to take a walk. She looked over and took the flashlight out of Mio's hand and put his book away because he had fallen asleep. She got up and turned the flashlight back on.

When she looked up she realized that she didn't need it because standing in front of her was a man that looked like he was 20 feet tall. He had an eye patch over his left eye and a HUGE overcoat made out of leather that was all black.

He said, "Go get your little friend. We're going for a walk." Gia ran as fast as her legs could take her back to the hole to get Mio. She shook him as hard as she could to get him awake. When he finally woke up he was very mad at Gia. He asked meanly, "Why would you wake me up? I was having a great dream!"

"Oh, just come with me," responded Gia, and she dragged him to the man with the eye patch.

When they finally got there Mio looked up and down and up and down at the man because he was so huge. When he was done he whispered to Gia, "That guy must be like 10 feet tall." Gia nodded in agreement. The man gestured his way.

After probably about 30 minutes of walking in silence Gia said to the man, "Hey, if we're going on this long trip with you, don't you think that we should know your name?"

"I don't think that will be an issue," responded the man.

He revealed a secret tunnel in the side of a mountain. Gia and Mio walked up to it. Just as they were about to walk in, the man picked them both up in one hand and then pulled up a cart, put the cart on a track, put them in the cart, and sent them down the track. After what felt like forever, the track ended. They climbed out and followed the passageway. "Here we are," said Gia.

"Come out. Just get us already," said Mio.

After a little while longer, they saw a shadow come up behind them. Then everything went dark.

They woke up with a potato sack on their head and their hands and legs tied back. Gia tried to struggle out, but Mio told Gia, "It won't help." Mio knew every knot known to man.

Gia felt something in her pocket and remembered that she brought her lucky wooden pocket knife that she had carved a weird picture into. She reached as far as she could and just barely got her hand on it. She pulled it out, flipped up the knife, and cut herself free. Then she did the same for Mio. As she was cutting him free she said, "I bet you wouldn't have thought to bring a pocket knife."

"No, I wouldn't, because my mother does not trust children with knives."

"Oook?" said Gia.

As they crossed hallway to hallway they looked up, down, right, and left. When they got to the final door, Mio pulled out his flashlight. When he shone it upon the door, they realized it was made out of some sort of metal and that the only way to open it was off of the keypad on the wall.

Mio tried multiple number combinations. But he could not get it for some reason. When Gia tried she got it on her first time. The code was 08232002. She tried it because it was her birthday.

The door split in half, and there, right in front of them, were two shiny, brown dirt bikes with matching helmets. They were both brown so that they would blend in. When they got up to the bikes they saw that in each of their helmets were £100 debit cards!

They picked up their debit cards and rode off. After probably about two and a half hours of riding they wound up in front of a restaurant that they could not see the name of. They went inside and sat down. When the waitress came over, they remembered her from somewhere, but they didn't know where. The waitress said politely, "Hi, my name is Katlyn. What will you be having today?"

Mio said, "A sunny side up egg with crispy bacon and wheat toast."

Gia responded "Hm. I'll have the breakfast burrito."

"Um that is the one with eggs and sausage? Remember it's spicy."

"Ya, that's the one I want,"

Gia and Mio talked about everything: the future, the past, the present. Oddly enough when they went over to pay the waitress, she said that it was on the house. They said thanks and left. About 15 minutes after they left, Mio said, "Wait, I remember where we know her from."

"WHERE?" asked Gia.

"That's the Queen!"

"No, it's not. It couldn't be. Could it?"

They ran back, but all that was there was the big tall man with one eye patch over his left eye. He was about to grab them when a man that they didn't think they knew grabbed them and rode away. When he finally stopped Mio and Gia said at the same time, "who are you? And why did you help us?"

The man responded, "My name is..." Then he fell down off of the motorcycle. He had been Tasered.

When they looked up from the man they saw a woman that asked them, “Do you want to live or die?”

Mio responded for the both of them, “Live. Definitely live.” They reached out to grab her rope, and she pulled them up into her house. It was in the trees! “This is awesome,” said Gia.

Mio said to the woman, “Hey, you never told us your name.”

“I’m Arora. What are your names?”

Gia responded. “Hi, I’m Gia, and this is Mio.”

“What are you two doing here?”

“We are looking for the queen’s ring,” responded Mio.

Arora let them sleep at her house that night and let them eat breakfast with her. Then she sent them on their way. They walked about 10 minutes to get their bikes and went on their way. They went about an hour and 45 minutes before either one of them said a word. Gia asked, “Where are we going?”

“I don’t really know.”

They rode about an hour longer and decided that they wanted to call it quits for the night. They found a cottage and decided to sleep there. They parked their bikes and went inside. They were so tired that they fell asleep in less than five minutes. It was probably around 11:00 that they fell asleep.

In the morning they were about to leave when they saw this glowing, magnificent light shooting out of a tunnel. Naturally they went over to check it out. Gia was going to walk in when Mio pulled her arm and said, “Are you really going to go in there?”

“Well, yeah. We have to find the ring. Why not try here?” exclaimed Gia.

When Gia went in she stopped. Mio said, “What, Gia, what’s wrong?” Gia was scared, while Mio was wondering what she was thinking and whether he should go in.

When Mio went in he stopped, too. Now they were both scared. They looked up to find the man with the eye patch looking down at them. The man gave them a death stare, grabbed each of their arms and started walking toward a man that looked like a shadow. As they got closer they saw that he was not very attractive. When they finally got in front of him he said, “You do not run from me, kids.” He turned around and started walking away and gestured for the man to come.

When they got into a secret room he sat down and said, “You might know my wife, Queen Kate III.”

“Yes we do, but why do you want us?”

"If you tell my wife that I stole the ring, she would turn me in."

"Um, we didn't know that, sir."

"Oh. Well, now I definitely can't let you leave."

He started walking, and the big man picked them up and carried them away. When they finally got to the room, right there they were face to face with the ring. It was shimmering from the ray of light peeking through a tiny slot in the ceiling. They looked at each other as if they were talking through their eyes, trying to decide if they should take it back to Queen Kate III or not. Gia and Mio both were deciding what would happen. If they took it back to the Queen she might think that they stole it for the money, but if they didn't take it back then she might never find it. They looked back and forth from the ring to the man. He asked, "Well, are you going to take and rat me out now?"

"Hey, wait, I have a deal," said Mio.

"What is it?" said the king.

"Yeah, what is it?" asked Gia.

"If you let us take the ring and take us back to the castle safely, we won't rat you out," said Mio.

"Hmmm. I think that you got yourself a deal, kid."

"FYI, I'm 12 years old."

"Yeah, and I am 41. Your point is? Ok, so if we let you take the ring, you will not turn us in," said the king.

"No," said Gia.

When they finally got back to the castle they went to the Queen and returned the ring and told her EVERYTHING. When they were explaining what happened, she asked, "Wait, who took you here?"

"Umm, we told the person that took us that we wouldn't tell," said Gia.

"Well, if you don't tell, I will have to arrest you or your parents," the Queen responded.

"Oh, ok, but if we tell you, will you promise no harm will come to him?"

"No, but as little harm as possible will."

"Well, I'm not sure if you will want to punish your husband."

As the queen passed around the room she repeated a name. Then she just started crying. When she finally sat down she said, "Bring in the king."

Once they told him to come in, the door slammed shut. Then there was a lot of yelling. When he came out he had handcuffs on.

They went down to the jail and watched him get his mug shot. Or so everyone thought.

About five days later the queen felt bad and went to pay bail for her husband. When she got there she went right to the constable and screamed, "That is NOT my husband!"

"We are sorry, Queen Kate. We thought he was the king, but what should we do? We do not know where he is," responded the constable.

"We know where he is," said Gia.

But the adults just kept talking.

"We know where he is," Gia said again.

But the adults just kept talking.

Then Gia just screamed it out. "WE KNOW WHERE HE IS!"

The queen looked at the girl and said "What did you just say?"

"I said we know where the king is."

"H-h-h how do you know this?"

"We told you he took us back, remember?"

"Oh, I did not remember. I always remember."

So the children took the queen and the constable to the king's hideout in the tunnel, and then to the secret room. In a bedroom hidden where there is no light, there was a door. The constable opened the door, walked in, and gestured to the queen and the children to enter. The constable switched on the light. They were all looking around when they heard a faint weeping. They followed the sound and found the king with a doctor. They asked the doctor what happened and he said, "The king was poisoned."

* * *

"...And the king never lived another day," said Gia, as she finished the story.

"Let's have another round of applause for Mio and Gia, who I have become such good friends with, and who helped me get my ring back. Thank you again," said the Queen.

P.S. The king is still in jail. (He he he he)

The Sharp Jaws

*It's summertime, and the living is easy—unless you are working. Of course, weekends are relaxing—unless you have an experience like the one in **THE SHARP JAWS** by **Andrè Wells**.*

“10 ...9...8...7...6...5...4...3...2...1...! Hurray! School’s out! Hey, guys, let’s meet up at the dock once we get home,” Andre said.

“Ok,” the group of friends said.

“I’ll bring the worms. Billy, bring the rods. We will meet up at the dock at 6:00.”

Billy brought rods, Andre brought worms, and the group of friends, Billy, Andre, Joe, and Kevin, went to the dock at 6:00. They all went fishing, caught a lot of catfish, divided them up evenly, and took the fish to their houses. Joe had his friends over for a fish dinner. Eating fish they caught was the best day ever!

The next day Andre called Kevin and said, “I’m bored!”

Kevin told him, “It would be great to get a job where we could make money and do something we like.”

“That’s a good idea! I’ll tell the others.” Andre told the others. They loved the idea.

Everyone received a job at the Kids Department, where there were adult intern jobs for kids. The kids observed the adults doing their jobs. The kids learned what they do and how they do it. Andre observed a doctor, Kevin observed a detective, Joe observed a boxer, and Billy observed a scientist. The group of friends thought work was fun.

Their jobs kept them busy for most of the summer until August. Business was slow in August due to school starting in September. The only person who had lots of customers was Andre because all the kids were getting their shots for the upcoming school year. Since everyone except Andre barely had work to do, the boss let everyone but Andre leave work early on a daily basis.

One day after work the group of friend’s decided to go fishing. They didn’t see Billy and assumed he was working late. They continued fishing, hoping that Billy would come, but he never did. Joe was the first one to stop fishing and leave because he was worn out from boxing. Kevin then left because all the mystery-solving

made his head hurt. By the time Andre arrived to fish everyone else had gone. "Aww, man, I didn't get to see Billy at all today," Andre thought. "Oh, well, I'll see him in the morning."

The next day everyone called each other before going to work and met along the way to work except Billy. Since they didn't see him and didn't want to be late for work, they hoped he was already at work. Everyone worked hard and came back from work exhausted. They were so exhausted they didn't want to go fishing. They were exhausted enough to not notice Billy was still gone.

It was Saturday. No one had to go to work on weekends. Most of the friends went fishing. The only one who didn't show up to fish was Billy. Everyone started to worry because they had not seen Billy in two days.

Everyone went to Billy's house. They knocked on the door. When Billy's mom answered, she said, "I saw Billy earlier today. I think he went fishing." Everyone went to the dock where they normally fish at 9:15 A.M., and there they saw Billy's fishing rod. That was his fishing rod that he uses at 9:00 A.M., Saturdays only. He never leaves his fishing rod unattended. They also saw a shark's tooth next to the rod on the dock. "Billy has been eaten," they all said in unison.

During Billy's summer job he participated in a science experiment. In case he ever had to smell the fumes of a stomach he would be okay for 12 hours before instant death. Everyone began to think of ways to use their skills to save Billy. Luckily their jobs prepared them for this moment.

Andre analyzed the shark tooth and saw the shark had a disease, Sharklet Fever. Whoever was bitten by the shark would contract Sharklet Fever and die in 12 hours if not treated. The shark must have eaten Billy at 9:00 A.M. when he disappeared from the dock. Sharks take 12 hours to digest food. Either way they needed to get Billy out of the shark by 9:00 P.M.

"We only have ten hours left to rescue our friend and give him the antidote," Andre said.

Everyone started to work on a plan to save Billy. Andre went to his office to make the antidote, while Kevin figured out how to get the shark back to the dock and have it leap out of the water. Joe's thoughts were to use his strength to knock the shark out with a punch.

Finally the trap was ready. First, Kevin started fishing to attract the shark to the dock. After Kevin had the shark leap out of the water, Joe could knock it out. Kevin would grab Billy out of the shark's mouth, and Andre would inject the medicine into Billy. The hard part was that time was not on their side. They only had one hour remaining to do it.

It took Kevin and Joe 45 minutes to do their parts. The shark tried to grab onto the hook and missed. Kevin tried to catch the shark in the air by raising the hook. Joe knocked him out, and Kevin took 14 minutes to get Billy out of the shark.

Andre had his needle ready. If the shark awakened he would ruin Andre's concentration. He had to do this fast. It took Andre 30 seconds to put the needle in, but the hard part was injecting the medicine. He had only ten seconds left. "9...8...7...6...5...4...3...."

"Done!" Andre said. Three seconds later Billy awoke. He thanked his friends for saving him.

As a victory treat they all went fishing. They caught lots of fish, reminding them of the first day of summer vacation. Thinking about the first day of summer vacation made them realize it was the second-to-last day of summer vacation.

On the last morning of summer vacation, everyone got up early. They told their manager what happened. The manager told everyone their summer jobs were over. On the last day everyone went fishing and was glad that their summer jobs were useful in everyday life.

Star Struck

*Look around. You never know when you will spot something—or someone—unexpected. In **STAR STRUCK** by **Aria O.**, read about the author’s meeting with a celebrity.*

“**O**MG! Someone on our plane is a famous singer!” I heard a fellow passenger say, talking on her phone.

It was the end of December break, and my family and I were on our way home from Puerto Vallarta. It was night time, and we were all sad to be leaving Puerto Vallarta. We had a layover in Atlanta before we would arrive in Michigan. It was going to be a long, boring day.

Our plane was running on time, and my family and I all boarded. We sat down in our seats and took out our iPhones. We were lucky to be able to sit behind the bulkhead since the plane was basically empty—maybe there were 40 people on board.

Once everyone was seated, there was some commotion in first class. I could hear a male passenger gossiping about a singer that just boarded our plane. I could not see who the famous person was because the bodyguards were surrounding him. My cousins, Dylan and Harrison, and my sister, Evann, started asking the stewards who the famous person was. But they didn’t tell us anything.

Dylan, who was nine years old, sneaked into first class to ask Papa Denny if he knew. But Dylan couldn’t see the man seated in the front row, and the stewardess was not letting Dylan sneak by. All Papa Denny knew was that he was African American, wore sunglasses, had two kids, and must be a singer because he didn’t recognize him from TV or the movies.

We kept trying to peak around the curtain into first class to see who this famous person was. We could not see the famous person at all—the bodyguards continued to block our view. Instead, we played with our iPhones and iPads and listened to music the whole flight.

The flight was over pretty fast. It was only one hour and 45 minutes, and it felt like 15 minutes.

When we landed in Atlanta, the bodyguards and famous person were let off the plane first. When we got off the plane, Harrison, who was seven years old, started running down the walkway as

fast as he could to figure out who the famous person was. Evann, my eight-year-old sister, went running after him, while Dylan and I walked as slow as zombies because it was ten o'clock at night. After a couple of minutes, my nerves got the best of me. I was too curious and found the energy to follow and run after Harrison and Evann, who were still running after the famous person.

"Stop, Harrison, stop!" screamed my Uncle Ryan. Harrison stopped for one second, looked at his dad, and then started running again. My Uncle Ryan started running after Harrison. The Atlanta airport was really small and thankfully very quiet. There were no people around as we ran through the airport to the customs area. The famous person was way ahead of all of us. We ended up not catching him.

Once we were in line at customs and our parents were all yelling at us for running through an airport, we finally saw the famous person. We couldn't get out of line, but once we got our passports looked at, we turned the corner and saw who he was. Of course, we kids knew who it was at first sight! Harrison and Evann were screaming at the top of their lungs.

I was so busy trying to find a piece of paper for him to sign that I didn't even notice Harrison go up to...Usher!

"These are your youngest fans!" my Uncle Ryan told Usher.

I just stared at him, astonished there was a famous person right in front of me! His security guards tried to push us away, but Usher told them, "It's ok! I like meeting my fans! I was just in Puerto Vallarta and coming home to Atlanta."

"Can I have your autograph?" Harrison asked, since he was too startled to say anything else.

"Sure, but after I have to get my luggage and get going," Usher said. As he walked away, my cousins, sister, and I stared in amazement because we all love music and think Usher is a great singer.

Afterward, we found the rest of our families in the luggage room, and I couldn't stop thinking about what just happened. I met Usher at an airport. He was on the same plane as me. I was star struck for life. I will always remember I flew from Puerto Vallarta to Atlanta with Usher and his entourage. I will never forget it. My cousins, sister, and I always talk about this memory. And next time I am going to ask Harrison if he still has the autograph.

The Three Ninja Pigs

*The farmer usually looks after the pigs—until it's time to eat them, of course. To stay alive, three animals take matters into their own hooves in **THE THREE NINJA PIGS** by **Eli Turner**.*

It was May, 1988. Three pigs in Tokyo, Japan were having a blast in their pig corrals! One pig said that it was great.

That one sunny day changed their lives forever when the farmer spotted many people coming near the farm and quickly from his high peak on Mt. Everest. When they got there one of the men said to the farmer, "You've got the last pigs on Earth!"

"We're the only pigs left on Earth?" the pigs said. The humans wanted to eat the pigs for their bacon.

The three pigs had to do something quick. They learned self-defense from the pig god spirit so they could protect themselves. They became ninja pigs.

They had to make a base, so they dug out the so-called ninja pig cave. But then came a day when the people of the Earth found the ninja pig cave. The ninjas put up a great fight, but only one survived!

The last ninja pig had to hide. He had nothing left but his dignity and his pride. He found an old tree and hid there where no one could find him except the most imaginative person in the world!

Then came a day when a small kid named Bill found the ninja pig. The ninja pig said to the kid, "Eat me, please. I'm too old to live!"

The kid Bill eats him. There was no longer a pig. Until....

iewpoint

00 Bone

*The name is Champ. Just Champ. He is a not just any dog, though. In **00 BONE** by **James R. Berry jr.**, we learn of the secret spy organization where dogs protect the world while we sleep.*

It was just a normal day. My nametag was vibrating; it was Buster the bulldog, aka “the caller.” He was calling me in for a new mission. I knew that my master was sound asleep, so I jumped down from the bed, gracefully landing on my feet. I walked out the bedroom door, went to the upstairs stairway, and walked down to the ground level floor. When I went into the hallway I made a right turn to the basement stairway.

I quickly scampered down. I crept all the way to the back of my master’s basement room, and there was the entrance to Dog Headquarters, or D.H.Q. There was an entrance in the basement of every house that has a dog in it. Now to just type in my D.H.Q. pin number.

When the door opened it was like seeing a new breed of work. Dogs were on computers and filing papers, and one was delivering my assignment to the big man in charge, The Great Dane. “Champ, you must go to the old abandoned warehouse where Cat Lord and his goons are trying to blow up the White House. There are a lot of warehouses in downtown Detroit. Look for the one that says James’s Metal House,” he said with a firm voice.

“On it,” I replied. I ran down to get three things from the supply closet. The first thing was a set of magnetic boots that were just my size. The second thing was a parachute. The last thing was a set of D.T.E.s [Dog Treat Explosive], which came in packs of four. I ran down to the vehicle storage department at the far right of the base. I got into my vehicle, which is a Nitro Seven X.

I raced through traffic looking like a blur that no one could see. I battled at every intersection to turn right or left while trying to get to the warehouse on time. When I finally got to my destination, I took out one of my D.T.E.s and placed it on the wall. *BLAM!* The blast sounded like millions of firecrackers had just been set off on the Fourth of July.

While the building still had smoke inside of it, I rushed in and knocked out all the guards with my metal magnetic boots. I looked up

to see Cat Lord doing some kind of signal with his paw, until I figured out it was a sneak attack from right behind me. Those guards must have been standing on the balcony right over my head while I was fighting.

I was about to turn around when one hit me right in the face with a metal pipe. They put a bag over my head so I couldn't see what they were doing. All I know is that they tied me with very thin rope to a metal pole in the warehouse.

