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Five Drafts Later...

Ninety-four Stories by
Sixth-grade Students of
Berkshire Middle School

Daniel Fisher, Editor

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Title by Burke Schure.

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TO THE AUTHORS

You already know “where you at.”
Now it’s the world’s turn to discover
how far you have come.
Your editor is proud of you.

ANIMAL PLANET

The Adventures of Fluffy the Sheep

He's a ram for our times. He's James Bond in sheep's clothing. He's Fluffy the Sheep, brought to life by Sam Putnam in THE ADVENTURES OF FLUFFY THE SHEEP.

"I'm so excited," thought Fluffy to himself. He picked up his bottle of "Baaaas" cologne (not "after shave," for it's not *that* season yet) and sprayed some on his fuzzy wool. "This is going to be a day in sheep's paradise."

Fluffy the Sheep was about to go out on a romantic graze with his girlfriend, Baaita. At 8:00 sharp, Fluffy met Baaita at "Some EWE-chanted Evening" – the newest romantic dinner spot in town. She looked gorgeous in her fresh, downy coat, and if Fluffy had the capability to do a wolf whistle, he would have. But whistling like a wolf when you are a sheep is NEVER a good idea.

Fluffy had reserved the best corner in the meadow. He had pre-ordered two dishes of new clover, topped with a tasty arrangement of Irish thistle. Baaita was impressed at his understanding of her palate. Fluffy almost lost his temper halfway through the meal due to the waiter, who was simply an old goat. Their meal arrived—much to Fluffy's dismay—with the corners chewed off, which is typical of all old goats.

When Baaita and Fluffy finally parted later that evening, Fluffy had not been happier in his life, for he had found his Ewe-come-true. He went home, took a shower, and went to bed after this exciting evening.

“BEEP-BEEP-BEEP!” At 7:30 the next morning, Fluffy woke up. He pulled on his favorite bathrobe and strolled into his living room. He intended to have a pleasant morning watching his favorite game shows, like *Supermarket Sheep* and *The Wool Is Right!*, but his relaxing morning was spoiled by a flashing newsbreak.

“This is SheepNN Network, bringing you the latest news. Now to you, James.”

“Thank you, Sheila. At approximately 9:30 last night, Miss Baaita, one of the famous Ewe-ettes from Radio City Music Hall, was sheep-napped from her home. Her maid, a nanny who has been with her since Miss Baaita’s childhood, came in from her evening constitutional and claimed that she saw Miss B being carried away by two burly-looking pigs. As the hogs threw Miss B in the car, she was reportedly screaming, “Fluffy! Fluffy – save me!” If anyone knows who “Fluffy” is, please call your local Fold Patrol, as “Fluffy” is wanted for questioning. Thank you, and back to you, Sheila, for the Saturday weather.”

“Thank you, James –”

Fluffy snapped off the television. “I’ve got to save Baaita!” he exclaimed, jumping up from his reclined Lazy Lamb. “Ditch the local Fold Patrol! They’ll never find Baaita. I’ll save her!”

He jumped in his hay wagon and roared off (this was a John Deere souped-up dragster, with SLX luxury comfort ride hay) to the airport. Fluffy conveniently owned his own personal jet, christened “The Shearer.” It was originally built for brief pleasure rides, but a friend of Fluffy’s had enhanced it with surveillance equipment, radars, and two anti-aircraft missile launchers, not to mention the finest in galley accoutrements. Fluffy could not only fight crime, he could whip up and serve a ten-course meal at a moment’s notice.

Little did Baaita know, but Fluffy had been in the Farmy Air Force for a brief tour of duty. He had the engines built to S-14 standards—the same as President George W. Baaaaach had on Ram Force One.

He fired up the engines, switched on the radar, set the anti-aircraft missile launchers to full power, and programmed the galley espresso machine—of exquisite Italian workmanship—to make a mocha latte, thinking he would need all the caffeine he could get. He was going to use all his resources to track down and save the young ewe of his dreams, his beautiful Baaita. Fortunately for him, this would not be extremely difficult, because he had implanted a homing device in the engagement ring he slipped on her hoof just last night. Yes, Baaita was to become his woolly wife, and he had won her heart just in the nick of time, for without the ring, she'd be mutton in no time.

Fluffy took off from the airport while drinking his mocha latte. He locked his sensors onto the homing beacon's signal and sat back for a long ride. Suddenly, Fluffy saw where the homing beacon was leading him—it was a slaughterhouse! Fluffy rechecked his scanners to make sure this was correct. Luckily the signal had been disrupted by interference from a satellite, and Baaita was *not* in the slaughterhouse. From his corrected scanners, it appeared that she was actually somewhere in Australia. Fluffy turned on the autopilot and got ready to save his Ewe. On the flight, Fluffy played *Baario Party 7* on his Sheep Station III.

Shortly, he arrived in Australia, where he was flagged into the airport by a couple of kangaroos, and landed successfully. He set off with his handheld sheep scanner to find Baaita.

After about five hours of trotting, he found the location of the homing beacon. "Go figure that they would build it on the biggest, most inaccessible mountain," thought Fluffy. The "mountain" was little more than a steep hill, but to a sheep it would be an exhausting climb. Before he got a chance to get one hoof on the rock, though, he heard a large THUMP behind him. Fluffy whirled around, but didn't see anything. He started to climb up the mountain, when the rock on both sides of him exploded. Once again, Fluffy turned around, but this time he saw a big shiny Battle-Droid. The droid said, "Surrender now, or you shall be eliminated."

Fluffy ran for cover behind some rocks as the droid shot at him. He dove behind a rock and whipped out his throwing knife. He popped up and hurled it with all his might toward the droid. With a small “ping,” it bounced off the droid. “Look at this specimen. It is over 200 years old. I will retrieve it and give it to my Master.” The droid then bent over to pick up the knife. This was exactly the reaction that Fluffy wanted.

He jumped on the droid and put a small timed detonator on the droid’s back. The droid snapped up and looked around to find what had touched him, but by then Fluffy was far away. The droid did a scan of himself to find out what had happened, and found the bomb on his back. “My language processors determine that the appropriate phrase for this situation would be ‘Darn it!’”...And with that, the droid blew up in a brilliant flash.

Slowly Fluffy climbed the mountain. Looking up at how far he had to climb, he decided he would have to make camp halfway up. Fluffy saw several jets flying in and out of the fortress on the hill. There were several sentries posted around the massive titanium doors. They were armed with heavy-duty military grade blaster cannons. There were also five stationary gunning turrets mounted on the walls. While wondering how he would get past all this security, he fell into a deep, long sleep.

In the middle of the night, Fluffy woke up to the sound of twigs snapping and the smell of mud. He shot up like a bullet and ran as fast as he could. Suddenly, a husky pig stepped out of the shadows, caught him, and said, “You ain’t goin’ nowhere, Flathoof!” And with that, he slapped a cloth over Fluffy’s mouth, and poor Fluffy drifted into unconsciousness.

He awoke to find himself in a hard steel chamber. “Last time I checked,” thought Fluffy, “my tent wasn’t made of steel.” He got up and looked around, and discovered he was in a jail cell. Suddenly, the previous night’s events all came rushing back into his head. He looked all around him, but

could see no doors. "I guess I'll have to wait it out until they get in here," he thought.

No sooner did he think this than the floor opened up beneath him and he fell onto a cold metal table. Instantly, he was strapped down by some evil-looking pigs. "I see you have fallen into the middle of our trap," came a cold voice. A large ugly pig stepped into the room. It was obvious that this hog had been rolling in the manure because of his stench. His skin was a disgusting-looking green, and he wore a dirty, torn cape. "Now you will be forced to tell me the vital information that the Farmy gave you. MWAHAHAHACHH - HACK - WHEEZE - COUGH - PLHACK!" Fluffy saw this putrid pig cough up a disgusting-looking hunk of mud. "Sorry, that's from the last mud bath. Anyway, I will now torture you until you give me the information you got from the Farmy," said the pig.

"Who are you, anyway?" asked Fluffy.

"I am the great, powerful, cunning ..."

"Sir, you forgot 'evil,'" interrupted one of the henchmen.

".... and eeeeeevil Maelstrom," said the pig.

"'Maelstrom'; what kind of name is that? I want your real name," said Fluffy.

"Oh, that one. My real name is Hoggy Pooperton, but you, lowly one, shall refer to me as MAELSTROM!" said the evil pig.

"Oh, I see now," said Fluffy. Hoggy was one of the animals that Fluffy had known when he was in the Farmy. Halfway through his career, though, Hoggy was kicked out of the Farmy for "accidentally" blowing up his commander-in-chief.

"You twisted, demented, horrible hog! I'll never tell you anything," snarled Fluffy.

"Then, I shall SHEARRRRR you!" shouted Maelstrom. He got out a large, dull, rusty, and suspiciously stained razor. Without even the benefit of the most lowly shaving cream (Fluffy always used *Baaa-basol*, by Fa-baah-bio, but the torture

chamber was not as well-stocked as Fluffy's spa), Maelstrom started the shearing.

"No ewe worth her salt will ever take another look at you once I have finished," cackled Maelstrom evilly. "Plus, you'll get a terrible rash, and I am out of after-shear lotion. Ha!"

The enormous razor pulled and scraped its way across Fluffy's delicate hide. After several horribly painful minutes of shearing, Maelstrom said, "Enough! We will see what information you will give us after you see what will happen to Miss Baaita if you don't." The henchmen picked Fluffy up and threw him into a different jail cell. He looked around and saw Baaita!

"Oh, Fluffy," exclaimed Baaita. "You're all bald. Did they hurt you?"

"No," whispered Fluffy, "but we better get out of here before they hurt *you*."

Baaita squeaked, "These walls are made of hard-packed mud. How can we get through them?"

Fluffy looked around and saw the old goat that had served them dinner just two nights before. Fluffy decided that now was not the best time to ask him why he was there, but instead sauntered over to ask the old goat a question.

"Hey, you," said Fluffy.

"The name's Munch. What do you need?" said the goat.

"Are you hungry?" asked Fluffy.

"Yes."

"Really hungry? So hungry you could eat anything?" said Fluffy.

"Well, yes, that's what goats do," replied the goat.

"How about you try eating through these walls?" asked Fluffy.

"Oooh, that's a good idea. I'll try that," said Munch, and promptly the goat began chewing through the walls.

"Aren't you a clever little ram," gushed Baaita.

As the goat ate through the walls, Fluffy and Baaita followed behind. Eventually they were outside the fortress.

"Ooooh, that was a good meal," said Munch.

“So, how are we going to get off the mountain now?” asked Baaita.

“I have no clue. So Munch, how did *you* get here?” asked Fluffy.

“Well, remember when I served you dinner? I was supposed to put poison in your food, but I didn’t. So Maelstrom got angry with me, and threw me in jail.”

“That’s interesting,” replied Baaita, “but I still have no idea how we are going to get off this mountain.”

“Let’s go explore the jungle,” said Fluffy. So they set off to look through the jungle. Fluffy was leading the trio, with Baaita close behind, and Munch eating any excess foliage. Suddenly Fluffy disappeared from sight. A few seconds later Baaita heard a loud THUUUMP!

“Fluffy, what happened?” she screamed. “Are you okay?”

“I’m okay; in fact, I’m more than okay. I’ve just stumbled upon the secret entrance to Maelstrom’s castle.”

“Why would we want to go back into that horrible place?” asked Munch.

“Because maybe when everyone is asleep, we can steal a jet and bust out of here,” replied Fluffy.

“Great idea, Fluffy,” simpered Baaita.

When nightfall came, the trio went through the entrance and snuck into the castle. Eventually from following some signs that pointed to the hangar (you see, pigs have almost no sense of direction, so they are constantly getting lost; hence, the signs), they came to a large steel door with a lock on it.

“If this is Maelstrom’s idea of high security, he’s definitely losing his touch,” said Fluffy.

Within minutes, Fluffy had the lock opened, and slowly he swung open the hangar doors. The whole hangar was crisscrossed with millions of thin red motion sensor beams. There were several racks of missile launchers stationed around the hangar, presumably as a “present” for intruders.

“I take it back that Maelstrom is losing his touch,” said Fluffy.

“Is there any way to shut them off?” Baaita asked.

"I have no clue, but for now we're going up the air ducts," answered Fluffy.

"What for?" asked Baaita.

"Generally there are power supply lines in air ducts, and if we can cut those, the motion sensors will turn off," said Fluffy.

So they went up the air duct until Fluffy came to a power line.

"How are you going to cut it?" asked Baaita.

"I'll chomp through it," said Munch.

And so he did. The motion sensors turned off, but unfortunately for them, Maelstrom had an alarm on the power supply.

"Geez, I didn't think Maelstrom was *that* high-tech!" exclaimed Fluffy. "We've got to get out of here."

Fluffy burst out of the air duct and ran toward the nearest jet.

"Come on, guys, we're out of here!" They all hopped in the jet and Fluffy punched up the engines. But with a sputtering cough, the engines died.

"Darn, we're out of gas," said Baaita.

"We're not out of gas," replied Fluffy. "The starter's just not working."

"So, then, how are we going to light the engines?" whined Baaita, feeling rather nervous due to the burly pigs running into the room with enormous guns.

"All we have to do is hold a lighter to the engines and they'll light," said Fluffy.

"I'll do it!" yelled Munch. "One complication, though, Fluffy. How am I supposed to turn this thing on?" inquired Munch, curiously looking at the lighter.

"Oh, sorry about that. Here, use this flint and scrape it against the fuselage," said Fluffy.

Munch leapt out of the cockpit and grabbed his flint. Crawling down the tail of the plane, he readied the flint in his hoof. Just as the burly pigs were about to shoot at him, with a small *snap-hissssss* Munch sparked the flint, and the turbine

roared to life. The jet took off with a roar. Munch crawled back into the cockpit, and settled down. "Now we just have to get rid of these darn pigs following us!"

"Here we go," yelled Fluffy. Fluffy soared off toward a deep crevice in the rock. He turned the jet completely vertical and started flying through the canyon. One of the pig jets didn't turn quickly enough and blew up on the rocks.

"There goes one!" said Baaita.

Baaita jumped behind the controls of the two anti-aircraft guns and started firing them off at random. As they came out of the canyon, the pig jets fired their machine guns at the stolen pig jet. They flew low to the ground, and luckily for them, one of Maelstrom's gas tankers was flying by. Baaita targeted it and let loose a missile. It found its mark and exploded. One of the pig pilots, temporarily blinded by the explosion, could not see where he was going and crashed into the ground.

"We can't keep this up much longer," yelled Fluffy. "We're running out of fuel." Fluffy turned back toward the fortress.

"What are you doing?" yelled Baaita.

"Just watch," said Fluffy.

As the jet soared over the top of the fortress, a large homing missile shot out of the base and started following the pig jet. With some good flying skills, Fluffy managed to get the last pig jet between the missile and Fluffy's jet. The missile locked onto the last pig jet and blew it up. Fluffy soared off toward the airport to land.

"Fluffy! We're all out of gas!" screamed Baaita.

"Hold on!" yelled Fluffy. "Everybody lock down into crash positions!"

The jet faltered once, twice, and then plunged down and crashed into the underbrush. Dazed, but unhurt, the trio climbed out of the cockpit.

"How far do you think we are from the airport?" asked Baaita. But before Fluffy could reply, there was a snap of a twig.

“Who’s there?” shouted Fluffy. “Show yourself!”

“I AM showing myself,” said the mysterious voice.

“Then where ARE you?” asked Fluffy.

“I’m at your feet, you massive hulking cretin!”

Fluffy looked down in amazement and finally saw a puny penguin standing by his leg, with attitude written all over his face.

“What brings you to MY neck of the woods?” asked the penguin. “And who and what are you?”

“We crash-landed our jet here. We’re two sheep and a goat that escaped from Maelstrom’s prison. But who are YOU?”

The penguin replied, “I am Jumbo, the smallest penguin on earth.”

This was nowhere near an understatement. Jumbo’s head was about as big as one of Fluffy’s hooves, and he only came up to just above the sheep’s knee.

“How can I help you?” Jumbo asked.

“We need transportation to the airport. Can you give us that?”

“Of course I can!” exclaimed Jumbo. “I’d like to introduce you to someone. Follow me.”

After a few minutes of walking through the underbrush, they came to a clearing. Sitting in the middle of this clearing was one of the most beautiful things the animals had ever seen. “It’s so...tough-looking,” said Fluffy.

“It’s a work of art,” commented Baaita.

“It’s shiny,” added Munch.

“And let me tell ya, this baby gets 38 miles to the gallon!” bragged Jumbo.

For, sitting in the middle of the clearing, was the biggest Harley-Davidson motorcycle they had ever seen.

Fluffy almost wolf-whistled (he would have if he could), but as you recall, it’s very improper to wolf-whistle when one is a sheep.

The four animals mounted the Hog, and rode off toward the airport. Once they arrived there, Fluffy, Baaita and

Munch said good-bye to Jumbo, and got into the Shearer to ready for take-off.

“There is no way I am lighting the engine on THIS jet!” cried Munch.

“Don’t worry—you won’t have to,” replied Fluffy.

And on the way home, Fluffy served them a ten-course meal, courtesy of the autopilot and the well-appointed galley.

The Fish and the Tie

*In a certain school of fish, there is a poetic individual who uses his teacher's neckties as inspiration. A picture is worth at least a thousand words in **THE FISH AND THE TIE**, by **Malarie French**.*

One day in a lake called Google, little fish were boarding a bus to get to school. They all agreed that they had the best teacher in the world. His name was Mr. Fisher. He was cool, funny, smart, the most fun teacher ever, and handsome if I do say so myself. Even though you're thinking fish can't talk, well, you're wrong. They were talking about their weekends when somebody asked why Mr. Fisher wore strange ties each day. And this is where the story begins.

It was 9:30 A.M. on a Monday morning when they were finally settled down. Everyone sat down and they all asked questions or told comments about their weekend. Then, one boy (fish) named Liam asked Mr. Fisher why he wore such strange ties. Everyone was always waiting to hear someone ask that question of Mr. Fisher. Mr. Fisher asked what was so strange about his ties. He knew that the ties were weird, but he wanted to hear Liam's response.

Liam was a smart and humorous fish. His hobbies were drawing and being funny. He always drew pictures during class. The next day, he came up to Mr. Fisher and started describing what his fish tie looked like. It was a tuna fish with gray scales and one eyeball staring straight at you. Liam described it as "A cold day full of gray and people's eyes just staring right at you; reptiles or some kind of scaly thing wanting to creep up on you."

All the kids in the class were whispering to each other, thinking Liam would be in trouble. But to their surprise, Mr. Fisher wasn't angry with Liam. He actually asked Liam to describe his tie every school day. Ever since that day, Liam always admired Mr. Fisher's ties. In fact, he said, "If I don't say I like your tie every school day, I give you permission to give me a detention."

One day, Mr. Fisher wasn't wearing a tie. Liam didn't know what to do. He was confused and surprised. He couldn't think of anything to describe Mr. Fisher's tie. He enjoyed Mr. Fisher's small, humorous joke even though he was expecting a detention. When Mr. Fisher came to talk to him, he wasn't upset Liam had no description for his "tie"; he was actually happy!

Mr. Fisher told Liam that it's good that he couldn't always find an answer. Liam understood, but just then he figured out the answer: Mr. Fisher was wearing an invisible tie! From that day on Liam was happy, but he still admired Mr. Fisher's tie.

-Mr. Fisher

The Flight of the Penguins

Penguins fly? They do when they find an airplane and head to the Amazon rainforest in **THE FLIGHT OF THE PENGUINS**,
by **Danny Cohen**.

On the continent of Antarctica there lived four penguins: Max, Fred, George, and Bob. One day the penguins wanted to do something different. They wanted an adventure. So they set off away from home.

After about a half hour of walking, Bob thought he saw something in the distance. It was something big. The penguins couldn't believe what they were seeing.

They had all heard stories about these things. They are very rare around where they live. But believe it or not, they were standing in front of an airplane.

"Shotgun!" yelled Max, as they all ran toward the plane.

Inside, the plane was beautiful, with all different colors, leather seats, and even a TV in front of all five seats.

"I think they call this kind of plane a 'Sawthweest,' a major competitor with 'Noethweest,'" said Fred.

Meanwhile, Max was in the cockpit staring at the big, red button. "It couldn't hurt if I only touched it for one second, could it?" Max thought. He pushed the button.

And off they went.

"Uh-oh," said Max as the plane began to take off.

After awhile George got bored and, by accident, happened to push the same button Max did. The plane came crashing down somewhere in the Amazon rainforest.

The penguins got out of the plane, and for the first time in their lives saw trees. “Well,” said Bob, “we might as well start walking and see if we can find something to eat. I’m starving.” And with that, the penguins started into the forest.

After about a half hour of walking, the penguins came to a big waterfall. “Finally, a drink,” said Fred. The penguins stayed and rested there for a while when all of a sudden a monkey popped out of a tree.

The penguins were so scared they couldn’t move. But then the monkey said, “Hi. My name is Mark.” The penguins quickly made friends with Mark.

Mark told the penguins how he had been trying to rescue his mom, who had been kidnapped by snakes. “We could help you,” said George. So they made a plan.

“C’mon, snakes. Come out here and fight me like a man,” said Bob. Immediately the snakes came out from everywhere.

Then out of nowhere, Max dashed in the opposite direction of Bob, and more snakes followed him. Soon the rest of the penguins were running everywhere and all of the snakes were out of the nest.

Then, all at the same time, the penguins jumped into four different holes, too small for the snakes to fit into.

While all of this was going on, Mark had slipped into the nest and saved his mom.

The penguins jumped out of the hole when the snakes had gone away. “Thanks a lot,” said Mark and his mom.

“No problem,” said the penguins. “We were just trying to help.” And with that they started for the plane.

Horse Party

*Horses just want to have fun! In **HORSE PARTY** by **Isabella Tillman**, find out how Isabella's four-legged friends kick up their shoes.*

“While I slept last night in the barn’s lodge, I had the craziest dream! In it, I dreamt that you horses had a party. Somehow you got out of your stall and let all the other horses out. In my dream, I think you were even wearing lampshades and dancing!” Isabella said as she groomed me.

My name is Maja, but it’s pronounced “Maya.” I’m the horse who threw the party, and what a party it was! It was my fifth birthday and my first birthday in America, so I decided to throw an awesome birthday bash.

I was born in Denmark. I grew up at a nice farm where the weather was cool and the grass was always green and delicious. When I was almost five years old, I was sold to an American girl. One day a trailer came and took me to the airport. Another horse named Lola and I were packed in a big wooden pallet and flown to America. Then, we were taken to Michigan where I met Isabella, my new girl.

When I got to my new home in Michigan, I was put in a field all by myself to get used to the horse farm. My first few days were pretty bad, spent all alone in a small field without much grass to eat. I was excited when I was finally put in a paddock with three other horses: Sari, a big, light bay mare; Grace, a slender white and brown splattered mare; and Seneaca, a tall, dark bay mare.

I tried to make friends with them, but they didn’t like me very much. Sari, the leader of the group, liked her paddock just the way it was and didn’t want any newcomers.

Whenever I would walk up to them, they would gallop to the other end of the pasture, bucking and kicking like I was a monster. *Queen Sari* made sure that I didn't get anywhere near Grace, who I was drawn to because of her odd and pretty coloring.

After leaving Sari's paddock, I was placed in a new paddock with Stella, Belle, and Pia. They were all nice to me. We became fast friends, and Pia and I became best friends. My birthday was just two weeks away. After all of that, I knew I needed a spectacular birthday party. So Stella, Belle, Pia, and I started planning.

Back to the party: What Isabella said is true, but we did lots more than that. There had to be music for my party, so earlier that day, I snuck into the lodge and took the boom box with the CD changer and Isabella's CDs. Luckily, she has good taste in music. The night before the party, Belle and I took a quick trip to the community center down the road. We kicked open the front door and "borrowed" all the ballet and Mexican dance recital costumes.

We had my party in the old field behind the big brown abandoned shed, because we knew no one would find us there. It was a perfect night for my party. The half moon shown over the grassy field, giving us plenty of light. D.J. Fortune got the party started by spinning some tunes. So we all stood up on our hind legs and danced to the song "Dance to the Music." Then we grabbed the sombrero hats and sang, "Olay, Olay, Olay; Olay, Olay, Olay, Olay; feeling hot, hot, hot," as the song blared from the CD boom box.

After that, I decided we needed to liven up the party by getting the lampshades to wear as hats from the lodge. "If you send me with Ginger and Lila, you know we can get the job done," Lady told me.

Belle agreed and commented, "We know these ponies can get the job done, because they are little, sneaky, and always on their toes."

I told her she was right and we sent them in. The ponies dressed in all black and crept silently into the lodge. When

they got back, Lady informed us that “taking the lampshades was like taking hay from a foal. We took all the lampshades without waking up Isabella or any of her friends.”

Wearing our new stylish lampshade hats, we ate some snacks and did some disco dancing back in the field. Belle and Sari were enjoying the last of the apple and oat salad when Stella came up and grumbled, “Where’s the rest of the food? There is never enough food at these parties.”

“You’re always eating, you pudgy little pony. The food is gone because you ate it all!” Sari sneered.

Suddenly the music stopped and Belle, Pia, Lila and I sprang onto the center of the dance floor, all wearing pink ballet tutus. The CD boom box began playing the theme from the *Nutcracker* and we started twirling, spinning, leaping and swaying. We moved in perfect unison, gracefully gliding across the grassy dance floor. After completing our performance, which we had practiced for weeks, my guests cheered. I felt wonderful.

Upon our return to the field after changing back into our party attire, General smiled and said, “Nice tutus, girls.”

Tank added, “Rock on, dude-ettes!”

Of course, Sari had to comment, “It would have been better if I were in it, but I guess it was decent.”

Next, some of us danced in the middle of a circle made by the others who watched and cheered us on. One of the horses, named Tank, wore a navy blue fringed lampshade while he did the “Robot.” Every time Tank, the huge, grey draft horse, took a step, the ground shook. York, a towering and muscular bay horse, moonwalked to the song “Benny and the Jets” while wearing a petite ruffled yellow lampshade. I wore a round baby blue lampshade with bows, which perfectly complemented my silky dark brown fur, long legs and big brown eyes. Two other mares—Stella, a plump tan pony, in a huge, floppy, red lampshade, and Belle, a tall copper mare, in teeny, tiny, pointy, purple lampshade—did the bump with me. General, a dashing bay gelding with a bright, bold white stripe down his face, breakdanced while wearing a dark blue

Yankees baseball cap flipped to the side and a gold rope necklace with a carrot medallion. General completed his look with a black leather jacket and pair of mirrored sunglasses he borrowed from Larry, the barn foreman. He spun and spun in a totally awesome breakdancing move, and then froze with his arms crossed and sunglasses pulled down. All the horses went wild and chanted “Rock On!” Oh yeah, I really know how to throw a party!

It was quiet and peaceful as I enjoyed Isabella brushing me and rubbing my favorite spot on my neck just below my right ear. I was almost asleep when suddenly a gust of wind blew through the barn and that baby blue lampshade with the pretty little bows came tumbling down from the storage area and landed on Isabella’s head.

“You did have the party!” Isabella exclaimed. I just rolled my eyes and winked.

The Story of the Sad-Eyed Dog

Poor puppy! How can he get help when his home is on the streets?
Kara Worden wags this tale in **THE STORY OF THE SAD-EYED DOG**.

Once upon a time there was a dirty brown dog named John. He was a cool dog who loved to play fetch. He was not a wimpy house dog that was polite and neat. Nope, he was a street kind of dog.

John was a real trickster who liked to make lots of trouble. He did all kinds of bad stuff. One day, for example, he sneaked into a meat store and stole some meat from an old lady. She yelled for help and the butcher went running after John. He grinned back as he ran away and disappeared. He also liked to chase cats and scare dogs by sneaking up behind them and barking. And he also enjoyed taking balls away from kids.

One day, John the street dog took a walk through the wicked woods near the park. He heard about the wicked woods from people, but he was no scaredy cat. Since he loved to sniff other animals, he thought these woods would be a great place to wander around and enjoy the smells.

After about an hour of sniffing through the grass, he suddenly began to see things in red and blue. He rubbed his eyes with his paw, but nothing happened. He still could only see in red and blue. The trees were blue. The grass was red. And he saw a blue and red squirrel digging nuts. He started to get scared and began to run faster and faster until he ran

outside the gate to the woods. He was scared to death and didn't know what to do.

Even though John got out of the woods, everything still was blue and red. He started to howl as loud as he could. All the other cats, dogs and people in the town heard the howling and came to see what the commotion was all about.

Trying to get help for his eyes, John tried whimpering. But no one seemed to care since John looked his same old self. Since everything seemed okay, everyone went back to what they were doing. John felt sad and upset. He wondered why people didn't help him and left.

Then John remembered all the dirty tricks he used to play. *Maybe that's the reason why the cats and people didn't want to help*, he thought to himself. Frustrated, he headed back to town, trying to think of a way to get someone to help him.

Walking back to town, he saw the red road, and the blue houses, and then he heard the birds in the sky. The birds were red. The sky was blue. Suddenly, he heard a scream and he saw a blue baby crawling across the road with a red car speeding towards the baby. The racing car got about two meters from the baby when John quickly zoomed across the road and gently picked up the baby by the diaper. The car zoomed by, missing the baby by an inch of its wheel. John walked smoothly to the sidewalk, careful not to drop the baby, and gave it to a very scared-looking mother standing on the sidewalk.

The mother was so grateful that she bent down to kiss John on the nose, and she saw blue and red dots in John's eyes. "Are you okay?" she asked. John just whimpered and looked out from his sad eyes. "Poor little puppy. I'm going to get you some help for your eyes. They don't look good."

The mother drove John to the vet and got his eyes tested. The vet gave the lady some eye drops for John's eyes. The woman had John stay in her house until he got better. After two weeks went by, John started seeing in his normal black and white again.

After staying in the woman's home, John came to see what it was like to be a house dog. It was relaxing, easy, clean and he did not have to get into trouble to get food. The mom and the baby liked having John around, too. So the mom invited John to live with them forever, and he wagged his tail yes. John the street dog never played tricks again. Well, sometimes.