When they finally took the bag off my head I was gasping for air because the bag barely had any holes to breathe through. Cat Lord told his minions to leave the room; he only wanted me and him to have a "chat." While I was busy squirming in the ropes to break free I noticed something. He had the rocket just a few feet away from the control panel with the launch button right at his fingertips. Then he introduced himself like I didn't know who he was.

"My name is Cat Lord. I will tell you a story of why I want to blow up the White House in D.C. It all started when I was just a kitten. I met Barack Obama. He found me in a box on the Washington streets. He fed me, walked me, and cared for me all while he was president. Then he brought a dog home one day. It barked at me and chased me around the house. I decided I couldn't take any more of the neglect, so I ran away. Ever since then I have been gathering an army of stray cats to get my revenge."

While he was telling that boring story I chewed through the ropes and broke free. I ran up to tackle him, but he saw me coming. He rapidly pressed the launch button. The rocket took off into the sky.

I grabbed only one of my metal magnetic boots and knocked him upside the head. I tied him up to the same pole I was strapped to, but with stronger rope. Then I called D.H.Q. using my nametag to take him to a holding cell in the base.

I raced to my car which recently got a new upgrade called jet sequence. It basically turns my car into a flying jet. This would be the perfect time to use that upgrade since the rocket was a mile away from me. I pressed the jet button and my car started doing this crazy new transformation into a jet.

I chased down the rocket at full speed. Once I caught up to the rocket I set the jet on autopilot. I grabbed my magnetic boots and slipped them on. I jumped off the jet and onto the speeding rocket.

I climbed up to the head of the rocket and attached the rest of my D.T.E.s to the head. I jumped off as quickly as I could before the

rocket exploded. *BOOM!* One thing that I noticed that I didn't have as I was falling down was my parachute.

I started to panic about what would happen if Master woke up and I wasn't there. As I was falling down my jet caught me, as it was still on autopilot tracking me with an implanted tracking device on my collar. I typed the coordinates to D.H.Q. into the jet's computer system. The autopilot took me to D.H.Q.

I returned my car to the vehicle storage department and ran through everybody to leave. They were trying to ask me questions while I was rushing through the office hallways. Once I got out I ran up the basement stairs, through the hallway, up the ground level stairs, into the bedroom, and jumped straight on the bed. I faked that I was asleep.

BUZZ! BUZZ! "Good morning, Champ," Master says.

Yep, just a normal day.

The Ball

In **THE BALL** by *William Hess*, a simple dog's toy is not what it appears to be. It will send Phil and his pet on an adventure far more thrilling than a trip to the dog park.

It's dark, cold, and kind of creepy in this jail right now. It is weird how I got in this stupid place. I am a 12-year-old boy named Phil, and I am stuck in here with my dog Cooper. The jail we are at is on a planet other than Earth. It is on a planet called Nexus. And the reason we are here is because of a ball.

It was a nice, hot, summer day when Cooper and I were having a great time at Oak Park in Rochester, New York. We come here almost every day just to play fetch. Cooper is a really coordinated dog, so he catches almost every ball I throw to him. But I threw one too far, and it went into the playground. Cooper and I ran to get it. But when we were halfway there a dude in a black hoodie just grabbed it and walked away. I yelled over to him and said, "Hey, that's our ball. Can you give it to us?" The man in the hoodie did not respond and just kept walking.

I glanced down at Cooper, who was barking nonstop. He had this ball since he was a puppy. I looked back up to see what the man was doing. He wasn't in the park! I looked around for him, and I saw him already on the sidewalk walking toward downtown. I wondered if I should go chase the stranger. Well, I am almost 13, and I am pretty strong. So, I did chase the stranger, not even thinking of the consequences.

Cooper and I ran over to downtown. When we reached the stranger we kept a steady pace behind him so he could not see us. The hooded man stopped at an old, closed store. I never really noticed the store when I drove through downtown. The man opened the door to the store and went in.

I told Cooper to stay outside just in case. I slowly stepped up to the door and peeked through the door's window. I saw the man examining the ball. I thought, *Why would a man want a dog ball anyway?* I decided to knock on the door to see if I could talk to him.

After I knocked, the door opened with nobody there. I walked in and heard a voice that said, "Hi, Phil."

I said, "Hi" in an awkward way. I walked deeper into the store until I saw the man. His back was to me, and it seemed like he was still looking at the ball.

The man was skinny and tall. He had tan skin, kind of the same skin color I had. When he turned around I could still not see his face because of the hood. When he took his hood off he stretched out his hand to shake mine. I really didn't know him yet, so I just said, "Hello."

He was a younger guy with a beard and dark brown hair. The man started out by saying, "I bet you're wondering why I took your ball."

I replied, "Yeah, that's why I came here."

The man looked down at the ground and said, "Well, you can't have it just yet."

"Why!" I said angrily. It was my ball in the first place. Then I said, "And how do you know my name? And what's yours!"

The man nodded and answered, "My name is Master Jeff, and I need the ball to prevent the Nexus king from destroying Earth."

I was getting annoyed by this guy. He just is making up a bunch of lies to prevent me from taking back Cooper's ball. I yelled at him, saying, "Dude, that's just a bunch of lies!"

The so-called Master Jeff said calmly, "I am not lying; watch." He took my ball and held it up to the ceiling and said something in a different language. Then the ball started glowing red. He pointed it at an empty tissue box, and the ball shot out a beam of red light. Then the tissue box vaporized!

I was pretty amazed by what the ball just did. Master Jeff said, "Now you believe me?" I nodded. I was still in shock by what the ball just had done.

Master Jeff said, "See, I am part of a group of seven people, one for each continent. We have learned that there is a planet with life on it that wants to destroy us. It's called Nexus. We have been searching for this magical ball to stop Nexus from doing that. This magic ball is one of the most powerful objects in the universe! And now I just have to take over the kingdom of Nexus with this ball." I had just taken in a lot of information.

Suddenly Master Jeff looked at the clock and said, "You have to go now."

"Why?" I replied. I still wanted to know more.

“Because I need to do some adjustments on the ball...alone,” said Master Jeff quietly.

Confused by all this, but also realizing it was getting late, I said, “Can Cooper and I meet you at the park tomorrow? I want to know more about this ball.”

Master Jeff nodded and said, “Bye.”

“See ya,” I replied, walking out of the abandoned store.

The next day I got out of my bed, got Cooper, and went straight to the park. My parents asked where I was going. I just said that I was going to play with my friends.

Master Jeff was already sitting on one of the park benches when we arrived. He had the ball in his hand, and he was holding it very tightly. I went over to the park bench and sat right next to him. Cooper was sitting quietly next to my legs.

Master Jeff started the meeting off saying he was going to planet Nexus tonight. I asked, “Could I go along, too?”

Master Jeff looked surprised I just asked that. He said, “No, it’s too risky. I don’t want you to get hurt.”

I really wanted to go on this awesome trip, so I said, “I could really help you. Two people are better than one.”

Master Jeff replied, “It is better, but it is just too risky.”

I knew I was getting somewhere. “It is my ball, too, so you owe me,” I said.

Master Jeff looked confused and annoyed at the same time. “All right, you can go!” said Master Jeff.

“Can Cooper go, too?” I added.

“Sure. Just be at the park at 5:00.”

“Ok. I should be going now. Bye,” I said.

“Bye,” said Master Jeff, leaving the bench, smiling. Little did I know Master Jeff was just using us for his plan.

At 4:45 I got Cooper and left for the park. I saw Master Jeff standing near a tree when I got there. I went up to the tree that Master Jeff was standing at. Right when I got there he said, “Are you ready to go?”

I responded, “Yeah, but how are we going to get there?”

“We are going to teleport by using the magic ball,” Master Jeff said.

“Cool,” I said, excited.

Master Jeff pulled out the ball and lifted it up like he did last time. He said some words I did not know. Then...

I look up and see the sky is purple, the ground is all rock, and there is a castle in front of me. Master Jeff and Cooper are standing next to me. "Is this Nexus?" I asked.

"Yes," said Master Jeff.

All of a sudden, guys that kind of look like knights come charging at us. Master Jeff stuck out the magic ball to zap them. But then he just looked down at the ground and sprinted into the woods. Cooper and I had no defense, so they just grabbed us and put us in their jail.

And that leads to this moment. Cooper and I are really scared right now. We have never been in jail before!

I can hear footsteps right now coming down the hall. I close my eyes because I am too scared to see who it is. I hear a voice I recognize, though. "Hi, guys." Master Jeff!

Master Jeff lets us out and gives me a high-five and Cooper a pet. "Why did you leave us?" I said.

"Because it was all part of the plan. I wanted you guys to see inside the castle. Since the doors here are invisible I only know where the jail entrance is. But you guys walked through the main door so you saw almost everything in the castle. So...what did you see?" asked Master Jeff.

"I saw a very large door made out of something really shiny," I said.

"Bingo," said Master Jeff. "That's the king's room." So, we went down the hall very slowly and then stopped and saw the giant door. "That's it," I said.

Master Jeff blew down the door with the magic ball. Inside the king's room there is one big throne and two big tables next to it. And sitting in that very throne is a very big alien (about 10 foot) with a helmet on its head. I am assuming that is the Nexus king. As soon as Master Jeff saw the beast he zapped it with the magic ball. Nothing happened to the beast. The beast suddenly started talking English. "Jeff, you are weak. No one can defeat me, the Nexus king! And now I will destroy Earth! Once I do I can finally build a new planet for me!"

He pulled a ball like mine out of his pocket, but much larger. He put the ball in a cannon to shoot the ball to Earth. I couldn't let this happen, so I pulled the magic ball out of Master Jeff's hand, and thought of killing the Nexus King. Suddenly a red beam shot out of

the ball. It was going straight at the Nexus king. Before I knew it the Nexus king was lying on the floor.

Master Jeff saw this. He was in shock. He raced over to me and said, "How did you do it?"

I shrugged. Master Jeff took the other larger magic ball out of the cannon and smashed it on the ground. Then, he picked up the Nexus king and threw him out of the castle. I was going to ask him why he did that, but I didn't really care anymore. I was just really happy I saved Earth.

We left the castle and went back outside. Master Jeff said that he has to take care of planet Nexus for a while. So Master Jeff gave me the magic ball and told me to only use it for good. He gave me a fist bump and Cooper a pet and teleported us home.

As I walked home I thought about all the crazy things in the universe that no one knows about. When I got home I saw the time never changed from when we left for Nexus. My parents were not home, so I just sat on my bed thinking. The last two days have been the craziest days of my life, and it was just because of a ball.

Bill's Excellent Cake Chase Adventure

*Theft from a king is foolhardy, to say the least. In **BILL'S EXCELLENT CAKE CHASE ADVENTURE** by **Joey Adelman**, one man is charged with finding a thief and the stolen item that King Johnson wants the most: his cake.*

Bill Billingsworth was sitting at the table while his wife was making dinner. There was a ring coming from the living room, and he heard his wife say, "Honey, it's for you. It's King Johnson, and it sounds important!"

Bill ran to the phone and said, "Bill here."

There was loud screaming on the other end of the line. "You've got to get over here right away! My cake has been stolen, and one of my rocket ships is missing!"

It seemed like an odd emergency, but rather than ask questions, he simply said, "Sure, I'll be right there," and hung up the phone. He ran out the front door and screamed back to his wife, "I'll call you when I get a chance. Love you." His wife knew not to ask questions. She knew if the king calls you must leave immediately. It was just cool that the king called Bill whenever things got crazy at the castle. Bill was an ace detective that had worked for the "SA" (Secret Agency) for eight years. He was the best on the force, and everyone thought very highly of him.

"Go right in, Mr. Billingsworth," was the butler's greeting as Bill jumped out of his flying Pomelo and ran past the open door into the king's dining room. Bill showed the right amount of respect for the king with a quick bow and then began to look around. He saw the empty cake plate and then noticed a trail of cake crumbs leading out of the room and into the map room.

"Just one minute, your Majesty. I think I may be on to something. You say that you're missing a rocket ship?"

"Well, uh, uh, yes. But that was awfully quick, Bill. And I'm more worried about the cake than the ship. I can always get another rocket ship, but that cake! Oh my God, that cake! I could never replace that cake! I had just one bite of it, and it was unbelievable! I don't care about the rocket ship. WHERE'S MY CAKE?"

Bill proceeded into the map room and saw one of the drawers open. There was an empty rack where a map had once been. "Where is the map that belongs here, and what is it a map of?"

The king looked over Bill's shoulder. "Why, that's the map of our solar system with all six of our planets detailed on it. Planets Dessert, Vegetable, Recipe, Multiply, Snack and our own Planet Melon are all in detail on that one map."

Bill told the king, "Since on Planet Melon all we can eat is fruit, pomelo, and melon, I think that whoever stole your cake wanted to try something else besides fruit, pomelo, and melon. He stole the cake and went to the map room and found our solar system and saw all of the other planets and thought 'I should leave so the king does not know where I am. I'll take the map and a rocket ship to go to another planet.' And that's probably why he stole your cake and your rocket ship." Bill continued, "He's somewhere in the solar system. Do you have a spare rocket ship I can use to pursue him?"

The king pulled on a long rope hanging from the ceiling, and in a minute a servant entered the room. "You called, Your Majesty?"

"Yes," replied the king. "Get Mr. Billingsworth here a rocket ship. Get him the fastest one we have." The king turned to Bill and said, "Follow him, and please, Bill, I will give you anything if you can bring back my cake." Bill gave the king another slight bow and turned right away to follow the servant.

It was the fastest rocket ship he had ever been on. He was already on planet Dessert. It was a good hunch, he thought....cake...dessert...get it? Bill went directly to King Nuttella and asked if he had any recent visitors who may have rocketed in from Planet Melon. "We would know if any rocket had entered our air space from within our solar system. We monitor that quite well. Sorry, I can't help you."

Immediately, Bill left to try his next hunch. "If the cake was that good, maybe he is trying to figure out the recipe. I think I'll try Planet Recipe next!" *Whoosh!* Away he went.

On Recipe, he noticed King Johnson's symbol on a rocket right next to where his landed. He immediately went to the security forces at the landing strip and told them to secure that rocket ship and not to let anyone fly it away. He then asked if anyone had registered when they landed. "Jack Wilson. Yep, here he is, Jack Wilson. We coded him, and our tracking device will show you exactly where he is."

How lucky was that! It was only a matter of time.

Bill went through the city following the tracker device. Bill ran through neighborhoods and malls and was getting closer to the signal. Bill ran into a mall and saw a lot of stores to get a recipe. They followed the tracker beam and before long they were confronted with Jack Wilson. He was in the cake recipe shop. He had two cakes in his hands. Jack sprinted off. Bill called his team and told them to come and help get him. Then Bill sprinted after him.

Jack put the two cakes in a case inside of a backpack. Then he climbed up a ladder to the top of a building and went from building to building. Bill climbed up the ladder right behind Jack. Jack was faster than Bill, so Bill jumped off the roof into a pile of hay. The hay was in a carriage on the back of horses. Bill told the man to follow the man on the roof. And he chased after him.

Jack looked back and saw no one, so he climbed down and thought he was safe. When Jack saw the horses with the guy, he gave him the backpack to hold and asked the guy if he could take him to the airspace. At that moment, Bill leaped out of the hay and took Jack to the ground. His team took Jack to the ship to go back to Planet Melon and be put in the dungeon forever.

When Bill went back to Planet Melon, he was awarded a medal for saving the king's cake. There was a ceremony for Bill, too. At the ceremony the King announced that Bill would get one-fourth of his castle in honor of him finding his cake and rocket ship. Later, after the ceremony, Bill went home to his wife, and she said, "I am so glad that you caught the criminal who stole the cake and the rocket ship."

Bill told her what happened and that the King was going to give them one-fourth of his castle. Later that day, Bill and his wife moved into the castle and ate the cake with the King. And that was the best mission he has ever gone to do.

Cinderella and the Three Giant Frogs

*Cinderella certainly has her share of adventures. In **CINDERELLA AND THE THREE GIANT FROGS** by **Lizzy Williams**, our hero finds the nearby woods contain strange and wonderful secrets.*

“Cinderella, are you done polishing my shoes?” yelled Cinderella’s evil stepsister. Cinderella ran out the door and straight into the woods (with the soap). She wanted no one ever to use it again and to dispose of it in the woods. She was scared, scared to return to the house in fear of her sister getting revenge for what she had just done. She planned on spending the rest of her life in the woods.

Cinderella was starting to calm down. She had found a clearing deep in the forest so her stepsisters couldn’t find her easily. The clearing was surrounded by a bed of smooth rocks covered in soft green moss, which worked as great pillows! Oh, and there were little tiny trees everywhere!

Cinderella did not sleep well that night. She was really scared about being alone in the woods, and was starving. When she ran away, she had figured that since she was in the woods there must be a fruit tree somewhere, so when she woke up she went looking for one.

Finally, after a *really* long walk, Cinderella found an apple orchard, but there were also tiny trees everywhere, like in the clearing she had slept in the night before. She was curious. She knew she was in a story, so anything could happen to her, but tiny trees everywhere weren’t your typical princess story.

She took a closer look at one of the trees. Their trunks were about as tall as pencils, and their leaves were about as big as your fingertip. They also had apples hanging on them, but they were so small they looked like M&M’s. There weren’t really branches either...well, none that she could see. She figured that they were just tiny versions of normal apple trees.

“Um, excuse me, but you’re stepping on my food,” said a squeaky voice.

“What do you mean ‘stepping on your food’...and where are you?” Cinderella didn’t know where the voice came from because when she looked around she saw no one.

“I’m down here, and I mean those tiny little apple trees. They are my food, and *you’re* stepping on them!” yelled the voice.

Cinderella suddenly realized that the little voice was one of the tiny trees. Besides, who else would eat M&M-sized apples! She got down on the ground and started looking around when suddenly she heard the voice again.

“Over here by your really bony elbow!”

Cinderella was a little offended by this comment. She looked over at her elbow and saw a tiny tree, but this one wasn’t growing apples. It was growing frogs, and it had a branch lying across its trunk that was moving! It’s a mouth!

“Yr, yr, you’re growing frogs, and you’ve got a mouth!” screamed Cinderella.

“Nice to meet you, too. I’m Zook. What’s your name?” said the little tree sarcastically.

“My name is Cinderella, but can you please explain to me why you are growing frogs instead of apples, and how you can talk?” Cinderella said, aggravated.

“So you noticed the toads. I was wondering: Could you help me with that?” asked Zook.

“*Ahem*, you aren’t going to, *ahem*, introduce us?” coughed a huge frog.

“Sorry,” said Zook, “Cinderella, this is Phibian, Herbert, and T.F.,” Zook said, clearly annoyed that someone interrupted her.

“Wait, the toads can talk, too, and they have names!” said Cinderella, still in shock from what she had just seen.

“Yes, we have names, and if you weren’t clear on who is who, I’m T.F. It means ‘The Frog.’ I am the best out of the three of us,” said the biggest frog.

“I am Phibian. Don’t worry about T.F. He is kind of grumpy,” whispered the girl frog to Cinderella.

“Don’t worry. I grew up with two evil stepsisters. I am used to grumpy,” Cinderella replied to Phibian. “Ok, so there is T.F., Phibian, Zook, and your name is Herbert, right?” Cinderella asked the little frog.

“Ye...Ye...Yes, ma’am,” muttered the little frog.

“That is a very nice name, and you can call me Cinderella,” said Cinderella kindly.

“Ok, now that everybody’s met each other, can we get to the point? I am stuck to these things, and if you don’t unattach them soon they will be bigger than me, and when they try to walk away, it will start ripping me apart!” yelled Zook.

“Hey, it’s not easy being stuck to you, either—listening to your boring stories about how cool it was being an apple tree,” said Phibian.

“How did you start growing frogs in the first place, and your mouth?” Cinderella asked again.

“I was once a small apple tree, but when a witch came by one day and stepped on me, one of my branches went through her boot and cut her, so she did this to me. As for my mouth, that was the bright side of the curse,” Zook said.

“Not for us,” Phibian whispered to Cinderella.

Cinderella smirked, and then thought for a minute. She had a lot to take in. This cursed tree wanted her to save her from being split in half by three frogs. You don’t get the opportunity to do that every day. Cinderella had no clue on how she was going to do this when suddenly she heard T.F. say, “What is this bottle for?”

Cinderella looked over at him and saw that he was looking at the soap bottle. Cinderella had an idea. She still had the soap that had dissolved her step sisters’ shoes! She hadn’t planned on using it again, but Cinderella could put it to good use by dissolving Zook so the frogs would be separated from her! She just needed Zook’s permission.

“I know how to separate you from the frogs, but I would have to dissolve you.” Cinderella explained to Zook.

“Why can’t you just dissolve the frogs instead? You’re supposed to be setting me free, not them!” said Zook.

Cinderella thought for a minute. Zook did have a good point. Then Cinderella said, “You have a good point, and I wish I could do it a different way so everyone is still here, but I’m afraid we don’t have a choice. Besides, if I dissolve them, you will just grow more frogs because you’re under the spell, but they are just normal frogs, so they won’t grow another tree.”

Zook was silent then said, “Fine.”

So Phibian and Herbert said goodbye, while T.F. waited, refusing to say goodbye, claiming he didn’t care for the tree. Then

Cinderella poured some soap on the tree. She used leaves to guide the soap away from the frogs, which was a little hard because the soap would dissolve the leaves, so she had to use multiples.

Cinderella watched Zook dissolve, and she was kind of sad. The tree hadn't been that mean to her. Herbert was crying his eyes out. He had clearly liked Zook. She was probably like a mother to him. T.F. ran away as soon as he was unattached to the tree. He obviously liked the freedom and not the tree.

Phibian was quiet for a little sitting there with Herbert and Cinderella, when a mother frog came by. When she saw Herbert her eyes lit up. She croaked something Cinderella couldn't understand, but Herbert obviously did. Before Cinderella knew it Herbert was yelling, "I'll be happy with her. Don't worry about me," and disappeared into the trees with the mother frog.

Phibian then asked if she could live with Cinderella. Since Cinderella knew she couldn't live the rest of her life in the woods and she liked Phibian, the two went back to Cinderella's castle. They were greeted by a bunch of screaming. Phibian was taken aback by this, so Cinderella rushed her to her room. When they finally made it up to Cinderella's bedroom, Cinderella realized that all the screaming was about her stepsisters' shoes, so she locked the door behind her in case her sisters realized that she was home.

While she was doing so, she heard Phibian yell, "Zook!"

Cinderella spun around and saw that on her bed were the parts of her stepsister's shoes that were dissolved and Zook, but in a ghostly view.

Consoles of Time

It seems sometimes that gamers would move heaven, earth, space, and time to get their hands on the newest gaming device. In CONSOLES OF TIME by Jacob Ockner, that is not far from what happens.

“**N**o! Get back to the dock!” He shot the bullet, hitting him in the arm, and knocking him off the boat and into the water, drowning him. *Game over.* “Aaahh, I was just about to get past mission twenty-four.”

There was a knock at the door. I went downstairs to answer it. I opened the door, and it was my best friend, Matt Steele. Matt’s kind of short and has brown hair that’s flipped to the left side of his head. He also has green eyes and light skin.

“Hey, Jason,” Matt said, “did you get past mission twenty-four on *Golden Treasure Adventures*?”

My name is Jason Smith. I’m a little taller than Matt, and my hair is kind of straight and black. I have brown eyes and tan skin. “No, I got defeated by the Captain.”

“That’s a shame,” Matt replied. “I flushed my Wii down my toilet”

“That’s a little extreme,” I said.

“But the consoles that are out right now are so lame and boring.”

“They are,” I said back.

“I can’t wait until they come out with something new.”

“Actually, I heard something about a new console coming out this month,” Matt exclaimed.

“Good, it’s about time they come out with something new,” I muttered.

“That’s why I brought my pro gamer guide magazine with me.”

“Excellent,” I said excitedly. “Now we can find out when it’s coming out and what the new features are!”

We burst at full speed, fumbling up the stairs and into my bedroom. We smacked the magazine on the floor and flipped through the pages.

“Is that it?” I said, guessing.

“Yeah,” Matt replied. “The Virtual Extreme. It says it can play any game from the consoles that were made from any time after the

1990s, like Nintendo 64, Gameboy, Wii, Playstation, and Xbox. It also comes with its own game and controller.”

“Look,” I stated, “you can connect controllers from other games to the console to play games from other consoles. You can also skype with other people you’re playing with online with the connect camera!”

“How does it play games from other consoles?” Matt asked.

“Well, there’s a slot to put dvds in, a slot to put Nintendo games in, a slot for Xbox, and a slot to put Gameboys in,” I replied.

“Wow,” Matt said, “and look, it’s coming out at the Gamestop in Stockling Heights. Actually, Michigan is the first state for it to come out in because the designer, Edward Light, lives and designed the game in Stockling Heights, Michigan.”

“Great,” I said, “we’ll get it tomorrow.”

“Finally,” Matt said, and he barged out the door.

A couple of hours later I went to bed, and I stayed awake for practically half the night thinking about the Virtual Extreme. When 8:00 A.M. rolled in, I burst out of bed and got dressed. I busted out the door and called Matt to meet me at Gamestop because there was already a huge line.

He got down there in ten minutes. But when we got in line there were no consoles in the store. Everyone left surprised and disappointed. The reason there weren’t any Virtual Extremes in the store was because Edward Light had disappeared, along with the key to the safe that held all the consoles.

Police searched his home, but did not find the key because police predict it was in his pocket when he disappeared.

When we got back to my house, we looked on line to see what might have happened to Edward Light. The website that we were on stated he was last seen at the Microsoft Game Design Factory.

“We need a time machine to see what happened at the factory when he disappeared,” Matt said.

“We could build one from a toilet,” I said. “We could push the handle to make us travel through time.

“Okay,” Matt replied. “Let’s see how they build time machines in movies.”

We looked at a video on how to build one, and we followed all the instructions on how to build it. We both sat on the toilet and flushed it, and we were warped to yesterday when Edward Light disappeared. We went into the factory and saw him being captured

by a time traveler. The time traveler jumped into a portal and got away. We jumped into the portal and chased after him.

We were suddenly in 1927. We saw Edward handcuffed with his mouth duct-taped shut.

We asked the time traveler, "What's your name?"

He responded, "My name is Larry Draft, and I captured this man so he can make video games in our time."

"What are we going to do?" I asked Matt.

"Don't worry," he said.

We started throwing chairs and other objects in the room at Larry. He picked the chairs and objects up, and started throwing them back at us. We hit Larry in the head with a chair, grabbed Edward, and ran toward the portal. Larry came running at us hollering. We jumped into the portal, and Larry jumped in right behind us.

But instead of going back to 2014, we were whisked 60,863 years into the future! Everything was different. There were giant bugs, giant turtles, giant wild dogs and cats, and giant lizards that were about 400 feet tall and 300 feet wide and 200 feet long.

Larry jumped out of the portal and shouted, "Edward's not going back to 2014. He's coming back to 1927 to make video games at that time.

"Never!" I shouted. "I'll literally die if I don't have a Virtual Extreme."

"Well, that's too bad," Larry replied. He grabbed Edward, and Matt and I grabbed him back.

Edward started sweating from being so scared. It made the duct tape on his mouth slip off, and he yelled, "Guys, guys, relax; you people are going to break my arms."

We all suddenly heard a loud, ear-bleeding growl. A dog, about 500 feet tall, came running at about 80 miles an hour, trampling toward us. We all screamed and ran into a huge shrub to hide, but we let go of Edward. He was grabbed by the giant dog and eaten in one gulp.

Larry, Matt, and I all screamed in terror. But lucky for us, living things in the future must have fast digestive systems, because in 30 seconds the dog let out a loud, screeching, nauseating fart. About five seconds after the fart, a huge piece of poop slid out of the dog's rear end. When it hit the ground and fractured into many pieces,

we saw Edward, covered in poop, rotten corn, and tomatoes from head to toe. The dog lay on its side and took a nap.

We tried to clean the poop off of Edward with leaves from the trees, but it was stuck to him like cement.

Larry came running at us, shouting , "I'm just going to leave you two kids here and take Edward Light back to 1927 to make video games in our time." But before he could grab Edward and push us aside and jump in the portal, the giant dog woke up, and bent over and let out a loud, fiery fart. Edward, Matt and I jumped behind a tree before we were struck by the deadly gas. Larry was standing right in front of the dog's rear end when the dog farted. Larry passed out from the toxic gas, and the dog picked him up and ate him.

Edward, Matt, and I jumped into the portal before it disappeared and before Larry came out the other end. We were taken back to 2014. We landed on the toilet, and someone had used it.

"Who forgot to flush?" Edward said.

When Edward left my house, he said to us, "You boys went through a lot of trouble to get me back to the present day, and I want to reward you both for your effort." He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a stack of money. He handed Matt and I each a stack. "This is enough money for you both to buy a Virtual Extreme tomorrow when it's out."

"Thank you!" Matt and I said.

Later that day on the news, there were reporters interviewing Edward and asking him what happened to him. He replied saying, "This man from 1927 captured me and brought me back to 1927 to design video games in that time, but two young, brave, magnificent boys, Jason Smith and Matt Steele, figured out how to build a time travel machine and captured the guy and saved me."

Twenty-five minutes later, local news cars, reporters, and CNN and ABC American news trucks showed up at my house to interview me. Ten minutes later, after they were done interviewing me, Edward Light showed up at my house. I asked him what he was doing at my house, and he said that he wants to start up a new business with Matt and me.

I quickly responded, "What about the Virtual Extreme?"

He said back, “Don’t worry, that’s still in production, but since you and Matt seem to like video games so much, I decided that I want to see what kind of ideas you and Matt have for video games.”

I froze in shock at what I was hearing.

“So, what do you say, Jason? Do you want to start up a new business?” he said.

“Yes, please!” I said in an excited voice.

For the next few months Matt, Edward and I were designing a video game console called the Virtual Extreme Deluxe. It has the same features, but now it’s also able to call the place where they make the video games, and ask them for help with the controls or a level that they’re stuck on.

Once it was out in stores, Edward had more money than before, and Matt and I were billionaires. We dropped out of school and spent the rest of our lives buying candy and going on expensive vacations.

Daisy

Who can resist the charms of a cuddly bunny? DAISY by Morgan Anton tells how a new mini lop rabbit joins a new family.

Pepper, Carrot, and Oreo were the three mini lop rabbits that Maddy owned. Maddy felt like she needed another bunny. She asked her parents. “No, no, no!” they said. “Three are too many, and four are over the top. Plus your little sister Bella is only three years old. She doesn’t know how to handle them.”

Maddy begged, “But...but...but...Pepper needs a friend that’s a girl. She’s stuck with all the boys.” Her parents argued no.

Maddy walked in the bunny room and sighed. She stared at her huge bunny cage. The cage has two floors and is very tall. Maddy walked up to the cage to say hi to all three of her bunnies. She noticed that they were getting bored, so she took them out to play with them. She put all the bunnies in their homes (the homes are caves made of plastic or hay), and she carried them out to the family room. She set their homes on the couch and waited for them to get out of their homes.

Maddy built a fence made of pillows so they could roam around without escaping and running all over the house. All three bunnies got out of their homes. Bunnies love dried apples, so Maddy gave them each some. The bunnies sat on her lap while they finished their dried apples.

Maddy pet the bunnies. They were shedding a lot, so she asked her mom if she could get her a brush. When her mom got the brush, Maddy brushed her bunnies for 20 minutes each.

Maddy worked extra hard so she could get another bunny. One thing she did was she cleaned her bunny cage every week. She got good grades in school, and one day her mom and dad said that she could get another bunny. Maddy had been working hard for three months, and her hard work had paid off. Her parents said that since Maddy had been working so hard she could get another bunny!

After Maddy’s parents told her the good news, she put the bunnies in their cage early to get ready for her new bunny. First, she got a brand new water bottle from the closet (she keeps extra supplies in the closet in case of an emergency). Next, she cleaned

out the cage since it was Saturday. Lastly, she got more toys and treats also from the closet.

Her mom and dad said that she could get her new bunny the very next day! They contacted a bunny breeder, and they said that they'd come at noon.

The next day finally came. She couldn't wait to go to the breeder's house and see the new bunny.

Her family arrived at the breeders at exactly noon.

The breeder was waiting outside for them at her house. When they walked in they saw this adorable black and white mini lop baby rabbit! But then she saw the one next to it, and it was the cutest thing she ever saw! She was a brown and white baby mini lop rabbit. After holding her Maddy decided to get her. She decided to name her Daisy.

When Maddy and her parents arrived home, Maddy went straight to the bunny room. When Maddy let the bunny out of the carrier Daisy walked out of the carrier into the cage, and then all the bunnies started playing with her. But Daisy wasn't playing at all. Maddy thought she was just scared because she is away from her brothers and sisters. Maddy blocked out an area so Daisy could be alone until she felt more comfortable and was able to play with the other bunnies.

The next morning Maddy went to feed her bunnies. Daisy wouldn't eat. Maddy got a little bit worried, but Maddy still thought Daisy just was a little scared. She thought, *if Daisy doesn't eat tonight then my mom and I will take her to the vet.*

That night Maddy fed the bunnies. Daisy still wouldn't eat. She called her mom and told her everything. They took Daisy to the vet, and the vet said that Daisy had a severe stomachache. The vet gave Maddy pills to give to Daisy every day.

A week later Daisy was playing around with the other bunnies. They all got along really well together.

Finding Olympus

*In the land where the Greek gods originated, there are some who still believe. **FINDING OLYMPUS** by **Beto Romano** sends three inquisitive explorers on a journey to unlock an ancient puzzle of great importance.*

There once was a young Greek kid named Harry. Harry was tall, thin, and 15 years old with short, shiny brown hair that was straight. His best friend Eric said Harry was lucky because his hair was straight and Eric's was curly. Harry was the best martial artist in his town. Eric was the second-best martial artist, or so he said. They trained with each other every day.

Harry was walking his dog, and his dog went to the bathroom. Harry buried the mess and discovered old stone tablets under some rocks where he dug. He picked them up and brought them home.

They were about the size of a desktop screen. They were heavy and looked like they were made of marble. They had ancient Greek writing on them.

The next day he went to the library and got some books on ancient Greek writing. The tablets said that Olympus was in a cold place on the top of a mountain and how glorious it is to find it. Harry thought it would be cool to find it.

The day he returned the book, the librarian's daughter said, "You read that fast. What did you find?" Harry said that he found two stone tablets covered up with leaves, and that he was going to try to find out what they said. The librarian's daughter, Athena, said, "Well, I want to come with you, wherever you are going."

They both went home. The next day Harry tells Eric about the stone tablets and how he is going to try to find Olympus with Athena. Eric was in. Harry decided that they would start to look after lunch. They got ready, and then they met at the library. Athena told her mother what she was doing and went to meet them.

The first place they decided to check was the Alps. They took a boat and a few horses so that they could get to the Alps. When they got there, they found a cave on the side of the mountain. It was concealed. Harry and Eric had brought swords, too. They pried open the stones with the swords. The cave was dark and wet with

stalactites and stalagmites and columns. Under the third column, there was another pile of leaves, like Harry had found in the field. He moved away the leaves and found another stone tablet.

It was smart of Athena to bring the book on the Ancient Greek language.

It was getting dark because they had traveled very far. They decided to set up camp and start deciphering the tablet. They couldn't leave before finding out the truth. It said "I am in a forest with large trees that is very dark and muddy." The ironic thing was that it was across the mountain.

They rode their horses to the forest. They found a third stone tablet in the tallest tree, in a bird's nest. They got it down with ropes and stones. Harry went up by throwing the stone over the branch. Then he tied another rope through the loop and tied it to his waist. Then he threw the rope with the rock up, untied it from the tree and it threw Harry up. He got on the branch eventually after a few tries. Then he crawled over the branch to the nest. He picked up with tablets and tied it to the rope around the tree and untied the rock and tied it to the tablet and lowered him and the tablet down.

Then they deciphered the third tablet. The tablet said the next one is the last one and to go to a swamp with lots of fish and no trees.

They went through the forest. The way they could tell was that they tied all the ropes together and put Harry at the top of the tree to see if he could see the swamp. He could, and he said that the swamp was all the way across the forest. This was surprising to Harry, because all of the tablets were close together except the one the Harry had found.

They rode their horses across the forest, being careful to avoid low-hanging branches. They went to the swamp. They were walking through the swamp when they felt the tablet under their feet in a box. The box was held down into the ground with chains. They found it because Eric had stubbed his toe. They unchained it and took it to shore.

They opened it, and it was filled with rocks, all different kinds of rocks. They decided it would be a long time searching through the box of rocks, so they set up camp. Athena tried to find the tablet, and since they had so many rocks, they decided to skip them in the swamp. They decided to do that every time they found a flat stone.

They eventually found the tablet at the bottom. It said, "Go to Moscow, Russia. Climb the highest house and jump off it at the northeast direction."

They rode and floated on the boat. They got to Moscow and went up to the highest building and jumped off. They didn't have a compass, so they just kept jumping off. It wasn't a very high house.

They found an invisible portal. Everything was green with stars, lots of stars. They stopped falling, and they found they were in a big field with bright grass and flowers. There was an invisible wall on either side of them. Eric met them close up.

The path between the walls led to a forest. There was a lot of glowing red eyes they were monsters that blended into the forest. Harry and Eric drew their swords. Athena was an archer. She climbed the nearest tree and stabbed the monsters in the tree with her knife. They got all the monsters and kept walking.

There were a lot of other puzzles, like human chess and Battleship. The animals were bewitched by Hermes. They finally won.

Then there was one of those mazes like those on the backs of cereal boxes. They solved it and came to a , stone door. They opened it. There were the gods in their giant, steel armor.

Flash Shoes

FLASH SHOES by *Lawrence P.* tells how Johnny obtained and then lost a special pair of shoes. He's going to need help to get them back.

Johnny wore his new flash shoes over to Henry's house. As Johnny's family walked in their house, Henry's family admired Johnny's shoes.

"Nice shoes, Johnny!" said Henry.

"Cool shoes, Johnny my boy," said Henry's dad.

"Loving them already," said Henry's mom.

Johnny's family goes to Henry's house for Christmas dinner every year. Their families always exchange gifts. Henry is Johnny's best friend; he is always there for him no matter what. Henry is also on Johnny's baseball team.

As Johnny gazed at the bluish-red shine in his shoes, the sparkle seemed to gleam brighter every time he looked at them. He looked at his shoes and said, "I know they were for me," in a whispering voice.

"Johnny... Johnny... Johnny!" said his sister Emily, trying to snap him back into the present time as he continued to gaze at his new flash shoes.

"Ahhhhh! I love it!" said Johnny's sister, getting a Rainbow Loom Bracelet Maker.

As everybody talked about what they cooked for Christmas dinner and what they got for Christmas, Henry and Johnny talked to each other in Henry's family room.

"Are you ready for the baseball season, Johnny?" said Henry.

"You bet I am!" said Johnny.

"I hope Brad is not going to be annoying again this year," said Henry in a really annoyed tone.

"Boys, dinner is ready," said Henry's mom.

"Oh boy, dinner!" said Henry.

"I'm starving," said Johnny.

A few months passed by, and Johnny's flash shoes still looked brand new. He decided to wear them to baseball practice so his teammates could see them.

"Nice shoes, Johnny!" said everybody on the baseball team except Brad.

After a couple of practices, Brad noticed that Johnny wasn't wearing just any kind of shoes. Brad recognized the new flash shoes that had just come out! Brad thought to himself how the new flash shoes make you amazingly fast when you wore them.

Brad really respected Johnny's flash shoes. He began to daydream day after day about Johnny's shoes. He knew the shoes would help him tremendously on the baseball field. Brad said to himself, "Maybe I'll take Johnny's shoes at the next practice when he's not looking."

That next practice, Brad snuck into Johnny's baseball bag, took Johnny's shoes out of the bag, and put the shoes into his own bag. After practice, as Johnny put away his baseball things, he noticed that someone had stolen his flash shoes!

"Someone stole my new shoes!" screamed Johnny to Henry.

"Wow, your new shoes?" asked Henry.

"Yes. They aren't just regular shoes, Henry; they are flash shoes. They make you run fast, extremely fast," said Johnny. No one else knew about the spectacular shoes and their gift of speed.

"Ohhhhhh," said Henry in shock.

Minutes after minutes after minutes went by. Neither Johnny nor Henry could find the magical shoes. They looked everywhere. They looked under the benches, in the dugout, and even out in the parking lot. Johnny and Henry asked people standing around after the practice. They looked high and low for Johnny's shoes.

"Maybe one of the baseball players on our team has them," said Johnny.

"I don't see your shoes anywhere. Did you check your bag really well?" Henry whispered.