The Three Little Wolves

*We grew up feeling sorry for the pigs, but **THE THREE LITTLE WOLVES** by **Simon Trask** presents a different picture of what happened among these age-old rivals.*

“Yum, yum, yum. Delicious bacon, boys,” said Mama Wolf with a piece of bacon still in her mouth. “Where did you get it?”

“Well—umm—we can’t tell you!” the three wolves said in a nervous chorus.

Well, if they won’t tell you, I will. Let me introduce myself. I am the male, literate, spider-butler that lives in Mama Wolf’s house. I am named Spidyerachnid Stringyclod Webster. Don’t laugh at the name. I come from a large family and that was the best name left.

The story began five years ago ...

The three little wolves, Matt, Max, and Mike, were playing tag with their mom. But their mom had to leave them for 20 minutes to get food for dinner. I know this because I was cleaning and observing the mayhem that the three little wolves were creating.

George Piglet (Sumo Pig for short) was lurking around, looking for an opportunity to come and try to beat them up, but the three little wolves beat him up instead! They bit him and scratched him, teased him, and jumped on him until he ran away screaming and bleeding.

From that moment, George Piglet sought revenge. Throughout the wolves’ childhood, Sumo pig was close to sitting on the wolves, but he always ran into a tree limb, got stuck in a fence or between two boulders, or couldn’t fit in a

tunnel. I should tell you that George suffered from extremely poor eyesight and relied mostly on his sense of smell. How would a spider know this, you ask? I may be small, but I am very observant, and from time to time I go on field trips, traveling in the ear of one of the little wolves.

As time went by ...

The three little wolves got bigger and started fighting all the time, so they had to move out of their mom's home. As a resident and cleaner, I was glad about this.

The woods were covered with building supplies, so they wandered around in the woods looking for materials to build their own houses. Mike found a chopped-down tree that had been hollowed out by ants. He patched the holes with twigs and I wove the curtains as a housewarming gift. Max found a small tree that he could climb up onto and built a roofed platform like a tree house. I spun the ladder and a safety net. Matt came upon a cave just outside the forest on a path, and also a nearby pile of boulders. He then built a small house with a chimney and door. I gave Matt a set of silk napkins as yet another housewarming gift.

All this time, George Piglet kept growing. He weighed 700 pounds and he was a champion sumo wrestler. He went in search of the three little wolves that made his childhood so miserable.

Finally he found Mike, who was lending me his ear. With one push, George sent the log rolling down a steep hill. As it tumbled down the hill, the log gathered speed. Mike and I managed to scamper out of the log and run away to join Max in the small tree. Actually, Mike did the scampering. I was in a clingy mood!

George Piglet found Max's house and uprooted the tree with one effortless shove. The two brothers ran for their lives to find their brother Matt in his cave. I have to tell you that I was clinging to the ear for dear life.

George Piglet found Matt's home, but he was too fat to enter the cave through the door. He spied the chimney, but he couldn't get up on top of the chimney. He tried several

times, but rolled back down. With frustration, he grabbed the iron flagpole that Matt had placed by the front door and, gathering all his years of resentment, he smashed the chimney apart so there only remained a hole. He then jumped down the hole.

He got stuck with a dull thwack and thud halfway down. Then there was silence.

The three wolves were ready for their doom. But someone whispered in Mike's ear, "Light a fire, dimwit." The three wolves eagerly got to work. Soon the delicious smell of fresh bacon was wafting through the cave.

So now you know the story of the three little wolves.

The Two Opposites

THE TWO OPPOSITES, by *Ellie Schreiber*, tells of two sister grizzly bears with very different personalities. When Shana is called upon to live up to the reputation of her sister Eliza, her true test begins.

In the gorgeous jungle of Yershum, there lived two opposite twins. They were both grizzly bears. The jungle had many different animals like wolves, bears, wild cats, dogs, gorillas, monkeys and all different kinds of species.

The grizzly bears' names were Shana, meaning gorgeous and intelligent, and Eliza, meaning strong and fearless. Shana was always very scared and Eliza was never scared of anything.

One late afternoon there was a severe storm, and the whole jungle was rumbling. The animals thought there was a curse on the jungle. They were very superstitious.

The courage from Eliza made her want to stop the storm. Eliza's mom and sister said it was fine for her to stop the storm, so Eliza went.

For weeks the jungle was waiting for Eliza to get back. The whole jungle (including her sister and mother) thought she was dead. The mother sent Shana off to search for Eliza to see if she had died, and to stop the storm.

Shana always thought of herself as a scaredy-cat, but the whole jungle was depending on her. Her mother always told her to believe in herself, or she wouldn't be successful.

Hours later the storms went away, but there were no sightings of Eliza and Shana. A baby bird spotted Shana, but the bird couldn't fly, so no one knew whether or not she was still alive. Then a jaguar spotted her and told the whole jungle.

Shana started to hear a strange noise. She didn't know what the noise was. When she got to the jungle, she saw every animal cheering for her. The jungle didn't know how much pain she was in because Eliza had died. She saw her mother and ran to her and started crying, "Eliza is dead!"

Shana was famous in this jungle. Years later her mother died so she was all alone, but she's not scared about that. All she was scared about is if someone found out her secret: She didn't stop the storm; it just went away.

Years later after Shana's death, animals in the jungle are still talking about it today.

The jungle is now a famous landmark because of Shana.

ANOTHER TIME,
ANOTHER PLACE

A Blast from the Past

*Four boy scouts go exploring, and find themselves on a path to another time. Drew Steffes is your leader on a journey he fittingly calls **A BLAST FROM THE PAST**.*

One moonlit night at summer camp, I went hiking through the woods with my patrol of boy scouts. Luke, Alex, Sean and myself are pretty typical eleven-year-old boys—adventurous, rowdy, and sometimes naughty. Taking a path that was rarely used soon got us lost. We walked up a steep, narrow, winding path that wound its way through the woods. As the grade increased my legs started to ache.

The moon cast an eerie, bluish glow over the mountain, causing the maples to shimmer in the darkness. It was a warm night, but a cool breeze filled the air as we climbed higher and higher.

We came to a cave-like entrance covered up with a wall of old, rotted wooden boards. There was wood, scrap metal and nails all over the place. We realized it was the entrance to an old abandoned mine. We looked around and saw that no one was in sight. I poked around at the boarded-up entrance, and by pushing a few pieces of lumber, the entrance gave way, opening up a dark and dusty passage to the mine.

Our curiosity got the best of us, and we decided to go down into the mine and check it out. Even though we had bright flashlights, the mine was as dark as pitch as we headed down the tunnel. We smelled the musty odor of the damp walls, and it seemed as if no one had been here in a hundred years. We went deeper and deeper, and heard the scurrying

squeaks of rats in the shaft. The flashlights were of no use in this place, because before we knew it, we fell into a shaft.

I didn't know how far we fell, since it was so dark. We kept falling and falling, or at least that's what it seemed like. Miraculously, no one got hurt when we hit the ground.

Stunned and dirty, we looked around in the darkness, and spotted the glow of what appeared to be a light in the distance. I heard the dragging sound of heavy footsteps, and the clinking of some kind of hammer. The light became brighter as the noise became louder. My heart began pounding like a racehorse. Luke kept quiet. Alex had a blank look on his face, his eyes wide and his mouth gaping. Sean started to shake in fear.

A middle-aged man appeared, scruffy and drab as a coal bin. His face looked tattered and his teeth were rotten. His clothes looked like something from another time, but before I could wonder about it, he growled, "Who are you?"

Alex said that we were from Michigan. The man replied, "Oh, we're from Michigan, too," as he pointed to a sign which read "Northern Michigan Mine." Then he commanded us, shouting, "Get over here!" as if he were our boss. I tried to explain to him that we were just lost in the mine, but he wouldn't listen. It was as if he couldn't even hear me. He just pointed to the iron picks on the ground and yelled, "Get to work!"

It was then that we noticed the others. The man's oil lantern cast shadows on several children down in the mine. I could see that their clothes were old-fashioned—leather suspenders holding up woolen pants, overalls, and cotton shirts—and I started to think that we had drifted back into another era. The faces on the child workers appeared pale, almost translucent, and a chill ran down my spine. The man growled again, "Take a pick and get to work!"

I spun around and looked at my friends. They had the same feeling as I did: fear. We were trapped, not just in a mine, but back in time! Alex asked me, "What are we going to do now?"

I thought fast as I moved to get a pick. I stumbled over something heavy and looked down. It was a box of dynamite. I shone my flashlight upon it, and the box was dated 1888!

I quickly shoved a few sticks to Alex, and he knew exactly what to do. Since we're scouts, we all had matches on us. We stuffed the dynamite into the cracks of the wall, lit the fuses, and ran to the other side of the mine, plugging our ears.

In a second, a flash of light gave way to a huge blast. Rock and dust blew all over the place, leaving a hole in the side of the mountain. After the dust settled, we saw the moon pouring in through the opening. We walked out, confused and dumbfounded, and silently found our way back to camp.

When we got to base camp we told the scoutmaster our story about the miners, the man, and his lantern. Mr. Gorlow squinted at us in suspicion. I could see that he didn't believe our story. He waved his hand at us dismissively, saying that we had a busy day in the heat, and that we should go to bed, but that we would all go back and check it out in the morning. We were pretty tired, so we packed it in for the night.

The next day arrived, and much to my surprise, Mr. Gorlow took us back out to where the mine was during our morning hike. I looked around, along with Luke, Alex, and Sean. No one was there but us scouts. I turned to Alex. He just stood there in disbelief, doubting the events of the night before.

In the afternoon we went down to the Charlesville Historical Museum to see if we could find anything out that could explain our strange experience. Inside, we found dozens of artifacts and memorabilia about the local area. An old man named Greg, who lived in the town his whole life, was the historian. He was talking about the town's history and name when I asked, "Do you know of any abandoned mines around here?" Greg recalled a list of many mines, and then we heard him say, "Northern Michigan Mine."

Sean shouted out, "That's the one!" We then explained how we went on a hike and found the mine. Luke said that we went exploring inside a little, and that's why we came to

see him, in order to find out about the mine's history. Even though Luke twisted the truth, Greg was obviously upset with us.

He said, "Why were you down there? You know no one's been down there since the explosion." He then told us the story of the mine, and how a gang of men took it over back in 1888. Greg said they put kids to work down there as slave labor. As the story went, the kids finally rebelled, and blew up the mine. Some of the miners died, but the kids escaped through a hole they blasted out of the side of the mountain.

We all looked at each other. A cold chill ran down my spine. Greg said, "There have been many stories over the years about people seeing ghosts over by the mine. Can't say I saw any myself, but plenty of folks 'round here believe in 'em."

Alex gave me a nudge, and we thanked Greg for his time and went back to camp, not saying a word to each other. There was no need. We already knew each other's thoughts. We were there. We saw them. And we went back into their history, if just for a moment in time.

The Creature and the Elf

*For wishes to come true, you must work for them. This is what Larry and the creature discover in **THE CREATURE AND THE ELF**, by Adam Egrin.*

“Bye, Larry; see you tomorrow,” said Matty.

“See you, Matty.”

Larry was a very nice, smart, muscular, and helpful elf. He was an only child. He had many friends, but he still felt a little lonely. He wished that he had a special friend. Larry hopped on his bike and started going home from school.

When he got home he took off his backpack and took off his shoes. He yelled out to his mom and dad, “Hello.” They greeted him with a hug when he walked into the kitchen. His mom was making one of his favorite meals, meatloaf.

He sat down for dinner after doing his homework. Larry’s parents were a little concerned because he was so quiet during dinner. Larry seemed a little depressed.

His mom asked him, “What’s the matter?” Larry said he just wished that he had a brother, that’s all. His mom said that was a nice thought, but it would be very hard to do. Larry then headed off to bed. He has always been afraid of the dark. He carried a nightlight with him.

It was very dark outside Larry’s house, but a lot of stars were able to be seen that night. He bent down on his knees, looked out the window towards the brightest star that he could see, and wished that he could soon have somebody special to care about. Larry did not know that out far away in the heavens, 75 light years in distance, a little creature wished on that exact same star that evening.

The little creature looked like a little bug. On his planet he was picked on a lot. His name was even supposed to be one that would encourage others to pick on him. His name was Cookabuga Nansue. Cookabuga Nansue gets “picked on” by his family and other kids all over the planet.

He was very different from the others because he was a very good little creature. Everybody else looked like him but acted totally different. His planet, if you ever saw it, was a scary-looking place.

The name of his planet was X-pobo. Planet X-pobo is a dark planet. It is not very pleasant, and has a bunch of volcanoes on it. It also has Bad Lands, icebergs, and swamps. While the name of the planet sounds funny, there is nothing funny about living there.

This little creature, Cookabuga Nansue, wished for someone he could call a true friend. While he was praying at the same time as Larry, he was interrupted by a mean yell from his brother, who said, “Shut up.” This did not bother him because it was a common occurrence. He was interrupted again. On the TV news was an announcement that a device, called a portal, was invented. A portal is like a box that people go into and select a planet to be able to be transported to. This would allow for travel to other planets. All of the creatures wanted to destroy other planets. This is how mean they could be.

Only one portal had been made so far. That gave Cookabuga Nansue an idea. He would escape from this planet by using the portal. He would go so far away that he would no longer be picked on.

Larry was fast asleep on his planet. He was dreaming about a special friend. He wondered what he would look like and what they would be able to do together. All of a sudden he heard a loud zinging sound and saw a flash of light. Larry did not know it at the time that this was actually Cookabuga Nansue. Cookabuga Nansue had found his way to the portal and figured out how to transport himself to another planet. He

did not know it at the time that he was transported to planet Happlael, where Larry lives.

Cookabuga Nansue was amazed at what he first saw of this new world. It was calm, and seemed to be a very beautiful, happy, place. Cookabuga Nansue then heard a hooting sound and became scared. He ran to find a place to hide. Cookabuga Nansue did not know that the hooting sound came from an owl.

Meanwhile Larry was in his parents' room asking them about the sound he heard and the light that he saw. Larry was told by his dad, "It was nothing. Go back to sleep. It is very late." Larry decided that his dad was right, so he headed back to bed.

The next day when his parents were off at work, Larry came home after school and went up to his room. He puts his school clothes in his closet. He did not notice the little creature huddled in the corner of his closet. Cookabuga Nansue had been having a hard day trying to make friends with fire hydrants and bunny rabbits near Larry's house. Being curious, he decided to go inside while Larry and his family were away. He happened to be in Larry's closet when Larry came home from school.

That night they finally came face to face when Larry went into the closet to get dressed for bed. Cookabuga Nansue finally got out from underneath the clothes and other junk that were in the closet.

Cookabuga Nansue and Larry screamed out at the same time. Larry closed the closet. He went into his parents' room yelling, "There is a monster in my closet!" His parents went with Larry back to his room to see what he was talking about. Cookabuga Nansue went back underneath the clothes once again. Larry's parents opened the closet door only to see a pile of clothes and junk. They told Larry to go to bed. He obeyed them.

During the night, Larry woke up, a little curious as to what that thing was that he saw. While trying to confront his fear, he went back to the closet, this time with a rubber sword to protect himself. He opened up the closet door. He couldn't

believe what he saw. It was true; there was a creature in the closet. This creature looked like an enlarged bug. This creature previously was screaming when Larry was screaming. This time when Larry opened up the closet, he charged forward.

The creature seemed to be sad and crying. The creature said sobbingly, "All I wanted to do was to have a true friend, and now I get this." Surprisingly, Larry understood what he said. They happened to speak the same language.

The two planets used to be one planet but were split apart by Judi, who created the planet in the first place. The elves had been scared of the bugs. The bugs decided to become mean because they thought the elves were being mean, because they were afraid of them. Judi separated them because he did not want them to be fighting all of the time.

The elves and the bugs are really very much alike. There are only a couple of things that are different: their appearance and their intelligence. Both planets worship the same god, named Judi.

Larry decided to call Cookabuga Nansue "Fubu," which is short for "FunBug." Larry and Fubu become the best of friends. Larry saw the portal, and Fubu explained what it was. Fubu explained to Larry how surprised he was that it was easy to get to the portal. No one had expected him to do such a thing, since everyone is mean, and the next night they were going to attack a planet. Fubu explained that he was very smart and figured out how to operate the portal all on his own.

After showing Larry the portal, Fubu decided to go back to his planet to teach the others how to be a true friend. Fubu became a hero to his people and was remembered forever.

The Great Fight

*To win means everything; to lose is unthinkable. In **THE GREAT FIGHT**, by **William H. Tredwell**, a young girl battles a formidable power for the freedom of her people.*

Everyone in Tashmugana was scared. They were always pushed around by Lord Evil and his minions—until one day.

“Come on, guys. My father said we had to get home quick!” I yelled.

“I wonder why your father needs *us*,” Joe murmured.

“Who cares!” shouted Ken.

See, we had to shout since we were jumping from house to house at a pretty high speed. And it was fairly easy, since the houses had flat roofs, and they were all close together.

I’m twelve-year-old Sara, and this is my story. I live in a place called Tashmugana. It used to be a beautiful place, until Lord Evil came. He destroyed everything, even my mother.

We soon arrived at my house. It was a big box made out of cement.

“Hello, Sara, Ken, and Joey,” my father said.

“Hey, Sara’s Dad,” said Ken.

“Why are we all here?” I said.

“Well, Sara, do you remember the chosen one?” my father said.

“Yes!” I replied.

“Well, Sara... you are the chosen one.”

“What! This can’t be possible!”

“It is.”

“Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“Because we wanted to wait till you were older.”

“Wait a second. What is the chosen one?” Ken questioned.

“Well, way back when Tashmugana was beautiful, there lived a man named Dain. One day when he was walking through the forest, he saw a faerie. He chased the faerie until he caught it, and when he did catch it, it said, ‘Dain, one day you will need to fight evil with this sword.’ Dain accepted the sword, and swore he would fight the Evil.

“And then the evil came. It was Lord Evil who attacked Tashmugana. And Dain finally defeated him with a magic spell. After that, he got married and had a daughter, and that daughter was your mother. But somehow, Lord Evil came back to life.”

“I still can’t believe this,” said Sara.

“See, I even have Dain’s sword.” My father handed me the sword. It was beautiful, with a picture of a dragon on it.

“What will Sara have to do as the chosen one?” Joey asked.

“Well, you have to defeat Lord Evil, and the only way to do that is to break into the palace and destroy him.”

“So will I be going to his palace tomorrow?”

“Yes, and Ken and Joey will come with you”

“What will we use?” questioned Ken.

“Dain’s sidekicks’ swords” my father replied.

The next day we started our journey. Father had told us that there was a secret passage that would lead us into the palace unnoticed. It was a small tunnel, but soon we were at the end in the palace’s courtyard.

The courtyard was very ugly, with dead plants everywhere. There was horrible odor, and bloodstained skeletons, probably of those who had tried to enter.

“What is that noise?” Joey murmured.

“I don’t know,” I replied.

Suddenly the ground started to shake. And there out of the ground came a huge snake-like beast. It was all green, with blood dripping down its mouth.

Soon it was upon us, lashing its tongue at us. Quickly dodging it, I swung my sword at it, only missing it by an inch. It soon pounced again. But this time I was ready. I swung my sword again, this time hitting right on the head directly, killing it. Now it was shriveling up into a little grain of dust.

But there was no time to rejoice, for the Black guards were already upon us, throwing their spears. We ran through a hallway into the palace while dodging the spears.

“Finally, we are away from the—”

Suddenly we fell through a hole on the floor. After a couple seconds of falling, we were in some kind of arena used for fighting.

“Welcome,” said a voice. And then from the shadows came a man with a scar over his eye. “I am Doom, Lord Evil’s great guard. I know why you are here, and I am challenging one of you to a fight. If you win, I will let you go to Lord Evil. But if you lose, I will take your soul. Which one of you will fight?” Doom questioned.

“I will fight,” I said.

“Okay, then. First one to fall loses. Ready, go!”

Doom pulled out his weapon, a long blade with a jagged side. I swung my sword with all my might, but he dodged it as if it were a mere stone. While I was pulling my sword back, he jumped up and struck me on my shoulder. Luckily it was a mere cut.

I tried hitting him again, but the same thing happened.

I swung my sword, this time making it extend. Doom dodged it, but I made the sword retract, cutting his feet and tripping him.

“I won!” I screamed.

“Now, Doom, tell us how to get to Lord Evil, or else we will kill you,” Ken said.

“Go through that door and you’re there.”

“I don’t know, guys. It might be another trap,” I replied.

“How about I go first to see if it is a trap?” Joey said.

Joey opened the doors and walked a little bit forward. Nothing happened. Then we entered. The room was dimly lit, with weird paintings, like a painting of a baby who actually was a man-eating piranha. There were cobwebs in every corner. Then we saw a little girl crying.

Joey ran to help her. “Are you hurt, little girl?” asked Joey.

“No, but you will be.”

Suddenly the girl turned into a huge giant with a staff in its hand. There were warts and scars all over its face. It picked up Joey and threw him to the ground.

“How dare you enter the great Lord Evil’s lair!” Lord Evil shrieked. “I will now kill you for what you have done!”

“Yahhhh!” yelled Ken. He managed to hit Lord Evil, but Lord Evil made the cut disappear.

Father said there was a spell that Dain used. But what was it? I thought. Lord Evil was about to swing his staff at me. “Oh, yeah. Now I remember. Draga Natos!”

Soon a great Dragon came out of the sword. It charged at Lord Evil and went straight through his body.

“Noooooooooooo!” shrieked Lord Evil as he shriveled up into a grain of dust.

I ran over to Ken and Joey to help their wounds. They were bad, but I knew how to treat them.

“You did it, Sara. You saved our land,” Ken murmured.

“Thanks,” I replied.

How Would It Be to See Your Future?

*The future awaits. Would you like to know it ahead of time? In **HOW WOULD IT BE TO SEE YOUR FUTURE?** by **Crystal Oropeza**, Castal goes on a journey of the mind that might be more than it seems.*

“Ewwwww!” said twelve-year-old Castal. “That looks like a snail and pizza at the same time!” she added. What Castal had seen was very gross! It looked all slimy and disgusting. It was sticky and solid, too.

“Eat it, eat it, eat it!” shouted her friends.

“Eat it?” she questioned. But before she had a chance to say another word, her friend shoved the mysterious object in her mouth!

All of a sudden Castal was in a totally different world. She saw a gigantic mansion that seemed one million times the size of the apartment that she lived in! She also saw a limo that was as long as the longest snake alive! She also saw the most expensive flowers, and a ton of more expensive things.

Castal looked around for her friends, but they were nowhere to be found. She walked inside the mansion and she saw a girl that looked somewhat like her. Castal tried asking for her friends, but the people ignored her. Castal tried forever to get someone’s attention, but no one noticed her. Finally, Castal realized that the people could not see her.

Castal saw that the girl was a famous person. She heard that the girl had to go see a bunch of other famous people, too. She heard everyone yelling for her. She saw that the girl

had maids, and the girl asked for lemonade and pretzels. Castal was shocked when the girl asked for lemonade and pretzels because that was her favorite snack to eat!

Later on, the girl had to go see the president for a meeting. When Castal saw what she was wearing, she was even more shocked! It was her dream dress: a purple and blue sparkling dress!

Soon a private jet plane landed, and she watched the girl get on the plane. She peeked inside, and saw some people who looked like her parents, but a bit older.

Castal started thinking about what was going on. She walked back into the mansion and saw a pool. Castal loved to swim and she was an expert at it, too. She had been on the swim team at school. She did a really good dive into the pool and went to the bottom of the pool excitedly.

“Castal! Wake up!” said her friends.

“Huh?” she asked.

When Castal finally woke up, she told her friends the story. They suggested that maybe the girl was her. Castal thought about all the things that seemed so familiar and knew for sure it was herself in her future.

So Castal grew older, and one day she became famous. All the same things happened in her future as they did in her dream, or whatever it was. To this day, Castal has still not figured out why she saw her future when she was only twelve, but she will never forget that day!

Journey Through Seussvill

*Get ready for a family trip like no other—unless you, too, have been sucked into a book and required to interact with characters you thought were fictional. A family’s odyssey leads to a valuable lesson in **JOURNEY THROUGH SEUSSVILL**, by **Madeline McCoy**.*

“Danny, where is the key?” Alice asked, sounding a little annoyed.

“You have it, Alice,” said Danny. Alice, sounding even more annoyed, stuffed her hand into her pocket and retrieved a key. She pushed it into the apartment keyhole, and shoved the door open, only to be greeted with a messy kitchen and their dog, Sam. Mrs. Gingersnap was late again. Mr. Gingersnap was probably at work. Mrs. Gingersnap did not ever talk to her family and Mr. Gingersnap was always at work. Being home alone was not unusual for the two Gingersnap kids.

Alice got out Oreos and milk for Danny and went to start studying for her test in Science. Danny would watch SpongeBob as many eight-year-olds do, then read twenty minutes, fill out his reading log, make some Easy-Mac, and finally take Sam for a walk.

While Danny was eating his Oreos, he said to his sister, “Wouldn’t it be nice if our parents were home more?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Danny,” said Alice. “Our parents are very busy people. They don’t have time to be home with us. And anyway, we have each other.”

It was 9:00 P.M. and Mrs. Gingersnap still wasn't home. Alice, who was a young sixth-grader, decided to put Danny to bed and finish reading her social studies chapter.

Because day follows night, and Tuesday follows Monday, the children woke up the next morning to Sam's high-pitched bark. The Gingersnap parents still weren't home, and Sam wasn't in the kitchen, either; he was sniffing a Dr. Seuss book behind the sofa. Danny picked up the book, wailed, and vanished in a flash of blue light. Alice screamed even louder, "Danny!" There was no reply.

She looked behind the sofa, screamed his name again, and ran to look around the house. *He is probably just playing a silly game again*, thought Alice. But Danny never showed up.

Alice ran to phone the neighbors and Danny's friends. Still, Danny remained missing. Alice got tremendously worried, and she phoned 911. Her heart felt like a beating drum.

When Alice returned to the sofa, she picked up the book that Sam was sniffing; maybe Dr. Seuss would calm her. The moment she opened the book, it was too late.

Alice and Sam were spinning in a vortex of *Hop on Pop*, *The Lorax*, and even mean old Mr. Grinch, whose heart was three sizes too small. Spinning and twirling and falling all in the same moment, Alice and Sam fell to the ground with a hard *thud*. When Alice was able to look around, she noticed herself and her dog first: Alice and Sam both looked like cartoon characters sitting dumbfounded in the Lorax's forest.

Sam looked especially goofy; he had on a red and white striped, collared shirt. The small golden retriever looked very silly. Alice was wearing a white marshmallow-shaped skirt and a red shirt to match her puppy. Both were gasping for breath, and Alice immediately knew that she was in one of Dr. Seuss's books.

I know Danny is around here somewhere, she thought to herself. And sure enough, Danny was drinking from a nearby stream.

Alice had never been so happy in her life. She practically pushed Danny into the cartoon water when she hugged him. Danny was happy to see Alice, too. After hugging, Alice and

Danny decided to plan their next move, but before the children could say another word, a fish started to bounce into view in his little fish bowl. With him, he carried what appeared to be a letter. But as the fish approached, the children realized that this fish was no ordinary fish. This fish was whistling.

When the very odd fish finally stopped, he read the letter aloud. It read:

Dear *Gingersnappers*,

You must report to the summit of the Grinch's cave. And make it quickish. Your parents are waiting for you. Get here before the sun sets, which is in two hours.

Yours truly,

The Grinch

The Grinch! The children remembered from one of Dr. Seuss's books that the Grinch lived over the town where Cindy-Lou Who lived. Maybe she could help!

The children asked the fish directions to Cindy-Lou Who's house. The fish replied, "On page four. To get there you must go back two pages. To do this, you must hop on Pop and bounce all the way to page four." And out of thin air appeared Pop. In case you don't know, Pop is a big yellow bear that always lies on his back.

Alice went first and started to bounce, and Alice disappeared. Danny held Sam and bounced. Just like Alice, he and Sam disappeared.

Alice and Danny were sitting in the center of Who-ville on page four. Cindy-Lou Who's house was right across the street from where Alice and Danny were sitting. The children walked

over and rang the bell. Cindy-Lou answered the door with a puzzled face.

“Who are you?” she asked.

“We are the Gingersnap kids who need your help.”

Cindy-Lou looked up bravely and asked what the matter was. Alice explained that there wasn’t any time to explain; they just needed to get up to the cave of the Grinch. Cindy-Lou agreed to show the Gingersnaps up the mountain and show them where the Grinch’s cave was.

The children started off down Who-ville’s main street. The mountain was soaring toward the sky straight ahead. It looked just as it did in the book, all crooked peaks and steep slopes.

The three children began up the mountain toward the Grinch’s cave. In no time at all it seemed they were most of the way up. They kept themselves entertained along the way by singing the Who-ville Christmas song. It went something like, “Fah who for-aze, dah who dor-aze, welcome Christmas, come this way!” Cindy-Lou Who seemed to know the song quite well and taught Danny and Alice all the words.

When they were almost at the top, the children heard a strange noise coming from the trees to their left. They looked around but didn’t see anything, so they continued on their way. A few hundred feet beyond, they heard the same noise.

All of a sudden, in a flash of light, out jumped two rather odd-looking creatures with really big blue hair. They began hurling objects at Alice, Danny, Sam and Cindy-Lou. It took the kids a minute or two to realize that the creatures were actually throwing green eggs and ham at them.

“What is going on?” cried Danny.

“Who are you guys and what do you want from us?”

“Why, we’re Thing One and Thing Two, of course!” said what appeared to be Thing One. “Don’t you recognize us?”

“Why are you throwing things at us?” asked Alice while dodging another green egg.

“Our job is to protect the Grinch from unwelcome guests—YOU!”

“But, he invited us to come to see him—look at this letter we received,” said Alice, showing Thing Two the Grinch’s letter.

“Ahhhhh, a letter—that definitely means that you’re not an unwelcome guest. You are, in fact, a very welcomed guest. Right this way.” And off they went to the top of the mountain to meet with the Grinch.