"Yep, I checked it all," said Johnny.

Several practices went by. Henry and Johnny noticed that Brad was different. He had incredible speed; he could run all the bases in a snap of a finger. Then, Johnny noticed a sparkling flash bolt on Brad's shoes as he ran by.

"Do you think..." said Henry.

Johnny interrupted him, "...That Brad stole my shoes while no one was looking? We have to find a way to get my shoes back! Here's the plan," said Johnny. "Why don't you distract Brad while I take my shoes out of his baseball bag? We will then put some old, smelly shoes in their place," said Johnny.

"That's perfect! But when are we going to do it?" said Henry.

“Before our first baseball game starts at Lawrence Field,” said Johnny, grinning. As soon as Johnny said that, he and Henry both started smiling at each other. They knew they would succeed at their plan.

As Brad walked into the dugout, Johnny and Henry nodded, saying, “Let’s do it!”

Henry jogged over to Brad. “Hey Brad, can you name all the Detroit Tiger players?” asked Henry.

“Why?” said Brad.

“Well, Coach said if you can name all the players, you can bat wherever you want to in the lineup,” said Henry, pretending to be excited.

At that moment, Johnny tiptoed across the dugout to Brad’s baseball bag. He unzipped Brad’s bag very quickly, but nothing was there! Johnny kept going through each pocket of Brad’s bag but couldn’t find the shoes. He was just about to give up when he noticed a second bag of Brad’s. Johnny searched the second bag and finally found his flash shoes!

“Bingo,” whispered Johnny to himself.

He took his shoes out quickly. Johnny then plugged his nose from the stench of the old, smelly shoes. He zipped Brad’s second bag back up as fast as he could and walked away.

“Austin Jackson and...,” Brad was saying still trying to name the Detroit Tiger players, but Henry stopped him in the middle of his sentence.

“Sorry. You didn’t finish naming all the Detroit Tiger players in time,” said Henry.

“Awww, man!” said Brad furiously.

After the game, Brad picked up his stuff, and noticed that Johnny’s shoes were missing. Instead, he saw a pair of old, smelly shoes.

“Noooooo! Not old, smelly shoes!” said Brad.

That was when Johnny knew his plan had worked. That was when Johnny knew his shoes were safe and sound.

I Guess Witches Do Exist

I GUESS WITCHES DO EXIST by *Raven Laurin* is a story of secrets that reveal the true nature of three unsuspecting sisters.

Three sisters, Isabella, Alice, and Nicole, knew that they were special, but not so special that they could make a vase levitate. “Isabella, did you just see that?” said Nicole.

“I saw that. I’m standing right here. How could I not see that?” said Isabella.

“Ok, well, Alice, did you see that?” said Nicole.

“Yes, I saw that, too. Should we tell Mom?” said Alice.

“Do you really think Mom will believe us when we tell her we made a vase levitate?” said Isabella. So the girls tried to forget about what just happened.

“I’m so bored,” said Alice.

“Me, too,” said Isabella. “I know what we can do. Let’s read a book.”

“Ok, let’s go,” said Nicole. The sisters went to their bookshelf in their room. It was a tall bookshelf with lots of new-looking books but one very old-looking book. The girls did not know why it was there. They had never bothered to read it.

Nicole tried to pull the old book off of the shelf. The bookshelf suddenly moved inside of the wall, revealing a secret room. “Um, did anyone else see that other than me?” Nicole said.

“I saw that, and I can’t believe what I just saw,” said Alice.

“I saw that. Why didn’t we pull that book sooner? We should go check out the room,” said Isabella. Isabella went into the secret room, and Nicole and Alice followed her.

The girls went into the room, turned the lights on, and walked to a table with a spell book on it. “Look at that book,” Alice said. Isabella, Nicole, and Alice looked at the book. “What do think this book is about?” said Isabella.

“I don’t know, but it sure is a big book,” said Nicole. As Isabella and Nicole were talking Alice turned the book over and saw that it said: Property of Alice, Isabella and Nicole.

“Guys, this book has our names on the back,” said Alice.

“No it does not,” said Isabella. Isabella turned the book over to see for herself that Alice was right.

“Well, what should we do? We can’t ask Mom. She’ll think we’re crazy,” said Nicole.

“Let’s leave and come back tomorrow,” said Isabella.

The girls did their bedtime routine and went to bed, and the next day at school they had the weirdest day ever. First when Alice went to open her locker it opened up before she could even touch it.

When Nicole’s pencil fell on the floor and she went to pick it up, it flew right into her hand. Someone saw what happened and asked her what that was about.

Isabella had to clean a table after her chemistry class, and the table cleaned itself.

They were happy to get home and figure out what was going on. They went to the room and pulled the book. They turned on the lights and went right for the table and the book to check it out. “All right, guys, remember, we have to be very careful with this book because we don’t know what could happen,” said Isabella to Nicole and Alice. But Alice wasn’t listening to Isabella and tried out the spell without thinking about the consequences. “So what spell should we do first and still be safe?” said Nicole to Isabella.

After Alice did the spell, they heard a *bing*. Nicole and Isabella turned to Alice to see what just happened and what that *bing* was. “Alice, what did you just do?” said Nicole to Alice.

“I might have cast a spell on myself,” said Alice.

“Why would you do that?” said Nicole to Alice.

“Did you even listen to what we said?” Isabella said to Alice.

“No, I didn’t. I’m sorry, I just really wanted to try a spell,” said Alice.

“Well, did anything happen to you yet?” said Nicole.

“No, not yet, and nothing will, so you have nothing to worry about,” said Alice.

But she was wrong. The next day when they went to the mall and were about to leave, Alice was nowhere to be found. Isabella and Nicole freaked out. When they went home no one knew where she was. They went into the secret room to find a spell to make her suddenly come home, and they saw that the book was not there.

That’s when Nicole and Isabella really started freaking out because now the book and Alice were missing. They knew that no one else would take it because no one knew about it but them, and that’s when they figured out who took the book. It was Alice.

They got a call from their friend Allison saying that she knew where Alice was. She had talked to her, but she was different and was really rude. Allison also said that Alice had gone downtown for some strange reason. Isabella and Nicole headed downtown to only hear screams and a crash.

There was Alice, and she seemed different, really different. She was evil, and it was all because of that spell that was a curse. "She should have listened to us," said Isabella.

"Really, that's what you're thinking right now when our sister is evil?" said Nicole.

Alice, Isabella, and Nicole were the only people downtown. When Alice saw Nicole and Isabella she went crazy and started to throw stuff at them. "Alice, you don't have to do this," said Isabella.

"Isabella is right. You don't have to do this," said Nicole. But Alice wouldn't listen to them and continued with her rampage.

"What should we do?" said Isabella to Nicole.

"Well, we should defend ourselves and then change Alice back to normal," said Nicole to Isabella. First they tried to talk to Alice, but that didn't work because she was not listening to them. Next they tried to defend themselves, but that didn't work because she was too strong for them.

They ran home as fast as they could to stop Alice and try to find something to turn Alice back to normal. They went in the room to hopefully find a spell or something; they looked and looked until they finally found something.

They went back to where Alice was, but when they got there she was nowhere to be found. When they asked one of their friends where she was, she told them that she was at the mall near their house.

They went to the mall. Alice was there, and everyone was hiding in the food court. They did the spell and everything was back to normal...well, almost back to normal. "We did it," said Nicole.

"I'm so happy that you're ok," said Isabella.

"I'm happy that I'm back," said Alice.

Isabella, Nicole, and Alice did a reverse spell, and everything was now back to normal, but they still had to tell their mom. They did, and could not believe what she said. "But witches aren't real. You know that, right?" said their mom.

“Come here and let us show you the secret room,” said Alice. They all went into the room to show their mom that they were telling the truth.

“See, Mom, we told you. Look at this book. It has our names on the back,” said Isabella.

“Is this a spell book?” said their mom as she flipped the pages to the old book.

“Yes it is. Do you believe us now?” said Nicole.

“I guess I do,” said their mom as she looked around the whole room.

Later Isabella, Nicole, and Alice got to be the best witches ever.

In the Woods at Night

IN THE WOODS AT NIGHT by *Zoé Louchet* has a title that reveals two of the creepy elements in the story. But there are more....

Em was staring at Will, the troublemaker at Camp Smileys. This time he was trying to scare her and Alice, her best friend, by telling them horror stories about vampires. "... The vampire was never seen again and is said to haunt Camp Smileys' forest," finished Will. He had this look on his face that said he had finally arrived at his goal. "So did I scare you? That story scared the other girls," he continued.

"No, Will, you didn't even spark a flame of horror in us. Better try again," said Alice.

Will made a sneeze, "Darn it!" answered Will as Alice and Em giggled.

It was the same thing each year. Will tried to scare them, but it never worked. This was really getting old. *Maybe it will become a tradition*, thought Em as the camp director came to tell them the usual stuff.

"Time for bed. It's 9:00!" he said grumpily, and everyone at the campfire stood up and started walking after having eaten their last burned marshmallow over the fire.

"This is way too early to go to bed," Em said, furious.

"You're right. So let's go chase down Will's supposed vampire," Alice said, joking.

Em laughed as she said, "Yeah, right, like we're ever going in the forest."

"I was serious, you know, it's only nine," Alice said as she showed her serious face. Then she took Em by the hand and dragged her into the woods.

"This is not a good idea," Em said. They were in the woods walking slowly as they jumped over branches in the hot summer air.

"Oh, come on. It's not like you are scared or something," Alice replied.

Suddenly a strong breeze came and the brown and long hair of Em floated in the air. A man appeared. He was running so quickly that Em and Alice could not see what he looked like. "Aaaaaaaaah!"

Alice screamed. Then the man was gone. Alice had fainted and was on the ground. She was covered with blood.

Em made it back to the cabins, carrying Alice in her arms. She had an idea so Alice and she would not get in trouble. She put Alice on the ground next to the stairs of the cabin they shared. At least Alice was still breathing. She ran to the infirmary where the nurse was sleeping and explained to her that Alice was all bloody on the ground. Mrs. Yo, the nurse, got Alice and sent Em to the office.

“So what happened to Alice?” asked the director, comfortably installed in a chair.

“Well, Alice and I talked, and we were too tired to get in our PJ’s, so we slept in our clothes. I fell asleep and got up later because I needed to go to the bathroom. I saw that Alice’s bed was empty, so I thought she was also in the bathroom, and when I went outside I saw her covered in blood at the bottom of the stairs,” answered Em, in a panicked voice. At least she was a pretty good liar.

“Do you know what might have happened to her?” asked the director.

“Well, I think she tripped in the night past the fences. They are pretty high up, you know,” answered Em.

The director replied, “Well, okay, you may go see your friend in the infirmary.”

Em was in the infirmary looking at Alice, and she looked bad. Alice was paler than a ghost, and Em could see her veins. Ms. Yo was giving her news on her friend. “She has some kind of poison in her system. I have not seen such a poison before, and I don’t think it’s a fall. She has a bite on her neck, like she was bitten with very sharp teeth. Your friend won’t last long. The poison is going to put her in endless coma, so she only has a few more days. We already called an ambulance.” Em started crying, and she ran out of the doors.

Em was crying when she bumped into Will who said with a little revenge in his voice, “It seems your friend got hit by a vampire.” And like that he ran away before Em could hit him in the face. “Vampire...of course, Alice got bitten by the vampire of Smileys’ forest!” was what Em thought with excitement, “Wait! Will come back!” said Em.

Will came back and asked, “What?”

“Where did you get that story about a vampire in Smileys’ forest?” asked Em.

“In the library. Why did you ask me that?” he answered.

Em answered back, “Because, but wait...” and she slapped him right in the face.

Em was back in the forest that night but this time prepared. She had mosquito repellent on her legs, and she was clothed for camping. Her backpack had some garlic, a knife, a long and strong rope, an empty bottle of water, and the book she found at the library about vampires that roamed Camp Smileys’ woods. She was running a big risk doing this, but it was for Alice.

She took a very big stick and got her knife out. Then she carefully cut herself with the knife. She was bleeding at the hand, but she still was holding up the big stick. Suddenly she felt what she was waiting for, a breeze of wind.

The breeze got stronger and stronger and when it felt strong enough, like the book had said, she hit backwards as strong as she could with the stick. It didn’t touch the air, but it hit a person. She had just stabbed a vampire. “Aaaaaaaaah! What in the world...?” said the man with pain in his voice. Like the book said, it had taken only a quick second for the vampire to come. She quickly turned and saw a boy. He looked between 16 and 18, and he had blond hair and eyes sparkling like demon flames. He was wearing old clothes. But still he was cute in a leather jacket and ripped jeans.

She hit him again and again, but at the third try the vampire stood up and sank his nails in Em’s neck and tightened them around Em’s throat. Em was too terrified to scream as she tried to remember what the book said: something about the stomach being the weakest part of the body. Em took her elbow and stabbed him right in the stomach.

The vampire lost his grip, and Em went free. She took back her stick and hit him right in the jaw and then on the stomach. This time the vampire crawled on the ground, and with a final stab she knocked him out and tied up the boy to a tree. As the book said, she cut him with the knife and filled up the empty water bottle with the vampire’s blood. She put the bottle back in her backpack. Before she left she cut up some garlic that burned up the vampire’s skin. She went back to camp with Alice’s “medication.”

The next morning Em’s mom drove Em to the hospital. When they entered Alice’s room Alice’s mom was crying on her bed and her dad sat in the guest chair. “Hello, Emma. We will leave soon

with Alice. She only has one more hour," Alice's mom said as she was crying.

Em's mom took Alice's parents out and left Em in the room. Em got out the bottle of vampire blood and forced Alice to drink. Suddenly Alice opened her eyes and asked, "What's going on?"

"Shh, I'll explain to you later. Just let me throw out this bottle and wipe your mouth," answered Em.

Em opened the door and her mom and Alice's parents came in and said, crying with joy, "Alice, you're alive! This is a miracle!"

Thankfully Alice and Em didn't face a vampire again in their lives, and they continued to go to Camp Smileys. As for the vampire, the police found a burned body in the woods, with very old clothes covered with garlic. The girls never heard about him again, ever.

Jet

*A serious injury threatens the life of a girl's prized horse. **JET** by Grace Silcox acknowledges the emotional bond between horse and human.*

June 16th

Dear Diary,

The black horse ran through the lush, green meadow. I knew at that moment that this was the right horse. While Mom went to go talk to the breeder, I stroked the horse. He was soft like velvet and had the prettiest eyes. Mom and the breeder came back to me with good news. This was my new horse.

June 17th

Dear Diary,

The trailer just pulled up to our little ranch. I live in California. We own a horse ranch. I had two horses, but Bailey just passed away. My other horse, King, was getting lonely, so we got another horse.

We unloaded the black horse into the meadow. He looked around then as if he already felt at home, starting to graze on the fresh grass. I couldn't decide what to name him. Just then he started going into a canter. He was so fast, he looked like a blur. *Jet, that's what I'll name him*, I decided.

June 18th

Dear Diary,

Jet waited patiently as I slipped on my riding boots. He was all tacked up and ready to go. We were going for a nice, long ride on the beach. I hopped on Jet and we took off.

The sand sprayed up behind Jet's hooves. I pulled at the reins, telling him to stop. He slowed down, and I hopped off. I grabbed the reins, and he followed me down to the water's edge. I dipped my toes in and laughed as Jet tried to sniff the water. A big wave came up and splashed him in the face. He looked at me, telling me he was ready to go.

June 25th

Dear Diary,

The last couple of days have been really fun! Jet and I went on many trail rides and even taught a little girl how to ride. Today Jet and I are going through a harder trail. It's a forest, so there are lots of trees.

I jumped on Jet, and we started through the forest. At first Jet went with caution, slowly walking along the woods, but then grew some confidence. We ran toward a log. The reins slipped out of my grasp. JET, NO, STOP!

July 1st

Dear Diary,

I've been in the hospital for about a week now. It might be five days, I don't really know. I've lost track. Every day I get more and more worried about Jet. My parents told me that he is in the vet. But they won't tell me more.

I have a paralyzed arm. I know what you're thinking, Diary: my arm can't move for the rest of my life. But that is only half true. It is more of a temporary paralyzed arm. I don't care at this point. I'm too worried about Jet.

July 2nd

Dear Diary,

I finally got out of the hospital today. My mom is taking me to see Jet in an hour. For now I'm trying to get used to not having my left arm. I am very glad that I write with my right hand because imagine having to relearn how to write.

We pulled up into the vet's office. I was nervous, very nervous. "Jet is going to be okay, right?" I asked my mom.

"I don't know, sweetie," she said. I started to get even more worried.

July 2nd- vet

Dear Diary,

Jet was lying in a special room for the big animals. He had his own stall, like at the barn. He had tubes sticking out of his mouth, and his leg was all wrapped up. I gasped; maybe I wasn't ready for this.

Jet was in a life or death situation. The vet was working hard, but it was looking more to the death side. I went in and sat down next to him. Suddenly I heard a beep.

The vet rushed in. He typed something on the computer. "What?" I asked.

"Well, Jet is improving," he said. By the tone in his voice I knew this was rare.

"Alana, honey," my mom called.

"Yes?" I answered.

"Come get some food, you haven't gotten any today," my mom replied.

"Well, see you later, Dr. Finn," I said as I walked out of the room.

After a quick lunch, we were back at the vet, only to find out horrible news. Jet was near death again. "Oh Jet," I said, lying down next to him.

Suddenly we heard a beep. "He has improved again," Dr. Finn said. "Wait, Alana, let me do a experiment with you," he said. I nodded. "Okay, I want you to walk out of the room for a quick second."

I did as I was told. I heard the beep saying that Jet was worsening. I sighed.

"Okay, come back in," Dr. Finn called. I sat down next to Jet. The beep came back on. What is up with Jet?

July 3rd

Dear Diary,

Okay, so it turns out that Jet and I have a special connection. Whenever I'm in the room he goes back to a normal heartbeat. But when I leave his health suffers. So basically I am living in the vet office. I sleep there, and spend like the whole day there, waiting for Jet to be fully okay. Each day he gets better and better, but he still hasn't woken up. It is kind of like a horse coma. At least he is breathing.

My mom brought me some salad and a sandwich. After eating I decided to read a little bit. Suddenly I heard a neigh. I looked around expecting there to be another horse, but it was Jet. His eyes were open and staring at me. "Dr. Finn!" I called.

"Yes Alana?" he asked. "It's Jet; h-he opened his eyes!" Just then a loud neigh came out, this time stronger!

July 10th

Dear Diary,

Jet is finally out of the vet. We are both going through intense therapy: me for my arm, and Jet to get 100 percent better.

Today is my first day back at riding. We grabbed Cupcake, a smaller, gentle horse. I saddled her up and hopped on. It was really hard because when you get on a horse, you use your left hand to lift you up. So I had to tie up Cupcake and lift myself up with my right hand.

We rode around the arena. I did pretty well. It was just hard to turn because you need both hands on the reins. Daddy is going to give me some lessons soon, but for now I need to practice other things.

July 15th

Dear Diary,

Today Daddy is going to give me lessons. I get to ride Jet because he is feeling way better.

When we got Jet out of the barn, he ran and ran until he got tired. I laughed. He hadn't been out in a while. Finally I got on him, and we rode around the arena for a while, my dad giving me a couple of riding tips.

In the end I didn't do super well on Jet like I used to, but I was just glad to have my horse back, even if my arm wasn't fully there.

Just Not My Game

*“There is no crying in baseball” is a quote from a movie. It’s not true! A case in point is **JUST NOT MY GAME** by Aidan Davis.*

As the umpire called me to the plate, I just had a nervous feeling in my stomach. I walked to the batter’s box, and the pitcher wound up and threw the ball for strike one.

I stepped out of the box with my left foot, and looked at my coach. He signaled for me to swing away, giving me the green light. I stepped back in the batter’s box; the pitcher wound up and threw the ball.

BONG!

I dropped my bat, my helmet flew off my head, and I started crying because it hurt so much. I started walking toward my dad (the first base coach). He said, “No blood.”

The ball hit my helmet and then hit me in the eye. I said to my dad, “Do I get my base?”

He said, “No, the ball deflected off your bat and into your eye.” In my mind I said, *You’ve got to be kidding me.*

I got settled down and went back in the batter’s box. The pitcher wound up and threw the ball. I swung halfway through and got a base hit, and the man on third scored.