The children and Thing One and Thing Two finally approached the small opening to the cave, and the Things showed the children through the spooky dumps of trash and the not-so-nice looking rats that were scampering in the shadows. The children met corridor after corridor and finally the Grinch’s secret lair. There was a fire flickering in the corner of a pitch-black room and there, huddled over it, was the Grinch! The children couldn’t believe their eyes—he really was green!

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t the Gingersnapper children. I bet you’re here to find your parents. Isn’t that nice. Such a loving family. So close-knit. I bet you sit at home doing puzzles together in your spare time. Or, I know it, you go caroling to the neighbor’s homes bringing them homemade cookies. Am I right?”

“Well, um, not really,” said Danny.

“Actually, we don’t see our parents very much at all. And we certainly don’t do puzzles or go caroling with them. They’re much too busy for that!” The Grinch had a peculiar look on his face.

“You mean you’re not a very happy family like those people down in Who-ville? If that’s true, it changes everything. You see, I had hoped to learn from your family so one day I might return to Who-ville. But since this family of yours doesn’t appear to be very happy, I’ll just have to let you go home and I’ll have to find another family to use.”

“You mean we can all go home now?” asked Alice.

“Where are their parents?” asked Cindy-Lou. “And how do they go home from here?”

"My dog is entertaining them with doggy tricks in the parlor. Everyone seems to like that dog but me. And you can get home by opening up a Dr. Seuss book just like they did in their home." Cindy-Lou offered to share one of her books with the Gingersnappers.

"Thanks, Cindy-Lou; we couldn't have done this without you," said Alice. Right at that moment, Mr. and Mrs. Gingersnapper emerged from the back room.

"We've got to teach Sam some tricks when we get home; the Grinch's dog knows a lot of them!" said Mr. Gingersnapper.

"But, Dad, you're never home. When do you plan to do that?" said Danny.

"Mom and I have given our family a lot of thought since we've been here. It turns out that the Grinch has taught us a lot about what it means to be a family. He's so lonely up here that we've spent a lot of time with him playing cards, talking, and watching TV. It was really fun, and we realize that we haven't had much fun at home recently. So we're going to make a lot of changes when we get home," said Mom.

They all climbed onto the Grinch's sled and said their goodbyes to the Grinch, Thing One, and Thing Two. They sailed down the mountain back to Cindy-Lou Who's house, where they found an old copy of *Oh, the Places You'll Go* by Dr. Seuss.

"Are we ready?" asked Mr. Gingersnap.

"All set," said Danny and Alice. They opened the book and in a flash were transported back to their living room.

"Ma'am, ma'am. Are you all right?" said the officer who was shining a bright light in Mrs. Gingersnapper's face.

"Of course I'm all right. What are you gentlemen doing here?"

"Must have been a false alarm, Tom," said the one officer to the other.

"Happens all the time. Good night." And the Gingersnappers all exchanged a secret look.

The Other World

A boy goes out for a bike ride and ends up in a place he never knew existed. He battles many obstacles as he attempts to return home in
THE OTHER WORLD, by Ryan Brode.

It was a warm and sunny February day in Northern Michigan. Baxter decided to take advantage of the weather and take his bike out for a ride. “Wheeeeeeeeeee!” Baxter was shouting as he rode his bike down the hill.

It was an uneventful ride until something very strange started to happen. The ground started rumbling and shaking. Baxter had a hard time keeping his bike upright. “What could be happening?” Baxter asked himself as his bike started to fall. He waited to hit the ground but the ground never came. Scared to death, he looked down. There was only blackness all around him.

After what seemed like an eternity, Baxter landed in what appeared to be a swirling vortex of colors. As soon as the colors appeared, they were gone. The next thing Baxter heard was a big splash.

He found himself in a pond surrounded by a beautiful, green jungle. He looked around and saw something moving in the water towards him. As it got closer, he could see that it was an alligator.

Baxter panicked. He didn’t know what to do. Faster and faster, closer and closer it came. All of a sudden in a tree, a mysterious toucan yelled to Baxter, “Follow me! We have to hide!”

Baxter got out of the pond and climbed the tree where the toucan was. Baxter was dumbfounded. "Toucans can't talk!" he said out loud.

"I'll explain later. Hurry!" replied the toucan.

When Baxter was safe in the tree with lots of branches, the toucan started to explain. "You are in another dimension. Animals can talk here. We are as smart as humans—some of us are even smarter. Let me introduce myself. My name is Lars. I am the most intelligent of my species."

"But why am I here?" Baxter asked Lars.

"You happened to be on the exact place where our two universes collided, and you fell through a hole into my dimension," Lars answered.

"How will I get home?" Baxter asked.

Lars answered, "Through there." Lars pointed way off into the distance with his beak at a giant, old vine-covered temple.

"That's very far away," said Baxter.

"I'll help you," reassured Lars. "But we will have many obstacles to face on our way there."

"What kind of obstacles are you talking about?" asked Baxter.

"Well, first we must find a way across a rather large waterfall, after which we will enter gorilla territory. Then there is the land of giant spiders. If we make it through all those, we will then have to cross the quicksand, after which is the valley of poisonous thorn trees. Also, we never know what kind of other jungle animals we may encounter along the way. But if you climb down from that tree, I'll help you through it all," replied Lars.

Baxter climbed down the tree. Lars hovered by his side. They got started on their long and difficult journey to the far-off temple. The first thing they came to was a waterfall.

"Our first obstacle is getting across this huge waterfall," said Lars. Lars and Baxter found several vines. Baxter grabbed the thickest one and tugged. It held his weight, so he got himself ready to swing. On the count of three, Baxter

swung himself across the open water and landed safely on the other side. Lars flew next to him the entire way.

"That was easier than I expected," Baxter said. "I hope our luck holds out."

Baxter and Lars then trudged deeper into the jungle. "*Sbbbbb!*" whispered Lars. "This is gorilla territory. Gorillas are the most intelligent and powerful beings in my dimension."

Step by step, they snuck through gorilla territory. As they were making their way through, a giant gorilla jumped into Baxter's path and grabbed him. "Help!" screamed Baxter.

"I'm sorry, Baxter! I didn't see him hiding behind the trees!" said Lars.

"Where are you taking me?" Baxter asked the gorilla.

"I am taking you to the gorilla king. He will decide what to do with you. No more questions," answered the gorilla.

Lars stayed near as Baxter was being taken away. The gorilla carried him through a dense area of jungle until they reached a small clearing. In the clearing was a huge gorilla sitting on a throne eating bananas, while two other smaller gorillas were fanning him with palm fronds. On his head he wore a golden crown encrusted with sparkling diamonds and other priceless gems. He looked up as Baxter was dragged in. "What do we have here?" King Gorilla asked.

Baxter shouted, "Let me go! Let me go!" as the gorilla put Baxter in a cage. When the gorilla moved away, Lars flew up to the cage to speak to Baxter. "When they go to sleep, I'll get you out of here," Lars told Baxter.

Later on, as the evening turned into night, Lars came up with a plan. He was going to swoop down and steal the keys from the guard to free Baxter. It took a while, but when the guard gorilla started to nod off, Lars seized the opportunity. He grabbed the keys and flew to the cage where he gave the keys to Baxter. "Hurry, Baxter!" whispered Lars. Baxter grabbed the keys and put them into the lock. He was free!

He ran as quickly and as quietly as he could. When they were out of hearing distance of the gorillas, Baxter said, "I'm so happy to be out of that cage."

Just when Baxter and Lars could see the temple in the distance, without even noticing, Baxter walked into a giant spider web. All of a sudden the web started shaking. A giant spider was crawling towards Baxter.

Lars saw that the web was attached to the branch of a tree. Lars grabbed the branch with his beak and pulled it back as far as it could go. When Lars let go, Baxter flew out of the web and was flung over the trees into a clearing. Lars was at his side. "Thank you for saving me," Baxter said to Lars.

"I was happy to help," replied Lars. "We flew right over the quicksand, but now we are about to enter the valley of the poisonous thorn trees."

"What will happen to me if I get scratched by a poisonous thorn?" asked Baxter.

"You will be paralyzed in minutes for the rest of your life. You will forever be a statue in the valley of thorns," answered Lars.

"Let's be really careful," said Baxter.

So on they went very slowly. Lars flew overhead and guided Baxter through the poisonous trees. Suddenly they heard an agonizing shriek that sounded like a wounded animal. "What was that?" asked Baxter.

"You will see in a minute as you pass the next tree," answered Lars, who had the advantage of seeing everything from the air. After traveling another few yards, Baxter found the source of the sound. What was alive only minutes ago was now a paralyzed jaguar. His mouth was frozen in a painful-looking grimace.

"I had really better be careful," Baxter said quietly to himself.

It took what seemed like hours to maneuver around and under the sharp, dangerous branches, but they at last emerged into a grassy field. They felt a great sense of relief.

Now the temple was within reach. Baxter was anxious to get home. As he was running towards his final destination, his hopes were destroyed when the entrance to the temple was blocked by a giant ferocious, man- and toucan-eating lion. Lars exclaimed, "This looks like the perfect time to use my bamboo shooter!"

Lars loaded his shooter with paralyzing pellets. He shot at the lion. "Quick! We only have ten minutes to get you out of here before the lion awakens and comes after us. We have to run to the top of the temple and look for the gateway back to your world," Lars explained.

Lars and Baxter raced to the top of the temple. There it was—the swirling vortex of colors. With only two minutes left, Baxter wanted to say good-bye and thank Lars for all his help. "You have to go now," said Lars.

"But what about you? Can't you come with me?" asked Baxter.

"No. This is my home. How could a toucan live in Michigan anyway?" replied Lars.

"Thanks for all the help. I'll never forget you," said Baxter.

Baxter then leaped through the colorful vortex. Before he knew it, he was on the ground, his bike next to him. He got up and looked at his watch. He said to himself, "That's strange. I've been gone all day, but my watch says I just left my house five minutes ago."

Baxter rode his bike home, stopping to get the mail before he went in to eat lunch. In the mailbox was a postcard. On the card was a jungle scene with the picture of a toucan and a giant vine-covered temple. He turned it over and it read, "Missing you. Wish you were here." The postcard was signed, "Your friend, Lars."

The Sentar Portal

*Brother and sister Jack and Anne are innocently exploring the attic when they are jolted out of their normal lives. A life-and-death struggle awaits in **THE SENTAR PORTAL**, by **Andrew Williams**.*

I bet you've been bored before, but I bet you've never been bored like this. Hot and bored, that's what I was.

My sister was calling me from the attic. "Jack, hurry! Look what I've found!" That's me, Jack. Old Yeller up there is my sister Anne.

"I'm coming!" I called up. When I finally got to the attic, I came face to face with the strangest mirror in existence.

In its surface I saw strange swirling colors. It was like looking into a cement mixer full of liquid lightning. "Can you believe this?" she asked.

"I don't think I can," I replied.

As some of you know, little sisters can be nosy. So of course, her first instinct was to reach in. "Anne, stop! You don't know what's in there!" I exclaimed. But it was too late. She fell through the strange mirror, and now I had to go in after her.

I stumbled through. I thought it would be a long way down, but it was just solid ground. I looked up to see greenish mountains that looked like circles and purple plants that had large spores growing out of them. Anne found me and came up to me saying, "Jack, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore."

I was too shocked to laugh. I did manage to say, "Well, I don't think we're on Earth anymore!"

"You are in Sentar," a strange voice came from behind us. I whirled around to see a brown creature that looked like an ape and a wolf. "I am Neman, leader of the..." his voice trailed off. "It

would be too hard to pronounce in your primitive language. If you're wondering why I speak English, I have studied and learned it quite easily. But never mind that. If you want to come back to my camp, you'll have to help us out by gathering food. We'll need it for tomorrow."

I was quite puzzled at what was going on tomorrow. "How do we know we can trust you?" I asked.

"Oh. You will want to trust me, because by tomorrow, if you don't have an ally...you will not survive," he ended grimly as he walked through the bushes. I don't know about you, but I seriously didn't want to doubt that guy.

Since we weren't very familiar with the food on "Sentar," we just picked some round things that looked like berries. I got to a bush full of the berry things and started picking them when I felt hot breath down my neck. "Go away, Anne. This is my spot." I said.

"I...I...I'm not doing that J-J-Jack," she stuttered. When I turned, I saw that she was next to me, not behind me.

I turned all the way around, looking at what was like a bull standing on its hind legs and with glowing red eyes. "Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" I screamed. I grabbed Anne's hand and sprinted out of that forest at like a hundred miles an hour. I ran until I got to a clearing. I looked around and figured out that it was Neman's camp!

Neman came out of a tent. "What's all of the yelling about?" he wondered.

"I just saw a bull...or something like one!" I explained.

"You saw a Glorgan?" Neman raged. "Why didn't you kill him?"

"Well..." I stalled. "I didn't have a weapon, and I didn't know I was supposed to kill him."

"Those are the most foul creatures on Sentar. They must be destroyed. That is why we're going to war with them tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" I cried. "But we'll still be here!"

"I know," Neman said gravely. "Now get some rest. You'll need it."

Anne and I crawled into an empty tent. I couldn't sleep very well, wondering if the next day was going to be my last day on...well, I can't say "Earth."

The first thing I heard when I woke up was axes banging, and members of Neman's race yelling. I ran outside and saw the Glorgans fighting Neman's race. Neman came up to me and handed me a sword. "Take this," he said. I didn't know what to do, but I did know I had to fight.

I snuck up behind a Glorgan and swung but missed. He turned around and we went sword to axe. I struck his side; he countered my hit with a jab near my head. I never realized fighting was so hard. I finally got a hit in his stomach. He groaned and his eyes rolled into his head. I moved on to another one, hoping for the best.

I snuck up behind another Glorgan and hit its head with the blunt side of my blade. It was knocked out cold. I was starting to get weaker as I went on. I dropped my sword and fell to my knees. I looked back up, and like a miracle, we were actually overcoming the ambush. I started to cheer weakly with everyone else.

Neman found me and gladly exclaimed, "We won! Thank you for all your help!"

"You're welcome!" I said, amazed. That's when I remembered Anne. "Anne!" I called out.

"Quiet down, Jack. I'm right here!" she said as she came up behind me. I sighed in relief. "I found one of these in a Glorgan's pocket," she said. "It kinda looks like a crystal."

All of a sudden, the crystal started to glow. It quickly shot out a strange beam that expanded until it looked just like the liquid lightning portal in our attic. "Hey! It's that portal!" I exclaimed. But before I could say another word, I was violently sucked into the portal and landed on a hardwood floor.

"We're back!" Anne said. "But look. The portal is shrinking!"

I stared at the shrinking portal, and to my surprise, right before it completely disappeared, I swear something winked at me.

GET IN THE
GAME

The Big Game

*Are you ready for some football? In **THE BIG GAME** by Jon Bajorek, Matt takes the field for the big game he has been dreaming about.*

“There are three seconds left on the clock, and Sleighborn State will take a time out. It’s games like this that you just can’t miss. One last play will decide who will take home the Championship Cup for the national title. Sleighborn’s quarterback Matt Smotace has performed beautifully. He threw four touchdown passes this game and averages six yards a carry throughout the season. He could be this year’s Heisman Trophy winner. Sleighborn is down by three points with forty-five yards to go. Their field goal kicker is out with a broken leg. The pressure is on the quarterback to win the game.”

“Ready, 42, 25, set, hike!”

“Matt Smotace has the ball. The crowd is chanting. Smotace throws the ball up. It’s... it’s...”

BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BE
EP.

Matt's alarm goes off. He rubs his eyes and glances at the calendar. Today's game is Sleighborn State versus Alaska State in the Western Conference Championship. He hurries out of bed, thinking it is a good thing this was a home game.

Matt drives to the stadium in a hurry. When he gets out of the locker room, the crowd chants, “Matt, Matt, Matt!” Then the game begins.

Sleighborn State wins the toss and takes the first kick with a twenty-yard return.

The first three quarters of the game go pretty badly for

Matt. He throws three interceptions and is sacked twice. He also fumbles once. This is his worst overall game of the season.

Sleighborn State is down by twelve points with a little under three minutes left on the clock. It will take a miracle to beat Alaska, considering the way Matt is playing and the fact that their kicker is out with a broken leg.

“Matt, Matt, Matt!” the crowd cheers again.

“Hike!” Matt yells as he gets the ball. Matt looks for an open receiver, throws the ball, and it’s caught. He receives the ball at the 35-yard line and is alone and running. He’s at the 30, the 20, the 10...touchdown! Sleighborn State goes for the extra point, but the kick is short.

Now Sleighborn State is down by six points. There are two more minutes to go and Sleighborn goes for an onside kick. There is confusion on the field because both teams are one top of the ball, and it looks like Sleighborn State has it on its own 45-yard line.

It’s third and seven on the 40-yard line with only ten seconds left on the clock. “Forty-two, 68, hike!”

Matt gets the ball. The clock is winding down: Five...four.... Matt is looking to throw the ball. There is nowhere to go, so he throws it away to avoid being sacked. With only three seconds left, Sleighborn State will take its last time out.

Wow, this is just like my dream, Matt thinks to himself.

“All right, we’ll do the 43 bootleg and...”

Matt interrupts. “Coach, I think—scratch that—I *know* what play to run.”

“Hmm. Well then, why don’t you explain it to us?”

Matt explains the play to his team.

“I don’t know, it sounds kinda risky,” says Coach.

“Trust me, Coach, if this play doesn’t work, I don’t know what will,” Matt says.

Both teams line up at the line of scrimmage.

“Ready, Red, 68, Green, 12, set, hike!” Matt yells.

“Three...two...one...!” the crowd chants.

“Sleighborn State gives it to the running back, and, boy, does he get nailed! And it looks like Alaska State has won it, folks! But what’s this? It was a fake! Matt finds an open receiver downfield, throws it, and it’s caught! Touchdown!”

Sleighborn makes its extra point. “Sleighborn State has won it! What an amazing finish!” says the announcer, breathless.

“Pinch me, I’m dreaming,” says Matt.

The Botched Shot

*Athletes dream of pulling out a victory in the last second of a crucial game. In **THE BOTCHED SHOT**, **Matthew Eleweke** imagines what goes through the minds of a basketball star and his supportive father as the script plays out in real life.*

This seven-year-old squirt can't miss! Darius Washington, at a halftime free throw contest, sinks thirteen shots in a row. This kid should be nervous. Two hundred and fifty fans are standing on their feet staring at him with astonishment, yet he doesn't mess up.

Twelve years later, the squirt is back on the court. Darius is in college and now plays for Memphis. The score is 75-73, with Louisville in the lead. The game is near the end and the coach calls a time out to set up the play. There is not much time on the clock, so Darius is in a hurry to make the shot.

As he goes in to take the shot, he is slapped in the arm. He draws the foul and goes to the stripe. Darius sinks the first free throw, and the fans begin to yell out his name.

His teammates knew this was their game, because Louisville fouled the one player that could make these shots and win the game.

Big D, Darius's dad, knew that the next shot was a done deal, because he remembered all the training he did with his son. Big D made his son run in the shallow end of the pool with his shoes on. Also, Darius couldn't leave the gym until he converted ten layups, and did "Donkey Kong" right. For Donkey Kong, he had to dribble down the court at full speed,

dribbling no higher than his ankles. Darius also had to make three hundred free throws!

As a result, his senior year at Edgewater High School looked really good for him. He was the all-star player, and held an average of thirty-one points a game.

Now here he is at the charity stripe, shooting free throws. Darius puts up the second shot. It fades to the right, then crashes off the back of the rim. It's a missed shot.

The fans went silent. Darius stood still for a moment to digest the fact that he missed the basket. He wondered how he could've missed when free throws were so easy for him. Darius buried his head in his jersey and began to cry.

Big D tried to run to his son, but security stopped him. As Darius cried, he heard a voice that calmed him down. It was Big D's.

Later that day he saw highlights of that game and thought that nobody liked him anymore. But as he roamed the streets, he saw that that wasn't true. Everybody congratulated him and only thought of next year.

Darius really took it hard. But Big D and some of Darius's teammates just joked about it and said, "Definitely next year."

Big D still trains and works with his son, and really gets Darius motivated. Big D will always joke and say, "Darius, do you remember the time you missed that free-throw?"

The Dog That Stole the Puck

*At least put some skates on that mutt! **THE DOG THAT STOLE THE PUCK**, by **Kyle Cameron**, is a story that will have you saying, "Bad dog!"*

Yes! Today is Friday, the end of the day, and tomorrow I have hockey. It is the championship, so I am really nervous. I'm a little excited, but way more nervous.

Finally, it's six in the morning, and time for hockey.

We are winning three to one. I'm skating down the ice with the puck on a breakaway. I am skating as fast as I can when a dog comes and steals the puck! Soon, the fans are chasing the little runt around the building.

The dog was mean and vicious. He ran outside into the parking lot. He was almost hit by a car.

All of a sudden the dog stopped. The fans stopped, too. The big dog turned around and charged at them. Now they were the victims! Boy, were they scared, running up and down bleachers and in and out of doors.

Finally, the dog dropped the puck. When I went to pick it up, I heard a growl behind my head. I felt drool running down my back.

The dog was getting really irritating. Earlier in the season, during every game, the beastly dog would take the puck. Dogs are not allowed in the building, but this dog belongs to the manager.

We ended up winning, because the dog started taking the puck from the other team and giving it to us.

It ended up being a pretty interesting season.

Dream Team

*Dreams are what keep us going. In **DREAM TEAM** by **Claire LaSota**, one girl's dream takes on a special significance.*

When I was young, I wished that I would one day be a world-class competitive swimmer. I hoped I would win lots of medals. I never thought it would be possible, and then one day my dream happened. In 2004, I traveled with the U.S.A. Olympic Swim Team to Athens, Greece. I was finally a part of my dream team.

I grew up in an average family with three children. My parents always told us to work hard to reach our goals. I had an intelligent older sister and an annoying younger brother. I also had an adorable black lab named Faun who was my constant companion. She went everywhere with me, even to school.

We had a pool in our backyard. For a long time I didn't swim. Faun and I would just watch my brother and sister play in the pool. One day I sat in my chair and watched for hours as they played in the pool. It was warm and sunny and I was getting really drowsy. Suddenly, I was accidentally tipped into the pool, and Faun jumped in after me. I quickly grabbed Faun's collar, expecting her to pull me to the wall, but she started swimming across the pool instead.

That ended up being my first swim lesson with Faun. She became my swim teacher. I would hold onto Faun while she would dogpaddle across the pool. It was such a great feeling gliding across the water, because I felt free.

After a while, I was able to swim across the pool by myself. I loved swimming so much that my mother signed me

up for swim lessons at our local swim club. I learned the four strokes in these lessons: backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, and freestyle. Faun was jealous because she could only do the dogpaddle.

I got so good that I joined our high school varsity swim team. Faun came to every meet with my family, cheering me on. My event was the 100-meter butterfly. Each week my times improved. Finally at the end of my sophomore season, I set a new pool record of 58.22 seconds. That's when my coach told me that I had to try out for the 2004 Olympics. I didn't think that I was fast enough, but when my coach showed me times of the fastest girls across the country, I knew I could compete with them.

After the high school season was over, I joined Birmingham Bloomfield Atlantis Swim team to get ready for the Olympic tryouts. I practiced with the team twice a day for five months. Faun came with me to every practice and would follow the coaches around on the deck while the team swam. My coaches, Ryan and Billy, loved her until one day she tried to join the team.

Ryan had given us a set of sprint 50's. I was in lane two with three other swimmers. I was going faster than I had ever swum in my life, and Faun knew it. She was overjoyed. She ran to lane two, and as I did my flip turn at the wall, she jumped in the pool and tried to keep up with me.

I didn't know what was happening since I don't look behind me when I swim. When I got to the wall and finished my 50, I couldn't believe what I saw. Faun was paddling toward the wall.

The rest of the team had stopped practicing and were trying to catch Faun. Billy was screaming at me to get the dog out of the pool. I swam back to Faun and pulled her to the wall. Then I pushed her out of the water. Ryan grabbed her and tied her to a bench. Faun looked at him with her big sad brown eyes, saying, "Please let me swim with the team."

A few weeks later, I traveled down to Indianapolis for the Olympic tryouts. Of course Faun went with me. My parents

promised to hold onto Faun while I swam. I was nervous, but I knew I was ready. I had worked too hard toward this goal to scratch now. When it was time for my heat, I stepped up to the block, filled with anxiety for my 100-meter butterfly.

“Take your mark,” the official said. I held my breath.

The buzzer sounded, and I took a huge final breath as I dove through the air and into the water. I came up halfway down the pool and took my first stroke. I was really “flying” through the water. When I finished, I could hear the barking of a black lab. I did it! I made the cut and was going to California for the final tryouts.

In California, I qualified for the Olympics. I stayed in California and started practicing with the U.S. Olympic Swim team. We practiced six days a week, two times a day for four hours. The only day I got to rest was on Sunday, and I spent time playing with Faun. Before I knew it, we were headed to Athens, Greece.

When we arrived in Greece, it was amazing. I was mesmerized by all the people from so many different countries. After checking into our hotel, we went immediately down to the pool. There were teams from other countries checking it out, too. It was 50 meters long. I could not wait to jump in the water and start swimming.

Each country had its own private time to practice in the pool. The U.S.A. team had the pool first. We could start practicing in a half hour. It was the best workout ever.

When we weren’t in the pool, we were busy seeing other things. Faun went sightseeing with me. Faun even walked beside me in the procession of the athletes in the opening ceremony. The swimming events didn’t start until a week later. During that week we kept training and also watched other Olympic events.

Finally swimming began, and it was my turn to swim my event. I thought I was nervous before, but it was nothing compared to the pressure I was feeling now. “Swimmers step up. Take your mark.”

Beep.

I was doing it. I was finally swimming the 100 fly in the Olympics. I was a world-class competitive swimmer. I was living my dream.

I was neck and neck with a swimmer from Australia. When I took a breath, I looked ahead at the wall and saw Faun barking at me to go faster. I don't know why, but that was my motivation to go faster. Maybe it was because I was afraid that Faun might jump in the water any second, and I had to get to the wall before that happened. I flew through the water, leaving the Australian girl in my bubbles. One more stroke and I finished in first place with a time of 56.05 seconds.

It was a new world record. I did it! I won a gold medal. I was so exhausted that I couldn't lift myself out of the water. I grabbed Faun's tail and she pulled me out of the pool. She started licking me all over. My dad, mom and sister all hugged me while my brother danced around us singing, "My sister's famous! My sister's famous!"

All of sudden I heard my mom call us in for dinner. I turned my chair, and Faun and I headed into the house.

Dreams are a great thing. We all hope for things and set goals for ourselves. But dreams are also something that happens when we are asleep. This story was both kinds of dream for me. I want to learn to swim and go to the Olympics, and when I was sleeping by the pool it happened in my dream. In real life this isn't possible. I would have to be in a special kind of Olympics, because I have muscular dystrophy and am confined to a wheelchair. My dog Faun goes with me everywhere and helps me do things I can't do on my own. But I can keep on dreaming.

Muscular dystrophy is a chronic, non-contagious disease characterized by progressive wasting of the muscles.

The Girl Who Played Football

*Football is not only for males. But if you are a female football player at a school that thinks otherwise, what do you do? **Katlin Beal** gives us one option in **THE GIRL WHO PLAYED FOOTBALL**.*

“Thirty seconds are left in the game. I’m sprinting across the field. TOUCH DOWN! WE WIN!” exclaimed Sarah.

Sarah is a girl who loves football. She has four brothers who play it all the time. Sarah’s dream is to be in the NFL (National Football League).

The boxes are packed and the truck is here. “Say goodbye,” said Mom. Sarah went back to her room for one more check. She said goodbye and shut the door. To cheer them up, all Moms kept saying was “There is a great football team at your new school.”

Sarah was finally at her new house. She had a room that barely fit all her stuff. Later she went school shopping. The next day would be the first day of school, and one more time Mom said, “There is a great football team at your new school.”

Sarah woke up and got ready. When Sarah got to school, she found out that girls could not join the team. Soon Sarah decided that no matter what it took, she would join the team.

Sarah decided to make a master plan to dress as her twin brother Max (even though he didn’t exist). The next day she dressed as a guy and she went to tryouts. SHE MADE IT!

After the first practice she had to dress in the shower. The guys noticed that she was not there, but they didn't care. They just walked away.

Soon the guys asked her brother why he didn't tell them that he had another brother. He said, "I don't. Sarah is the only one that is in the seventh grade at my house. She doesn't have a twin!" The guys immediately knew it was her. The guys decided that would not tell on her till the end of the season.

The day of the first game rolled around. They played great and they won. After the game, the coach heard two guys talking about how Sarah was so good for a girl. The coach was furious. He confronted her and sent her off the team.

The guys decided that if she could not play, they wouldn't either. Finally, the coach decided that girls could sign up. The next game the coach announced that girls could now try out.

Longhorns

*A football standout is made, not born. The journey to prominence of one hero of the gridiron is the subject of **LONGHORNS**, by **Mark Corless**.*

Mark could go all the way! “Touchdown, Groves!”

Mark played on the Falcons high school football team as running back. Mark is now in his freshmen year at Texas. This was the first game of his freshman season at Texas and the game was against Oklahoma. Mark was nervous. He was shaking badly.

This was the first game in Mark’s college career. He had a huge game with 250 yards and three touchdowns. The next day when he went to his classes, everybody was so nice to him and trying to be his friend. Mark was so popular that the all-stars were jealous of him. The next game he only ran for 150 yards. After that game, nobody tried to be his friend.

One day he met a friend from USC after a game. His name was Scott. Mark met Scott on the field. One day Mark was not talking to anyone and he was in a sad-looking mood, but Scott still talked to him. That’s why they became friends so fast. Scott was now the starting wide receiver.

One day the two friends were assigned a dorm together. They were both really happy to be roommates. When they became roommates they got an even better relationship with each other because they had time to talk to each other and catch up on what they missed through their lives.

At the end of the seasons both were All-Americans. Mark, with 1807 yards and 30 touchdowns, was great. Scott had 1789 yards and 28 touchdowns. Both of them made it

into the Heisman Trophy race, but both lost to Reggie Bush, the all-American from USC. Reggie Bush was Scott's old teammate.

All during the summer Mark, Scott, Reggie and LaDainian Tomlinson, the running back from the San Diego Chargers, worked out together. The way they got to work out together was Reggie knew L.T. and Scott knew Reggie. When the new season began, Mark and Scott were ready to play their friend Reggie, but they had to get into the national championship game. After the first game Mark had a career-high 300 yards.

Then a horrible thing happened. Mark's grandpa died from cancer. Mark took it really hard because his grandpa was his most devoted fan. Mark's grandpa was at every game and he took him to and picked him up from all the practices. Mark had a very good relationship with his grandpa. Mark's grandpa always told him that he loved watching Mark play.

The next game Mark had a new career high. He ran for over 400 yards and scored five touchdowns. He told his mom that from then on whenever he scored, he would point to the sky. His friend Scott was there for him the whole time.

At the end of his sophomore year he put up 2000 all-purpose yards. He was first in the league. He was in the Heisman race for the second year in a row. This time Scott won it by just a little bit. Mark was happy Scott won because they had gone through so much together.

The next year Scott went pro. Mark was kind of sad because that was his true best friend. Scott went to play for the San Diego Chargers. When it was Mark's junior year, he had the best season in college football since Barry Sanders of Oklahoma State. He had 3000 all-purpose yards. This would tie the record with Reggie Bush. That season he won the Heisman.

Then Mark and his parents had a decision to make. Did they want their son to go pro or stay in college his senior year? Mark picked to stay in college because he loved the

college game so much. His coaches saw how dedicated he was to the game that they made him team captain. This was a huge accomplishment.

Mark really had to step up big now because all the other seniors and juniors left to the NFL. Mark had a huge game. So the coaches made him play linebacker as well as running back. Mark was the first to ever do that.

At the end of the season he was unstoppable. Mark had a league high in yards and tackles. He won the Heisman again.

Mark was put into the NFL draft. He was a first-round pick for the Houston Texans. He was so happy to be in the pros. He finally completed his dream.

But then Mark broke his arm in the off-season. He was supposed to be out for six games, but he loved the game so much he only missed three games. He played three games with a cast but then his arm was healed.

The NFL named him the MVP in the Super Bowl with 200 yards. He also had three touchdowns. The coaches saw how dedicated he was and they gave him the game ball. After the game, Mark put the game ball right next to his grandpa's grave. His mom and dad thought his grandpa would have been so proud of him.

Mark retired at the age of 42. In five years he was in the Hall of Fame. He is the number one all-time rusher to ever play football. When he entered the Hall of Fame, he was wishing his grandpa could have seen it. Mark was one of the greatest players who ever lived.

The Miracle of Dan

*Golf may be an individual game, but it is most fun when played in good company. **THE MIRACLE OF DAN** by **Donald DeSantis** takes Dan into the company of golf's elite players.*

"Wow!" said Dan. "I can't believe I can hit it that far."

It all started on a warm day in Hawaii. The conditions were perfect for golf. The wind was slow, and it was sunny. Dan was on the 18th hole and hit his drive. It was heading straight for the ocean. Dan was scared because he was only one shot in front of the leader, Mike Stone. The ball started to drop. Dan knew it was heading straight for the water. The members of the crowd were all biting their nails.

The ball came down and hit a piece of lava rock. The crowd went wild. And the ball bounced onto the green.

It was Mike Stone's turn. He pulled his club back and hit it. He hit it right on target. The crowd was going wild. The ball was getting closer and was going for the hole. It got close and just lipped out. Oh, no, for Mike Stone.

It was Dan's turn to go for the win. He took his putter back and hit it perfectly. It went right into the hole.

Dan won the state golf tournament of Hawaii.

"Dan, I now would like to present you with this: a check for one thousand dollars."

"I thank you, and all of Hawaii."

Dan went to the store and bought a set of new golf clubs.

Dan had not been very wealthy. So he did not belong to a golf club. Dan went to the new golf club right up the street and joined. It was called Civil Lake Golf Club. It was a country club type place.

Dan decided to go golfing on Tuesday. When Dan was finished he went home.

That night Dan got a call from the PGA Tour chairman. "Dan, I would like you to come and play on the pro PGA Tour. I heard that you won the Hawaii tournament. Every year the PGA Tour picks one state and this year we picked Hawaii!" said the chairman.

"Why, I'm speechless. Yes, I would love to!" said Dan.

"Okay, then you will tee off at 4:00 on Monday," said the chairman.

Monday, Dan stood right in front of the tee box in suspense. *Who am I going to play with?* Dan asked himself.

"Dan, today you will play with Vijay Singh and Tiger Woods," said the starter named Pat. Dan couldn't believe it.

Dan walked up to the tee box. Dan stood over his ball. He was shaking like crazy. He hit his first shot right in the center of the fairway. Dan got a birdie on that hole, bringing him to one under. On hole number three, Dan was in third by two strokes. On the ninth hole, Dan was in the lead by one. Vijay was in second with a score of 34. And Tiger was in third with a 35.

On the 18th hole Dan was more comfortable playing with the pros. He took a deep breath and hit his tee shot. It went right onto the fairway. Dan pitched it up onto the green. Dan was tied with Vijay. Dan pulled his putter back and pushed it forward. It went straight in the hole. Dan jumped up and down. "YES!" he said.

Vijay was putting to tie it up. He hit. It was going for the hole. It was getting closer, but it ended up a bit too short. "Oh, no!"

The final score came out to be Tiger Woods in third with 64. In second place was Vijay Singh with a 62. And in first place: Dan, with the score of a 61.

"Dan, how does it feel to come from behind and win against the pros?" asked the announcer.

"It feels great!" said Dan

“Dan, I would like to present you with a new ‘06 G55 AMG GRAND EDITION from Mercedes Benz and 3,000 dollars,” said the announcer.

“Wow, I’m speechless. I can’t thank the PGA Tour enough!” said Dan.

Dan lived long and became a pro on the PGA Tour.

Shopping

*On your mark...get set...shop! **Ellie Toth** makes the case for athletics at the retail level in **SHOPPING**.*

Shopping should be a varsity sport. The usual sports are football, basketball, hockey, soccer, and swimming. You know, these sports are the ones that always fill the sport pages. If you think about it, shopping has a lot in common with these sports.

All of these sports involve a lot of exercise. Imagine the entire mall as the playing field. You are in a store on the third floor on the north side. You need to get to the first floor on the south side to get the perfect outfit. Running from one side of the mall to the other side is like running the mile. Getting the perfect outfit is like scoring a touchdown.

All sports involve scoring. In a shopping match, you earn shopping points to win or lose the match. For example, you score seven points for purchasing one outfit in a category like business or casual for less than one hundred dollars. Extra points are awarded for outfits bought on sale or on discount. Accessorizing an outfit earns bonus points. It definitely helps to have a teammate who is good at accessorizing!

Our uniforms are sneakers, jeans, and a pink t-shirt. Jeans are comfortable to run in, as are sneakers, and the pink shirt is just something fun. Referees still wear striped shirts, but the stripes are pink and orange instead of black and white. Nobody calls them “zebras”! The referees’ job is to make sure that nobody steals outfits. Each team is given a set amount of money and the refs check receipts periodically.

Games are played at malls with several floors. It makes the games more difficult to run up and down escalators. Strip

malls like Birch Run are where we practice. For the Detroit team, Somerset Mall is the home field. It is the largest mall in Detroit. Our away games are played at other malls like Twelve Oaks or Northland. Okay, here is one difference between my sport and the “real” sports. We do not travel to away games in school buses. No, we travel in stretch limousines

Play-off games are played at large malls in the east, west, and south, and there are Midwest regionals similar to the NCAA basketball tournament. For example, Water Tower Place in Chicago could host the Midwest Regional. If we go to the championship, we will play at the Mall of America in Minnesota. Of course, every time we go to the championships we stay in the nicest hotel in town. Now, don’t you think shopping should be a varsity sport?

The *Shortest* Race

*Bridget is full of surprises right from the beginning of **THE SHORTEST RACE**, by Elyse Dumas. By the time the swimming race of the title is finished, Bridget may even surprise herself.*

Calm down, Bridget, I thought to myself. You have practiced for this day for the whole summer, and now it's time to focus. When is this race going to start? I can't wait forever.

It seemed like just yesterday that I was sneaking out to go swim in the pond down the street, saying that I was at Sarah's house playing or studying. And after all that my parents still wouldn't let me go swimming. They said I was too small, but what do they know? I'm 11 and everyone else my age is a foot taller than me! It's hard to play basketball with giants! Also, a nickname like "Midget Bridget" hasn't increased my confidence to play a sport very much. My parents don't know how bad it feels to be left out of all these sports, and then be forced to go to my own siblings' games. Then it also feels like just yesterday when the swim coach saw me swimming in the pond and invited me to join his swim team.

All this, and my parents still didn't know what was going on. And then just last night I asked my parents to come to the first swim meet of the season, to watch a swim team they didn't even know I was part of! And what did they say? They said no. After a lot of persuading they still said no. But then hope came the next day when we had nothing to do, so we went. Yippee!

Right now, I'm on the pool starting blocks. I have no idea what my parents are doing. Probably just sitting with their mouths open. Then all of a sudden...

BANG!

That was the signal to start the race.

SPLASH! A girl in the lane to the right of me and I dove off the blocks and started swimming freestyle (or the front crawl) at the exact same time. That girl was Emily. She's the best swimmer on the team! We hadn't exactly had a good friendship *before* I started swimming the same event, and now.... With both of us swimming, she's just too much of a "thinks she's the greatest" type of girl.

SWISH! That was the sound of me completing my first lap. In this event the winner is the first person to complete two lengths of the pool.

Another *swish*. That was Emily's flip and turn. She's right behind me!

That made me nervous. But that means that I'm in the lead. I think Emily knew that, and wouldn't let me win. And she probably took advantage of it. She shot up in front of me like *that*. Once I realized that she was in front of me, I must have sped up, because I could hear the crowd starting to cheer.

Emily and I were even for a few seconds, and then she got ahead again. Since it took a while for me to catch up, I was behind for one or two seconds.

I was almost there. I could see the edge

We were even, again. Then I started to kick really hard. This was the final stretch. I inched ahead. Then I sprinted. Emily must have been tired. Me? I felt like I could swim for hours.

Suddenly everything went in slow motion. Emily was catching up...but too late!

I had touched the wall and won! But it was so close, I didn't know.... Let's see what the judges think....

"...First place goes out to Miss Bridget Hemonds!" Everyone started cheering wildly.

And then...

After that I heard a familiar whistle. That was my dad's. I'd heard it at Joe's soccer game; at Michel's baseball game; at Maddie's lacrosse game...the list goes on and on.

But they aren't here. This is all about me.

HOLIDAY MADNESS

The Christmas That Was Almost Forgotten

*When you're the top dog, there is always someone eager to take your place. Even that most famous of jolly old elves has a target on his back in **THE CHRISTMAS THAT WAS ALMOST FORGOTTEN**, by *Andrew Du Comb*.*

It was early December, and Santa was making his list, when a little elf named Bob stepped into Santa's office. "Hello, Bob," said Santa. "What do you want? I am very busy."

"Sir, we just got news from our secret spies on what the other holidays are planning," said Bob in a squeaky voice. "It seems that the Easter Bunny, the April Fool, the Thanksgiving Turkey, Cupid, and the Great Pumpkin have joined forces to take over Christmas again!" yelled Bob.

"Well, we shouldn't have to worry about that. You know I beat them three times in the last 100 years," said Santa.

"Oh, no, you don't understand, sir. They're planning to make people forget about Christmas forever," screeched Bob.

"WHAT! We will not stand for this. The last three times they went after me directly, but going after the holiday of Christmas itself? This is an outrage!" roared Santa.

"What do you want us to do then, Santa?" screeched Bob.

"I can't do this mission alone. Find the three kids that are most likely to keep a secret about my existence and bring them to me immediately," said Santa.

“Yes, sir,” said Bob. Minutes later: “We found them, sir. Here are their pictures,” said Bob.

“Great, let’s have a look. Ahh, they’ll do, Bob... they’ll do.”

Meanwhile...

“I can’t believe that you still think Santa exists,” said Dan.

“He does, too; my mom even told me,” said Jimmy in a sassy voice.

“Oh yeah, when? When you were five?” Dan and Samantha (Sam for short) roared with laughter.

“Well, he does!” screamed Jimmy. All of a sudden, a huge teleportation ray hit them and sent them directly to Santa’s headquarters.

“W-w-w-w-where are we, and who is that fat guy in the red and white suit ahead?” asked Sam in a timid voice.

“It looks like... oh, no... it can’t be, it’s—it’s—Santa Claus,” said Dan.

“Ha, I told you so, I told you so; see, he does exist,” said Jimmy. It really was him, although he looked different. He was still fat and everything, but there was something different about his face. In the books, he looked happy and jolly. But this guy was the opposite of jolly. He looked cold, mad, and almost mean.

“Kids, I am Santa,” said Santa with a grim look on his face. “I brought you here because I need you to help me save Christmas,” said Santa in a deep tone.

“From who? And why us?” squeaked Sam.

“The other holidays are planning to get rid of Christmas because it is becoming too popular. I need the three of you because I cannot do this mission alone, and you are the most likely kids that will keep a secret of my existence,” said Santa.

“We are?” asked Dan.

“Of course you are. I’ve been watching you three, and you are the only kids that have kept every secret you’ve been told,” said Santa.

“Can we please focus? Now what are they specifically planning to do, Santa?” asked Sam.

“They are planning to use a hypnotizing ray on the whole world, so that everybody would forget about Christmas forever,” replied Santa. “But I have constructed a plan that will stop them.... Bring in the fighter sleighs, boys.” Then Santa rolled out two maps, one of Antarctica. The other looked like a secret base or something like that. “Ok, so what we need to do is fly these sleighs down to the South Pole where the other holidays’ secret base is. The base is in the exact center of Antarctica.” Santa pointed to a spot on the map. “Now, they haven’t launched the hypnotize ray into space yet, which means we will have time to take our army of super elves down there and stop them from getting rid of Christmas. They have made an army, too, that is made of mutant eggs. When we get there, our job is to sneak in through the back and disable the hypnotizing ray, which will be in the control room right here.” He pointed to a spot on the base map.

“You said that we are going to sneak into the back entrance. How? Won’t it be guarded?” asked Jimmy.

“Good question. No, all of their forces will be here in the front of the base defending it from us,” replied Santa. “Now are we clear on the plan?”

“Yes,” said the kids.

“All right, let’s move out,” said Santa.

Five...four...three...two...one...blast off! *BOOM!* The first sleigh took off. *BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!* The rest of the sleighs took off and headed toward the South Pole.

About two hours later they landed on the outskirts of the base.

“Sir, we just detected a large amount of sleighs that have just landed. What do you want us to do?” said Private Cuns.

“Well, it seems that Santa has come to save the day. Fire the traps and send out General Eggmen’s army,” said the Easter Bunny.

Meanwhile at the sleighs: “Looks like they didn’t see us, General Santa,” said Lieutenant Snow. All of a sudden, lasers came out of the ground and they started to make beeping sounds.

Beep...beep...

“What is that noise?” said Dan.

“It sounds like a detonator of some kind,” said Santa.

Beep...Beep...

“GET DOWN!” screamed Santa. *BOOOOM!* The lasers went off.

“Is everybody all right?” asked Sam.

“Yes,” replied everyone.

“Good, because we have a battle to fight. Now, come on, men!” yelled Sam.

About ten minutes later, they ran into a minefield. “Oh, no, General. How are we supposed to guide our 10,000 elves across the minefield?” asked Lieutenant Snow.

“I’ll tell you how,” said Santa. Then, Santa snapped his fingers, and out of nowhere the fighter sleighs appeared. “We fly,” said Santa. “Now listen up. Once we get to the other side, we will probably run into General Eggmen’s army, and when we do, I want you guys to fight with all your might. General Eggmen’s army has about 20,000 mutant eggs, which is double our army. But I know you guys can do it. Now let’s move out,” said Santa.

About five minutes later they landed. Then, they departed from the sleighs. “Uh... Santa,” said Jimmy.

“What is it, Jimmy?” replied Santa.

“Look.” And standing directly in front of them, no less than 100 yards away, was General Eggmen’s army.

“Dan, Sam, Jimmy, come here. Now remember the plan. We sneak around to the back and disable the force field,” whispered Santa. “All right men, get ready... CHARGE!”

“AHHHHHHHHH! Fire the cannons!” *BANG, BANG.*

Soon, the sky was covered in smoke. “Now’s our chance. Sam, Jimmy, Dan, quickly get down and follow me,” roared Santa. “We’re sneaking in through the back.”

Minutes later: “Looks like we made it into the base safely, Santa. Now all we have to do is turn off the force field, right?” asked Dan.

“Correct. Now the switch should be around here somewhere,” said Santa.

“There it is,” replied Sam.

“Good work, Sam.”

Flick.

“Now, I think we go down this hallway. Come on,” said Santa.

A few moments later: “Look, there is the control room. We can destroy the ray and get out of here in time,” remarked Jimmy.

“Oh, you think so, do you?” said a voice. Out of nowhere, all of the holidays appeared. The Easter Bunny looked evil—really evil. His fur was spiked up, his eyes were red, and his tongue was forked. The April Fool looked mean, too. This guy is supposed to be funny and make people laugh, but he didn’t look funny at all. And instead of making people laugh, he’d probably make them scream. Cupid wasn’t a bundle of joy, either; his hair was reddish pink and all messed up. He also had a bow and arrows on his back, which probably weren’t love arrows. The Great Pumpkin looked like an ordinary pumpkin, but bigger, and his eyes were a fiery yellow. The Thanksgiving turkey was big, fat, and looked horrendous.

“Dan, you have to destroy the ray. We’ll take care of the holidays. NOW GO!”

Dan left, but before he went into the control room he looked back to see what was happening. What he saw was either funny or sad. Usually when people think of these characters, they think love, happiness, and joy, but these people were the opposite of those. Even Santa was going berserk. Of course, Sam and Jimmy weren’t really doing anything. But the holidays were just crazy. Then, he went into the room, trying to forget what he had just seen.

"Now I'm in the control room, but where is the control box...? Let's see here. Oh, there it is. Now how do I work this thing? Hmm, I wonder if I press this big blue button?"

"Hypnotize ray will launch in 30 seconds and counting."

"Oh, no, wrong button. Come on, which button is it? Hmm, maybe if I just press all of them, something will happen."

Beep.

"Operation Forget, deactivated."

"Phew."

"Self Destruct Unit, initiated."

"WHAT? WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! Jimmy, Sam, Santa, this place is going to blow up! We've got to get out of here now!"

"What! What did you do!" roared Cupid.

"I hit the self-destruct button," said Dan.

"You idiot!" cried the April Fool. "RUN!"

"Dan, Jimmy, Sam, come on; this is the fastest way out."

Five...four...

"We're not going to make it," cried Jimmy.

"Oh, yes we are. Come on, hurry!" shouted Dan. "We're out!"

One...*BOOM!* The entire base blew up in one big explosion.

"Are you kids okay?"

"We're fine. Well, at least now we are," replied Jimmy.

"We made it! We did it! We saved Christmas!" yelled Sam in an extremely happy voice.

"Well, then, come on, let's get you kids back home," said Santa.

"Why are you in such a hurry, Santa?" asked Dan.

"It's Christmas Eve. I still have a job to do, remember?"

About an hour later, they were at their homes. "Bye, kids. I'll see you all next year," said Santa.

"Bye, Santa," they said together. Santa left and the kids were saying good night.

"See you guys tomorrow," said Dan.

“See ya, Dan,” replied Jimmy and Sam. Jimmy and Sam walk to their homes while Dan was already at his porch.

Dan’s mom dashed out of the house. “Oh my gosh, where were you? I’ve been so worried. Are you okay?” asked Dan’s mom.

“I’m fine. After all, it’s Christmas Eve. Why wouldn’t I be fine?” replied Dan, looking up at the sky.

“Well, come on, let’s get you in bed,” said Dan’s mom.

In the sky, Santa was making sure everything was all right. Then after one last look he went back to the North Pole. And then, as he always does, he said, “Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas!”

The Human Size Santa Doll

*Ho, ho, ho! Guess who's dropping in—literally? Both Tommy and Santa receive a rude awakening in **THE HUMAN SIZE SANTA DOLL** by Caitlin Van Ermen.*

It was a snowy Christmas Eve, and all little boys and girls were having visions of sugarplums in their heads while they were sleeping and waiting for Santa to come.

Unfortunately, all little boys' and girls' wishes did not happen when they wanted them to happen...

It was a cold December when all the ice had made its way down from the sky along with the snow that had fallen on the rooftops of all the houses. It was loaded with ice and lots of snow.

Santa was making his way to Tommy's chimney when he slipped on the roof and fell backwards. Santa's weight was too much for the roof, so he fell backwards, thinking he would fall right through the house. And he was right. Because he was terrified, the not-so-jolly Santa screamed at the top of his lungs, "The roof is falling! The roof is falling! The roof is...!" But before he could say the word "falling," he plopped right down next to the Christmas tree.

Since he did not feel well after his fall, he gave the presents to the reindeer and they delivered them to all little boys and girls. And before you know it, he fell fast asleep right next to the Christmas tree.

When the morning came around, six-year-old Tommy woke up to the sound of his grandfather clock chiming. He knew at once it was time to open presents. And he was right. He ran downstairs to see an empty spot on the floor. There were no presents. *How could this be?* he thought. So he searched all over the room until he found the **HUGE** doll. When he turned it over he saw...

“Wow, Mom, look at this! I got a human size Santa doll.”

His mom had no idea what he was talking about, so she came over and woke up the very tired, not-so-jolly Santa. Of course, Santa got up and saw what he had done.

“I am terribly sorry about that roof of yours, so I will give you a new roof for Christmas, plus the other gifts I was going to give to you in the first place,” said Santa.

“Yes! Thank you! I was worried that the only presents we were going to get was a stink’n new roof instead of toys,” said happy Tommy.

“You’re welcome,” Santa said.

From then on Tommy and Santa kept in touch, until one day the very same thing happened to Tommy’s son Bob. But that is a different story.

Santa Claus vs. Easter Bunny

*Who knew that being a symbol for a holiday involved such cutthroat practices? It's a smackdown between two giants of mythology in **SANTA CLAUS VS. EASTER BUNNY**, by **Joseph Mayone**.*

At the beginning of time, there were two sides on Earth. Both were holidays trying to conquer each other: Christmas-winter and Easter-spring. While the head of Christmas-winter wanted there always to be a nice snow and have Christmas-winter for eternity, the opposite came from the head of Easter-spring. He wanted to celebrate Easter-spring all the time and have a perfect amount of sun.... You know what? Let's just get to the action!

Santa Claus is the Leader of Christmas-winter tribe. His weapons: Big Bag of Doom and the perfect little toy. His transportation: flying reindeer and sleigh. His Army: thousands of every kind of elves—tall, small, fat, skinny, fast, and strong.

Easter Bunny is the Leader of Easter-spring tribe. His weapons: Basket of Terror, and egg dropper. His transportation: basketmobile. His army: all the animals of the forest, including cheetahs, leopards, lions, tigers, and bears.

The War

There were toys flying everywhere, elves down, and animals howling. There were so many candy canes waving around trying to revive the little passed out elves, it wasn't even funny.

One of Santa's reindeer got hit in the eye with a hard-boiled egg thrown by the Easter Bunny. Santa jumped out of the sleigh before they crashed and was unharmed.

All of a sudden, Santa was scratched in the back. He turned around and scooped up ten bears in one swipe with his Big Bag of Doom.

Meanwhile, the Easter Bunny was hopping on and squashing elves two at a time. It was a sight to see.

After a harsh discussion between some reindeer and a leopard, the leopard ran away and was never seen again.

Finally after all the pawns were down from laughter, injury, or sheer cowardice, the real battle began.

With only Santa and the Easter Bunny left, it was a show no one would want to miss. First Santa went for the scoop, but the Easter Bunny hopped over it. Then the Easter Bunny tried to egg Santa, but Santa caught it with some wrapping paper from a leftover present.

Santa put a present down to distract the Easter Bunny. It worked. Santa bagged him. Right when it seemed it was all over, the Easter Bunny broke out of the bag and threw ten eggs at Santa. Santa was hit! The Easter Bunny quickly put Santa in the Basket of Terror.

The Easter Bunny carried Santa to the cliff of A Long Way Down. As Santa was being dangled over the cliff by the Easter Bunny, he said, "Look! My reindeer are back!" The Easter Bunny turned around to look for Santa's reindeer. Santa jumped out of the Basket of Terror, then captured the Easter Bunny in the Basket of Terror.

Santa threw the Easter Bunny down the cliff, saying, "Now who will get the last laugh?"

"Me!" said the Easter Bunny as he used the helicopter mode on the Basket of Terror. Then he shot some missiles out of the Basket of Terror.

"You missed me!" said Santa

"Wasn't aiming for you," the Easter Bunny said just as the cliff edge broke, and Santa was no more.

HORROR- STRICKEN

The Back Woods

There is no such thing as monsters. Keep telling yourself that as you brave **THE BACK WOODS**, *by* **Nate Stucky**.

Thump...thump...thump...

That's how my heart felt at my cousin's barn when we heard a really loud noise like footsteps. We were having a sleepover and we thought it would be fun to have it in the barn because it was so dark. At first we thought it was his older brother, but then we realized that the noise was coming from the path that leads to the woods. We knew that his brother couldn't have made footsteps that loud.

My heart thumped even louder when we found our flashlight didn't work and it was pitch black. I couldn't even see my hand in front of my face. Just to make sure it wasn't his brother or the pigs, we looked out of the missing board in the wall so we could see the path to the woods. That's when we saw the creature that was making the noise. I almost had a heart attack. Just then the pigs started squealing and the "thing" turned around and looked in our direction. Luckily, it didn't see us. But we saw it.

Its hairy face and yellow eyes stared at us. It began walking away on its hind legs, just like a human. It sniffed the air for our scent. He dropped on all fours and crept closer and closer until it came to the barn.

We thought we were safe since we were on the second story loft in the hay. Just to be sure, we took some haystacks and put them over the trapdoor. As we were lifting the last haystack over the trapdoor it fell on the floor with a thud.

The creature looked up and we could see his bright yellow eyes looking up at us through the crack in the floorboards. We watched as he strode to the ladder. It actually started to climb the ladder.

My cousin and I started to scream and mumble, "He's...he's going to get us." We screamed like little girls and we started to hug each other.

Then the hay started bouncing up and down as the creature started ramming the trap door with his back. We both jumped on top of the hay. But it seemed useless.

Then all of a sudden the creature stopped. Everything turned quiet. I could only hear my own heartbeat and my cousin's breathing. We looked at each other in fright as the creature jumped onto the small tractor, then the big tractor. He was using the tractors as steps. We were trapped!

We could hear him on the other side of the wall. The only way out now was through the trap door. We started tossing hay off the trap door while the creature was pounding on the wall with his head.

As we opened the trap door, the wall gave way and the creature fell through. We jumped! My leg felt broken as I limped back to the house with my cousin. Just as we got to the door, the creature was out of the barn.

The door was locked! I started yelling, "He's coming! He's coming!" My cousin grabbed his key in his pocket and unlocked the door. That's when the creature dove for my leg.

He grabbed it, I grabbed my cousin, and he started yelling, "Help! Help!" Luckily his brother came and saw the creature. He ran back upstairs to get his hunting rifle. It was too late. The creature started dragging me away!

But before he got too far away, my cousin had a clear shot with his rifle. The creature fell with a thump.

We were finally safe, the creature was dead, and that puts an end to my story.

The Black Widow

*When Ben and Jerry are taken unexpectedly to a notorious island, they discover the truth behind the rumors about it. Be prepared for **THE BLACK WIDOW**, by **Jordan A. Banks**.*

May 31

Ben and Jerry were going on a field trip to an environmental center. Well, at least that's what they thought. They were really going to an island in the Atlantic Ocean. Their Skills For Living teacher was going to go with them.

Everyone in Ben and Jerry's class was so excited about the field trip, because they knew that when they were done with the activities at the environmental center they would be able to play on the playground there. At least that's what they thought. At 8:15 A.M. the buses would take them to the boat that would take them to the island.

It took them about one hour to get there. Once they got there, everyone looked scared. Ben and Jerry looked at each other, and at the same time they both said, "What the heck is going on!"

Their Skills For Living teacher got everyone to stop talking and said, "I have tricked you all and told you we were going to an environmental center, but we're not! We are on an island in the Atlantic Ocean." Their Skills For Living teacher was interrupted by all the "oohs and aahs" of the students. When the students stopped, he finished by saying, "The name of this island is the Black Widow!"

"Oh, no!" said Ben and Jerry, because they had heard of this island in social studies. They knew this island was cursed. There was a legend that whoever made it through the whole

island would carry the curse, and just by touch the curse would spread.

There were huge doors that 18 out of 20 students had to push open. Once they got through they saw a humongous skeleton that looked like it might be a *T. rex* skeleton. It spooked everyone, even the teacher.

The teacher told everyone to keep walking, but there was one who saw a cave that the *T. rex* skeleton was blocking. He climbed through the bones and entered the cave. He screamed, and sad to say, it was his last.

All the students started to look for Johnny Mersek, the kid who entered the cave. All the students were in groups of five. Ben and Jerry were partners with Susie Catents, Maria Estevens, and Danielle Markey. Susie was the girl Jerry liked.

When they started walking, the girls started to giggle because they thought Ben was sort of cute. They stopped when they saw a huge footprint that looked like it might be a kangaroo's.

Susie screamed when a giant kangaroo behind her picked her up. Ben and the rest of the group started running toward a cave. Once they got in, Maria screamed. There was a baby kangaroo with eight legs like a spider crawling on her back. She screamed, "Get it off! Get it off!"

Jerry picked up a stick and hit the creature with it. The creature attacked Jerry. Danielle took the stick from Jerry's hand and hit the creature until it died. "LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!" yelled Ben.

Once they got out of the cave, they saw the giant kangaroo and followed it as Susie screamed for help. Ben noticed that the kangaroo had wings.