When the next batter came up I would usually steal, but not this time because of my eye. The pitcher threw for strike one. He wound up and threw the ball for strike two. He threw the ball once more and strike three, the batter swung at it.

Then—*BOOM*—came thunder. When we hear thunder, that never ends well because when thunder comes, rain comes. And we could also get struck by lightning because we have metal bats. We packed up our bags and went up to the snack house. We all hung out there until the rain passed.

After about an hour the rain stopped. We were back on the field warming up and getting a new pitcher ready because my head hurt.

As the team made its way back to the bench my teammate’s dad came up and said, “Are you all right?”

I said, “My head still hurts.”

So he said, “I can go get you some medicine at a drug store for your headache.” He came back just before the inning was over and after I took it and started to feel better, I was able to play again.

When I was up to bat I crushed a three-run triple and got us right back in the game, up 8 to 6 in the top of the fifth inning.

We got three outs. When we went on the field, I was shortstop. That is my best position behind pitcher and catcher. I can stop almost anything that comes to me. In that inning I got a ground out, and it was a laser. It took a bounce and hit me right in the chest! But lucky for me I wear a chest protector under my jersey, and it hit the chest protector. I let it bounce in front of me, grabbed it, and threw it over to first to end the inning.

In the top of the sixth inning things weren’t going so well again. My headache was back, and my eye started to swell up. I was going up to bat this inning, and everyone was counting on me because there was someone on first with two outs, and I was up.

As I walked up to batter’s box I was feeling the pressure. I stepped into the batter’s box. I look at the third base coach, and he gives me thumbs up. That means I have the green light. I stepped into the box with confidence. I took a deep breath as the pitcher wound up and threw the ball. I fouled it off for strike one. The pitcher threw a ball in the dirt that bounced up and hit me in the leg. I was mad as I ran down to first because the next batter was Liam, and he has not gotten a hit all game and he struck out when we needed a hit.

In the bottom of the sixth inning they scored, and a man was on third with two outs. We had our second-best closer named David on the mound. He struck the kid out to win the game 8 to 7. We lined up to shake the other teams’ hands, and then we mobbed David in a dog pile in left field.

I was so happy we were able to pull out the win, but my eye still hurt badly. That didn’t matter to me. I was just happy we won.

The Lost Ancient Jewel

*When their parents disappeared, a sister and brother could only depend on each other. They will have to stick together to save all they hold dear in **THE LOST ANCIENT JEWEL** by **Mackenzie Taylor**.*

It was a rainy Tuesday, and the orphanage was bright with kids who loved to play with the toys and whiteboards. Nina was a very cool but strict girl who had a brother named John, who was sometimes cautious and smart. He loved his little sister and needed to protect her. She was the only family he had left.

Right before they saw lightning, the power went out. “What the...?” Nina said. The power just went out after it damaged a power line close by, and everybody was wondering how they were going to see since they had nothing to see with.

“Everybody, please stay calm. I will go get some flashlights from the kitchen,” said one of the staff who worked at the orphanage. She told everyone to go to their rooms and stay quiet and everything would be fine, but Nina and John had something they both have in common....the love to solve mysteries. They went to the control room, and suddenly everything went black.

Once they woke up they noticed that they weren’t in the orphanage anymore. They woke up in the house they used to live in with their mom and dad before they disappeared. They saw two men. One was tall, and one was short. “Who are you?” Nina asked.

They both stayed silent, and the tall one went into the kitchen and got two people who were tied up and blindfolded. Once they removed the blindfold, the kids saw it was their parents. They have been gone for all their lives, and now they were here with them, finally, after so long.

“MOM...DAD!” Nina and John both exclaimed as they ran to their parents. They stopped. “Hold on a second. Those people look fake and not are real people,” John said. They looked again, and the people fell over as if they were paper. “Wait a sec...,” John said, as the two hooded guys came back out and started to laugh.

The short one said, “Look, kids, your mom and dad are safe, but not just here at this moment in time unless you can find them

before it's too late. They are on an island called Hollow Bay, a very far island from where they lived, so it is far from here."

"What do you want from us to get you?" Nina asked.

John said to Nina in a surprised whisper, "What are you doing? You can't do this. We don't know them."

"I'm doing what I have to do: save our parents so we can have normal lives again and be free from that prison...please?" she said.

"Fine," John said.

"Here is what you need to do...," said the short one.

They got onto the boat they needed to get to Hollow Bay Island to find the jewel and their parents and get back to the life they had before. "How long do we have until we reach the island?" Nina asked.

"Three more hours."

Finally they reached the island and got off the boat for their search for the truth and the jewel. "Hopefully they're not lying to us so we won't have to go back and call the police." That's when they saw a sign that shows a mine where the jewel is supposed to be. *What about our mom and dad? What if those two guys lied to us?* Nina thought.

The next day on the adventure they encountered a lady who knew about the gem and its value. She would love to make some money off of it and live like a queen. "I feel that you should be like those kids on the movies. You get your reward and stop the bad guys and make use of the object," she said. She looked suspicious liked she wanted the gem, too.

Once they got done with the interview in the cave they headed on and found a secret room with many obstacles. It looked hard. Once they got in there the door shut behind them, and that's when they saw the people with the suits and their parents tied up and blindfolded.

"Do you have the jewel? No? Well, then, you can get it from the end of the obstacle course and get your parents back, ok?"

"Okay," they both said.

They got into suits and started the obstacle course. There were fire hoops, sharks, missiles and all this other stuff that they had to go through. "Do you think we will make it and get our parents back?" Nina said.

"Yes, we will," John said.

They went through all the obstacles and got the jewel. They still put the bad guys in jail after they kidnapped their parents and enjoyed their life with their family.

* * *

“Tell me another story, Grandma,” Anna said.

“I think you should get some sleep, Sweetheart. It is getting kind of late,” said Grandma.

“Okay, Grandma. Goodnight,” Anna said.

“Night, Anna,” Grandma said.

The Magic Piano

In THE MAGIC PIANO by Abigail Landers, a poor crocodile makes a bad neighbor for a wealthy duck. The piano is the last straw in this strained relationship.

In a faraway land in the year 2000, there was a crocodile. Actually, he was an alligator, but he thought a crocodile sounded meaner. And since this crocodile (whose name was Iner) liked to be mean, crocodile was a good name for him. Iner had rough, greenish brown skin, sharp claws that curled up his fingers, and a powerful mouth. In other words, he was an ugly beast.

Iner the crocodile lived on 131 Foraway Street. Next to him, at 132 Foraway Street, lived a duck named Wurlitzer Dons. This duck, who Iner rarely saw, was rich. He wasn't just rich; he was a billionaire. While Wurlitzer lived in a forty-nine and a half room mansion, Iner lived in a beat-down, crumbling shack that barely stood up. He absolutely hated it. He was extremely envious of Wurlitzer. His crumbly shack was the only house on Foraway street that was not a mansion.

On a particularly hot day in mid-July, Iner was eating his lunch at noon when suddenly, he heard a shake. He looked up just in time to see a piece of wood and a couple of bricks fall on top of him. He looked out his little window. He saw Wurlitzer's ginormous mansion, complete with nine balconies, three pools, a waterslide, and a huge roof. He was very angry, and at that moment, he wanted Wurlitzer's house more than anything.

Iner turned green with envy (greener than he already was).

"That's it!" he yelled, stomping his foot. "I am done living in this dusty, horrible shack while Wurlitzer over there lives with forty rooms!" He walked toward Wurlitzer's house, preparing to give Wurlitzer a piece of his mind.

In the back of his mind he knew he shouldn't shout at Wurlitzer. He knew it wasn't Wurlitzer's fault Iner had to live in a shack. But Iner was in a jealous rage and needed someone to yell at.

When he was in front of Wurlitzer's front door, he banged on it angrily. It was already open a little bit, and it opened completely.

The house was dim, and Iner walked in slowly. The first thing he noticed was a giant, nine-foot stand that had a box of papers on the

top. He started walking toward toward it, but tripped over a bright yellow bucket full of tulips. For a second everything was in slow motion, and Iner could see what was going to happen. He tried to turn to avoid the stand, but somehow kicked over the stand and a giant bookshelf full of heavy books. Thankfully none landed on him.

Iner hurried out of the room. He ran into a bright, white room that was completely empty except for a small lawn chair and a tiny little table. On the table was a piano keyboard.

Iner walked over to the table curiously. He picked up the keyboard carefully and switched the power button on.

“Welcome to the M7-9 Magic Piano Keyboard System,” a robotic voice buzzed out of the keyboard. Iner jumped, landing on his tail. “Magic piano?”

“In this new 2000 model, the magic piano can grant wishes or fully heal any sickness. Press one for more information. Press two to cancel. Press three to have a wish granted. Press four to heal a sickness.”

Iner’s eyes nearly popped out of his head when he heard “grant wishes.” He grinned. *I can wish for a mansion!* he thought joyfully. He grabbed the piano and started lifting it up when he heard footsteps in the room next to him. He gasped. Wurlitzer was home. His head turned wildly as he raced around the room, searching for a place to hide. He settled on the chimney.

“What in the world happened?” a voice rang out from the other room.

Wurlitzer quacked angrily, and Iner shivered.

Suddenly Iner heard the front door slam. He turned his head at the right angle, and he could see a sliver of the window. Iner saw Wurlitzer walking to his car. He could hear Wurlitzer muttering, “I need to get a new bookcase.... How in the world did it fall over...?”

“I can’t take the piano now. I’ll come back later for it,” Iner said to himself quietly.

He climbed carefully up the fireplace to the roof. The bright light of the sun blinded him for a second, and he stood there, blinking. When he was on the roof, he jumped on a balcony slowly and crawled through the open doors. Luckily, it was an empty room that looked like it had never been used. A spider web stretched across the room, and dust caked the walls. It wasn’t a very big room either.

“Great,” he whispered to himself, “just what I’m used to.” And he fell asleep, dreaming of having a mansion.

He woke up with a jump around three o’clock in the morning.

He looked around the room and for a second he didn’t know where he was.

“You’re in Wurlitzer Don’s house, and you hid in his house because you’re stealing a magic piano that going to grant you a wish,” his brain told him, and Iner smiled.

He wobbled out the door of the bedroom, cautiously slinking across the hallway. He realized he had no idea where the piano room was. He turned and saw a long stairway leading down to a different floor. Iner slipped down the stairs soundlessly. When he reached the bottom step, a noisy creak squeaked loudly, and Iner prayed that Wurlitzer didn’t hear it.

There was another staircase down, but this one had four stairs missing, and Iner decided against jumping. It was too risky, and anyway, even if he made the jump, Wurlitzer would probably wake up. He would have to come in through the front door of the mansion.

Iner located another balcony. He walked outside, took a deep breath, and jumped off the balcony to the ground. Thankfully, the ground wasn’t too far down and it didn’t hurt when Iner landed on the ground. It only hurt his tail.

The front door was unlocked, thankfully, and Iner crept in quietly. There was an opened box with pieces of wood all around it—the new bookcase. The old bookcase was still lying on the ground with the books scattered all around it.

Iner walked past this and walked into the Magic Piano room. He smiled at the piano keyboard. It didn’t look like Wurlitzer had been in here after Iner had left, which was good. If Wurlitzer didn’t come here often, he might not even notice the piano was missing for a while. But who wouldn’t notice a magic piano missing at some point?

Iner frowned as an idea came to him. What if he got his fingerprints on the table—and Wurlitzer found them?

“Gloves,” he thought, and he tiptoed into the kitchen. There were oven mitts hanging on a hook above the oven. He grabbed a bright purple one and shoved it on his right hand. He put a grey one

on his left hand. Now there was nothing to stop him from his precious magic piano.

He walked back into the piano room, cheerful and excited to get the piano. He stopped when he entered the room.

Wurlitzer was standing in front of the piano, staring right at him.

“Give me the piano,” Iner said angrily. He didn’t care about Wurlitzer seeing him anymore. He just needed the piano.

Wurlitzer frowned. “This one?”

Iner nodded.

“Why? It’s not magic,” Wurlitzer said, looking confused.

“Yes it is. The-the voice said so when I turned it on,” Iner said. His voice trembled.

“This is a fake. If you want the real one, it’s in the freezer,” Wurlitzer said. “Come on. I’ll show you.” Wurlitzer led him into the kitchen, past the pantry, and to a big metal door. “The magic piano,” he said, pointing to the door, “is in there.”

Iner greedily grabbed the handle of the door, opened the door, and ran in. “Wait, where is it?” he asked, turning around. Wurlitzer slammed the door shut and clicked the latch, laughing.

“Wait, there’s no piano in here. Hey! Why is this door locked? HEY! LET ME OUT!” Iner screamed. But it was no use. Wurlitzer walked away, completely ignoring Iner’s shouts.

As Iner sat in the freezer, shivering and turning icy, all he wanted was to go back to his shack. He didn’t care about having a mansion at all anymore. *If I get out of here, Iner thought, I’ll be thankful for what I have.*

But Iner never got out of the freezer.

Marina Blue

MARINA BLUE by Noël Stanley is a story within a story. A man looks back on a pivotal moment in his life that gave him everything at the same time it took so much away.

It was November 7, 2007, thirty years to the day since the Marina Blue sank. It was also Jack's 57th birthday. Jack sat at home in his recliner. The memorial service was over, and his grandkids were coming over for cake and ice cream. Jack heard a knock on the door. "Coming," said June, Jack's wife.

She opened the door. From where he was sitting, Jack could see the smiling faces of his grandchildren George and Lucy, his son Tom, and his daughter-in-law Jane. "Take off your coats and stay awhile," said Jack merrily. Seeing his grandkids always made him smile.

"Sorry we're late," said Tom apologetically. "The snow slowed us down."

"It's all right, Tom," said Jack. "As long as you're here."

"Grandpa!" Lucy yelled as she rushed inside to hug him. "Happy birthday!"

"Yes, happy birthday, Grandpa Jack!" said George.

"Thank you, children!" exclaimed Jack. "Now that you're here, we can have dinner, cake and ice cream!"

"Yes, cake! Cake! I love cake!" shouted Lucy as she jumped around the room.

"Lucy sweetheart, calm down. You'll get your cake. Just be patient!" exclaimed Jane.

"It's dinner time!" yelled June from the kitchen. "Come and get it!"

"Yaaaaaaaay! Food!" exclaimed Lucy.

They all walked down the hall to the kitchen (except for Lucy, who ran) and sat down at the table.

"Ok. We're all here?" said June. "Good, let's eat."

After dinner, the family sat around the fireplace, watching the snow flurry past the windows.

"Grandpa, can you tell us a story?" asked Lucy tiredly.

"Yes, Grandpa! Tell us the story of the *Marina Blue*!" exclaimed George.

"All right," said Jack. "Let me get my book."

Jack got up out of his chair and walked to the mantle. On the mantle sat a small black book with a tattered binding. On the front, written in gold print was the title *Marina Blue*.

Jack reached out and gently lifted the book from its stand. "This," Jack whispered, "is the story of the shipwreck of the *Marina Blue*. It happened 30 years ago today."

It was a cold November morning. The sky was gray with clouds. I hurried toward the docks. The *Marina Blue* was sailing out to Duluth with the last shipment of bricks before winter. I was on the crew. When I got to the docks, Bill and James were already there.

"Look who it is!" shouted Bill from on the deck. "Jack's here! Now we just need to wait for the captain and we can cast off!"

"Why are you intent on getting to Duluth so early?" I shouted back up at him. "Shipment isn't due to arrive for another two weeks!"

"The November storms'll be here soon," he replied. "Don't want to get caught up in 'em." I nodded. The November storms on Lake Superior could sink even the toughest freighter. Even the *Edmund Fitzgerald* was sunk in an early storm. I climbed up the gangplank and performed the checks. Anchor line: check. Ropes: check. Lights: check. Bilge pumps: check.... As I finished my checks, Captain Amero walked up the gangplank onto the ship.

"Is she ready to cast off, boys?" he yelled.

"Yes, sir!" we shouted back.

"Alrighty then. Let's go!" We scrambled to untie the lines as the captain walked to the bridge to turn on the engines. We cast off the last line as the engines rumbled to life. We headed out onto Lake Superior.

"It's been a whole 24 hours of smooth sailing, Bill. I don't think we should be worried." Bill was still sure that a storm would catch us. Two years after the *Edmund Fitzgerald* sank and he was still sure November was unlucky. We were sitting below decks playing cards.

"I don't know, Jack," said Bill as he threw down a jack and took the pile, "this year just seems unlucky for some reason." I knew what he meant. Half the crew was missing for injuries. Jenny sprained her ankle. Jim broke his wrist. Tim got the pox. Bill's father and mother had died. This year *was* unlucky.

“Well, even if there is a storm,” said James, “we’ll make it back home. I’ll see June, and ask her to go to the festival with me.”

“Not a chance, James,” I said, “she’s mine.” James snorted. I scowled. Bill laughed.

“You two can fight over my sister when we get back,” he said, “when you aren’t gone for a week at a time on this freighter.” Suddenly, there was a light tapping sound on the hull.

“Storm,” whispered Bill.

“Don’t be silly,” I said, “just because it’s raining doesn’t mean it’s a storm.” But I was scared, too.

“I’m going up to check,” said Bill. And he climbed up the ladder to the deck and popped his head out.

“You should see this,” he said quietly. James and I walked over to the ladder and climbed out into the rain. The clouds behind us were jet-black and moving fast. Thunder boomed in the distance. The rain picked up to a hard patter.

“I knew it,” whispered Bill, “we’re going to die.”

“I’ll never see June again,” whimpered James.

“Hush, don’t jinx it,” I said. But I knew they were probably right. The wind grew to a low howl. The rain dashed against our faces.

“Lower the storm anchor!” shouted the captain from above. “Maybe we can weather this one.” We raced to the huge winch that holds the storm anchor and pushed. The wheel turned slowly, but we finally lowered the anchor all the way. The wind grew to a shriek, and the rain pelted us like stinging bees. I had the sinking feeling we were going to die on this ship.

A wave broke over the railing. The ship tilted over a wave. The ship jolted. I heard the screeching sound of tearing metal. Lightning flashed, and I saw the huge rock scraping against the side of the ship. The ship jerked again, and we were thrown across the deck. Bill screamed.

“What happened?” I yelled to him over the storm.

“The railing is broken. Got me in the side. I’ll be all right, but watch yourself,” he replied. I could barely hear him. Lightning flashed. In the brief flash of light Bill looked ghostly white. Black liquid drenched his side.

"Where's James?" I shouted.

"I don't know," said Bill, "I thought he was with us."

"Help! Help!" called a voice over the wind.

"James!" I bellowed, "Where are you?"

"Over here!" called a voice from our left. I ran down below decks and through the ship to the hold. Bill came behind me. Once we were sheltered below decks, the wind died down.

"There you are!" I sighed in relief. "I thought you'd been swept over the side."

"Thankfully I wasn't," he said, "but my leg got tangled in this cord. I can't move my foot."

"Don't worry," I said, "I have my knife, I'll cut it." I quickly slashed the cord and James stood up. Only too late did I realize that the cord had tied the bricks down. The boat lurched and the pile of bricks toppled over. I jumped back in time, but James wasn't so lucky. His legs were trapped under a half-ton of bricks, more than we could possibly shift. "James! We can't get you out!" I said. Tears streamed down my face, cleaning a path through the brick-dust. Sweat beaded on my arms from trying to shift the bricks.

James sighed. "It's all right," he said. There were tears in his eyes. "I just needed to know that nothing could be done." He was sobbing now. He caught sight of Bill.

"What happened to Bill?" he asked.

"He got cut on the rail," I replied.

"He needs to get out of here before he bleeds to death," he said grimly. When he looked at me he looked like he had resigned himself to his fate. "Go," he said quietly, "save Bill. There's nothing you can do for me now."

"I'm sorry, James," I whispered, "for everything."

"It's all right," he said, "Just, tell June I love her."

"I will," I replied. "You were the better man," I admitted. "She would have chosen you."

"Thank you," he whispered, "for everything." He sobbed. "Now, go. Save Bill."

"Goodbye, friend," I said solemnly.

"Goodbye, Jack," he whispered. As we ran toward the deck, another wave rocked the boat, and the rest of the bricks toppled down.

I sat Bill down on the deck. "Stay here," I said. "I'm going to get the captain."

I ran up to the helm and saw the captain fighting the wheel. I helped him to turn it center.

"Thank you, Jack," said the Captain. "I thought you and the boys would already be on a lifeboat out of here. What happened?" I told him about what happened to James.