Once the kangaroo finally stopped, it dropped Susie on its nest and went to go get some food. In the meantime, the rest of the group whispered to Susie.

"You camel!" said Susie.

"*Shh*," said the group.

"We don't want that kangaroo to hear us," said Jerry.

"Now, let's go," said Maria.

“That’s a good—AHH!” screamed Susie as the kangaroo tried to pick her up.

“Come on!” said Ben.

Susie had already fainted. The group had to carry her. They ran as fast as they could. When they finally got to the place where the boats dropped them off, they met up with the rest of the students and the teacher. Just in time, the boats came to pick them up. They all ran and sat in the first seat they could see. The boat took off as the kangaroo chased them. The kangaroo finally ran out of breath.

The boat took them to the buses and the buses took them to school. The kids arrived safely at the school, all except for Johnny Mersek. The students’ parents came to pick up the—

Ben woke up. “Oh, man, I’m glad that was just a bad dream!” Ben looked around. “NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO OOOOO!” screamed Ben as he realized that he was in the kangaroo’s nest, surrounded by hatching eggs.

It wasn’t a dream after all.

The Creature

*What is the thing that is revealing itself to Alexa? In **THE CREATURE** by Sarah Knoll, Alexa faces a challenge unlike anything she has ever imagined.*

Alexa normal? I don't think so. In Net Middle School, everyone is normal. But she doesn't do well in school, and she is supposed to be perfect like everyone else.

One day at Net Middle School, they were having a band/orchestra concert. When the concert began, the lights flickered on and off. Then the power went out, and everyone was screaming. It was pitch black in the school except for one room where a light was flickering. Alexa went in the room and saw something or someone in it.

Alexa noticed a figure on the other side. It was pitch black, like walking in a deserted home at midnight, but the lights were flickering on the other side. Alexa moved closer to the darkness and said, "Hello."

Then Alexa heard from the darkness, "Hello."

"I am Alexa. Who are you?"

"I am an unknown creature." Alexa stared at him, for he was red with black eyes and a tail.

"You are an unknown creature, too," said the creature.

"NO, I'm normal like everyone else," said Alexa. "How would you know?"

"There is a name for you, but you won't like it."

"What am I? Tell me!" said Alexa.

"Okay, disguiser," said the creature.

"What is a disguiser?" asked Alexa.

“Find out,” said the creature, and the creature disappeared. Then the lights went back on.

Alexa went home, and at dinner she asked, “What is a disguiser?”

Her mom and dad stopped eating. “Who told you that?” asked Alexa’s mom.

Lying, Alexa said, “I don’t remember.”

“Well,” said Alexa’s dad, “it’s where you are able to change to who you want to be or what you want to be, and also to disappear.”

“Well, don’t talk to this person again,” said Alexa’s mom.

The next day at school was going great. At lunch everyone was eating, but they suddenly froze except for Alexa. The creature was back. Alexa looked at him, frightened, and the creature came closer. Alexa got scared and disappeared. Alexa turned invisible and the creature looked for Alexa. The creature found Alexa under a table. Then the creature grabbed Alexa, and they didn’t have any time left.

Alexa and the creature disappeared, never to be seen again. Some say that Alexa and the creature went to another planet. Others say that they evaporated. Everyone believes that her parents knew something, but they wouldn’t speak about Alexa. No one knows for certain what happened that day, and it will always be a Net Middle School mystery.

The Doll

*You've seen them before: Those creepy playthings whose eyes seem to follow you around the room. **Keely Nowland** understands your nightmares, and brings them to life in **THE DOLL**.*

This story is about a doll. This doll looked like it was made by a blind man because it was such a horror to look at. It was given to Mathew Perry as a gift from his Spanish nanny. That nanny was fired because she had been practicing voodoo. People say that when she got fired, she gave the doll to Mathew after putting a spell on the doll, so the family would be cursed forever.

Mathew took the doll everywhere. He wouldn't leave without it. Mathew's mother, Mary, started to become concerned.

The Perry family decided to move to a bigger house in the country. A week before the Perry family moved, the doll started controlling William Perry, the father. William started yelling at his wife for no reason, and then he would stop and say it was the doll. William could do nothing about the doll and its control of him. Mary went to the police and they said they would look into it.

When the Perry family finally moved to the new house, William said that the doll demanded his own room. Mary said okay, but later in the middle of the night, she went to the police again. The police would just laugh and laugh and say they would look into it. Mary felt like no one was listening to her and felt very scared for what would happen in the future.

Life went on pretty easily for the Perrys, until one day William got very sick and couldn't move. He told Mary that if she put the doll in the guest bedroom, he would get better.

Mary went upstairs to the attic to get the doll. When she opened the door, the doll was right at her feet waiting for her. The next day William was fine.

Mary became very worried that Mathew would get sick, so she went to the police again. Later that day Mary was put in an insane hospital. Just two weeks later, Mathew and William Perry were found murdered in their home. No one knows who killed them, but Mathew and William's blood was all over the doll.

The creepy thing about this story is that the doll is still out there.

Horrors

*Ready or not, here comes evil. In **HORRORS** by **Keith McAllister**, a boy becomes the target of a ruthless killer.*

It was January 5, 2005. There I was in my bedroom, half asleep. I heard the furnace downstairs making a funny noise, so I went to check it out. Normally that would have creeped me out to go down in my basement, but today, for some strange reason, it didn't. So I got out of my bed, walked downstairs and went to the door at the end of the hallway.

When I opened the door it smelled musty and old. I started to walk down the stairs, and each one made a creaky sound. *Eek, eek, eek.*

When I got to the bottom I found a box that looked pretty heavy. I took the lid off it and found that it was old newspaper. My parents are really weird and collect the weirdest things.

As I went through them, I couldn't help but notice one that had the date ten days after I was born, and it said the place where it happened was where I was born and where I live now. The article said that there was a killer that broke free from a prison and killed some people. That didn't scare me because it was ten years before. What it really said was:

There has been a prison
escape and one of the
convicts is a murderer. Be
on high alert and lock all
doors and windows at
night. All schools have

gone on high alert. For your kids' protection, the schools will lock up ten minutes after they have started. We have found some bodies that we think might be from the convict. All of this is taking place in Macomb County, Michigan. The man is five feet four inches tall, has brown hair, is 145 pounds, and has blue eyes.

When I was done reading I went upstairs and went to sleep.

The next morning I went to school and was thinking about that all day. When school was over I went over to the abandoned train station. That's where my dad and I went and just hung out before he died. I was just walking around when I heard someone talking on a cell phone. He said, "Fine, since you don't have the money like we agreed on, I'm going to kill her." Then I crouched over to look and I saw a man that was about five four, had brown hair, looked about 145-150 pounds, and from what I could see had blue eyes.

Oh my gosh, this can't be true. Right when he hung up the phone, he walked over to a woman that was his hostage, and pulled out a pistol with a silencer. He walked up behind her where she was tied to a pole. In my head, all I said was, *Oh my god!* He took aim and shot her.

All I heard was a muffled shot. Right at that moment I let out a little gasp. And he heard the slightest bit of it, and I ran for my life! He got off a few shots at me, but only one got close enough to make a whizzing sound.

I knew a shortcut back to my house that only I would fit through. I ran so fast through the fence and the rest of the way home.

When I got home, I locked all the doors and windows and told my mom what I had just seen. When I was done telling her she said, “How much pop did you have today?” I kept telling my mom that it was true, but she just wouldn’t believe me. Eventually, I finally felt safe and went to bed.

When I woke up I went to school, but when I got home there was a surprise there. I saw the killer, so I threw my backpack at him and ran. I ran around the whole neighborhood and made it back to my house. I ran into the garage and locked the door.

I couldn’t find anything to defend myself. Then I saw a chainsaw.

Right when I started it, the convict broke the door down. I took the chainsaw and slashed at him. I missed the first three times. Then I just went crazy with it. I slashed it everywhere. But I just couldn’t look. It was too scary. I hit him somewhere and then heard him *thump* to the ground.

I did it. I killed a killer. Later, I took the body and dumped it in the marina. After that I moved to Arizona. Of course...who believed my story?

Mayhem

*An average man turns into a murderer without warning. **MAYHEM**, by **Jon Holland**, tells of his downward spiral.*

This is the story of Lukas Kane, an ordinary man who does something so vile he's probably regretting it right now as he lies in a body bag. For security reasons I will not be telling you my name, but trust me on every detail of the story. I witnessed everything. This story will be told from the perspectives of Lukas Kane and Trisha Smith.

Lukas Kane: Pops Diner

I got up and went to the bathroom. There was a man washing his hands in the sink. The window was open, allowing a cool breeze to enter. I walked into a nearby stall and did the strangest thing possible. I pulled out my pocketknife and began to carve these foreign symbols on my arm. But the weird part is I had no control over it, like I couldn't stop what was happening.

That's when I saw this weird figure dressed all in black surrounded by thousands of candles. In the man's hands was a knife identical to the one I was holding. He began to walk forward and when he moved I moved and I couldn't control it, so I walked forward, too. I was heading towards the man washing his hands. Before I figured out what was going on, I had stabbed the man in the back.

That's when I regained control. I looked down at what I had done and panicked. I dragged the man into the stall I had used and locked the door to the stall and the door to enter the bathroom. I then climbed out the window.

There was a bum with a bottle of liquor in his hand. He started yelling at me in gibberish. There was a train station not too far away and I sprinted towards it like there was a pack of cheetahs behind me. I took the train to my apartment, where I fell asleep, hoping I'd wake up and find out it was just a dream.

Trisha Smith: Pops Diner

As soon as I arrived at the crime scene, I knew something was different. I've handled countless homicides, but something about this one was different than the others.

I walked into the diner to be greeted by another cop. He said the body hadn't been touched and that they were waiting for me before they moved the body. He also suggested I speak with the waitress who had served the victim his food. He said she was a little shaken up, so I should go easy on her.

I walked over to the waitress. The cop was right. She looked like she was having a huge nervous breakdown. I sat down across from her in a booth. She told me what she thought happened. "A regular at the diner, Lukas Kane, had come in like any other day and was eating his food. Then he went to the bathroom and never came back."

I then talked to two men sitting at the bar. They both gave pretty much the same story as the waitress.

I headed to the bathroom that the man was murdered in. *The killer had dragged the body into a nearby stall.* I noticed a slight breeze; I looked at the direction it was coming from. The window was still open. *The killer must have escaped through the window.*

I crawled out the window to see if I could find out what direction he was headed. I heard a grumbling noise from what appeared to be the dumpster, and upon further inspection I noticed there was a bum in the dumpster. I walked over to the bum and asked him if he had seen anything. "Yeah, there was a man wearing a black sweater and black pants that crawled out of the window. He looked pretty

freaked out. He had blood all over his hands and feet. He was just a wreck.”

Lukas Kane: Pine Tree Apartments

When I woke up, I felt like somebody was drilling nails into my head. I reached over to my dresser and grabbed a bottle of Advil. From there I walked over to the bathroom to clean up. On the way to the bathroom I wasn't looking and I walked into the wall and fell back, hitting my head on a glass coffee table. I then lay on the ground in pain. I crawled over to the bathroom to wrap my head.

After that there was a knock on the door. I opened it and immediately I regretted it. It was a cop. He said the neighbors had called due to a noise disturbance. I calmly told him everything was fine and he left.

Trisha Smith: NYPD station

“Trisha, the waitress from Pops is in your office. She's here to give us a description of the killer,” said my boss. I walked into my office and, sure enough, there she was. I opened up the police records on my computer to see if Lukas had any prior offenses. Turns out Lukas had a few minor offenses on his record. From the record, we discovered he lived at the Pine Tree Apartment Complex.

Lukas Kane: Lukas's office

I must have gone to the bathroom eight times that day to throw up. It was disgusting. I'd been having killer migraines and, worst of all, I couldn't hold any food down. When I began heading towards my office, I started having this hallucination in which giant ghost-like figures were chasing me. When they caught me, they sucked the life right out of me. Afterwards I passed out.

When I came to, I was in the corner of my office, huddled up in a ball, sweating pools of sweat. I decided to head home to try to calm down.

When I got back to my apartment, I turned on the TV. The news was on. On every channel they were reporting that a man had been murdered at Pops Diner.

Unable to deal with the pressure of life, I did the one thing I thought appropriate. I walked out to my balcony, climbed on the edge, and jumped off, killing myself.

A Not-So-Nice Dream on Elm Street

*Maybe you think you've heard this story before. You haven't! **David Sprung** has his own ideas about the troubles dreams can cause in **A NOT-SO-NICE DREAM ON ELM STREET**.*

"Are you ready?" I asked. My friend Patrick and I were about to do something dangerous. We were going to fall asleep.

You might wonder why that is dangerous. Two words explain that. They are "Leddy Dueger." An evil, horrible man, Leddy was convicted of twelve murders a few years ago. He was sent to jail and put on death row. Death row was a horrible place.

Leddy was driven crazy twenty-four hours a day. At night, rats squeaked as they scurried around the cell. During the day, the guy next door, Pott Seterson, banged a cup against the cell doors incessantly. When Leddy could stand it no more, he decided to hang himself.

Before he committed suicide, he vowed revenge on all good people. He said that he would come back in our dreams. How this is possible, I do not know. But lately, there have been two strange murders in our neighborhood.

"Time to sleep," I told Patrick. We both lay down on our pillows. It was then that I thought that if I don't wake up howling, I might not wake up at all. Knowing this, I fell into a troubled sleep.

In my dream, I was in a jail. I was running, but I don't know why. It was then that I saw him. Wearing a tall hat, a

horrid sight stepped out of the shadows. It was Leddy Dueger. He had green skin and was carrying a long knife. His green skin reminded me of my mom's cabbage casserole. He was rank and fowl. He smelled like rotten eggs. I screamed and ran.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the knife. It was extending toward me like a claw. I ran, and the knife whizzed past my ear. Leddy started whining. He said, "I never do anything right. I'm such a sissy."

After realizing that he had no self-esteem, I turned around and yelled, "Ha, you missed, loser!"

Leddy said, "Don't laugh. Stop!"

"Boo hoo," I said. Then I was awake.

My mother was standing over me, telling me to quiet down. I took in my bearings. I was home. It was 8:37 in the morning, and I was all right.

My mom left, and I turned to Pat's bed to wake him. I shrieked. Through the mattress, a knife was sawing toward Pat. He must be dreaming about Leddy.

He woke up, but by then it was too late. The knife was sticking out of his chest. He screamed in terror, and the unthinkable happened. Leddy appeared and with a grunt said, "This is for laughing." Then he dragged Pat into the mattress. He was gone.

There was no funeral right away. I was unable to convince Patrick's family that this could have actually happened. They were devastated by the loss of their son. I was terribly upset. After three days of mourning, I was a mess. Pat was gone forever. Every night I worried about going to sleep.

That night, I was ready for Leddy. When he jumped me, I was prepared. That sissy can't hurt anything. I was in command of the fight. His knife kept whizzing by me, and I was easily punching him.

All was fine until he ran downstairs into the cellar. I didn't know if I wanted to follow him or not. It was awfully dark in that cellar. I knew I had to, though.

The cellar was cold, dark, and damp. It looked like something out of a horror movie. I called in a trembling voice, revealing my fright, "Here Leddy, come out, loser." Then I saw him. Patrick was with him.

"Patrick!" I yelled. "I never thought I would see you again! Why didn't you kill him, Leddy?"

He said, "I couldn't bear to kill a human being."

"So he wasn't hurt?" I asked him how he pulled that off.

He said, "Special effects, my friend."

"So did you do the same with the twelve people?" I asked. He said that those were also special effects.

I couldn't believe he was falsely accused. That also meant that he had nothing to do with the murders in my neighborhood.

"So then why were you trying to kill us?" I asked.

He said, "Kill you? I would never kill you. I thought you liked playing with knives. Like I said, I'm a Grade A sissy."

"You never told me that," I said.

Leddy said, "I didn't? D'oh, sorry!"

After our conversation, Leddy threw a party for me, Patrick, and the other twelve people. He said that he wanted to celebrate our joyous friendship. Leddy served hors d'oeuvres and snacks for all of us. Leddy told Pat, the kids, and I that we would wake up in our beds. This was one dream that I did not want to end. Sadly, it came to an end when I abruptly awoke.

As the weeks went by, I realized that Dueger never had tried to kill me. I checked on Patrick to make sure that he was all right. He told me that he remembered that party, and couldn't believe that all of it was real. We made a note to ourselves to inspect supposedly evil men in our dreams before we judged them.

I never knew what happened to Leddy, but I'm sure he was still nice. I hope. There has been another scare in the neighborhood lately. But Leddy was nice, right?

LIVES IN THE BALANCE

Amanda Macy

*High-school students need to be adept at problem-solving. In **AMANDA MACY** by **Natalie Garr**, one girl takes this skill to a new level.*

Amanda was definitely not your normal student at South Forest High School. Amanda was tall and blond. She spent most of her time in the school library studying. She was a good problem solver and was an all-A student. She helped her mom often at Macy Problem Solvers. Macy Problem Solvers was an investigation place that Amanda's mom worked at. You may wonder who her dad was or where he is, but her dad was long lost and Amanda always dreamed of finding him one day.

Amanda's school was very out of the ordinary, too. So many horrible things happened there that the police were there once a week, and there were security guards there working a full day. At her school people were caught vandalizing and fighting.

One seemingly normal day Amanda went into school late. She discovered that there were many police officers and Crime Scene Investigators around South Forest High's premises. Raimy's parents were next to the head police officer and her mom was crying. There was a lot of commotion flying through the air. Amanda felt a cold tingle run up her spine. She asked her friend Erica what was with the police all over. "Raimy has been missing from her walk to school. They looked at the security tape and a man in a mask snatched her," replied Erica.

Amanda felt that she was needed to find Raimy as soon as possible. So when school was over she started to look for evidence. She took the route that Raimy had used to go to school. Amanda found some muddy boot tracks. She decided to follow them, and they went into a forest. Amanda felt goose bumps on her arms and legs. Amanda decided she'd call her friends Jason and Erica.

About twenty minutes later Jason and Erica arrived. They started walking in and searched for evidence. Then they went down a hill. There were tons of creepy spiders and animal holes.

In the distance they saw a house. They heard a man's loud voice that was so clear that you could hear him from afar talking to someone. They went down the hill and hid behind a few trees. "Hey, Joe. I'll meet you at Tim's Steakhouse at seven o' clock. I found this girl walking this morning. I'll drop her off. You can decide what to do." The man then left in a van.

The girls ran down to investigate and Jason went on lookout. They first peered in the windows to make sure that no one was inside the house. The house was dusty and smelled like cigars. It wasn't very big. "GROSS!" Erica shouted as rats scurried across the floor. Then they saw Raimy's backpack on the floor. They knew it was hers because it was bright pink and had key chains with her name on them and names of things that she liked. "Wow, I guess that that man has her in the van. We'd better hurry!"

Amanda called up her mom. She told her mom what happened. Her mom didn't believe her.

When Amanda got home, she used Mapquest to find Tim's Steakhouse. It was two miles away from the house. Amanda drove over there and took a few pictures and did some interviews with the workers there. Her mom then called some people to spy around Tim's. She also informed the police because her mom didn't think it was true. The police searched the house and found the backpack.

That evening Amanda and the police went to Tim's to catch the criminals. There were spies everywhere. Fifteen minutes later the men came in together. They were wearing black suits and hats. They sat at a table near a spy. The spy had a listening device that recorded everything that they said. Then the police told everyone to freeze and arrested the men.

Next the police went and got Raimy while Amanda followed. She gave her a big hug. Raimy said it was good to be free! Amanda was mentioned in newspapers for helping, and was on the front page.

"Good job. I should have believed you," Amanda's mom said to her.

Class of Warriors

With training barely completed, a group of elite fliers is called upon to carry out its first mission. By the way, success or failure will determine the fate of the world. Chris Ryu describes it all in **CLASS OF WARRIORS**.

“Missile attack! Evasive maneuvers!” I yelled. (Evasive maneuvers are maneuvers that present a hard target for an enemy or oncoming missile. They also help a plane or object escape.)

The missiles were coming in fast. Shutting off the engines, inverting, diving, and then shoving the throttle to full afterburners got me from 45,000 feet to less than 100 feet in less than two seconds, and the missiles lost me. (Afterburners, or AB, increase the thrust, or the force, that moves an aircraft through the air from 100 percent to anything 50 percent above 100 percent. They inject more fuel into the exhaust stream, because there is still oxygen in the stream, expanding the gases and further increasing thrust by 50 percent or more). Then I pulled up to 5,000 feet.

Bad mistake. As soon as I got out of the ground clutter, the remaining missiles were on me again. (Mountains, hills, and other ground features make it hard for radar, or Radio Detection And Ranging, to detect an aircraft, because the radar will think the aircraft is part of the ground.) Two of the missiles that were fired at me detected a near-miss and exploded. Luckily I escaped from the 200-meter blast radius, but there was a sudden jerk as the rapidly expanding air made my plane jerk and spin out of control. I managed to get out of the spin and pull out before I hit the ground. The rest of

the missiles ran out of fuel and fell “harmlessly” on the ground—on a chain of nuclear factories.

Suddenly there were nuclear explosions everywhere and I yelled, “Full afterburner! Get out of here!” I shoved the throttle up as far as they could go into AB. Even though we were in the air, the shockwave (even though it’s just air) could knock our planes out of the sky. Also, an EMP, or Electro Magnetic Pulse, could short-circuit our electrical systems and onboard computers, and we would lose control of our planes or the computers would blow up and we’d die (a shockwave is air expanding *extremely* fast).

After the explosions were over, we surveyed the area. It was an eerie black for as far as we could see, seeming to be saying “Death.” Well, at least all our objectives, primary and secondary, were completed. It was time to go home.

Meanwhile, our scores on the simulator were being graded. This was for determining if you got to stay in the Air Force. Also, it was a competition.

The next major part of the test was the oral/multiple choice/written section.

All the people in my squadron found the oral/multiple choice/written part of the test very easy and got at least 95% or higher.

Then came the most important part of testing: seeing how we did in a real situation. Of course, all the weapons had in them was water, and nothing in the test range reacted to water in a dangerous way.

Our first main objective was to destroy a lab capable of and suspected of creating nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Our second main objective was to completely wipe out an enemy research and development lab that could make these weapons even more dangerous and create an even more lethal weapon. The third main objective was to destroy an airfield suspected of housing experimental planes and deadly weapons (weapons of mass destruction and other extremely dangerous weapons).

Our secondary objectives were to destroy squadrons Alpha, Beta, and Epsilon. They also were to destroy any remaining anti-air defenses such as SAM sites (surface-to-air-missile sites) and AA (anti-air) guns. The secondary objectives were like extra credit: If you dropped bombs on them and hit, then you got extra points. They didn't take away your score if you didn't drop anything on them, but if you missed, they would take away points. The main objectives, however, must be destroyed or heavily damaged—enough damage so they couldn't operate in order to receive all the points.

At the award ceremony we were in first, with 100 percent bombing accuracy, all the main objectives completely eliminated, and 98 percent missile accuracy with squadrons Alpha and Epsilon destroyed. The people in second place had 98.47 percent bombing accuracy with most of the remaining AA defenses destroyed. All they carried were bombs so they didn't have a missile percentage score. The third place team had a 97.23 percent bombing accuracy with 99.38 percent missile accuracy.

At 0100 hours, or 1:00 A.M. (0200 hour means 2:00 A.M., 1300 hrs. means 1:00 P.M., 1330 means 1:30 P.M., etc.), a Humvee silently came to my house and a dark figure came out. It knocked on my door and immediately I woke up and grabbed an Smg (Sub-machine gun). The knocking persisted and I cautiously crept toward the door and opened it.

There was a droid-like figure at the door. It reached out and grabbed me. I shot it, but the bullets just fell harmlessly a few feet away. Then I whacked its arm, thinking it would break off, but it didn't. Instead the gun broke, but the thing's grip loosened, just by a hair. Seizing my chance to get away, I pried myself free of the death grip and jumped out of the window 25 feet off the ground. Luckily, nothing was broken.

As quickly as I could, I got up and ran, trying to forget about the pain. Then, I heard a sound that sounded like a jet taking off, but on a much smaller scale. Suddenly, the figure was in front of me, blocking my path. I turned around and ran, planning to jump the fence and hide in the woods until it

went away. But before I made it to the fence, I felt a bolt of extremely painful electricity that sent me sprawling to my knees. I got up, but then another bolt of electricity causing excruciating pain sent me on my back. The next thing I saw was the terrifying figure looming over me. I tried to fight back, but the electricity had zapped my strength away.

It carried me off to the Humvee. Inside the Humvee, the figure sat down and took off a helmet I hadn't noticed before. The man who had just taken off the helmet was...

"Patrick!" I exclaimed. "What are you doing here?" Patrick was on the short side, but solidly built, and his cobalt blue eyes that could change from soft and warm to piercing were seemingly made out of titanium. He could change them in a way that no matter how many times he did it would always be surprising.

"Just scaring you out of your pants," he said, laughing.

"Ha, ha. Very funny," I said.

After he was done laughing, he said, "Okay, okay. I really came here to get you. All of this is top-secret stuff. This is to be shared *only* between you and me, *no matter what*." He handed me an envelope with the words 'TOP SECRET' on it. "You will read this only when you get to the specified location. It states where gate 10-a is; 10-a is the gate you're supposed to go to," he said. Then he handed me another envelope. "This one you may show to anyone. It just states that you are supposed to go there and wait at gate 10. Of course, you really are supposed to go to gate 10-a. If anyone asks where you're going, just tell them your unit is being transferred to another country and they can't come." He handed me my plane ticket and said, "That is all. You are dismissed."

When I got out of the car, I saw that I was at an airport. I looked at Patrick and he said, "Well, what are you waiting for? You might miss your plane."

"Already?" I asked. "Can't I at least tell my family I'll be gone?"

"Yes. When you get to your final destination," said Patrick.

I went on the plane with the rest of my squadron, got to the airport, showed the person the non-classified set of orders, and went to gate 10-a.

We waited there for one day. Finally, I saw a shuttle come to my gate. We were called up one-by-one. The vehicle then moved back and went to a deserted area a few miles from the airport and stopped. Then, as instructed, we got out. We waited for a few minutes. After about five minutes, a pilot came up to us and said, "Will you hurry up? We've been waiting for you for almost ten minutes." There was a plane and we hadn't even noticed it, even when we were looking right at it! It was black and seemed to absorb the air and obscure it so it looked like it wasn't there. We got on and lifted off. Then we arrived at our final destination.

We got off the plane. Then a few men came out of the hangar and walked toward us. There was a massive man, at least six feet four inches tall. He stepped forward.

"Welcome to Area 51," he said. "I am General Samson. If you thought you had a bad life, then you're wrong. Life here is worse. If you thought you saw the meanest commander of all, you were wrong. I am that person. You will no longer have as many freedoms as you do if you work here. Now if you want to work here, step forward." Everyone stepped forward.

Then, he clamped something on each of our shoulders and took it off. It felt like something entered our bodies. "Those are small microscopic chips with which you can communicate with each other. They will not set off alarms of any kind. You can change the channel by thinking the channel you want. Now go into the hangar and wait."

He followed us into the hangar. Then he pushed a button. The hangar doors closed. Suddenly, the entire area in the hangar started moving down. When it stopped, he said, "This area is capable of withstanding a direct nuclear hit." We walked through the base, and were introduced to our living quarters. I guessed when Samson said life stunk here, it stunk.

The next day, he said, "You were chosen to work here because you were better than the best of the best. Now you're

going to have to live up to that. Huanduray (a newly formed country) has a facility that is building many lethal weapons. There are some that are operational already. You must destroy that facility. It is heavily defended, and I mean *heavily* defended, and there is something there that jams radar and causes electronics not to work. We have modified your planes to work under these conditions, have made them stealthy, and raised their overall performance by about 25 percent. You have 15 days to come up with a plan to destroy the facility and the weapons. You have 15 days only, because after that, it might be too late to stop them.”

Fifteen days later, we launched. But this time, it felt much different. We had only 500 feet of paved runway, but after that, we had at least 2000 feet to spare. The launch was very, very fast and we were airborne before the 500 feet ended. After that, it would just be sleep for a few hours, letting the AP (Auto Pilot) fly us to the facility.

A few hours later, we were woken up by an alarm signaling that we were 400 miles away from the facility. We got ourselves ready, and then some of our electronics faltered a little, and our radar would refuse to work. We switched to infrared scanning. A few miles offshore, we saw millions of threats on the threat receiver, but we didn’t need to worry about them right now. When we were attacking the sites and after we attacked them was when we would need to worry about them.

The defenses were increasing by the billions. When we got to the facility, I said, “Prepare for extreme evasive maneuvers.” I opened my bomb bay doors and yelled, “Extreme evasive maneuvers!”

As soon as I opened the bay doors, the AA (anti-aircraft) defenses started blaring like crazy. There were millions of missiles everywhere, and bullets were lighting up the sky as if it were daytime. I dove as fast as I could, but with my bomb bay doors open, I couldn’t maneuver well, and I was a very inviting target for the missiles. I dropped three bombs on the facility in less than 15 seconds and hoped they wouldn’t blow

up in mid-air because a bullet or missile might hit it and blow up. I closed the bay doors and as soon as they were fully closed I pulled my plane into a 12-G turn. It creaked in protest, but gave in and did it. I started blacking out almost right away, but I pulled out of the turn, dove, and, putting the plane into its most aerodynamic form, shoved the throttle to full afterburner and barreled down at hypersonic speeds. I leveled out at less than 50 feet above ground, and although it was very dangerous to fly so low at these high speeds, it was safer than having trillions of AA defenses shooting at us.

I called a rejoin and to my surprise found that little damage was done to my squadron. I looked back at the facility and saw nothing but black for 200 feet from the center of the explosion. *Yes*, I thought, *all of the bombs hit*. But the threat receivers were still blaring at us.

The next site was where the electronics functioned the worst. We got rid of as many defenses as we could, and then destroyed it. It was a radar, EMP, and radar-jamming device in one. Immediately everything worked better, and we didn't need to worry about the AA defenses as much, because they relied on it to track targets. The next things to destroy were much easier to destroy because they needed the radar device to attack us.