"That's terrible!" exclaimed the captain. "James was a good fellow. Now you and Bill should get to the lifeboats. I don't think this ship is going to hold out much longer."

"But, Captain, aren't you coming with us?" I ask, shocked by his unwillingness to come with us.

"No. I'll try to make it to Whitefish Bay. Maybe I can beach her there," replied the captain.

"But—"

"No buts about it. I'm staying here with my ship. For good or bad. Now go! Take Bill and yourself and get out of here! Before the storm makes it too hard to lower the lifeboats!"

I knew I couldn't change his mind. I just nodded. "It's been a pleasure serving with you captain," I said. Then, I turned and jogged out to Bill.

The lifeboats came out easily. I lowered one into the water, and Bill and I stepped in. We lowered the boat into the water.

"What about the captain?" asked Bill.

"He decided to try for Whitefish Bay," I replied. I started rowing into the wind. I took one last look back at the slowly sinking ship as we crested a wave and it was lost from sight.

We were two days from land. There was food in the boat, and we could drink the lake water. I rowed on.

The storm lasted through the night, though neither of us slept. By the time we found bindings for Bill's wound it was too late. He had lost too much blood. He died after a day on the lake. His last words were: "It's always so beautiful on the lake after a storm, isn't it? So beautiful...." I let him float away on the gentle waves, joining his family.

It *was* beautiful. The water was completely still, and the sun shone on the water like a thousand diamonds, but I couldn't appreciate it. My two best friends and my captain were dead. The lake had taken them from me.

I rowed until my back and arms ached and I couldn't row anymore. I reached land on the morning of the third day. The whole

town was at the docks that day. We drank and we cried. Nobody laughed or smiled for a week.

Three months later, I married June. We had a son named Tom. He persuaded me to write this story down for all the future generations.

There is just one thing you must remember: Lake Superior took many things from me that day. The lake is cold and unforgiving. Never let it take from you. If you do, it will change you. Forever.

“That, children,” said Jack, “is the story of the *Marina Blue*.”

“That was a great story, Grandpa,” said George. Lucy was sleeping on her mother’s lap.

“All right,” June said with a sigh, “it’s time for the children to get home to bed. They have school tomorrow.”

“Yes,” said Tom, “I quite agree. Let’s get going. George, put your coat on.”

“Goodnight, Grandpa Jack,” said George tiredly.

“Goodnight, my boy,” said Jack.

Jack’s family left for the night. People are still reading his story to this day. And so Bill, James, Captain Amero, Jack, and June live on in the pages of the book *Marina Blue*.

The Minecraft Experiment

*Two brothers feel lucky to have been chosen to take part in a Minecraft greet. But something happens to remind them that luck can be both bad and good in **THE MINECRAFT EXPERIMENT** by **Taric Gheit**.*

“**H**ey, Charlie! Five minutes till school ends,” whispered Charlie’s brother, Jonathan, from two seats down. Charlie looked at the clock.

“Class, quiet down,” said Mr. Fisher.

After a long, suspenseful wait, the bell rang, and all the kids ran out like cheetahs. Charlie stood up and said to Jonathan, “I wonder what we are going to do this summer.”

Jonathan replied, “I am not sure.”

That night at the dinner table the two brothers stuffed their food in their mouths and then ran to their computer. They opened their Minecraft and started playing. Charlie said, “Hold on, Jonathan. It looks like we have an email.” Jonathan opened the e-mail.

“Jonathan, who is it from?” asked Charlie. The two boys looked to see who it was from. It said it was from the Mogang office. Charlie started reading the email.

Dear Minecraft player you have been invited to the Minecraft Mogang office to get to meet Markus Persson and learn more about Minecraft from Markus.

“Wow, it is from the owner of Minecraft. Wow, this is amazing!” said Charlie. The two boys ran down the stairs and shouted for their mom.

“Hey, Mom, look!” they both shouted. They brought the laptop to the table where she was reading a book.

“Hey, Mom, can we go to this Minecraft meet?” said Charlie.

“Yeah, can we go?” added Jonathan.

“Maybe,” responded their mom, Mrs. Woodchuck. “It depends on where it is.”

Jonathan replied, "Mom, it is located in Los Angeles."

"Yeah, sure, it's not that far away. You two better be happy we live in San Diego, or else you would not be going," said Mrs Woodchuck.

Just then Charlie and Jonathan ran to their room. "Pack your bags. We are leaving tomorrow morning!" she called to them.

"Yes, Mom!" they screamed with excitement.

After an uneventful car ride, they all arrived in Los Angeles. "Hey, Charlie, look. It's the Mogang office!" Jonathan was happy.

"Wow, it is," replied Charlie.

"Listen, boys," said their mom, "you can get out here and go. I am going shopping, so here is one hundred dollars. That's all you get."

Yes, Mom. OK, let's go!"

"Charlie, where do we go? This building is so big," worried Jonathan.

"Don't worry. I will ask the man over there," said Charlie with a smile.

"Excuse me, sir, I am looking for Markus Persson."

"Hi," the man answered, "I have been waiting for you two hours. I am Markus, also known as Notch, my Minecraft name."

"Wow! Can we have your autograph?" they blurted.

"Ok, maybe later."

They quickly followed, not wanting to get lost in that huge crowded place. Notch led the two boys to an elevator and put a rather large key into the hole where the button should be.

"Psssst. Hey, Jonathan, is this some secret elevator or something?" whispered Charlie.

"I don't know, maybe," Jonathan whispered back.

The elevator doors opened. "Boys, come with me!" yelled Markus.

Amazed, the two boys were in a state of shock. In that very room standing there were all of Charlie and Jonathan's favorite YouTuber celebrities. Jonathan and Charlie started running toward the crowd of their heroes till Markus said, "Boys, stop! You can't go over there. You can't even be here. Come with me."

Markus led the two boys around the crowd to an area with computers and lots of Xboxes to PS3s. "Boys, you can play here till the others arrive."

Over the next few hours more kids from ages ten to eighteen kept pouring in.

“Hello, may I have yore attention please,” said Markus on the stage. “You all will get to stay at our hotel for free in a suite with your family and all your gaming needs.”

“WOOOO!” all the kids cry.

“Ok, ok, settle down. Now all you guys go to your rooms. They are located down that hallway to your right and up the stairs. Your parents or guardians will be waiting for you there.”

“Hey, Charlie, come here. Follow me.”

“Jonathan, why?” Jonathan grabbed Charlie and dragged him to the corner of the room and behind a table. “DUDE, what are you doing? Are you crazy? Come on, we got to go to bed.”

“Shhh, stupid. Look what is behind those red curtains.”

“I don’t know and I don’t care,” said Charlie. “Now let’s go, Jonathan.”

“Chill out, Charlie. Don’t be a wimp. Wait till they all leave. Then we can check.”

“Fine. Let’s look behind the stupid curtains and then go to sleep. And what about Mom? She should be waiting for us.”

“Don’t worry. I got a text that she can’t make it. She is far away with a flat tire, so she is going to stay at a different hotel.”

Hours passed, and the two boys crept closer to the red curtains. “Charlie, on the count of three, let’s go.”

Wait. What is that?” Sitting there was a big green pod with a WARNING sticker on it.

Come on, let’s go in it.”

The two boys closed the hatch and sat down. Then Jonathan noticed something that he could not resist. “Oh, no, JONATHAN! Don’t do it! DON’T do it! You better not!”

Jonathan pushed Charlie out of the way and pushed the big red button. Then the capsule started to rumble and shake, and then—*poof*—the two boys passed out.

“Oww, what happened? Where am I?” said Charlie. “Wait, Jonathan. JONATHAN! WHERE ARE YOU?”

“Hey, it’s ok. I am over here. You will never believe this: We are in the game of Minecraft!”

“AHHH! We are? What are we going to do? Jonathan, how are we going to get out?”

"I am not sure. Come on."

"WAIT! Hey, look. There is a village. Let's go."

"Ok, Charlie, but wait. We are in Minecraft, right?"

"Yeah."

"So can we make weaponry?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Hmmm. Ok, then, let's move on."

At the village, the boys see a villager. "Hey, villager!" called the two boys.

"Yes?" the villager answered in a confused voice.

"We need your help. We are from the real world, and we can't get out. We are stuck in Minecraft. Can you help us?"

The villager stood there for a while till he shouted, "Guards, arrest them!" Then a tall figure with long arms and long legs with a big body called an iron golem came toward them.

"RUN!" said Jonathan. Charlie and Jonathan ran for their lives into a dark forest.

They came across a small cabin with signs in red that said DO NOT ENTER and YOU WILL DIE. The two boys knocked on the door. "Hello. Anyone home?"

Then a cranky voice answered, "Go away. No one is home." But the door started to creak open.

"Jonathan, should we go in?"

"Yeah, let's go."

All of a sudden the floor fell from under them.

"Where are we?"

"I don't know."

Ha, ha, hah, you fell for my trap!" came the cranky voice again.

"Ahhh, it's the witch!" said Charlie.

"The only way you can escape is by DEFEATING ME...in a dance battle."

"Well, ok then. Hit the music."

Hours of terrible dancing went by. "Phewww, I am so tired," said Charlie.

"Yeah, I am the same, Charlie."

Ok, fine. You guys are free. The exit is down the hallway to your left."

"Wait, can we ask you a question?" said Jonathan.

"What do you want?" asked the witch suspiciously.

"We are really from the real world, and we are stuck in

Minecraft. Can you help us get out?"

"Well, I can't help you, but I can tell you how. You need to kill the ender dragon. When you do, a portal will spawn where you kill him."

"Ok. thanks."

"Wait. Take this." The witch handed the boys full diamond armor, golden apples, and potions of all kinds!

"Thanks, witch!"

"And here," she said, "eat these cookies. They will teleport you to the End where you will fight the ender dragon. But watch out. Before you fight him, you have got to destroy his health crystals or we will just heal too fast. I recommend destroying the crystals with a bow because they blow up when destroyed."

"Ok. Let's go, Jonathan, in 3, 2, 1..." *Whoosh.*

"We are here. Now where is the ender dragon?"

Wrahhhh!

"There he is! Run! Make a bunker!"

"I'm on it, Jonathan.... Done! Come in. Hurry!" Jonathan jumped in, and the boys caught their breath while deciding what to do next.

"On three, let's charge. I will get the dragon. You get the health crystals."

"Ok, Charlie. On three: 1, 2, 3, go!"

Charlie distracted the dragon. Jonathan made his move. "I got all the health crystal," he said.

"Then let's finish him off. Charge!"

Charlie kept hitting the dragon with his sword. *"WRAHH!"* screamed the dragon.

"HELP! He is mad! Run! Jonathan, keep running! I will shoot him with my bow." Charlie took aim and fired three times. *Wrahhh!* came the dragon's cry one last time.

"Wait, we killed him," said Jonathan. Then all of a sudden the portal spawned at their feet. "Ok, let's go. This was fun."

"Ok. Jump!"

The boys spawned in the capsule. They ran back to their hotel and went to bed. They knew they would never forget this amazing experience.

Operation Falling Stars

*Operation Falling Stars never officially existed, according to Private Jones. But the same man lets us know that we should be very afraid in **OPERATION FALLING STARS** by **Heath Durren**.*

It all started during a record-breaking meteor shower in Draco, Nevada. I still remember the colors of the aliens: blood red, with bursts of white. They were larger than a human but shaped more like a hunchbacked wolf. Oh, sorry, I'm so rude; let me introduce myself. I'm Max Jones—Private Jones to be exact

I could've been a doctor, or a banker. But my scholarship fell through when I failed a very important test. So I chose to be a soldier. It was the only option in a town like Wells, where I grew up, with the population barely scraping the thousand mark. That's how I got into this mess. Now I'm not saying that being a soldier is bad. But I was forced to do some things I didn't want to do back in Draco.

Now back to my story that everyone else calls a "tall tale." I was on patrol, and I heard on my radio that there was supposed to be a huge meteor shower that night. I didn't think anything of it. I was pacing back and forth outside of the base when the meteors fell through the sky. All I saw were balls of purple fire in the night. The backdrop of the mountains only made them more noticeable. Then I saw the meteors crashing. It sounded like a jet, probably going at Mach three. I heard the explosions, and then I got worried. The next morning I saw army trucks going into the woods.

I heard rumors that our scientists had found an unidentified bacterium on the meteors. I didn't think it was true, but apparently it was. Under a microscope you could see that they looked like red spikey orbs that were evolving by the second. Of course like the stupid humans they are the scientists experimented on them.

They kept evolving, and no one could figure out how to stop the progress. So they tried to freeze them, burn them, you name it and the scientist tried it. The evolution just wouldn't stop. The government needed everyone to help in the lab, so I was recruited. My grandpa was the local doctor, and as a hobby he was a chemist. I spent my summers following him around in his lab, which meant I had some background knowledge. So you can understand why I

was shocked when some brainiac chemist decided to dump radioactive waste on bacterium. Didn't we learn anything from the Incredible Hulk? After that things went from bad to worse.

Overnight we didn't need a microscope to see them; they were as big as my pinky finger. No matter what the scientist tried the bacterium adapted and grew. They began to be the size of a Chihuahua but looked more like a turtle with a red spikey shell.

These alien creatures had nubby teeth and horns. Even when we shot at them they just took in the bullets like nothing happened. People were starting to think these things were indestructible. They started calling them *Fortis Diablo*, which means "strong devil" in Latin. Then a patrol soldier named Billy made the mistake of taunting one and was bitten on his hand. The bite wasn't serious, but the poison that the alien injected into him was.

By now everyone was in a panic. Then the soldier mutated. It started at the bite mark and spread from there. Soon his whole arm was infected, and it worked its way to his brain. Within hours he became so ill he slipped into a coma. It was like a fungus growing on a dead tree. This alien bacterium was making its home in poor Billy.

Billy woke up from his coma and tried to kill us. Now don't think that he was still human. The mutated soldier jumped on me and tried to infect me. Luckily the paramedics came and tore him off of me. The scariest part was that he was lifeless. He had no emotion and no memory. Let's just say I didn't sleep well that night.

One good thing we found out about these creatures: They can only infect someone or something once. It's kind of like how a bee lives: Once it stings it dies. The aliens shrivel up and die because the poison is what is keeping them alive. I kept hearing about one of the most brilliant scientists that we have, named Dr. Smith, and how he came up with all these theories about the aliens and most of them were right. It seemed like we were learning all the important stuff from him.

I was patrolling the lab when I met Dr. Smith. I was impressed. He was literally a genius, but also the bravest person I've ever met. He said he had a wife and kids back home. But I noticed something weird about him soon after I met him. He wouldn't go into the lab without two pairs of socks on. I even asked him about it once. He just went silent.

I noticed some of the scientists were sneaking away at night. At first it was just one or two, but by the end of the month there were only four of us left. A couple of days later some mutated humans broke into the lab. We realized one of the scientists must have been bitten before he left and infected the general public with this devastating virus.

We needed to find a solution and fast.

We did our best to hold the mutants off, but there were only a few of us left. We were lucky to make it out the lab alive. That place was like our home. Even with my military experience they still defeated us. The other two soldiers were too slow. Mutants overtook them. Even though we were just partners in survival I still felt bad to see them go. But there was a bigger challenge ahead of us. Mutants were everywhere. Dr. Smith and I ran for our lives. There seemed like there was only one place to go, the power plant.

We sprinted into the building and slammed the door. We were safe. But we knew it wouldn't be long before we had to go back out. Unfortunately, the only weapons we had were a couple of rusty wrenches. It was then when we knew what we had to do. We had to risk our lives to save the world from these disgusting, mutated, otherworldly creatures.

Dr. Smith said that there was no way to save the town and we had to blow up the power plant. I trusted him, so I helped him.

We knew that the power plant would blow in a few minutes. Then Dr. Smith fell and got bitten on the ankle. But I had enough time to shove the mutant off of him. I guess the double socks came in handy.

Dr. Smith said to me, "I'm a higher rank in the government than you think. Nobody can know about this outbreak."

"There have been more of these?" I asked.

"I'm sorry."

Then he swung at me with his wrench. But before it was a millimeter away from my face the mutant dove for him. It's too bad the doctor didn't wear two turtleneck sweaters. I was in shock because I had never seen a man's face torn off and I never want to again. Then the mutant dove for me, but I had time to punt it mid-air. Then I took off running.

Unfortunately he was still in pursuit. I killed the mutant chasing me with my wrench.

Suddenly the town burst into flames. It dawned on me that the power plant must have exploded. I was swept off my feet from the blast. It took me a second to realize that my wrist was broken, and there was a loud ringing in my ears. It felt like my eardrums could pop at any second. I had no time worry about my wrist. All I could think about was getting out of town and finding help.

I traveled for days looking for another town. When I get to one I finally thought I was safe again. I found a gas station. There was a man behind the counter. I asked for help, and he took me to the back storage room. He fed me and bandaged my wrist. I tried to explain what happened to me in Draco. He said he had never heard of the place. I didn't believe him, so he showed me a map. On it there is no Draco. I wouldn't believe that it was real. I was in a panic and asked other people, and they all said no. Eventually I just sat down and cried. And that's why the local kids call me Sobbing Sam.

I'm never going back to Draco ever again, or at least what's left of it.

Race to the Finish

*For a swim team of reluctant swimmers, it will take more than good coaching for the team to have any success. **RACE TO THE FINISH** by **Eden Sherman** reminds us what “team” means.*

One day at Oak Peak Middle School, five girls named Rachel, Katy, Grace, Lily, and Ava were forced to join an activity to raise their grade. Activities earn extra credit.

The next day they appeared at the swimming pool ready to swim. The coach came over and said, “My name is Paul, but you guys can call me Coach. Do you guys know how to swim?”

“The only reason I’m doing this is to raise my grade. Almost everyone here only chose it because it was the only girl activity to do,” Ava said in a nasty voice.

After a very long pause, the coach said, “Let’s get in the pool and see how good or bad you are.”

Before they got in the pool, Rachel asked, “Where is everybody?”

“Yes, barely anyone swims. I guess they have more important stuff to do,” Coach said.

The girls looked in at the water. It was a beautiful, sparkly blue. Katy and the other girls touched their first toe in the water. They immediately got goose bumps. Finally each girl got in the water, and the coach said, “We’re going to do some laps to see who’s good and who’s bad.”

After the girls did a few lengths they were huffing and puffing like crazy. When Grace got her breath she said with a sassy attitude, “Why are these bathing suits so ugly? They look like they’re from the 50’s!”

The coach replied sadly, “Well, they don’t support the team with that much money because usually the swimmers aren’t so good and it gets boring to watch after a while.”

“This year is going to be different. We are going to win finals, and everyone from our school is going to cheer us on,” Rachel said in a very confident way.

“But how are we going to win when we aren’t even that good?” Ava said.

“We are going to have to practice hard. By the way, we are not all bad. Lily over here is really good, and I see a lot of you that with practice can be great,” said the coach. Lily’s face turned bright red.

After practice the girls were tired from learning all the strokes. The coach assigned what the girls would be swimming in the upcoming meet. He said, “I watched each one of you swim all the strokes, and I think Ava and Katy should swim freestyle, Lily butterfly, Grace breaststroke, and Rachel backstroke.” Everyone was happy about what they were swimming.

They walked to the first school they were swimming against, Blake Wood. The first thing the coach said when they walked in was, “The Blake Wood Bobcats are really good, so just try your hardest. The first one to go is Lily. Lily, you are swimming the 50-meter fly. Are you ready?”

“I think, but I don’t know if I can beat this girl. She looks really good.”

“Just try your hardest, and you will do amazing.”

Lily is at the blocks and nervous as ever. The official says, “Get on the blocks. Take your mark...Go!”

The girls jump off the block with a perfect streamline. Lily is flying through the water, but sadly the other girl beat her by a hand touch. Lily was mad, but the coach was excited for her. He said, “Great job, Lily! You just went your fastest time. Don’t be mad. That girl is really good, but with practice you can beat her.”

Lily was still bummed, but she said, “Ok.”

Next up is Rachel with the 50-meter backstroke. Rachel jumped in the water, but she wasn’t scared. She was just doing this for fun. When the race was finished she got last place. She had a lot to work on, but she could do it.

After her was Grace doing the 50-meter breaststroke. Out of nowhere Grace swam faster than she has ever in practice and got first place. She was excited.

Next were Katy and Ava with the 50-meter freestyle. They both did ok, but neither got first.

After the meet the coach talked to them and said, “You guys did pretty well for the first meet, but if we want to win finals we have to work harder. Tomorrow we are going to do a practice where we help everyone on what they have to work on. See you all tomorrow at practice.” The coach gave a wave and left.

The next day he said, "I am going to videotape all of you once, and I'll tell you what you need to work on." After they videotaped all the girls the coach said, "We are ready for finals. We just need a bit of tweaking for some of you." The meets after the Blake Wood meet they won six and lost four. There was one meet left, the league meet. They were ready.

After all the practices and meets, they were an improved team throughout. Then it was time for finals. When the girls walked in they saw a whole bunch of teams. Before the meet, the coach told them everything they improved on, and to remember to do it in practice.

When Lily was heading to the blocks, a whole bunch of people came with signs. The signs all said "Go Oak Peak Swimmers." Then the principal walked over to them and said, "You can't go to a big meet looking like this." While she was saying this, she was handing out new beautiful swimsuits. It had a bedazzled Oak Peak Swimmers on it. The girls ran to the principal and gave her a hug while saying, "Thank you so much."

Lily is swimming the 50-meter butterfly. She walked over to the blocks, happy as ever. Lily got on the blocks. The official said, "Take your mark...go!"

All of the girls jumped off the blocks. First the girl from Blake Wood was winning, and the girl from the other teams were behind Lily. Then for the finish Lily put her head down and had an amazing finish. It really was close. You could see everyone on the stands looking at the scoreboard. It said Lily got first. Everyone was cheering. Lily told the person who got second, "Good job. You did amazing." Then she got out of the water to talk to her coach.

Now it was Rachel's turn, swimming the 50-meter backstroke. After she swam even though she didn't get first, it was her best time by a lot, and everyone on her team gave her high fives.

Next was Grace swimming the 50-meter breaststroke. She rocked it again like all the other meets and got first place.

Now it was Katy and Ava's turn. They swam as fast as they could, but not fast enough. Katy got second place, and Ava got fourth place.

Now it was all down to the relays. If Blake Wood wins the relay they win, but if Oak Peak wins they win. Ava was the only one that wasn't swimming in the relay, but she was going to cheer her

teammates as loudly as she could. The rest of the girls went behind the block and did a team cheer.

Rachel was first. She got on the blocks, and the official said, "Take your marks...Go!" By the time Rachel finished she was about tied with everyone else.

After Rachel touched the wall Grace jumped off the blocks. When she finished, Oak Peak was up by just a little bit.

Next it was Lily's turn. When she touched the wall they were up by a little bit.

Finally Katy was next. She was swimming against the girl that beat her in the 50-meter freestyle, so she was scared. Right away Katy jumped off the blocks. Even though Katy got a little head lead the girl from Blake Wood was catching up to her. They both flipped the wall, and when they came up the Blake Wood team was tied with Katy. Then out of nowhere Katy used whatever she had left and went as fast as lightning to the wall. Everyone was cheering because the scoreboard said Oak Peak Middle School won finals. The girl next to Katy shook Katy's hand and said, "Good job."

After the meet when the whole team was huddled together the coach said, "That was amazing. You all worked together as a whole team to beat the Blake Wood Bobcats. I thought you would never beat them."

All the girls gave each other a hug and Ava said, "Thank you for a great swim season that I thought I would hate."

Then the principal said, "You guys earned enough credit to not have to do an activity next year. Great job on your amazing meet."

"Actually, I think we're going to do it next year, with credit or no credit," Ava said, looking at everyone to make sure they were all going to do it next year. They all promised each other that they would not just do it next year, but the years long after.

The Seer

The author writes: *Before I begin, I'd like to say that this story is definitely NOT real. This is not meant to scare anybody, but it is in the horror genre. I admit I got some inspiration from creepypasta/Internet scary stories, such as Jeff The Killer, Slenderman, and also the enemy in the Doctor Who shows "Weeping Angels." My story has totally fictional characters, and any resemblance to a dead or living person is completely coincidental. Without further ado, I present...THE SEER by Thermoball.*

It was just a normal night. At least it had been so far. A friend had gone over to Mason's house. The friend's name was Jack, and he was a bit of a joker. Mason's parents were out.

They were sitting on the grey couch, watching *Family Guy*. Then the TV flickered. "Huh?" exclaimed Jack. The picture resumed for about two seconds, and then blinked off again. Forever. The room, without its only illumination, was black as shadow.

The duo stood up. "Lemme go turn on the lights," said Mason. The light switch was around the corner of the wall. When Mason rounded the corner, using his fingers to feel his way, he saw two floating, donut-shaped beacons. They were glowing white.

"I must be imagining this," Mason thought. Yet, the white light from the beacons seemed to shine upon the very real light switch. He rested his finger below the switch, and looked back at the donuts. He switched the light on, and during the second before the room came back to light, below the glowing donuts in the dark, was a crescent with the bowl facing up:

A smile.

The lights came back on, and the two donuts and the smile disappeared. "Weird," thought Mason.

"Hey, ya comin'?" hollered Jack.

"Yeah." He walked over to him.

"What took you so long?" said Jack.

Mason thought, *I can't tell Jack about them. Or it. Or whatever it was. Jack couldn't know.* "I spaced out," Mason lied.

"Well, it's getting late, let's get in bed," exclaimed Jack.

"Yeah."

They went upstairs. They took turns dressing and brushing

their teeth. Jack brushed his teeth first, and came out with an uneasy look.

Mason stretched the shirt over his stomach and then looked up at Jack's face. "Hey, you ok?" asked Mason.

"Yeah, I swear I saw something move behind me in the mirror. Then I got really nauseous all of a sudden, and puked a bit."

"Oh, man!"

"Nah, it's fine, I'm ok."

"You sure?"

"Yeah, but I'm still nauseous."

"Ok...why don't—" Mason's sentence was cut off by the sudden appearance of a smiling man with glowing white eyes behind Jack. Just for a second.

"Dude?"

Mason lost all train of thought. He felt nauseous. His stomach began to rumble, and instinct told him to run to the bathroom. On the way to the toilet, he bumped into Jack. Surprised, Jack said, "What the heck, man!" but the "an" trailed off as he heard a "HEEAAUUGRRRRHHH" from the bathroom.

Mason pulled his exhausted head from the toilet and glanced at the murky depths below. He was revolted, and threw his hands back and away from the toilet. He felt around, eyes closed, for the lever. He finally found it just as a worried Jack dashed into the room. Mason pulled the lever as he opened his eyes to see Jack hovering over him. Mason coughed and muttered, "Let's go get ginger ales."

Soon after, they raided the fridge for ginger ales and returned upstairs to the bedroom. While on the floor they drank them and then, exhausted, quickly fell asleep. At least Jack did. Mason, try as he might, couldn't sleep. He kept wondering who the man was. Overwhelmed, he blurted out, "Hey, you awake?"

No response. Except for a small knock downstairs.

He asked again.

No response. Except for a small knock downstairs.

He got out of bed, and stumbled over to Jack. He nudged him and whispered, "Dude, wake up." No response. Except for a small knock downstairs. He tried to wake Jack once more.

Finally, Jack, in a zombie-like condition, whimpered and then sat up in his bed. "Duuuddee, is it morrrniingg?" murmured Jack.

"No," said Mason.

“Then why didja wake me up?”

“At first I just asked if you were awake. But then I heard something downstairs.”

“Dude, don’t be afraid of things that go bump in th—”

Thump.

The knock again. “What!” asked Jack.

They ran downstairs and heard the *thump* again. They traced it to Jack’s parents’ room. Jack leaned against the door. Secretly he knocked on it. Mason jumped. But then he chuckled when he realized it was Jack knocking. “You were the knocker! But how did you pull off that eye thing?” said Mason.

“I was the knocker, but what eye thi—” The door he was leaning on flew open. His head hit the floor with a *clonk!* Then Mason could only watch as Jack was dragged into the empty room.

Mason stood up and tried to push the door open, but it wouldn’t budge. He heard “No! No! No! NO! NOOO!!” The bloodcurdling scream pierced his ears like a bad violinist. The scream seemed to trail off into forever.

He sat there, mouth and eyes wide open, when he heard a disembodied voice in his head, clearly not from a human being, whisper: “Run while you still have your legs.”

He tried to run but was frozen. Slowly, the door creaked open. Right in front of him was Jack. He was motionless. Slowly Jack’s expressionless face started to smile as he grew taller, as did the roof. The whole room started to get darker, and Jack’s smile grew wider and wider, until the flesh in his cheeks ripped in half, revealing muscle and tissue. His eyes began to whiten, and glow. “J-J-Jack?” whimpered Mason.

“There is no Jack, only I.”

That was it. He’d had it. He’d had it with the fizzling TV. He’d had it with the floating donuts. He’d had it with the barfing episode. He’d had it with his friend’s nasty pranks. If it even was his friend. He’d had it. He couldn’t take it anymore. He stood up, and, heart pounding like *Eminem’s* rapping, bolted out the door.

Mason ran out onto the sidewalk. He was running. He couldn’t stop. He noticed a tree with gnarled branches and a line in it. He thought to himself, “Nature did NOT do that.” Then a second later, he saw the same tree. “That’s funny,” he thought, but he kept running. Then, right on his left was the same tree again. He ignored it and kept dashing. Then he noticed it again. And again. And again.

Finally, he looked behind him. At first he could see only the expanse of the sidewalk, but then he saw something. It was 100 yards away, so small it looked like a Lego mini-figure. He blinked. Suddenly, it was standing right in front of Mason.

The man was only five-and-a-half feet tall, but there was a weird look on his face. He had enormous round, almost circular eyes. Below these “eyes,” if that’s what they even were, was a huge distorted grin with lips that looked like the skin had been ripped off. And it had been.

Mason turned around and kept running. The tree kept appearing. He knew he couldn’t stop. He had to get away from whoever—or whatever—it was. He kept running. It felt like he was running for an eternity and a second at the same time.

Mason was getting tired. “It’s better to lose my legs by perseverance than by a psychotic man—if he was even human,” he mused. He kept running. He eventually ran out of energy, and collapsed. The last thing he saw were two feet near his head. Then the owner of the two feet bent down toward his head, revealing his mouth—and a scary, demonic grin.

Mason woke with his eyes glued shut. He couldn’t open them. He tried moving around. It felt like he was clamped to a steel plate. He tried to get free. He couldn’t. Then he heard a sweet voice. A soothing voice. “Sh-sh-sh.... It’s going to be okay, little one.”

He realized his adventure, more like tragedy, was all a dream. He was relieved, not with the kind of relief you get after playing a board game where your opponent doesn’t make the move that could beat you, but with the relief you get when you survive a near-death experience. “Thank G-d, it was just a dream.” His heart rate slowed down. His eyes felt lighter, and he opened them, expecting to see his mother.

Instead, he saw a blinding light above his bed. He then realized that the light was actually two lights. And then a third light appeared below the two. A smile. Mason almost had time to scream. Almost.

The Tales of Nisma and Her Underground Adventure

THE TALES OF NISMA AND HER UNDERGROUND ADVENTURE
by Ugo Uchendu lands Nisma in an unfamiliar place. But her greatest adventure awaits her return to the surface.

As I ran through the forest, trees whizzed past me, and I wondered where I thought I was heading to. I mean, people run away all the time, but they usually have a plan of where they're going. I, on the other hand, had absolutely no clue. All I knew was that I was tired of the bland orphanage scenery, and if no one wanted to adopt me, I would find my own family.

Paying no attention, I suddenly realized I was falling. *Maybe I fell into a ditch*, I thought. But ditches don't go down for this long. I was contemplating how much longer I would be falling when I suddenly hit solid rock. "Ow," I said rubbing my legs and back.

I stood up and looked around me. Above I could see the light from where I had fallen down. Apparently, I was in some kind of cave. The ground was wet, and water was dripping out from the rocks. Small cave spiders crawled along the walls, and I shuddered. The walls were bumpy like the rough terrain of the mountainous area I lived in.

Further down in this cave I saw a small patch of light. Thinking this would be some way out, I followed it. As I walked I realized how foolish I had been. Something terrible could have happened to me as I was running away, and it's still possible for something bad to happen to me.

After what seemed like hours of walking, I finally emerged from the cave. I wasn't used to the light, so I found myself squinting as my eyes adjusted.

"Are you just gonna stand there or what?"

My eyes finally adjusted, and I found myself looking at a boy around the age of 13 (my age) staring at me with big brown eyes. "Oh, I'm sorry, do you know the way out? I fell down a ditch of some sort, and somehow I ended up here."

The strange boy stared at me with eyes of confusion and said, "Why would you want a way out of a place so wonderful?" My eyes

must have shown that I didn't understand because he said, "Come with me. You need to meet the king."

"Wait a second. I'm not going anywhere with you until I know your name," I said, pulling my hand away from his, which he somehow managed to grasp.

"My name is Angelo. Now will you please take my hand and follow me?" I reluctantly took his hand, and we started down a winding road to the king's palace.

When we finally arrived at the king's palace, my mouth just about dropped to the floor. The walls were made of pure gold, and the palace was so tall that I couldn't even see to the top! Everywhere I looked I saw gold. "How many people live here!" I asked Angelo, still in shock.

He looked at me with a look of annoyance and said, "One of course. You really never have been here before, have you?"

"Of course I haven't been here! What, did you think I was lying?"

Angelo ignored me and led me through the doors of the palace. "Your majesty, we have a newcomer," Angelo said, bowing down at the king's throne. Copying him, I bowed down as well. Apparently this was the wrong thing to do because Angelo pinched me and pushed me toward the king. I turned around and saw Angelo about 30 feet away from me. I hate to admit that being so far from him made me a little nervous.

"Hello, your majesty. My name is Nisma. I would like to find my way back home if you would let me," I said.

The king smiled at me and said, "Of course I will help you find your way home! But first you must help my friend Angelo find a new home."

I looked at Angelo and then back to the king. "But isn't this place his home?"

"No, he's not from this kingdom. His parents dropped him off here when he was a baby." I looked down at my shoes in embarrassment and sadness for Angelo. "Don't feel sorry for him, because you are going to help him find his home," the king said, smiling.

"How am I supposed to do that?" I asked.

"All you have to do is take him back home with you."

"WHAT! I LIVE IN A ORPHANAGE!" What is wrong with this king? He isn't making any sense.

“His mom is the worker at the orphanage, but he doesn’t know that.”

“Ok, well, how do you know that?” I asked the king.

“Because I knew his mother when she lived here, and when she moved she told me.”

Ohh, that made more sense. “But how did you know where I lived in the first place?” I asked the King quizzically.

“Oh, I have lots reporters scattered everywhere. They tell me EVERYTHING!” That last part about the reporters knowing everything kind of scared me.

“Ok, and I have one more question. Why would his mother want Angelo back when she gave him away?” I said staring at the King patiently.

“Well, at that point in her life she just wasn’t able to care for a child. She was only 19 at that time. So she came here and dropped him off, and off she went.”

I nodded to show that I understood. “Well, so where do I go to find my home?” I asked the king in anticipation.

“All you have to do is go back to the cave where you fell down,” the king said in a calm, soothing tone.

“Ok,” I said, walking back toward Angelo.

“So what did he say?” Angelo asked, biting his nails.

“He said I have to go back the cave where I fell down...and I have to take you with me.”

At that Angelo looked up at me. “WHY!” he shouted.

“Because your mom is there waiting for you,” I said in a reassuring tone.

The look Angelo gave me was a mix of sadness, confusion, and even a hint of anger. “Where has she been and why hasn’t she contacted me yet!” Angelo had started pacing around, and, quite frankly, he was starting to scare me.

“Your mom just wanted the best for you. Please understand! At least come with me and speak to her. Then if you don’t like her, you can leave.”

Angelo looked like he was considering running away at first. But with even more prodding from me he reluctantly started walking. For the rest of the long journey back to the cave we walked in silence. Once we were there Angelo still wasn’t speaking, so I took the initiative and said something. “So what do we do now?”

Angelo looked at me and sighed. "There's a ladder right behind you." I turned around, and, sure enough, there was! How did I not see that before? So we climbed for about five minutes.

Finally we emerged in the forest, and I found myself where I had been when I had fallen. "I think the way to my house is this way," I said, pointing north. Angelo nodded, and we headed off.

As we walked he seemed fascinated by everyday things, like birds and bugs. I also noticed that in the other land I had been in (which I found out was called Plantopia) there were no bugs or anything.

We finally made it to my orphanage, and Angelo obviously wasn't very happy with the way it looked or smelled. "Eew, it smells gross in here," Angelo said as we walked into the orphanage.

The head clerk/Angelo's mom looked up in shock. "You look familiar...have I seen you around?"

Angelo shook his head and said, "Hi..Mom."

"A-Angelo?" she stammered.

"Mom?" They ran toward each other like you would see in the movies, and I realized something: home is where your family is. I didn't have a family, though, so I thought I didn't have a home.

"Nisma, what about you? What can I do to pay you back?" Angelo's mom said.

"Well I don't really have a home...so you could adopt me, maybe," I asked shyly.

"I will do my best, but you must know that it might take a while with the whole adoption process. And I don't know. I kind of just got my son back, and now I would have to learn how to parent two teens!" Angelo's mom said. "But I guess I'll try to make it work. We can't just leave you without a home. Come along, then."

From that point on I guess you could say I lived a fairly normal life. After a few months, Mom adopted me, and Angelo became my brother. We lived together like a normal family. Mom had a better job, and we lived as normal kids, though nobody can ever get used to Angelo.

Their Yearly Traveling

*Two women meet when one needs help. After that, help comes from both sides. **THEIR YEARLY TRAVELING** by Lily Spencer is a story of friendship.*

Ruth is a gardener in Birmingham, Michigan, and she owns her own flower shop. She has to re-stock her flowers every hour because her shop is so popular.

One time she was cutting ribbon with a sharp blade and cut the tip of her finger off. She covered her finger with paper towel and drove herself to the Emergency Room of Beaumont Hospital. Her nurse's name was Emma, and she helped to bandage Ruth's finger. Right when Ruth and Emma met, it felt like they had known each other for years.

The next day Ruth went to the Food Store. Surprisingly she ran into Emma at the meat department. Ruth invited Emma to the party for her 15th year of having the flower shop, because they hit is off so well at the hospital. Emma said "YES, that will be so much fun! Where would you like to meet, and what time?" Ruth could tell that Emma was very happy that she asked her to come. Ruth told Emma the shop was located at the corner of Maple Road and Woodward Avenue.

On the weekend of the anniversary, everybody who Ruth had invited was very excited. But the most excited was Emma. When she woke up, she put on her best sunflower dress to get into the mood of the party.

When she got to the party, she was overwhelmed with all of the colors, shapes, and smells. She lost her breath in all of the excitement. From the corner of Emma's eye she saw Ruth and ran over to her and gave her a huge hug. Ruth said, "I am so happy to see you, Emma."

"I'm so happy to be here!"

Ruth grabbed Emma's wrist and walked her over to her dad.

"Hi, it is a pleasure to meet you. My name is Emma."

"I have been waiting to meet you. Hello there. My name is Samuel, but people call me Sam."

“My little Ruthie has been telling me about how kind you are,” Sam’s wife said. “Samuel, can you come over and help me get down the crackers from the top shelf in the pantry?”

“Coming, darling,” said Samuel. “Hope to talk to you again soon, Emma.”

“Emma, I LOVE your dress; it’s so cute!”

“You really think so? I got it at the store down the road.”

“Let’s go after the party and go to the store.”

“That is a great idea, Emma.”

The anniversary party was four hours long, and Emma was the last person to leave because she stayed to help clean up. “Do you still want to go to the store? It has been a very long day, Ruth,” said Emma.

“I agree,” said Ruth.

It was one year later, and Ruth and Emma had become almost like sisters. They had been hanging together almost every day since the anniversary. One day, Emma asked Ruth if she wanted to go to a cottage on Vancouver Island for her yearly traveling. Without a thought Ruth said, “Yes.”

Two months later

When Ruth was done packing for the vacation, she realized that she had forgotten to pack her beautiful sunflower hat that she would use on the patio to not get sunburned. But the thing that she made sure that she had was her pair of hiking boots so she could walk through the woods.

Emma knew everything that she wanted to bring. She never misplaced any of her things that she was going to bring on the trip.

The next day they were both super-excited about the vacation. When Emma got up she drove over to Ruth’s house and picked her up and they went to the airport. The plane ride was four and a half hours. When they got off the plane there was someone to drive them to the cottage.