Then, we came upon a problem. There was another radar site, and more AA defenses. And, we all had some scratches on our plane, and the scratches made us less stealthy. We couldn't go around, because we didn't have enough fuel. So, we had to go right into the lion's den.

The AA defenses started shooting at us wildly. "Evasive maneuvers!" I yelled. I dove, pulled up, did a loop, tried everything you could imagine, but my plane still got partially shredded up. I had half a wing missing, one engine gone, and a huge fuel leak—and I still had about 1500 miles to go. I pulled up as far as I could, because the thinner air made less drag; therefore one didn't need to use as much fuel to go the same speed I would if I were lower. This would conserve

some fuel, at least. I hoped it would be enough to last until I could get an aerial refueling. It wasn't.

I called for refueling in enemy territory. The tanker could easily be shot down, as it moves slowly. I just had to take the chance. It came and refueled me. We would have to escort it back home so it wouldn't get shot down. At least we made it out of enemy territory. Now all we had to do was land back at base.

When we got back to Area 51, there was a huge crowd cheering as we got back. We had done it! We had saved the world!.

A Life as a Girl... or a Wolf?

It is a strange turn of events that leaves a girl helpless in the Canadian woods. Luckily for Helen, help arrives from an unlikely source in
A LIFE AS A GIRL...OR A WOLF?, by **Heather Robinson**.

One stormy night in the woods of Canada, the village Con Loon was under attack! They were under attack because the soldiers didn't get along with the villagers. Flames took over houses and little children were screaming! All the families got buckets of water to try to put the flames out. Some men were fighting against the men that were attacking.

A mother and her little daughter, Helen, were running out of the village so they wouldn't be killed. When the mother couldn't run any more, she and Helen hid in the bushes, hoping no one would find them. They hid there silently so no one could hear them.

The mother heard footsteps coming toward her and her baby girl. She sat there waiting and hoping that the men would not find her and her baby. The men got closer and closer and then, finally, one of the men pulled back on the bush and said, "GOT HER!"

"MY BABY! MY BABY!" screamed the mother.

"Take the mother to base camp. She is our prisoner now," the leader said.

The baby was never found by the men, but was found by a fierce wolf! When the wolf found Helen, she had a cut on her arm, which was in pretty bad shape. The wolf sniffed Helen but didn't harm her.

The wolf didn't like the smell of Helen. The mother wolf could have just left Helen, but she grabbed Helen and took her to her den. The wolf raised Helen.

Eight years later (she was about 13 years old), Helen could eat, run, and even hunt like a wolf. She was exactly like a wolf.

One day, the same group of men that caught Helen's mother and took her prisoner came to get Helen! They remembered the lost baby that was never found. Helen ran toward the mother wolf as fast as she could. The mother wolf fought and fought until she was out of breath and was wounded. Then the mother ran toward her pups and Helen to protect them.

The men grabbed Helen and put her in a cage. They let people see her for three dollars. At the end of the day they had over one hundred dollars.

One late afternoon a man with a nice suit came up to one of the men. His name was Mr. Jenkins. He wanted to take Helen and have her learn all human things. Mr. Jenkins was willing to pay five hundred dollars for Helen! The men agreed.

Now Helen had to go to a village in Japan! The village was named Devil's Village. Mr. Jenkins would come the next morning for Helen.

Helen tried to escape from the men, but she didn't. She did everything she could.

Later that day when all the men were going to sleep, the mother wolf came with her other pups to help Helen escape. They finally got Helen out, but Helen saw her mom and ran toward her. So Helen, the mother wolf, and her pups went to get Helen's mother. Helen saw her mother and ran over to her and they hugged.

"MOM!" Helen screamed.

"DAUGHTER!" Helen's mother screamed.

"Why are you still here?" Helen asked.

"They didn't want me to leave. I also tried to escape that very night they caught me. I kept trying and trying. They told me I could never leave. That's when I thought I would never see you again."

“Well, let’s get out of here!” Helen, the three pups, and the mother wolf tried and tried to get Helen’s mother out. On the last push, the gate to the cage fell off. Helen and her mom hugged again.

Helen’s mother had lots of questions, but she waited till she got out of the cage herself. When they got Helen’s mother out of the cage, they ran back into the woods.

The first thing that Helen’s mother did was thank the wolf for taking care of Helen for seven years. Even though the wolf couldn’t understand the words, the wolf took it as a thank you. Helen’s mother decided to move into the woods near the mother wolf’s den.

Mr. Jenkins went back to the men to get Helen to take her to Japan, but she wasn’t there. Mr. Jenkins got his money back.

A few years later, Helen went down in history for being raised by a wolf! There were thousands of stories about Helen, and all of them were different.

Several years later Helen became a teacher. She taught children with disadvantages. Then she grew up helping wounded wolves.

Lupo, The Marvelous Dog-Wolf

*A cross between a dog and a wolf might seem like a dangerous animal. But in **LUPO, THE MARVELOUS DOG-WOLF** by **Léa Hermen**, the only danger is to anyone foolish enough to come between Lupo and the human he loves.*

Lupo was a beautiful dog-wolf whose master was a little girl named Alexandra. They lived in the 1920s, in a house in Wisconsin. Alexandra was ten years old. She had brown hair and eyes. She was very smart and careful, and she loved Lupo like a brother! One day, Alexandra got very sick, so her parents sent her to the hospital. Lupo had to live with Alexandra's parents. They got very mean: They treated him like he was a dirty sock! Lupo had to leave.

After a month of walking, Lupo was in Canada. He met the man he would stay with ever after, but he didn't know this yet. His name was Jake Tharton. He was a strong and tall miner who lived alone.

One day, in a bar where a lot of miners of Canada meet, they met a famous and strong miner named Charles. He was famous, but not smart, and he had never been to this bar before. He was tall, but not as tall as Jake was. No one there liked him, and even everyone that knew him hated him. When he wasn't a miner, he was a robber. But he was never proven guilty. He saw Lupo and thought he was the most beautiful dog-wolf he had ever seen.

Lupo was allowed in the bar as every dog was. Every miner was boasting his dog's qualities. Jake said fiercely, "My

Lupo could pull a very heavy sled, and he probably walked one month to come here! He's the strongest!"

Charles was so jealous. He absolutely needed this dog! He decided to challenge him. "Could your dog stay three days in the cold ice desert without anything to eat?" he said. "Is he strong enough to do anything you would like him to do?"

"Yes, probably," Jake answered, looking at his dog, "Anything... like what?"

"Well, could he stay in cold water for a long time?" Charles replied.

"Maybe, but why are you asking me all those questions?" Jake asked.

"I want your dog," Charles said

"He is not for sale!" said Jake, as Charles took money out of his bag.

"OK," Charles said, "but I will get this dog, eventually." He mumbled so Jake couldn't hear him.

The next day when Lupo got up, he went in Jake's bedroom, but Jake was not there. He went outside and saw Jake in the river that was next to their house. Lupo looked around him and saw Charles walking towards him. Lupo understood immediately: Charles had put Jake in the river so he could steal Lupo. Before putting him in the water, he had made him lame so he could not get out of the water by himself and fight back.

Lupo waited calmly until Charles was just in front of him. Then he jumped on him! Charles didn't have time to react. First, Lupo bit his leg. Then he scratched him. At the end, Charles was really injured. Then, Lupo ran to the river and dived in. He swam as fast as he could, and finally he reached Jake. He grabbed his clothes with his mouth and began to swim. It was difficult to hold onto Jake, but then he awakened and helped his dog.

They got out of the river and took Charles to a police officer that was near the house. Jake said Charles had tried to kill him so he could have Lupo. The officer put Charles in jail.

The next day, everyone knew what Lupo had done, and Lupo was declared the most intelligent dog-wolf in the world. Charles had to pay for what he had done and the money went back to Jake. Then, everyone in the country, maybe in the world, wanted to see Lupo, so they gave money to Jake to see him. This is how Jake became rich. Jake and Lupo were almost the happiest “people” in the world.

Plane Crash

*Three survivors of a plane crash must make new lives for themselves on a remote island. They will need luck and help to make it in **PLANE CRASH**, by **Brad Goforth**.*

On September 14, 2000, my plane crashed. I was on a business trip. There were only three survivors: me (Brad), Myles, and Damien. We were stranded on an island. It was called Mauritius. We did not know how we would live in a place like this!

We had to have jobs. I decided to make the fire. Myles went to find food, and Damien had to make the shelter.

I had a hard time making the fire. We had no matches or anything. The plane crashed in the water, so we could not use that fire.

Myles had to find the food. He could only find nuts. He knew that there were fish there, so he had to make a spear. It was hard, but he managed to make one. He went fishing.

Damien had to make the shelter. He made it out of fallen trees and leaves from the trees. He used the vines to tie the logs together.

We decided to explore the island. We found a tribe! It was amazing. They did not hurt us or anything. They taught us everything—how to fish, how to make a shelter, and how to hunt. We stayed there a while. We had fun. We learned their language.

Finally, some explorers came. We asked them if we could come back with them. They said yes. We were excited. We wanted to go see our families.

Run Away or Die Trying!

*The lessons of history are too important for us to shy away from the unsettling parts of the past. **Lynna Bendali-Amor** presents a chilling view of American slavery in **RUN AWAY OR DIE TRYING!***

Christina's view:

Another day, another 20 lashes, I always say. But that's not what Master says. He says stuff more like this: "Now, Christina, you and them other servants can't go running around the farm like ya'll own the place. That's why we always give you those lashes for discipline." Every time he says this I roll my eyes when he's not looking. He says we're his property, he owns us, he controls our will... Stuff like that is usually followed by some lame lecture on how we must be loyal to him. But that's not the way he acts around his friends. He usually says things like how loyal we are, and how we don't complain about lashes and working in the fields (etc.). Somehow when he brags about us I don't feel too proud.

But nonetheless, we have to work our butts off every day and night, trying to keep ourselves from getting lashes. There are four servants on Master's plantation: my friend Ann; Bob; Christopher; and me. Ann and I have been buds since she came to the plantation when she was ten and I was twelve. Bob is the oldest person on the plantation. He has been here longer than anyone can remember. He says he's thirty-five winters, but I don't believe him. He looks older than that. Christopher is six, and Master says the lashes will make him stronger so he can do the work of five men. But Christopher has done nothing but severely bleed when Master lashes him. He tells us to let his wounds heal on their own, but I hate to see him suffer, so I grab

a couple of the cotton plants I pick and seed each day and hold them on his back till the blood clots. There isn't much to say about the plantation except there are two cows, six chickens, three horses, and rows and rows of corn, wheat, and cotton.

Later in the day as I was picking and seeding the cotton, I heard Master shout my friend's name in his deep husky voice.

"ANN!"

I left the field and tiptoed up the stairs as quietly as possible. Careful not to lean too close to the door—knowing that it creaks—I carefully leaned my ear onto the door. I heard a weak voice saying, "I need water." I kept wondering who it was as I pretended to clean, in case Master needed to get out of the room. A moment later Ann left the room. I followed her down the stairs. I said, "What was going on there?"

"Master's wife is sick or something like that. Anyway, I need to fetch her a pail of water from the well. Wanna come with?"

Oh no, I thought. She's giving me that look! Look away; look away!

I couldn't look away any longer and said yes.

When we went outside, I heard a big *BANG!* "Lordy, it's the Yankees!"

The Yankees, I thought with fear. Master always said Yankees were no-good-sit-on-their-butt-let-machines-do-the-work-for-them people. He said they had horns on their heads and tails of the devil himself. But I didn't see any. Then, I heard another rifle shot much louder than the other ones from the Confederates. We were fighting back and running away, hiding in fear. I saw a mother with her two children running for dear life. "I didn't think the war was coming here now!"

Ann wanted to get a better look, but I grabbed her by the arm and hauled her back all the way to Master's. We didn't stay for long, although Ann wanted to. She loved the excitement, although she may puke at the sight of blood.

When we got back to the house, Master said, "You two went out together!" in his deep voice. "Whatever, I'm not going to lash ya'll as long as you got the water. Ya'll did get the water, right? "

"N...n...no," I said, stuttering in almost a whisper tone. "There is a war going out there. We were scared to get shot."

Then he brought out his whip and gave both of us hard twenty lashes.

"I don't care about the stupid war! My wife is sick and she demands water, and ya'll better go out there like dang decent servants and get it!" So we went outside again, running for our lives to get the pail of water. Fortunately we succeeded.

We gave the pail of water to Master's wife. I didn't know what Ann was doing, but I was looking out the window, staring at the war. With shot after shot, more screaming came and more blood fell to the ground. I was staring at the war until there was nothing left to see but the same thing repeating itself: a shot, screams, and blood, over and over again.

I got tired of watching people kill each other, so I sighed and thought about the blood as I milked the cows, prepared dinner, and picked and seeded the cotton. As I was doing these things, I was lashed for working too slowly and keeping my mind off work. I can't deny keeping my mind off of work. Although Master was probably expecting the war to happen, I wasn't. So the blood, dead men, and gunshots were a shock.

Later that night I couldn't sleep, so I tiptoed to the stack of rags Ann was on, careful not to awaken the boys, and saw she couldn't sleep either. "Ann," I said, "do you want to go with me?"

"Where?" she asked.

I just smiled and said, "Canada."

"WHAT?" she said, almost falling out of her stack of rags. "Did you just say Canada?"

"Yeah, think about it: you and me away from all the lashing, away from the war, away from Master's temper. Me and you free, finally free!"

Ann thought about it for a while, and then she said, "Sure. When do you plan on going?"

"Tomorrow," I said, hardly believing she accepted. The next night our adventure would start.

I still couldn't go to sleep, and I couldn't figure out why. Was it because I was excited that Ann had accepted, or maybe because my blood hadn't clotted from where I was whipped, or

was it Bob's loud snoring? But after about a couple of hours of wondering, I fell asleep.

I had a terrible dream. Ann and I were running away. We were about to get our freedom papers when Master saw us. He put our hands behind our backs and chained them together. And we were walking with our hands chained to his wagon while he was whipping us. Ann bled so much she fainted. Then I awoke.

The next night, Ann and I started to pack up and go. All we brought was our ragged clothes and some food. I felt like smuggling doing so. I felt a knot in my stomach. I couldn't think of anything but running away. I tried to stop, but then I thought of the dream I had had the night before, and it made the little knot grow tighter.

We started, not knowing what we were doing, looking for the North Star. After about a week of getting lost in the woods, we found it. I was surprised that we didn't find it earlier, considering how bright it is. But we kept on following it. My heart was beating loud. I put my hand over it, but it felt like it was moving its normal way, so I took a deep breath. Then, I noticed it wasn't my heart, but footsteps; someone was following our tracks! I grabbed Ann by the arm and we ran for our lives. We hid inside bushes in case they had dogs.

I closed my eyes and started to pray that the dogs wouldn't find us. We stayed in the bushes the rest of the night. While Ann was sleeping, I kept praying.

Next morning, I found that I had fallen asleep and Ann was there with berries that she found. They were blue and sweet. As I continued to munch on the berries, I heard a loud bark. Looking, I saw the plan didn't work. The white man had left, but his dog was still there on duty. I made sure that we were alone with the dogs, then I plucked some of my hair and threw it away from the bush. The dogs went to their masters, then to the lock of hair I left. It kept us safe from them.

It was then that we decided to just keep running. It was a bad idea, especially since they had dogs that could easily track down our scents. But the next question was, What to do to get

to Canada? We couldn't go back; Master would have lashed us till we were dead. But we couldn't just keep running. The dogs would track us down, and then we'd be dead for sure.

After a couple of hours we decided to just keep running north. "We ain't going back there to be lashed our lives away," Ann said. We decided to run, hoping we might run into what some people were talking about: the underground railroad, as they call it. My hopes were low that we would find them, but Ann's were high, and I'm not the kind of person to crush her hopes, so I just pretended I liked the idea.

We rested in a bush again. The next night we would start moving. (Since we slept during the day and were awake and moving during the night, I felt nocturnal.)

Next night, we were on the run again. I found a nice plantation. Next to it was a huge stack of hay, and I grabbed a lot of this hay and put it in my rags that I sewed together. Tomorrow I was going to weave a basket in case we found more berries. We couldn't make the food we brought last all the way to Canada unless we had only a crumb a day.

Next morning I awoke to a rifle shot. We weren't as far in the woods as I thought, but since we were following the North Star we weren't totally lost, or at least I hoped not. But this time I heard something different: not just a rifle, but a cannon. The Union was bombing the Confederacy, or was it the other way around? Maybe they were both doing it to each other. It didn't matter. The sound was so loud that I was surprised I was not deaf.

"Ann, do you want to get a closer look?" I asked (more like yelled).

"No," she said, "you know how I get around blood." I totally forgot about that. Last time she had to treat Master's wound she threw up all over the place. It was a nasty sight, but I wanted to see the war anyway, so I told her to wait there and followed the sound of the guns to the war scene.

I hid in a wide bush and watched. The men's nice suits were now drenched with blood. The Union had about 12 men

carrying a huge cannon who loaded it with shot. They fired it, and then I heard a *bam*. After that, all I saw was dust and some more of the men's blood.

Slowly the dust cleared, and you could see Confederates were either retreating or down on the ground—dead, barely alive, or so wounded they were unable to move. I saw one man that was shot in the stomach reach for his rifle and shoot the celebrating Union soldier who fired the cannon. Then both of them lay down with the life sucked out of them.

I watched all of this with mixed emotions. I was glad the Union won the battle, but I had a feeling that the war wasn't over yet.

I took one last look at the battlefield and saw a sign that said:

WANTED!
Two runaway slaves
Ann & Christina
REWARD:
\$1000
If you see two Negro girls
in ragged and stained clothing
with hair with knots and
patches of scalp showing
with NO freedom paper
please contact
The Johnson Family of Texas

I could only read Ann's and my names, but I knew we were in trouble, so I ran back as fast as I could to talk to Ann about it. Now, we were in big trouble if Master had come all the way here to find us. But I was scared to leave the forest. People already knew that we had run away. Canada was going to be harder to reach than I thought. People were already looking for us! We were in trouble now, yes we were.

Ann insisted that we keep going in the woods and, if we had to go in the city, we would wait until it was so dark no one could see anything. But if we were to do that, the moon would

have to be covered with those white puffy clouds. I thought it might be a good idea, especially since Ann found more berries. So we put them in the basket and we were off again.

"We're probably in Ohio or south Michigan," I told Ann about a month later.

"What makes you so sure of that?"

"Weather is colder." I was probably right, considering we came from Texas. Cold weather kind of sticks out to us. It was becoming fairly cold and we were both tired, so we camped out in a bush, with our rags. (I didn't like the idea because it was fall now and the bush leaves were starting to shed.)

We awoke at sunrise to the barking of a hound dog. We stood very still. Every minute we would take a breath, careful not to make so much noise. I carefully reached for my basket to grab us some berries hanging from the bush. But I accidentally tripped and Ann had to go and reach for me, but it was too late. We both tripped.

As we fell to the ground I yelled, "RUN!" Three men were chasing us, and their two dogs were chasing us. The men were screaming, "Show us your papers!"

We ran as fast as we could, our hearts pounding like mad. Not bothering to take a rest, we continued to run. We stepped on thorns, twigs, pebbles, and pieces of glass, not bothering to turn back or look behind, just running, running for our lives. Eventually I lost nerve and looked back, not sensing the danger we were in. Our feet were swelling and bleeding, but we were used to it from working on the plantation. The dogs were still barking like mad, and we were still running, until the white folk fell out of breath. This was nothing compared to the plantation work Master made us do. But bad luck was ours. There was even the "wanted" paper here, and it was daylight. We were still running for our lives, and tearing down every paper we could find with our names on it as we ran.

Until night came we didn't feel safe. Then we found a bush to camp out in. Nothing happened much. We rested in

the bush for two days with no guard dogs, no nothing to bug us. We were finally safe. Without the stupid guard dogs, we made it to Detroit safely. But the problem is we didn't have a boat to cross the lake. We were stuck and we didn't know what to do.

"Why don't we swim across?" Ann suggested.

"Are you crazy?" I asked. "We don't know how to swim! We'll drown!"

"But we've gotta try. It's the only way!"

"We can't."

"Well, it's that or lashes for breakfast."

"What are we gonna do?"

"Well, you should have thought of that before we left. But no! You should have had some decent planning!"

"If you're so sure of that, why don't you go on your own?"

"Well, maybe I will and maybe I won't."

"Fine!"

"Yeah, I know it's fine for me! Nah, nah!"

That's how it started; then it went to screaming; then to slapping, hitting, and screaming. I was slightly bruised from that. We didn't realize the noise we were making until we heard "They're over there. I can hear them. Let's get them before they cross the lake."

"We won't have to worry about that," the other one said.

"Why not?"

"Because they don't have boats! Do you actually think that they could cross a lake?"

"No, this is the runaway slave crossing the lake: 'Ahhhhhhhhhhhh! Water up to my neck...losing—*gasp*—air! I need air!'"

Both laughed as hard as they could at the thought of us drowning. I dropped focus and went back to the lake. How were we going to the other side? I needed Ann's help to get through this. "We're going have to get out of this one together," I said. "So, we still friends?"

Ann thought about it for a minute and then mumbled, "Yeah, we're still friends."

We didn't know what to do. We exchanged looks. Finally, I took a deep breath and jumped in the lake. Ann followed.

It was freezing, and we didn't know what to do. We stayed in there a long time; finally we noticed that the water was so shallow we could walk in it. After a couple of steps it was too deep to do that. Finally I tried not to put too much pressure against the water, and I floated. I told Ann to do the same and she agreed, and then Ann was on her back. My head was above the water, but not my body. I showed her how, but we were still stuck. We didn't know how to move.

Then out of pure anger I lifted my foot and arms and smacked them against the water and I moved. Ann did the same, and she moved, too. We just kept on splashing, but there we still had problems: our clothes were so heavy we could barely move, and we were making too much noise, and the splashing water was making it easy to find us.

By this time we could hear the white folks putting themselves in a canoe. They were getting closer. Ann and I stopped splashing and waited. Then they saw us. I went under water and held my breath. I looked up and saw lots of bubbles wrapped around the underside of Ann's body. I wanted to grab her down here with me but the bubbles were moving so rapidly that I was scared to try.

When I saw the boat was gone, I went up and caught my breath. "Why didn't you come down with me?" I asked. There was no response. "Hello, it's me, Christina. You know, your buddy? Hello?" Then I noticed there was a thin red liquid pouring down her face from her forehead. Those white folks had shot her.

"Them there black folk think they can steal from their Master and get away with it by running away. Pathetic," I heard one of them say.

"How long do you think before we find the other one?"

"Don't know, but they deserve it."

“Smuggling from their Master. Pathetic. I’ve seen some really stupid black folk, but they were the stupidest.”

“Ann, don’t go!” I yelled as I sobbed on her wet body that was now drenched with blood. I forgot about the white folk looking for me, and they heard the noise. They turned the canoe around and were heading towards me. My clothes were now so drenched in water, tears, and Ann’s blood that I couldn’t move. My clothes were just too heavy. I was scared, without a clue what to do.

My heart was beating like mad as I heard the splashes with the paddles. I felt a huge knot in my stomach and a lump in my throat. Then, I took off my shirt and pants until there was nothing left but my under-things. I felt free, but the cold water reminded me that I was not free yet. Without the clothes I was able to move much faster in the water—a lot faster than the people in the canoe, who were coming closer to me. But I was still scared, too scared to move. I was frozen.

Unfortunately, the white folk caught me and held me by the neck. And before the rifle came up, I was struggling to get out of their clutches. I heard the wind blow in my ear, sounding like Ann’s voice saying, “Keep moving. They can’t shoot you unless the can aim it at you.”

Wondering what to do, I kept struggling to get out of their grip, moving and moving, trying to get his hand off my neck. Finally, he lost his patience and shot his rifle, and the bullet hit me in my cheek. He lost grip of the gun and me, but didn’t care, thinking that I was dead. I wasn’t dead, but I was knocked out.

I awoke much later. The water current had drifted my sleeping body safely to shore. I felt a little awkward in my under-things out in a public space. It’s a good thing that it was still night or at least early in the morning. I couldn’t see a thing, but as the cool breeze blew I could feel almost completely bare. *Where to go? Where to go?* I thought. *What if*

I'm still in Michigan? Were the people still looking for me? Is Canada still a free place for blacks?

As I thought about this, I felt a lump in my throat and my eyes were watering. I was about to shed a tear. I wanted to cry and my cheeks were already tear-stained. Canada was so cold and I just got out of a lake. What if I caught pneumonia? Why didn't I think of this before? *I can't take it anymore. What can I do? I don't think I can do anything. Why can't I do anything? What would happen if Ann were here? Why didn't I do anything for her?*

I thought about this for a while, but I still couldn't get a solution for any problem. I just stayed there, asking more and more questions with no answers, weeping my heart out, not knowing what to do. Then I noticed the sky was beginning to turn a lighter blue, and the ray of the yellow sun was beginning to shine. *It's sunrise, I thought, and I am still out in my under-things in public.* As the sun was gradually rising higher and higher, I began to come up with solutions to my questions.

I was most likely in Canada because it is so cold, plus the current was with me when we were crossing the lake. Then the memory of the shot came back to me. I touched my bleeding cheek with pain. It was starting to clot, but most of it was blood. I tried opening my jaw with great difficulty. *Canada is probably still a free place for blacks, and if I had caught pneumonia I would have noticed by now.*

When I finished answering my questions, the sun was up and shining, and I heard footsteps coming. I hid in the bushes, watching the people hop into boats and ride in the lake. It was so peaceful, I felt as if there was nothing to be afraid of. There was the gentle sand against my feet, the cool breeze in my face, the smell of food in their baskets. It...it's...I...ZZZZZZZZ...ZZZZZZ...

ZZZZZ...ZZZZZZZZ...ZZZZZZ...ZZZ... I just slept for a while. It was such a good dream. Ann and I were in Canada, playing.

When I awoke, it took me a while to find out what had happened and where Ann was, but it slowly came back to me.

The more reality became clear to me, the more I longed for my dream to be true.

I looked around. The sun was starting to set. The sand was cold, and not soft as it was before, for it was now wet. I touched my scar again and it was very raw, but there was no blood. It had clotted. It was now swollen and bruised. It stung like mad as I touched it, reminding me of poor Christopher, who is getting lashed because he can only do so much.

“What to do now?” I said out loud to myself. At least, that’s what I intended to say, but instead I said, “Whaf fo dowe nof?” Because of my jaw, it stung when I tried to make out a sentence.

I continued to walk north, looking at the North Star. I was satisfied to see that I was in Canada. *Canada, finally*, I thought with a long sigh of relief.

The next day, I got my freedom papers and met a nice lady who offered me a place to live if I were to be her maid. The best part is: no lashes! If only Ann were here to see me now.

After this, there was nothing to worry about. A couple of years later I was married and had a baby named Ann.

This is my story as a runaway slave and the loss of my very best friend. Every story has an ending so we can recap or discover the moral, but I like short endings, so mine simply ends with... the end!

Ann’s view:

It was a normal day. I was doing my work as a servant when I heard my name being called: “Ann!” I knew who it was and I went up the stairs into Master’s bedroom. He was kneeling by his wife, who lay sick in bed. She was mumbled a couple of things, let out a cough, and said, “Water. I need water.” Her voice was quiet and hoarse. But I understood what she was saying and left the room.

When I went outside, I saw Christina leaning against the door. I asked if she wanted to come with me and she said yes. I love giving her my baby face. It works every time.

When we got outside we saw a battle. I felt like I was going to throw up, but it was cool anyway. I was holding my stomach and looking at the war when Christina started pulling me back. When we got to Master's house, I was holding my stomach still. Christina was stuttering and trying to tell Master what had happened. He didn't care and he was whipping us again. I couldn't hold on any longer. I threw up during the lashes (not like he cared). We went back outside and got the pail of water that Master wanted.

That night I couldn't sleep. I was lying in bed looking up. Bob was snoring again. I rolled over on top of my rags and tried to sleep.

"Ann," I heard. Scared, I didn't react. "Ann," it repeated. I recognized the voice as Christina's. She said, "Do you want to go with me?"

"Where?" I asked.

"Canada."

"WHAT!" I said, almost falling out of my rags.

Christina told me to think about it and told me all the good stuff about going, so I accepted.

When we reached Michigan, Christina and I were fighting. I was cursing, she was yelling, and we were both slapping and punching when we heard voices coming out of the forest of white folks looking for us! We looked at each other, then the lake. The thing we were fighting about was how to cross it.

We held hands and walked in the lake. The cold and polluted water stung my swollen feet. Christina showed me how to float and move. But when we moved we made splashes in the water. So it suprised me when I saw a canoe.

I was looking for Christina, but couldn't find her! I saw the white folks pull out a rifle and aim it at me. It hit my cheek. I acted dead, but it didn't work. They aimed again and hit me in the forehe—.

Master's view:

I was kneeling by my wife's bedside. The doctor said she had a fever. She said she needed help, so I called one of my servants. "ANN!" Kneeling by my wife's side, I heard footsteps and the creak of an opening door. I don't know why but this is my wife's favorite servant, probably because she does all the cooking and cleaning inside the house.

My wife made one simple demand: to go get a pail of water. Ann nodded and left the room. About fifteen minutes later, Christina and Ann came in together. I should have lashed them more than I did for not getting the pail of water.

Two days later, Ann and Christina were gone. The girls ran away. After a several months of fliers and search parties, I gave up my search. Bob and Christopher will have to run the plantation by themselves!

“MY HERO!”

Blackman vs. Killercom

*Can holding a grudge really kill you? A couple of childhood enemies end up with the fate of the world riding on their bad feelings in **BLACKMAN VS. KILLERCOM**, by Jordan Ofeimu.*

James Champs had been picked on every day at school by a group of mean kids for as long as he could remember. They picked on him and gave him a hard time for whatever reason they could think of. Aaron Harris had been the ringleader of the group for many years.