When they got to the road that the cottage was on they got out of the car and started walking down the dirt road. They walked down the road for about ten minutes and came upon a clearing with the most beautiful cottage that Ruth had ever seen. The whole front yard of the house was covered with colorful wildflowers. Ruth was so excited to explore all of the other plants and flowers that were on Emma’s property during their stay.

During their week stay they enjoyed swimming and catching their own dinner in the crystal clear lake that is a mile hike from the property. Some mornings Ruth would surprise Emma with fresh cut bouquets of wild flowers to brighten up the inside of the cottage.

The week flew by so fast that Ruth and Emma were sad that it was already time to go. They finally started to get relaxed, and now they had to get back their real lives.

One year later

One day Emma came to Ruth's Flower Shop and asked, "Do you want to come on my yearly traveling?"

"If it was anything like last year, count me in!" said Ruth.

Tipoff

*In basketball as in life, practice and dedication are keys to success. Johnny learns that lesson in **TIPOFF** by **Joey Haitaian**.*

“Shooting foul, two shots!” yells the ref.

“Yes!” I yell. I can do this. This is my chance. I’m up to the free throw line. I get set; take the shot; and put up an air ball. “Dang it,” I said.

“One more shot, make it count,” I said to myself. I get set again, take the shot, and miss again. “I hate basketball,” I said. My one chance and I blew it, just like always.

The rest of the game I didn’t get passed to once.

“Honey, what’s wrong?” my mom says after the game.

“I’m terrible at basketball, Mom,” I say. I am terrible. I never score, and my teammates never pass. “I should just quit. What’s the point?”

“Johnny, no son of mine is going to quit. We finish what we start. Got it?”

“Yes, Mom, I understand,” I say. Even though it’s my mom who’s making the decisions for me, I don’t even want to do it. I mean, I never get the ball, and I have no chance of making it to the pros, so why should I even try?

“If you want to, we can practice at our park every day, and we can walk over there together, Johnny.”

“Ok, Mom!” I say. “That’s a good idea. Let’s go right now!”

“Ok, Johnny, ha ha. Get in the car, and let’s go.”

“Johnny shoots the three...and it goes in! The Spartans win the game with the buzzer beater three to end the game.”

“Yessss!” I say. The Spartans is the name of my basketball team. After yesterday when I missed those free throws, it inspired me to try even harder. I have confidence in myself now. My mom and I went to the park yesterday and practiced all afternoon.

“Shooting foul, two shots!” yells the ref.

“Yes!” I say. I get set, shoot the ball and...swish. I get set again, shoot the ball, and make it again. I’m on the Detroit Pistons as a starting point guard. I’m one of the best on my team, too! It was all because of the two free throws.

The Ultimate Splinter

*A whirlwind adventure of supernatural proportions takes Derick around the world. He returns with an unusual souvenir in **THE ULTIMATE SPLINTER** by Carolina I.*

“**W**hoa! Derick, that was a sick stunt! The way you just jumped off of that car and how you did that backflip...MAN THAT WAS COOL!” said the guy that made the dare.

“Thanks, bro, that was a pretty sick dare.” Hi, I’m Derick, and I like to live life fast and rough, but I don’t know how. I had a few dares that almost killed me, but that wasn’t enough. I needed more. I want to travel and explore the world, but I just need time, at least one second every time I visit...just one...so I have time to visit every single place in the entire world. That will be enough for me... I’ll have the chance to explore and learn a little bit more about the world I live in. That’s it! I should get a helicopter and visit everywhere within a few seconds like a bird’s eye view. It’s still not enough, but who cares.

All right, I went to *Helifly* and got a helicopter because it could travel to places that are nearby. Also, I chose it because I like the flying experience and the adrenaline rush. It’s exciting to see different places from the sky.

The next thing I know I’m flying the thing. It was thrilling flying a helicopter for the first time, but the most exciting part is that I can visit many places on my own, and I can choose where to go. Never in a million years would I have thought that this helicopter could transport me as fast. First stop: Ontario, Canada... *BEEP* Oh I’m here! Wait a minute, this is not Canada *BEEP* This is 42 Wallabyway, Sydney in Australia! *BEEEEEP*

My helicopter is not telling me good things. I didn’t know what was happening because all of it was happening so fast, The first thing that came to my mind was ...We’re going to crash!

I unbuckled my seatbelt and jumped off. I should’ve thought where I was going to land; it could be cement or water. I pray it to be water. After all, it’s Australia. It was a pool. Glad I made it here... could have been worse!

Just like that my helicopter vanished. I was safe, and I didn't know how it happened!

A very strange sensation... inexplicable, but intriguing at the same time. I thought, *How in the world can you travel so fast in a helicopter?* And the only answer I had was: This has something to do with magic or something more out of this world. Something was happening, and I didn't know what it was. Then all of sudden, I can't believe it! I'm in Australia! If only I can—

I'm cut off by a huge swirl in front of me. Then without thinking I'm getting dizzy. Then I arrive at Hamburg, Germany. Wow! This isn't happening. Did I just land on a dining table? In a public restaurant? And—*bang*—food and plates are flying everywhere. People are staring at me, and some are screaming because they have no idea where I came from. Well, this is awkward. People may think I'm an alien of some sort because things like this don't happen in real life.

Ok... "Hello, I'm sorry to disturb everybody like this. I was experimenting with a machine, and this is what happened." People are still screaming. I need to think of something better to say. "This is not what you think." What should I do?

I was starting to get up until I got sucked in the big swirly thing I saw last time. I see cows and sheep this time. I wonder where I'm going this time. Then I start to relax. Maybe this is better. My eyes start to relax. I try to stay awake, but no.

I wake up in Mumbai, India with a stingy feeling somewhere, but I'm too distracted. I'm exhausted. This is tiring. I don't want to travel anymore.

I try to move my hands. That's where my pain is. I look around to notice where I am. It looks like I'm in a house, apartment, cabin? I stay alert not to go to that swirly thing again, but I don't see anything. I finally look at my right hand. There is something in my index finger. I got a splinter on the way...when?

"Long journey, huh?" I say to myself. That wasn't bad. I just travelled the world, sort of. At least it was the ultimate splinter.

An Unlikely Miracle

Where there is life, there is hope. Marley understands that sentiment in AN UNLIKELY MIRACLE by Abby.

“**M**arley and her best friend Jackie were walking to Long Beach Middle School together. It was the last day of school, and Marley had a feeling it would be great. The sun was shining down onto their skin, giving them a little tan to kick off the summer.

“Marley, Marley, wait!” someone screamed. It was Marley’s little brother Ben.

“What do you want, Ben?” Marley yelled. She didn’t want her sixth-grade brother to ruin her reputation on her last day in middle school.

“You left your lunch box at home,” Ben answered.

“Oh, thanks,” Marley said, and then continued her way to school.

Even though Marley gives her brother a hard time, they actually are close, and have gotten closer ever since their dad went missing five years ago. Their dad Todd went missing one day on his way home from work. His car was left behind with his ID and his belongings. The police went on an investigation but didn’t find anything in the five years. It has been very frustrating for their whole family.

After school the girls and Ben were very excited for summer. They stayed up late, watched movies, ate popcorn, and swam. It was probably close to midnight before they ended up falling asleep.

That night Marley didn’t sleep very well. She was having a dream that her dad had come back and everything was back to normal. This had happened to her before, and it made her upset.

The next morning, Jackie noticed that Marley was acting strangely. She kind of seemed shaken up and sad.

“What’s wrong?” Jackie asked.

“I had another dream about my dad last night, and I’m really sad,” Marley replied.

“I’m sorry. You’ve had these before, and you haven’t seemed as upset,” Jackie added.

“This dream was different,” Marley exclaimed. “My dad told me to keep looking,” Marley said.

“I think you should tell your mom,” Jackie stated.

“She knows. I’ve told her, but it doesn’t help,” Marley said. “I think I want to tell her that I want the police to do a further investigation,” she added.

“Well, if you think it’s worth it, then I don’t see a problem with asking,” Jackie said.

“Okay,” Marley said. They headed down the hallway to the kitchen for breakfast.

The girls sat down for breakfast at the table with Ben.

“Good morning, kids,” Ms. Ann cheered.

“Good morning,” the kids said, and ate their breakfast.

After breakfast Jackie went home. Marley was still upset. Marley decided to go upstairs and look at an old memory book. She couldn’t figure out why her dad kept coming to her in her dreams. It was like someone was trying to send her a message that he was still alive. She felt bad bringing it up to her mom so often, but then she got a knock at her door. It was her mom.

“What’s going on with you?” Ann asked. “You seem sad.”

“Well, I didn’t want to bring it up to you, but I had another dream about Dad,” Marley exclaimed.

“Honey, I’ve been over this with you many times. Dad is not coming back,” Ann stated.

“Mom, I know, but something feels different this time. I think that we should bring the case up to the police again,” Marley said, hoping that her mom would agree.

“I’m sorry. I know that you miss him, and I do, too, but we can’t bring it up to the police again,” Ann answered sadly.

“Okay, Mom, I understand,” Marley said, and Ann left the room.

After that talk with her mom Marley tried her best to put her dad into the back of her mind. She went to camp for the last two weeks of summer, which was a great distraction. When she got home from camp Marley was excited to see her family, even her little brother Ben. Marley thought that they would be more excited to see her, but they both seemed so serious. Once Marley got settled, her mom wanted to talk.

“I really don’t want to get your hopes up, but we got a call from the detective saying that we might have found Dad,” Ann exclaimed.

“Wait. Are you serious?” Marley said, surprised.

“The LA police department was called by a local hospital. They were claiming there was a man there who described memories of a family that may fit our description,” Ann announced.

“When will find out if it’s Dad?” Marley asked.

“We are going to the hospital right now,” Ann replied, as Marley looked surprised. Then, they headed off to the hospital.

When they arrived at the hospital they were all excited, but nervous that it wouldn’t be Todd. All of them had sweaty palms and were sort of shaky. They went to the front desk and got visitor’s passes. A lady directed them to a conference room at the nurse’s station. They went down the hallway and finally reached room 5W, which was the room that the man was in. They held hands and slowly walked in.

The detective was in the room waiting for Marley’s family to arrive. Next to the detective was Marley’s dad! Marley, Ben, and Ann all ran up to Todd.

“Marley, Ben, Ann!” Todd screamed. Todd remembered everyone once he saw their faces.

“Dad!” the kids yelped.

“Honey!” Ann bellowed.

“We missed you so much!” Marley declared.

Tears rolled down all their faces. They were captivated by their father’s story of what had happened to him. Apparently, he had car trouble and was waving down a passing car on the freeway when he was struck by the car. The person who hit him was afraid they’d get into trouble, so they took him and treated him as a roommate. They told him he was an old friend. They were giving him a place to stay and providing him with work on their farm. He went on for the next five years believing the story, until recently.

He suffered another head injury from falling in the shower. He took himself to the hospital. After a short period of amnesia, he started to recall bits and pieces of his old life. The nurses became very suspicious and called the police to investigate. As the police started to put evidence together, they realized who Todd was.

As the police began to give details regarding the upcoming trial to prosecute Todd’s “roommates,” the family wasn’t even listening. All they cared about was that they had their husband and father back. The whole story was unbelievable and overwhelming. They couldn’t believe it, but they were finally back together as a whole family.

Upper East Side

UPPER EAST SIDE by *Sydney Y* takes place in a high-end sushi restaurant. When a tough food critic comes around, will SB Sushi make the grade?

Summer, New York, 2008

The buzz around town was about a new food critic. She was going from restaurant to restaurant checking out the local cuisine. But, boy, was she tough. Her name was Rachel Ray. Rachel Ray was 35. She worked for the Food Network and is very well-known throughout the restaurant world. Every restaurant in the area was so nervous Rachel Ray would come into their restaurant. Rachel Ray wasn't like a normal food critic. She only critiqued the fanciest restaurants.

Sara Bella, of SB Sushi, wasn't worried at all. She knew she had the best and fanciest sushi on the Upper East Side. She had the best chefs and the best decor.

Sara Bella's restaurant had tons of famous people coming to her restaurant on a daily basis. These people were known for bringing more customers in. Not only were these famous people, but they were rich, famous people with a lot of influence and influential friends.

Rachel Ray had heard the best things about SB Sushi, and she couldn't wait to eat there to critique it. Rachel had her assistant call to make a reservation for Saturday night, the busiest night of the week.

When Sara Bella heard this, she was very excited! She called upon her best chefs and her best servers. "No problem, I'll handle this, piece of cake," said Sara. "I have nothing to worry about." Oh, was Sara wrong.

The next day Sara Bella spent all day preparing for Rachel Ray's arrival. She ordered the best and most expensive fish from Japan. She ordered new linen and new china just to impress Rachel Ray. Unfortunately, not everything went according to plan.

As Wednesday afternoon approached, three days before Rachel's arrival, the wrong linen arrived, and it was too late to order new stuff. Then the worst part was the fish that was

supposed to be delivered didn't come in. Sara Bella had to use the local fisherman's fish from New York. It was the only thing she could do. You could actually get really good pieces or not so good pieces, but Sara Bella was feeling confident she was going to get a good piece.

Sara Bella was really worried about what Rachel Ray would think. The new linens were so ugly. They were plaid with navy and purple stripes, not exactly what Sara Bella had ordered. Sara Bella was devastated about the new linen. But, instead of stressing out, she went to a neighboring restaurant and borrowed plain white linen. The first problem was solved. Sara Bella was mostly worried about the local fish SB Sushi would have to serve, but it was too late to do anything.

Saturday night arrived, and the place was packed. Blair Waldorf and Serena Vanderwoodsen were regulars, and they were coming in at the same time as Rachel Ray. Unfortunately, these girls were very snobby and always caused a scene. Sara Bella was very worried, but again, there was nothing Sara Bella could do. Blair Waldorf and Serena Vanderwoodsen arrived right at 8:00 p.m. on Saturday night, and Rachel Ray came shortly after.

Rachel Ray came alone, and as it turned out was very good friends with Blair and Serena. Rachel requested that they all sit together. Sara Bella seated the three great friends at the best table in the house. Their waitress's name was Liv, and she was very excited to wait on Rachel Ray.

Everyone around them was doing their own thing, eating and talking, but so were Blair, Rachel, and Serena. Once in awhile some people would notice them and ask for a picture or an autograph, but mostly Rachel, Serena, and Blair were talking to each other.

"Rachel, what other restaurants have you critiqued lately?" asked Blair.

"How do you like working on the Food Network?" asked Serena.

"I have critiqued Nobu, Sushi Samba, and Sushi Heaven. As you know, there are many sushi restaurants to choose from in NYC. That's why I can't wait to see what SB Sushi is all about." Rachel continued, "The Food Network has given me the freedom to experience so many different restaurants all over New York and the world, and it has been a dream come true. I love traveling all over the world and meeting new people and trying different foods. My favorite places to visit are Italy and Japan." Rachel said the best

food is definitely in Italy where everything is homemade and very fresh.

Rachel ordered for everyone at the table. She decided to go with the chef's choice. The chef's choice is when the chef chooses what to bring to the table.

Back in the kitchen, the chef, Mario Batali, decided to make the most exquisite sushi he could make. Mario had chosen the monkfish paté with caviar as the chef's choice for that evening. Sara Bella was happy because the paté was one of her signature dishes, and the chef mastered the recipe.

Rachel took her first bite of the monkfish paté with caviar. Rachel had a weird expression on her face, so Sara Bella thought her critique was going to be bad for the article. After that Rachel kept taking a bite of everything else on the plate.

"Rachel, how do you like the blue fin?" Serena asked.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes!" Serena and Blair exclaimed at the same time.

"It is so good! I have never tasted anything like it," Rachel said excitedly.

"Great! Don't worry. We won't tell Sara until the article is out!" proclaimed Blair.

A half-hour later...

Everything seemed to be going very well until Rachel Ray stood up and abruptly left the restaurant. Sara Bella went over to the table to see what had happened. Sara Bella was beside herself. "Liv, what happened?" Sara Bella said. Liv, the waitress, had no idea. She said she thought everything was going really well, and she thought Rachel seemed happy and kept complimenting the food. Serena and Blair told Sara Bella that they thought Rachel was enjoying herself, but Rachel had mentioned that she had a stomach problem. Later, Sara Bella found out that Rachel Ray had bad stomach cramps, and she had to be hospitalized for her illness.

Only two days later, Rachel Ray's column came out, and in it was her review of SB Sushi. The column read:

SB Sushi: 5 stars.

SB Sushi is the best sushi restaurant I've been to on the Upper East Side. It has the best sushi I've

had in a very long time. The bite-sized crab rolls, with a side of ponzu sauce and organic micro greens were creamy and flavorful. They blew my mind! The Toro was the best blue fin I've ever had, and the caviar was so exquisite I ordered more. Every bite was melting in my mouth. The monkfish pate' with caviar was amazing, and had every little detail including the presentation on the plate. The lobster ceviche had the freshest lobster, while the shrimp salad with spicy lemon dressing was delicious. All in all, my experience was fantastic. The decor could use a little help, but it wasn't that noticeable. The food was phenomenal! I would go there every day if I could!

Sara Bella later received a phone call from Rachel Ray herself. Rachel said, "I'm so sorry I ran out yesterday. I did not mean to startle you. It was because I have a bad condition called upset stomachitis, and I always get these cramps everywhere I go. I'm sorry it happened again, but as you can tell from my review I loved your restaurant and cannot wait to come back."

Sara Bella was so thrilled it wasn't the food. Sara Bella thanked Rachel Ray for taking the time to come in, and told her that they hoped to see her again very soon. Sara Bella thought Rachel Ray was so nice and was happy she chose SB Sushi to write about in her column.

The Watch

*A man creates a device that gives the person who wears it the power to affect time. It is his son who takes it to the limit in **THE WATCH** by **Brady Zabawa**.*

There was a kid named Jason. His dad has been working on a project for years and years while Jason has been wondering what his dad was working on for all these years.

One day Jason's dad, Tom, said, "Jason, I'm going away on a very important road trip." He said, "Jason, do not look inside of this box."

After his dad left, Jason opened this mysterious box. He saw this watch and thought, *Why would my dad be working on a watch for years?* Then he remembered when his dad told him that he made it with special tools and certain metal that cost a ton. Jason put this mysterious watch on.

He ran upstairs to ask his mom why his dad has been working on this watch. But before he made it upstairs all the way he pressed a button to see what this button was going to do.

After Jason pressed the button on the watch, he made it upstairs and asked his mom, "Why was Dad working on this watch for so many years?" When he finally looked up he noticed his mom was frozen stiff. Then Jason thought, *Why is my mom frozen?*

Jason thought about why his dad said, "Don't touch that button." Jason thought about it and then realized that it froze his mom. He pressed the button once again. His mom unfroze without knowing that what just happened really happened.

He went outside, pressed that button again, and saw everybody that was in sight freeze. He went over to his next-door neighbor and saw that when she was using the hose the water froze in the air. Then he thought, *Wow, my dad is a genius.*

A couple of days later when he liked this girl he told her the whole story and what had happened that night. She didn't believe him, so he said to the girl named Alana, "Grab onto my arm." She asked why. Jason said, "Just do it." She did. Then Jason pressed that button again, and everything went frozen.

She said, "Sorry for not believing you, and I won't tell anyone." Then Alana said, "Let's go do some things."

"Like what?" said Jason.

They pressed the button. Alana held on.

They went into candy shops to steal candy without people knowing. They tied something around a guy's neck, painted someone's face, and took a car.

They were having fun living the life and doing fun things. Then they started going out. They found out from Jason's father that people were out to get them and that watch.

The people who were out to get them made suits so that when Jason pressed the button on the watch they would not freeze. Their suits were amazing. No one knew how they made them. They went in Jason's basement when Jason did not know it.

Jason knew they wanted that watch to take over the world. Jason told three other friends so he could have help. Jason's father had his phone, so Jason quickly called for their help. They also had no idea who the bad guys were. They had never seen them in their lives.

They found Jason and his friends and locked up Jason and his friends. Jason's dad came to the rescue to help him and his friends while getting the watch.

Before he made the watch, he made something where you press it and it gives you what you say, plus guards. He got out his guards and got some help from his other creation. He used his favorite power: super strength. After he got them free, he got the watch and put those people in jail.

They lived happily ever after with the amazing watch that they did many things with. They became rich. The watch made Tom rich because he made more and sold them to many companies for tons of money.

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