Today was no different than most days. James Champs was being picked on, which is normal for James. But Aaron Harris wasn't the one picking on him. It seemed quite strange that Aaron would not be around to torment James like he did every day. "Maybe he was stopping. Maybe he has realized how wrong it is," James thought.

Before James could even enjoy the thought of Aaron stopping the teasing, things were back to normal. Everything changed after the bell rang. Aaron and his friends were right behind James, ready to torment him. They were ready to go after him. At first, James had no clue that they were right behind him until he looked back. Once James saw them, he started to speed up. Once he walked out the door, he started running at the speed of light. Aaron and his friends were right on his tail.

His first plan was to run home, but that didn't work because he was running so fast. He was a good runner because he got a lot of practice running from Aaron. He ran so fast that he accidentally passed his house.

His second plan was to run to the power plant that his dad wned. He hopped the fence to the power plant. He thought he was safe from Aaron until he turned around. Aaron was right beside him.

James had nowhere to go. Aaron had cornered him. James started backing away from Aaron, trying to escape. While James was backing up, he tripped back and fell on a gas tank, which caused a big explosion.

When the explosion happened, all of Aaron's friends died because they inhaled too much gas. Aaron and James survived the explosion, but the inhaled gas changed them. It gave them powers. They were turned into super beings. No one would ever see the old James and Aaron again.

James became Blackman, a superhero, and Aaron became Killercom, an evil super villain. They would live the rest of their lives as Blackman and Killercom. Blackman would work to keep the world peaceful and safe, and Killercom would work to do evil and cause problems.

One day, Blackman was watching TV and changing the channels. He saw Killercom on an emergency news flash. Killercom was saying that he had bombs that could end the world. Killercom planned to blow up the world and kill everyone. Blackman knew he had to do something to help.

Blackman went to Killercom's secret hideout in the Himalayan Mountains. Killercom was expecting Blackman to come. He knew that Blackman would come to try to save the world. Killercom turned the bombs on.

Once Blackman got there, they were face-to-face, maybe for the last time. Killercom unexpectedly shot his dodon blast, one of his smallest but deadliest weapons. It blasted Blackman's arm right off. Blackman attacked right back with his kombi blast that took off Killercom's legs.

Blackman knew he had to defuse the bombs if he wanted to save the world. His chance to turn off the bombs was now, so he had to act. He thought for a minute that if he was going to save the world, he might have to sacrifice his own life. He knew that Killercom would have an evil plan in store

for him. He wouldn't be able to simply defuse the bombs. There was definitely going to be big trouble.

There was no more time to think about it. Blackman quickly acted and defused the bombs. But, Blackman was right. Killercom had another evil plan up his sleeves. Killercom had a bomb strapped to his chest. He had set it to explode in five seconds. Killercom was going to blow himself up and Blackman, too. Blackman was trapped; he had saved the world but didn't have time to save himself.

Five...four...three...two...one... *BOOM!* The bomb went off. This time they didn't survive.

Laser Man

LASER MAN *is the protector of the weak—and he still has to pass his final exams. Liam S. Rush tells his tale.*

This is a story about a boy who came from a long line of superheroes called the Laser Men. The Laser Men had the power to blast lasers from the palms of their hands at tremendous speeds. For over a century, they protected the world from evil.

As a baby, Laser Man had been left on a dirt road in the country. A man and his wife found him and named him Laze. Before long, they found out about his powers. They tried to keep them a secret, but as Laze grew older, he saved people countless times, and almost everyone in the country knew. And Laser Man's story had only just begun.

The Country...15 Years Since the Day Laze was Found...

Laze awoke from a dream. He had dreamt about the Laser Men before him and his destiny to become one. Quickly, he ran downstairs and sped out the door onto his skateboard.

Laze's friend Sam ran until she caught up with him. "So how's the hero career going?" Sam asked.

"Well, I'm not a hero," Laze said.

"Sure you are. You just don't run around wearing tights with your underwear over your pants."

"I did have a dream about superheroes and my being one," Laze said.

They talked about this most of the way to school. Just when they were halfway to school, Laze heard screaming. Laze threw off his backpack and ran toward the screaming. There was a huge building that had caught on fire. Laze ran so fast toward the incident that he flew through the air into the building.

Inside was a small boy. He was yelling for help. Laze ran toward the boy and swept him from the floor into his arms. Just then, the ceiling fell through with a gigantic flaming explosion.

The little boy screamed. Laze shot a huge laser beam at the falling ceiling. The debris blasted away, making a narrow escape. Laze flew through the gap. They glided down to the street. The boy leaped out of Laze's arms and ran to his parents.

"Do you still think you're not a hero?" asked Sam. Laze smiled, then leaped onto his skateboard and sped off to school.

After school, Sam talked about the rescue that had happened earlier that day. Laze never liked to talk about the rescues or accept any award that was offered to him. He knew that was his destiny and it always would be.

The City...Three Years Later...

Laze turned eighteen and went to the city for college. Little did he know that he would encounter many super villains along the way.

Laze awoke in his apartment bedroom. It was much different than the one back home. He got up and got dressed.

As he went downstairs, he thought of what evil he would encounter that day. Laze walked out the door and onto the sidewalk.

He was doing well in school, which was amazing. It seemed like every second of every day there were evil villains. In class, Laze had been studying the laws of physics, which had helped him get his flying moves down.

Just then, Laze heard the sound of screaming. Laze knew that the sound meant trouble. He ran super fast and then jumped into the air. He looked down. Below him was a super villain!

This super villain was named Deathtro. Deathtro had the power to ignite his hands with blue fire. He had one big black eyebrow and a horrible scar under his eye. His hair and face were covered with dirty grease and sweat. Nailed to the top of his head was a small glass dome. Inside the dome was his brain, floating in a pale yellow liquid. He also wore dented armor and a black cape with tubes protruding from his back to his head. Compared to Laze's plaid shirt and fine brown hair, he looked like a mess.

Deathtro found out Laser Man was there. Deathtro and Laser Man shot at each other at heart-pounding speeds. They collided with a powerful blast. Laser Man spun around and blasted a huge laser at Deathtro. Deathtro ignited huge fireballs and threw them at Laser Man. Laser Man leaped out of the way just before the blasts hit him.

Deathtro boomed a huge yell at Laser Man. They shot at each other again. This time, they rapidly slashed and shot each other second by second.

Just then, Laze smashed Deathtro's brain dome. All the yellow liquid splashed over both of them. Then Laser Man flew back and, with Deathtro coming right at him, he blasted the biggest laser beam in the world. Everything flashed out of focus. Laser Man was still alive, and Deathtro had been defeated.

Laser Man will always fight evil and rescue innocent souls. His legend will be remembered forever.

Oneshot Goes to Dead Man Island

*A secret agent finds his next mission is personal in **ONESHOT GOES TO DEAD MAN ISLAND**, by **Le Ron Harden**.*

I was on vacation with my girlfriend Amy. She's a rap singer. We had just seen a movie. We started out into the lobby, when the people started to go crazy. Everyone was running, jumping, and falling on the floor.

It was an attack by Admiral Fireman and his troops. They rushed all the people and took my girl.

I searched for Amy and called out her name. Some of the others were gathering up their loved ones and leaving the building.

After everything settled down, I went to the office. I had to find some answers. My name is Oneshot, and I am a secret agent.

After days of searching high and low for my girl, I had found nothing. On the fifth day, the phone rang. It was him, Admiral Fireman, saying, "If you want to see your girlfriend alive, you must let me take over the world." He was the enemy that no one wanted to hear from. He was once an agent, too. We had battled in the past. I thought that he was dead, but boy did I get a rude awakening.

While Fireman was telling me all the details, Captain Gun entered the room. We work out a plan so that we could save the world and Amy. We wanted to get rid of the mean force once and for all.

We had to remember that Admiral Fireman was once with our troop. He thought just like us, only he was part man and part machine. He had one arm that was a sword and one leg that was a cannon. He was tough, but I was tougher, for I had sunray eyes that could cut through metal, and both my arms were machine guns. Off I went to fight the battle and return my girl safely.

I remembered she had a cell phone, so I was able to locate her at Dead Man Island by the radio waves. I didn't speak to her because of the high-tech sounds on the island.

The island was heavily protected. I had taken my best artillery, which was a Bern LMG and the Lee-Enfield.

It would have to be a surprise attack. I started from the back and destroyed half of his troops. Then I drove my tank into the cave where I ran over the other troops. Finally I found Admiral Fireman, and the war began.

It was a fight to the end. Loud gunfire shouted out. Fire was everywhere. Then a big bang sounded, and everything got really quiet. I knew it was over. I had killed Admiral Fireman.

Now the search was on for my girlfriend. I called out her name. There was no answer; I looked in the holes in the walls. I finally found her taped up in a corner. I picked her up, because she looked very weak. I hugged and kissed her. Then we left the cave and I blew it up so that it would be the end of Admiral Fireman forever.

Amy said to me, "Thanks for saving me. I am very hungry." We went back to the hotel, cleaned ourselves up and ordered room service

Then Amy said, "Next time, I will pick the vacation."

When Hats and Mustaches Attack!

*And now for something completely different. Hold onto your hats (and mustaches)—***Jason Mitson** *tells a surrealistic tale in* **WHEN HATS AND MUSTACHES ATTACK!**

My name is The Terminator. I am a superhero. I save an unnamed city. My dog is Sparky. He is a super Boston terrier....

“Let’s see what is on TV,” said The Terminator.

“Help! Help! Gigantic mustaches and hats have taken over downtown. The mustaches and hats behind me are ripping buildings in half. They have been turned into gigantic monsters by Professor Housenbob. This is ace reporter Little Boy Blue. Back to you, Bob.”

The Terminator clicked the TV off after the last piece of popcorn was gone and said, “It’s time to get out the guns, Sparky.” The Terminator opened the toilet to unlock a room in the wall that was full of bazookas, machine guns, snipers and jet packs.

The Terminator and Sparky were downtown on their jet packs in a blink of an eye. They saw mysterious hats and mustaches attacking harmless people. The mustaches and hats must have been ten feet tall.

“Sparky, distract them. I will fire at them.”

Sparky was on his jet pack and he was barking at the mustaches and hats. *Bark, bark.*

BOOM! BOOM! The Terminator hit the mustaches and hats. They were unconscious.

He brought the mustaches and hats to the University of Michigan to experiment. "How can we get these mustaches and hats to normal size?" said the Terminator.

"I've been working on a shrink ray that may turn them normal," said the doctor.

"Bring them in!" said The Terminator

Sparky had a huge cage filled with wild hats and mustaches. The doctor fired a huge beam that lit up the room. The hats and mustaches instantly became normal and nice.

Sparky and The Terminator released the hats and mustaches into the sewer to live happily, until Professor Housenbob put growth slime in the sewer....

That was our first mission together. The memories we have! We've been retired now. Sparky and I have been training my grandson. He took over the family business.

But we have to go now. The town is on fire!

SCIENTIFIC NOTATION

The Amazing Clones

*Is Doctor Dre a real doctor? Is Robo-Cop a real police officer? Is Lequisa a real security guard? One thing is for sure: The Professor is a real scientist, as he proves in **THE AMAZING CLONES**, by **Keon Collier**.*

The story began at the Professor's house, the only person in town who had a 52-inch plasma television. There were four people there: the Professor, who had a specialty in future science; Doctor Dre, who was an all around American doctor; Lequisa, who was a very experienced security guard; and Robo-Cop, who was an ex-police officer.

While the others were watching a movie, the Professor was busily working in his lab. The Professor was gone a long time. Doctor Dre decided to go back there to see what he was doing. He saw the Professor working really hard on something with his back turned towards the door. When the Professor realized Doctor Dre was over his shoulder, he covered his project immediately.

Doctor Dre said, "Professor, what are you working on?"

The Professor said, "N-n-n-nothing, nothing." The Professor was trying to hide it and he told Doctor Dre to go away. Doctor Dre backed up with a suspicious look on his face. Now he really wondered what the professor was doing.

Doctor Dre ran into the living room to get the other people. He told them to come into the Professor's lab to help him figure out what the Professor was up to.

When they came into the lab, the Professor quickly put his project away in his walk-in safe. While he was locking up the

project, Robo-Cop used his eye binoculars to watch him put in his code to the safe.

Later that night, after the Professor went to bed, they all crept back into the lab. When they got to the safe, Robo-Cop typed in the secret code and the safe opened.

When they looked inside, they all gasped with creepy looks on their faces because the project, which was a red box about four feet tall and three feet wide, had cobwebs on it. Lequisa said, "He probably designed it this way to make it spooky-looking so no one would touch it."

As they were reaching for the box, the Professor walked back into the lab. He started yelling at them for going into his safe and tampering with his secret, magical box. The Professor grabbed the box and when Robo-Cop tried to snatch it away, the professor slapped him in the face.

The Professor told them it is very important that they stay away from the box. He still needed to test it and the results could be unpredictable if someone tampered with the box. He told them it would be double trouble and things could quickly get out of control.

The Professor trusted Lequisa the most, so he asked her to guard the box for him. She said, "I will do it for you if you pay me \$70.00 per hour."

Doctor Dre said, "For that kind of money, I want to look after the box for you."

There was a sudden silence. The Professor said, "Doctor Dre, you stick to being a doctor. This is a better job for Lequisa. I need someone with experience as a security guard to carefully watch my box overnight so it will be safe until tomorrow."

They moved the box from the lab to the basement. Lequisa and the Professor draped a tablecloth over it to keep the box hidden. The professor went to his lab to get a similar box to put on top of the real box, using the old camouflage trick. They draped that one, too.

She sat in a chair next to both boxes and after a few hours she fell asleep. Later that night, Doctor Dre and Robo-Cop

tiptoed into the room to steal the box from Lequisa. They slipped it away from her and, surprisingly, she didn't wake up. They took off with the box.

They ran up the stairs past the bathroom to the empty attic. When they opened the box, they found nothing inside except some old Christmas lights and some black majestic oils that came from the Northern Sea. At that point they realized the box they had was not the secret, magical box.

Meanwhile, Lequisa woke up and realized one of the boxes was missing. She reached under the tablecloth to get the real box.

She was curious about what was inside of the box. She decided to flip a coin to make up her mind as to whether or not she should look inside. "Heads I don't look, tails I do." She flipped the coin and it was tails. She bent over to look inside the secret box.

She was amazed because it was so colorful inside. From the outside it looked like a normal box. Little did she know this was a special box that could clone anyone and anything instantly. She looked deeper into the box and accidentally fell inside. The giant spring inside popped her right back out. The next thing you know, something else came right out of the box. It was her very own clone, and now it was standing right in front of her.

At first she was afraid. Then she realized the clone not only looked like her, but she acted like her, too. When they looked in the mirror, there were two of them that looked just alike.

Doctor Dre and Robo-Cop heard a noise in the basement. They ran down to see what happened. They found the secret box next to Lequisa and her clone in the basement. They thought they were going crazy. They yelled for the Professor.

Before the Professor could get there, one by one they all looked inside the box, fell in, and popped back out. The next thing you know there were clones of all of them running around the room. The Professor said, "This is a problem. I don't have enough room for all of you to sleep or enough food for you to eat. Everybody, out of the house!"

Lequisa and her clone went out to the park. Lequisa was walking with her clone next to a cliff with a boulder on top. Suddenly the boulder fell down the side of the cliff, clearly coming toward Lequisa. Clone Lequisa flew through the air and smashed the giant boulder.

Lequisa said, "You saved me. How did you do it?"

Clone Lequisa says, "I don't know. I just did."

Lequisa said, "Now that's amazing!"

Lequisa ran back to the Professor's house and busted through the door. She yelled, "My clone saved me from a boulder that was about to fall on top of me!" This miraculous story gave the Professor an idea. He began to get a vision that his magical box could be a million-dollar idea that could save the world.

The Professor wanted to do some more testing, so he invited everyone to go to town with him to look for opportunities for the clones to work their miracles. Doctor Dre's clone saved a baby in a burning building. Robo-Cop's clone rescued a couple that was drowning in a nearby river. The Professor's clone jumped in front of a car that was about to hit a little girl and saved her life.

All of these miracles were published on the front page of the local newspaper. The next day the Professor's phone was ringing off the hook with requests for his magical box. Within a few weeks, he built a manufacturing plant that could quickly produce the cloning boxes. He modified the boxes so the new boxes limit you to two clones per person and the clones die in 24 hours. He set up stores all over the country and sold them to everybody. This ended up being the best selling product of 1994 and he earned a million gazillion furfillion dollars. He shared his newfound wealth with the entire town and everyone lived a happy, prosperous life.

Attack of the Grubs

*The mutant grubs are coming! Collin Williams guides us through the squishy mess in **ATTACK OF THE GRUBS**. Be afraid. Be very afraid.*

The day began like any other for twelve-year-old Michael Smithson and his eleven-year-old brother Jack, a.k.a. “JJ.” As the boys were getting ready for school, they were complaining about how it was going to be another boring day at the Tudor Academy for the Gifted. After picking out what they were going to wear, they went downstairs to have breakfast with their father. As the boys were eating, they wondered if their father’s job at the chemical waste plant was as boring as their school.

JJ said, “Where’s Mom?”

Mr. Smithson said, “Sleeping, because she was out pretty late with her gardening club discussing the grub problem in town.”

Michael said, “What grub problem?”

“Shouldn’t you be getting ready to go to school, guys?”

Mr. Smithson said absentmindedly.

“Well, you have to drive us, Dad,” said Michael.

“Oh, yeah, I totally forgot. Well, we’d best be going now.”

On the way to the car, Michael saw some grubs crawling and squirming on the cement near the garden. Michael turned to JJ and said, “That was really weird.”

“What?” said JJ.

“There were grubs on the cement instead of in the dirt where they like to live,” Michael said.

“Who cares? It’s not like they can do anything to us,” said JJ.

The day dragged on for the boys before lunchtime at the Academy. Michael said, “I wish something exciting would happen in our lifetime.” Little did they know that tomorrow they would have to become heroes of their town and even the world.

At 4:00 A.M., the houses in town are as quiet as can be, with crickets chirping and everyone asleep. Michael and JJ’s hero time was about to begin. At 4:30 A.M., Michael woke up to a loud *BANG* from outside. As soon as he opened his eyes and looked out the window, he saw that the chemical waste plant had had an explosion.

Michael rushed to wake up JJ and the rest of the family. They all ran outside to see what was going on. They saw fire and smoke shooting up in the air and glass exploding from houses. They hurried back inside the house to go downstairs.

Two hours later, Michael and JJ’s mom and dad left the safety of downstairs and opened the front door to look outside. A mysterious, dark figure jumped out of the shadows and ate them!

The boys quickly shut the door to avoid the bloodshed. With incredible sadness, the boys went back downstairs. They couldn’t believe that some sort of blob just ate their parents. They could hear the sounds of guns going off and people screaming. It all sounded like the guns were not effective.

The boys were so scared that they spent six months in the basement, until they began running out of food.

Michael said, “I’m leaving. I’m sick of this old, stale, and moldy food. So if you need me, I’ll be upstairs.” When Michael got upstairs, he waited against the wall and counted to three.

Then JJ bolted out of the basement yelling, “Wait for me, Michael!”

“Dude, I’m right here!” Michael said, scaring JJ half to death.

As they looked out the front door, JJ said, “Man, they tore the whole city apart.”

“Quick, let’s keep low and hide behind anything that’s bigger than us,” said Michael.

“OK,” said JJ.

While they were out, they began searching for some guns and ammunition. “All I’m seeing are bullet shells,” said JJ.

“Keep looking,” said Michael.

“I give up. I’m going back home,” said JJ.

“Oh, no, you’re not!” said Michael.

“Why not?” asked JJ.

“Because you don’t want to be eaten by one of those things!” said Michael.

“What are those things, anyway?” asked JJ. It was then that Michael had a flashback of the grubs on the cement when their dad was last taking them to school.

“Those things are grubs! They must have been mutated in the explosion,” said Michael. “JJ, what food do we have left in the pantry?”

“We have some sweet potatoes, broccoli, soup, nuts, lima beans, and Jell-O,” JJ said.

“JJ, do you know the way back to the house?” asked Michael.

“Yeah,” said JJ.

“Go and get the lima beans!” said Michael.

“Yes, sir, Sergeant Smithson,” said JJ.

While JJ was gone, Michael thought, *It’s the number one thing kids hate, so the grubs might not like them either.*

Five minutes later...

“I’m back,” said JJ.

“Okay. On the count of three, we’re going to throw the lima beans at the grubs,” said Michael. “Ready? One, two, three!”

The boys saw that as soon as the lima beans hit the grubs, they shriveled up until they died. “Keep throwing them, JJ!” Michael said. The boys kept throwing for hours on end until the grubs were no more. And the boys were the heroes of the town and the world.

Black Hole

*Scientists say that nothing can escape one. See for yourself in **BLACK HOLE**, by **Luke Peterson**.*

It was a normal day.

Kids go to school and adults go to work, but today was a little bit different....

Luke woke up, got dressed, and ate breakfast as he normally would, but today was different when he got outside. When Luke was about to get in his car, he caught a glimpse of something from the corner of his eye. He saw black clouds in the sky. *That's strange*, he thought to himself. There wasn't a cloud in the sky other than the black clouds in the distance.

He went to check things out. He ran inside and turned on the TV in his living room. When he got to the news station the news reporter said calmly, "People of Earth, we are under a black hole watch. We have had strange sound waves on radar and strange video clips from outer space. So don't be alarmed if we are all frozen solid if a black hole does occur. Thank you."

Then Luke just froze. He had no clue what to do. He knew that there would be a black hole occurring soon, because there were black clouds in the distance.

Luke looked outside in the distance again. More black clouds he saw in the distance.

About an hour later he ran outside and the clouds were all black: over his head, and in both ways he could see. He looked again and saw people panicking, which

was not odd. He would panic himself, which he did. “AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!”

Yup, there were people panicking, all right. If he tried to calm a person down, that person would just scream. He began running to town square where it was deserted (obviously). He looked at the temperature and it said 20...19...18...17.... The temperature was dropping like a roller coaster at Cedar Point.

When he went back to his house he heard a big sound. *Cccccccrrraaaaaaaaaacccccckkkkkk!* He looked below him. His shoes were frozen solid to the ground. He tried breaking the ice, but he couldn't. The ice was too strong. He just gave up instantly, standing there looking like he was confused, and he just froze there and became an icicle. Eventually, Luke never saw the light of day again. No one saw the light of day again.

The Green Thing

*Rock hounds, beware. The simple discovery of an unusual green rock leads to interplanetary intrigue in **THE GREEN THING**, by Dylan Kakos.*

There once was a girl named Fayth Crud. She lived in a mansion with lots of servants. She had a boyfriend named Bayan Frayham. One day when she was walking home from school, she found a colorful rock that was mostly green lying down on the ground. She took the rock home and put it in her rock collection.

A few days after she found the rock, a weird green slimy thing (with a long nose, big round eyes, pointy ears and a nasty smile) came looking for the rock in her room. The rock had been passed down to him by his father. He saw a big safe and went to look inside.

He opened the safe by dripping some acid slime on it. When he got his rock and was leaving, he saw a girl lying down in her bed. The green thing thought she was very beautiful.

The next morning Fayth woke up, and immediately thought about her rock. She was going to show her rock to Bayan. He was the smartest kid in school, so he would know exactly what it was. When Fayth went to her rock collection to get her rock, she noticed that the rock was gone. Going back to her bed to make it, she stepped on something slimy. It was the same color as the rock. She picked it up and put it in a tube to show Bayan.

The green thing was a prince named ABC. ABC's home of Cyron was being invaded by Gorgons, and that is why he had gone to Earth. He was soon going to be king of Cyron, and in order to be king he had to get married. ABC's parents wanted him to choose a bride at the ball they were throwing for him.

When ABC got home from finding his rock, he rushed up to his room. His parents asked him why he was in a hurry, and ABC replied, "I am going to get married to the girl who found my rock."

At school, Bayan was examining the slime. He was very puzzled by what it was. He finally found out from a really old textbook that it was the slime of a creature called a Smeagle. He told Fayth not to worry because they were extinct, and the slime might have been mixed in a brick during the construction of her house.

The next day, ABC went looking for Fayth with 100 war men to protect him (only 150 Smeagolians remained). When the people on Earth saw ABC, they screamed and ran home.

ABC found Fayth at Pink College. When they entered the college, the students fled the building. ABC found Fayth as she was leaving the building. His soldiers grabbed her and left. Fayth was screaming for help, but nobody would help her, because they were way too scared.

When Bayan heard that Fayth was captured, he knew he had to help her. Bayan dressed up as the president, and entered the human armory. The human armory was the place where they kept all of the weapons and potions. He loaded up with all the high-tech gear and set off to find Fayth.

In five hours Fayth would be forced to get married to ABC for all eternity. Bayan search for Fayth for four hours and thirty minutes. Finally Bayan found an abandoned city and started looking for a palace. Bayan found a palace and went in. He battled many guards with his gadgets. He got hurt really badly but healed himself with some potions that he stole.

Right before the priest asked if anyone objected, Bayan burst in the door and started killing anyone who got in his way. ABC knew that he could not win, so he snuck outside, ran to his spaceship, and went back to his planet and married a girl named DEF.

Fayth and Bayan also got married and lived together forever, until death did they part.

Invasion

*Under the waters of the Arctic Ocean, a young man makes a startling discovery. In **INVASION** by **Joshua Lumsden**, one wrong move could mean disaster.*

It was 3:00 in the morning. I was on our family's submarine. I had been driving it all night and I was almost to the North Pole.

I was so tired that if I did not move for ten seconds I would doze off.

You might wonder how I got the submarine. A long time ago, my dad was going fishing in his boat. When he pulled up his anchor, it wouldn't budge. He went diving to see what it was, and he discovered it was a sub. He hired a big tugboat to get it to land and then fixed it up.

This was my first time riding on it myself. I decided I was too tired to go on any further, so I stopped to rest. I fell asleep almost immediately.

I woke up to the screeching of the sub's alarm. Something or someone had hit the sub. The sub was sinking!

Water was coming in from everywhere. On a hanger near me there were some old diving suits. I hoped they worked.

I put one on just as the window shattered into pieces. The sub collapsed.

I was in the ocean. I did not know what to do. All of a sudden I thought of something. There was a mini escape sub hooked to the sub. I went in it.

The small sub was more technologically advanced than the big one. It had sensors and torpedoes. The sensors

showed that there was a tunnel very close to me. Out of curiosity I went in.

Inside the tunnel it was very dark. Before, it was very bright from light reflected off the ice.

I saw a different unusual sub with really strange lights. All of a sudden I blacked out.

I woke up in a small room with dim lights. I was on an iron table.

“Oh, no, he is waking up!” I heard someone say. I looked down and saw a strange, small, red man.

My first thought was that someone was playing a mean trick on me. But this man could open its mouth and talk. I knew it was real.

“We are only here to observe you,” said the person.

“By kidnapping me?”

“It was necessary. I am going to extract all your blood now,” it said.

I got up and jumped on the person, picked him up and put him on the table. It was easy because he was so tiny.

“Wait. If I put you back in your sub and leave you, will you let me go?” he pleaded.

“O.K., but first answer some questions,” I said. “Who are you?” I asked.

“I am from a planet you call Mars. I came to get blood from humans and analyze it.”

“Now send me back to my sub,” I said.

“O.K.,” the alien said as he pressed a button. I was teleported off his sub and into mine.

I was about to turn around when the alien’s sub shot a torpedo at me. I turned the sub and the torpedo narrowly missed me. I loaded one of my torpedoes and fired. *Boom!* The alien sub exploded.

Mutant Flaming Marshmallows from Mars

*With a title like **MUTANT FLAMING MARSHMALLOWS FROM MARS**, does this story really need an introduction? **Kendal Gumbleton** relates the adventure of a brother and sister's battle against—well, you know what kind of marshmallows they are.*

You'll never believe it, but something really freaky happened to my sister and me this past summer. This is our story.

It all started when my dad said we were going camping. My sister, Molly, didn't want to go, but I was really looking forward to it. The reason my sister didn't want to go is that she doesn't like the forest. She really "needs TV," as she says.

We live in Detroit, Michigan, and where we were going camping is about an hour away, in Metamora. Our campground was in the middle of a forest and pretty remote. A creek wound through most of the campground. It's very different from where we live.

Molly and I were in our own tent and our parents were in another tent right next to us. Right before we cooked dinner over the campfire, Molly and I had to go get water from the creek. After we ate dinner, we had dessert, which was s'mores. While we were making the s'mores, the strangest thing happened. We heard this little whirring sound from somewhere in the sky. We heard it get really close, and then it

just stopped. We could barely sleep because we were so scared.

The next day, Molly and I went looking for the source that made the whirring sound. We looked all over the campsite and in the forest surrounding the campsite but couldn't find anything. Then when we were having s'mores for dessert again, we heard a *crunch, crunch, crunch* coming from the forest and saw a very faint light in the distance. But when my dad went to check it out, there was nothing there.

That night, I heard the *crunch, crunch, crunch* right by my tent. I saw what looked like the same light that I saw earlier, right next to my tent. I opened up my tent and jumped out, just to find out it was only my sister going to the bathroom. So, we just went back to bed.

The next afternoon, after lunch, I snuck into our car and grabbed my Super Soaker water gun that I had hidden in the car while we were packing. I filled it up in the water buckets that Molly and I brought up from the creek so that I could surprise my sister and squirt her with it. But while I was sneaking up on my sister, my dad caught me and took the Super Soaker and put it in his tent.

That night, after my parents went to bed, Molly and I were sitting around the campfire when we heard the *crunch, crunch, crunch*. The next thing that we saw was unbelievable!

It was three giant, four-foot tall marshmallows, with the tops of them on fire. They had razor sharp teeth and beet red eyes. They were holding small ray guns. They saw we were eating s'mores (that contained marshmallows) and they freaked out and started yelling and howling in what sounded like some sort of gibberish. We didn't understand what was happening.

Then their leader, who they called Squishy, stepped forward and said, "The Marshmallows of Mars are going to invade Earth and take all the marshmallows back to Mars." They threatened to take us back to their home planet and torture us if we didn't stop eating marshmallows. He seemed

to be talking through some sort of translator because we could understand what he was saying.

One of the marshmallows shot its ray gun at a tree as a warning. It blew up into a million tiny pieces. Then the pieces just disappeared. It was like the tree was never there!

The marshmallows left. Molly and I were just staring at each other. Our parents came running from their tent and said, "Quit making all that ruckus; people are trying to sleep!" We tried to explain, but tripped over our words. Our parents just shook their heads, told us to be quiet and went back to their tent. Then we went to bed, but we where so freaked we couldn't sleep.

The next night, almost the same thing happened. But instead of three marshmallows, there were about sixty of them, with their leader, Squishy, out in front. They were all holding ray guns of some sort. Then all of a sudden, I heard a *pop!* I saw a green ray of light shoot by my head. And then there were more *pops* and more light.

Molly grabbed two sticks and handed one to me and said, "It's just like roasting marshmallows. Stick the stick into the marshmallows." We took out about ten of them by doing what Molly said to do. Then a marshmallow fired right at my head! I picked up a pan and held it in front of my head as a shield. The blast deflected off the pan. I threw a pan to Molly and she also used it as a shield.

When I stabbed one of the marshmallows, it fell back into one of our buckets of water and shriveled up into nothingness. Molly realized that they were "flaming" marshmallows and that water was their weakness.

At that moment I remembered that my Super Soaker was in my parents' tent and wondered why my parents didn't get up with all the commotion. I ran into my parents' tent and I realized why my parents didn't wake up. It looked like they had been knocked out!

I grabbed my Super Soaker and ran out of the tent. "Molly, Mom and Dad are out cold! They don't look hurt, just like they passed out," I said.

Just then another green ray of light hit the ground by our feet. Molly said, "Well, if they're out cold, we'll have to deal with them later. We have to do something about those marshmallows first." I ran to one of the buckets and filled up my Super Soaker. I blasted some of the marshmallows with it and they shriveled up into nothingness, too. It worked; it really worked!

After I blasted a couple more, Molly threw one of the buckets of water on some of them. Then there were only about twenty of them left. One of them was their leader.

He came up to the front of the pack of marshmallows and started speaking to them in that gibberish language. I realized he wasn't using the translator. All of a sudden we saw a couple of the marshmallows retreat into the forest. We heard a whirr like we had heard a couple of nights ago. A spaceship that looked like a giant marshmallow bag flew over us. We heard a giant blast, and then there was a giant gaping hole in front of us. The spaceship was shooting at us. Thankfully it missed. Then the war was on again.

I blasted a few more, and Molly got some with the other bucket of water. There were only four left, including the marshmallow in the spaceship still hovering above us. Their leader, Squishy, then said that they surrendered, but one of his soldiers shot at us one more time. I blasted him, so I took care of that.

A ray of light from the spaceship came down around Squishy and the other marshmallow. They rose up into the air and into the spaceship, and the spaceship flew off into space.

After the spaceship was out of sight, we were just standing there wondering why they left so quickly. It was really strange that the marshmallow war only lasted about an hour. Everything went so fast. Just then our parents came stumbling out of their tent. We asked them, "What happened to you guys?"

My dad said, "We tried to get out of the tent to see what was going on outside. We were moving so fast that we bumped into each other. I knocked my head on the large

lantern hanging from the center of the tent. I guess I passed out and fell on your mom.”

“When we woke up, your dad was on top of me and the lantern was broken on the floor of the tent,” said my mom.

Our parents asked us what was going on outside. We tried explaining everything, but they didn’t believe a thing, probably because they were knocked out the whole time. It’s been eight months since the marshmallow war, and they still don’t believe us.

Pluto's Sixth Universe War

*The battles are fierce, and their necessity is unquestioned. **PLUTO'S SIXTH UNIVERSE WAR**, by **Dan Reynolds**, takes the fight against evil to a future arena.*

Finally, all the killing is over. The Sixth Universe War has come to an end, and all on Pluto are celebrating in the year of 3273.

In 3267, King Pluton (my father) had heard that Ax was moving out of Ebuda. Ebuda is the latest planet that the evil dictator Ax has taken over. Ebuda is a horrible place because of the slave trade, and almost the whole planet is in poverty.

My father knew that Ax would come to destroy planet Pluto, because my father was in a desperate attempt to rescue one of our ambassadors from the evil Ax. My father had just sent the ambassador home in a transport when Ax showed up. My father told the pilot to go and return the ambassador safely back to Pluto. Then he stared at Ax and said, "I will give you one chance to let me go and you will not be harmed."

Ax just laughed and said, "Your strength is nothing compared to mine!"

King Pluton's expression then turned very serious, and he said, "So be it."

There was a huge blow of light and they both jumped in the air towards each other. They both had their weapons ready to slash, and when they did, there was a giant blinding light. The next thing I knew, my father was kneeling with his

eyes squinting in pain and Ax was standing up tall and laughing. But out of nowhere Ax fainted to the ground and didn't get back up, while my father surprisingly got up with only a cut on him.

I had to get to my transport quickly, because my father had told me earlier to go back to Pluto and care for the ambassador. While in my transport, I was wondering how my father was going to get back to Pluto. His transport had already left with the ambassador and I was very worried. I headed for the bridge to tell the driver to turn around, and I found my father in the driver's seat of the cockpit! I was very happy to see him on the ship, but he just looked at me and said, "I told you not to stay, so why did you?" I only answered with a lowered head and a walk to my quarters.

That brings us to the start of the war. The battles were brutal and hard. Many started diseases that people from Pluto have never experienced before.

The war's first battle was in the city Wutermain. King Pluton knew that was where the enemy was going to land its army. Wutermain is full of mountains and caves, so it would be easy for Ax's army to hide whenever it needed to. But we used the caves against them. King Pluton placed most of his army in the caves. Once Ax and his army landed, my father's bowmen shot their fire-arrows and killed many of Ax's unsuspecting and lazy warriors.

That was the signal for all of the men in the caves to attack. I jumped out to signal the others to do the same. We all forced them to do exactly what we wanted them to do, which was for them to retreat to their transports and land somewhere else. Earlier, King Pluton hacked into all of the transports' autopilots. He also had a first-class technician jam their manual pilot so they couldn't use it, and forced them to fly back to Ebuda. That was Ax's last chance to live that was given by my father, because if he came to Pluto again he would be shown no mercy.

Ax regrouped and thought of new plans to attack until 3268. Ax's next attack was going to be at the floating city of

Exintimite. Ax attacked Exintimite because King Pluton wouldn't be able to hack into their systems like he did before. It would disrupt Exintimite's mainframe that keeps it floating in the air, and the city would tumble to the ground.

King Pluton decided to evacuate all people off of Exintimite so no one would get hurt during the battle. Also to prepare, King Pluton sent his men to have one post for every square mile in the city Exintimite. King Pluton had three-quarters of the remaining men meet up with the men Peace and Ghost (men who believe in peace and protecting the innocent) to brief them on the situation and to protect the locals and the defenseless people. The other remaining men were sent with Uno, our third in command who is a great general, to hide in Exintimite and shoot as many of Ax's men as possible to force them to retreat. Finally Silver Sword, the brother of Ax, gave what information about Ax he knew to my father to help him determine what strategies to use against Ax. He was a great help...or so we thought.

When Ax finally attacked with a weak force, our general Uno attacked with his force and killed almost the first five lines of men with poison arrows. This caused Ax's army to retreat into the city Eyesworth. King Pluton was amazed that Ax didn't come with his whole fleet. They looked like the reinforcements.

The battle in Eyesworth was a difficult battle. First we set up four Control Points (at the edge of Eyesworth so Ax's men couldn't retreat out of the city). We wanted to keep them inside the center of the city by sending in men from the Control Points (CP's) that they were retreating to. Our plan was to push them back into the other men to slowly destroy their army and win the battle.

Our plan failed. We never noticed the giant machines with Ax as the leader! We didn't have enough time to call back our men. I thought we were doomed.

I was so surprised that we never detected them. We had used our scanners and searched the areas and no life forms showed up on our scanners. It seemed as if Ax's army came

down in strong stealth transports from another planet onto ours.

I called King Pluton and General Uno in for backup and help. It was a good thing King Pluton and Uno's units were having a simulation with real weapons, so they were ready to come and help us.

By the time King Pluton's and Uno's units arrived in Eyesworth, Ax controlled all four of our CP's. We had to retreat into the inner battle and destroy the enemy army, so we could use our remaining special tactics fighters to pick off the main leaders near the CP's with our sniper rifles. We needed to move in and destroy the rest of the regular fighters. When we got to our vantage point, all of the enemy people near the CP were lying down dead.

One of my snipers said, "I see someone!"

Then I said, "Who is it?"

"It's your father!"

"Let's move in and help my father. Go, go, go!"

When I spoke with my father he asked, "Is the inner battle over?"

"Yes," I said

"Good. Everything's clear here."

"Dad, how did they get here without us knowing?"

"Uno, you, and I are about to figure that out."

The galactic space raid was led by King Pluton, Prince Titan (me), and General Uno. We searched our six moons, which took a long time. We had no luck at first. We then searched our neighboring planet Neptune, and found the rest of Ax's army. There were even more people on the planet than the ones Ax first attacked with.

I was horrified, King Pluton said "I knew it," Uno said nothing, and all of our men's jaws stood wide open. King Pluton told us to fall back to planet Pluto, because we definitely couldn't take all of those men. They were so good! They were such accurate shooters they were shooting apples off of other soldiers' heads just for fun!

When we got back, we called on Silver Sword's assistance to advise a plan to defeat Ax. He had the perfect solution. It was to call on the very strong army of the planet Earth to help defeat Ax and his army. We had a messenger sent immediately to Earth to request help. In one month the Earth's army was there to help us.

Earth's army leader, Bush W. George, said we should bring the battle to them. King Pluton agreed, even though he is annoyed by Bush W. George. It was settled. We would go and secure the small force on Pluto, and then we would go to Neptune and catch Ax's army while it was sleeping.

When we got there, we first sniped out the guards so quietly that no one could hear the people killed, and then we caught their bodies and gently set them on the ground so there would be no noise. Our army surrounded the settlement Ax's army had set up and attacked quietly and quickly. We took our swords to kill them so it was quiet. We slowly but surely made our way through the tents, massacring all who were either asleep or awake on patrol. We had to kill the people on patrol more quietly so they wouldn't sound an alarm to warn other people.

Finally we were closing in fast. We were hoping to find a high class general to capture. This would raise our troops' spirits. Instead they found something much, much worse.

There was a huge brigade of soldiers armed and ready to fight right in the center of the settlement. The scariest part of it all was that the leader of the brigade was Silver Sword! Wasn't he fighting on our side? Silver Sword said, "I could never betray my brother, so I have to betray you." King Pluton just smiled and laughed.

Silver Sword yelled, "You lost; why are you laughing?"

King Pluton just smiled and said, "Because this isn't my full army!"

"What?"

Then out of nowhere all of the fighters from Earth came out from hiding in the tents and destroyed almost 85% of the soldiers who were there!

Silver Sword was angry and said, "What! That wasn't in the plans!"

King Pluton said, "I know. I held a secret meeting without you because Ghost, the peacemaker, told me that he had overheard you talking over our plans with Ax."

"Fine. I can get you with the men I still have...Attack!"

"You can't win...Attack! Create a strong right flank, General Uno; Prince Titan and I will take the left flank."

I was so happy my father was including me in the biggest battle in history. All three of us destroyed so many people. Finally we came to where Ax and Silver Sword were waiting for us.

My father said, "Uno, take the soldiers. Titan, take Silver Sword...I'll take Ax."

In the history books it was recorded as the greatest moment in time itself. Uno destroyed the soldiers with ease and came to assist me in defeating Silver Sword. But before he could get there I had already killed him. I had taken his weapon, which was a huge sword. Uno and I went to help King Pluton. When we both got to where my father was, Uno, my father, and I struck Ax with our strongest slash and diced him up into tiny pieces. It is a horrible sight to see someone in that stage, but my father looked at me and said, "It had to be done, son."

I looked at my father and said, "I know.... I know."

Ax was a menace to all the galaxies in the universe. His body pieces were put in a bag that is now floating in space.

So This Is an Alien Invasion...

When the aliens finally come for us, what will we find ourselves up against? It just might be the brick wall of a comedy club if we are to believe **SO THIS IS AN ALIEN INVASION...** *by Collin Barnwell.*

On spaceship Gorninx III...

"All right, so how does this work again?" asked the newly hired Lieutenant Zorflox. He had a large, greenish head with two eyes and two antennas.

"Well," said Commander Menix, who was orangey and very thin with only one antenna, "you know, everyone sort of takes over planets in different ways, but since you are a first-timer, I suppose that we could sort of play by your rules today. We normally would destroy something and then mop the place up after lunch, but as long as we are done by five, anything will work. Say, Private Bowflex, what planet are we going to take over today?"

Private Bowflex was by far the fattest of the crew, and by that, I mean that every time he sat down, he would lift up his ridiculously huge belly with his fat orange fingers, place it somewhere in front of the object that he was sitting down on, sit down, and then heave it up into his pants. Despite all this, he was the strongest of the crew. He was all orange, except for his pea-like black eyes.

"I can't pronounce it, Commander," said a puzzled Bowflex. "I think it's like Err...Earr...Earthay, maybe?"

"How about the race?" asked Commander Menix.

"I don't know. I've never heard of it," Bowflex said. "I think they call themselves 'Hoomings.'"

"Thank you," said Menix as he got on the public address system and began his announcement. "Good Hoomings of Earthay, we are sorry to inform you that we must destroy your planet because...err...we're aliens and that's our job. Anyway, we have a newcomer on board, so if you could just, well, let us teach him to work these gadgets and show him the ropes, then it will help us out. Thank you for your cooperation, and have a nice day."

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., U.S.A....

"Hey, look!" cried a man roaming the streets of Washington, D.C., pointing at the sky. People all over the city were stopping whatever they were doing to look up at the sky.

"Wow, dude, that thing is like...a spaceship and stuff?" said another person. People from all over Washington, D.C. were gathering in the mall to see what was going on.

"It certainly isn't as big as I would have expected," said a woman.

"I'll say!" agreed another.

"And to think that we were afraid...," someone said. Agreement rang out through the crowd.

"Hey, here comes the air force!" said a voice. And sure enough, four air force planes were making their way toward the alien ship.

Meanwhile, on the alien ship...

"Hey, Blorgas, will you get me some of those sandwiches my Grandma Glorgon made us? It's time for a lunch break. Bowflex, keep watch," said the commander. Blorgas was the ship's mechanic/cook/jailer/inspector/third-in-command/bystander/food -go-getter/assistant weapons officer/assistant assistant pilot. He looked like Bowflex; he just wasn't as fat.

"Of course, sir," said Blorgas.

“Aww, why do I always have to keep watch whenever we destroy a planet? It’s so boring,” complained Bowflex.

“Because it’s your job,” answered the commander. “Look, if you do a good job, I’ll promote you. Deal?”

“Fine,” said Bowflex. “Hold on, I’m picking something up on the screen.... Here, I’ll put it on the main screen.... Done!” On the screen, four red dots were advancing toward the spaceship steadily.

“I have the sandwiches!” said Blorgas, holding four large tentacle chocolate cheese sandwiches.

“Cancel the sandwiches,” said Bowflex. “These Hooming things are actually fighting back. This is going to be fun!”

“Fire the power-draining rays!” said the commander.

Meanwhile, in the cockpit of an American air force plane...

“Darn it! I’m losing power! I’ve got to land!” said Captain Smith over the radio. “Those things hit me with some sort of energy sucker ray thingy! I’m going to have to land in the mall!”

Meanwhile, on the alien spaceship...

Bowflex was staring at the screen, spinning around and pressing buttons.

“Hit the red button!” Blorgas shouted. Bowflex hit the green button. “No, what did you...” Blorgas stopped. “Whoa, how do you do that?” asked Blorgas as four of what looked like shiny birds slowly sank and landed in a field of green.

“Double power shrinkers, zappers, and then that green button over there,” replied Bowflex.

“Oh, come on, you have a cheat code book, don’t you!” said Blorgas.

“Maybe, maybe not,” said Bowflex, patting his sack/snack/almost a backpack.

“Come on, let our newcomer have a go also; he needs to learn,” said Menix. “All right, we’re going to want to take the biggest target. Try that obelisk over there.”

“Okay,” said Zorflox, aiming the blasters at the large white obelisk. “You mean the one next to that big white house?”

“Are you sure?” asked Zorflox. “I mean, according to the general’s order, we are supposed to take the place over, but he never said anything about destroying. What do you think?”

“You know, you are right,” said Commander Menix. “I guess I never thought of it that way, but I guess since we already have the thing targeted, we might as well. Who knows, maybe those floppy pieces of cloth are symbols of unity, and if we destroy them then we will be able to take the place over easier.”

BZZZZZTTTTBOOF!

“All right, you are in charge now; just kind of...well...learn from experience,” said Menix.

“All right, let’s see what’s on the other side of that big shiny blue liquid thing.”

Meanwhile, in the narrator’s office...

I would just like to take this time to say that the aliens are crossing the “Atlantic Ocean” as you Hoomings call it, and going to England. You may have been wondering how you can understand us even though we are aliens. The reason is that language translators have been added for you convenience. This story is also available in the alien languages Gorflorjian, Lankmanij, Jinjoish, Klorfouxez, and Italian. Also, I am not a Hooming, so most of this stuff I won’t know and you will just have to find out what the heck we are talking about. Oh, and also, all the stuff that isn’t in quotes is me. I would also like to take this time to tell you that I am the best narrator ever. Thank you.

Meanwhile, in London, England...

“My, my!” said the queen to her royal guard, “Send the Royal Air Force after those things!” She had noticed the alien ship in the sky about five minutes before.

“Absolutely,” said the royal guard. And two minutes later, ten of the best pilots in the Royal Air Force were speeding toward the alien craft.

Meanwhile, in the spaceship...

“Incoming fliers, sir,” said Bowflex, throwing a smart salute.

“Fire power-down rays,” Menix said. Ten fliers descended onto a large black strip.

“So,” said Bowflex, “normally we would abduct some type of leader, get any info out of them, and then destroy the planet.”

“Sounds good,” said Zorflox.

“You are going to want to target someone who is inside a large building. On planets like these, leaders always live in large, oddly-shaped buildings. There is one right over there,” said Menix, pointing a bony, purple finger at a large, white building in the middle of some kind of primitive settlement.

“See that button there?” asked Bowflex. “Just push it when you are directly over the building. Take the controls.”

“Am I up close enough, sir?” asked Zorflox.

“Not quite,” replied Menix.

Meanwhile, on the streets of London, England...

“Wow, I thought the rays would be green, not purple,” said a man.

“Hey, you’re right!” said another person.

“I say, that spaceship has been hanging around for quite a while. I’m getting bored,” said a man walking back from a lunch break.

“I wish it would do something,” said another.

“Maybe they’re new. We should help them out,” said a woman.

“Hey, let’s run around in circles and panic!” suggested another person.

“Yeah!” answered the other people of London.

Meanwhile, in the narrator's office...

In case you were wondering (you probably weren't), all of the alien characters in this story, plus me, are from I.P.L.G.P.P., which is what you Hoomings would call a "country." It stands for Interplanetary Life-forms (water-based and chemical) Government of Planets and Provinces. Within I.P.L.G.P.P., there are forty-six and one-quarter (don't ask) planets that spread across two galaxies, sixteen provinces, or parts of planets shared by other "countries," and three asteroids caught in orbit by the gravitational fields in two planets. I believe the closest relating term in your language would be "moons."

The reason that the aliens are trying to take over your planet is because it is their job. The aliens work for a company called ZconcrĒtas, which takes over enemy planets and mashes them up into rubble, which is then taken to the ZconcrĒtas headquarters where the planets are made into concrete and shipped all around I.P.L.G.P.P. The armed forces, as you call them, are all called the Zantox, which do not deal with the concrete-making process, but are involved in keeping order in I.P.L.G.P.P. for defense purposes, and for war with planets over four hundred and seventy-six trillion in population. Anything less, however, is turned over to ZconcrĒtas. In other words, ZconcrĒtas is almost a division of the "armed forces."

Meanwhile, in the alien spaceship...

"Perfect, now bring her up," said Menix. "That button there." The queen came up through an opening in the floor. She was wearing a strange piece of metal around her head that had red, shiny rocks inside of it.

"Tell me at once what has happened!" the queen demanded.

"We are aliens. Nice to meet you," Blorgas said, thrusting out his right tentacle.

"Don't you put that thing in my face like that, you creature!"

"Ahem!" Zorflox cleared his throat. "We have received orders to destroy your planet. Is it true that you are queen of planet Earthay?"

"No!" said the queen. "For one thing, our planet is called 'Earth,' not 'Earthay,' and second, I am not queen of it."

"Are you sure?" asked Blorgas.

"Positive," answered the queen.

"Silence," said Commander Menix. "Can't you tell that we just mispronounced the word?"

"Don't you dare silence me, the queen of England!" said the queen. She knocked the alien out with a quick punch. "Now tell me, why are you destroying my home planet?"

"Well," said Bowflex, stepping cautiously away from the queen, "we don't really know why—it was our orders, I guess. According to the general's records, we have been at war with your planet—don't you have any knowledge of this war?"

"Why, no. You don't suppose there is a conspiracy going on within my kingdom, do you? Why, I should have known. I knew that Larry wasn't being honest with me when he said he was going home to be with his family. Oh, why did I let him off!"

"We will help you find out about this 'conspiracy' of which you speak," said Zorflox, "if you will agree to make peace with us.... I figure that will be just as good for the general."

"Deal," said the queen.

"I will call up the general right away."

Meanwhile, in some newscasting station headquarters...

"...And people everywhere are asking the same question: Where is the queen? Here is field reporter John Smith who is standing by with Fred Freedman, who claims that the queen was abducted by aliens. John, take it away," said the English anchorwoman, Barbara Banks.

"Thank you, Barbara," said John Smith. "According to Fred Freedman and many others in downtown London, thirty

minutes ago the queen was abducted by aliens. So tell us, Fred, what happened?"

"Well," said Fred, "I was walking back from my lunch break when I noticed that many people were pointing up at the sky, so I looked up and I saw an alien spacecraft, and it wasn't moving. It actually wasn't that impressive until people all around me started running around screaming as if there were aliens in...never mind. And during all this I saw the ship drift over to the palace and send down a shaft of light."

"Thank you, Fred Freedman. Barbara, back to you," said the reporter.

Meanwhile, on the alien spaceship...

"So, queen...if that is your real name," said Bowflex suspiciously, "who do you suspect?"

"I don't know," said the queen. "What exactly is your plan, Mr. Bowflex?"

"Well, obviously, whoever has the responsibility of telling you things is the person you should suspect, Mrs. Queen," pondered Zorflex.

"Why, Larry and Lou! My head advisors! We have to get them here for questioning!" exclaimed the queen.

"Where are they?" asked Bowflex.

"They should be in the palace...of course, I can't trust them anymore," said the queen.

"The palace?" asked Zorflex.

"It is the building I was in," replied the queen.

"Oh, so that's what it was," said Blorgas.

"Yes."

Meanwhile, in London, England...

"Hey, look!" said a man walking home from work who had stopped to point the alien ship out. "It's that spaceship again!"

"Hey, it's headed toward the palace. Maybe it is to return the queen!" said another.

“Why don’t they do something exciting, like land and try to overthrow us or something? I’m getting bored,” someone announced.

“Hey, there is that beam again. Maybe they are putting the queen back,” a woman said.

“We should cheer for them,” said another woman, “to let them know that we are happy they returned the queen.”

Meanwhile, in the alien spaceship...

“So, you won’t talk, eh?” Zorflox asked Larry and Lou suspiciously.

“I can’t believe your disloyalty!” said the queen, offended.

“What?” asked Lou.

“Yes, we really don’t know what you are talking about,” said Larry.

“And to deny it... Can you believe what is going on these days? You know very well that we were at war with these kind aliens, and you didn’t even tell me? I hereby demote you from informational advisors, and I banish you from ever setting foot in my palace again,” said the queen, now truly disappointed.

“What should we do with them?” asked Bowflex.

“Put them in the dungeon immediately!” said the queen.

“You heard her,” said Bowflex to Blorgas, who gripped the prisoners’ arms with two massive, three-fingered hands.

“Why, look!” said the queen, pointing to the cheering citizens of England. “They must have known about the disloyalty of my advisors!” All of them looked out the window at the cheering crowd.

“You’re right. I wonder how they knew about it?” asked Bowflex.

“They could’ve seen us bring them up with the beam,” suggested Blorgas.

“We have to get back on track,” said Bowflex. “It is already four-thirty and we have to be done by five. We have kept our end of the deal; now you must keep yours. Just sign this peace treaty here, initial here, and we will be all set to

return you home and show the general that we have made peace.” The queen read the treaty through thoroughly and signed it.

“When you get back,” said Zorflox, “you must tell everybody that you have made peace with us.”

“I know. I promise,” the queen said.

“Okay,” instructed Blogas, “step on that circle and we will lower you down.”

“Get the prisoners,” said Bowflex to Zorflox. As soon as the queen and her advisors were on the yellow circle, Bowflex lowered them down to the palace.

Meanwhile, in London, England...

“Hey, look, they are fleeing,” cried a man. Cheers rang out through the streets of London.

Meanwhile, back in the alien ship...

“I’ll make the call to the general and tell him that we were successful,” Zorflox announced as the aliens were riding home. He picked up the groopnaber (or as you Earthay people call it, “the phone”), and dialed the general. “Hello,” said Zorflox, “this is Lieutenant Zorflox speaking. May I speak to the general?...Okay, thank you.....Is this the general?...Yes, we made peace with the planet....Really?...It is a no peace planet?...Yes, we went to planet Earth....It is pronounced ‘Earthay’?...No it isn’t. I happen to have met an organism from that planet and it always called the planet ‘Earth’....What? We were supposed to go to Earthay, not Earth?... There is a planet Earth and Earthay? Sorry....Okay, bye.” Zorflox frowned. “Hey, guys,” he said, “turn this spaceship around. We got the wrong planet.”

“What?” asked Bowflex, surprised. “We got the wrong planet?”

“Yes, we were supposed to go to Earthay, not Earth,” said Zorflox.

“Blogas,” commanded Bowflex, “see if you can make the commander wake up.”

“Aye, sir,” said Blorgas, walking to the fallen commander’s aid.

“I’m so fired,” said Bowflex.

“Me, too,” Zorflox agreed.

“Maybe we could do something to make it up to the commander,” said Bowflex, “like take over the planet so that he can lie down to rest.”

“Sounds good,” said Zorflox. “It was ‘Earthoy,’ right?”

“Yeah,” agreed Bowflex, “that was what I heard him say.”

THE END

(Maybe.)

If you would like to call me (the narrator) and tell me what a great job I did writing this, please call (ЦЖЖ) йшґ-££€€-ΩΣ∂⌚-♂♀●-□◻☺. If you were offended in any way by this story or if you didn’t like it, well, we can’t help you there. Thank you!

Stay tuned for **RETURN OF THE CONCRETE COMPANY!** It’s the thrilling sequel to **SO THIS IS AN ALIEN INVASION....**

SELF-HELP

How to Become a Weirdo in 8 Easy Steps

Carlos Leao has very kindly offered his tutoring services through
HOW TO BECOME A WEIRDO IN 8 EASY STEPS.
Don't forget to thank him in your own inimitable way.

Have you ever known someone whom you look at and think *What a weirdo?* And yet, under that extreme weirdness, there is some kind of odd goodness? Well, if you have, and you want to be like that, these steps are for you. I'm here to tell you all about how to become that sort of a person. Just read through these steps and you'll have it down in no time.

Step One

Start slow, and then grow (let your weirdness develop slowly). If you start at full power, you might mess up. You also need to let the people around you get used to your new self.

Step Two

Don't be shy. It may feel strange to be weirder than usual, but I think that if you have the nerve to be caught reading this *Five Drafts Later...* story, you have enough nerve to handle the "beginner's stress."

Step Three

Be as bizarre as possible, make a joke or two, but still **DON'T** do something you will regret later. This may take away your self-confidence.

Step Four

You can't just make up something weird; you have to find a change around you and change the change into something odd (e.g. "Lend me hand," says someone. You take that opportunity and say something like, "You can have my left hand, but I'll need my other one to write with!").

Step Five

Practice! If you don't, you won't ever get it right. If you want, you could even practice with TV! If you're ever really bored and want to do something interesting, turn on the TV. Soon you will want to remark on something that you see, which is great practice for when you need it.

Step Six

$R+F=W$ (random+ funny= weird.) What I mean by "random" is something that is totally uncalled for, and that doesn't make any sense whatsoever. And what I mean by "funny" is—well—funny (?). And "weird": weird is just odd, strange, *gashmenveigens*...oh, you know.

Step Seven

This step has a lot to do with Step Three in the sense of using a change around you, and also with Step Five, as in being random and funny. Sometimes, you have to fuse the two. Look at my ending, for example. What I did was take the famous phrase "May the force be with you" from (you all know) *Star Wars* (no duh), and treated it with randomness and funniness (I think) to create (hopefully) a funnier phrase (finally).

Step Eight

You may have noticed I have been using a lot of parentheses, and I want you to know that using a lot of parentheses is my special way of doing things. I think it

adds character to the person, and I recommend that you try to find something that is special about how you do things.

Well, I hope now you are ready to try it. Good luck, and may the flatulence be with you [*snort, snort* (bad joke.)]

Weirdo's Way To: Become a Couch Potato

*If you've ever considered one of those books for the not-so-bright, but decided you were not up to the challenge: Don't despair! **WEIRDO'S WAY TO: BECOME A COUCH POTATO**, by *Patrick Carlisle*, could be just the thing you've been looking for.*

Preface

After “reading” this book, I hope you people that are too lazy to figure out the ways of the couch potato by yourself will be satisfied (because this is supposed to help you become a couch potato)...OH, WHO AM I KIDDING? You're only “reading” this because it's short, or because you have no real life¹, or because you want to see funny pictures [well, too bad, there are none of those here (yet); *okay!*].

Now before this “book” really begins, here's a question.

Question Number One:

What do you think this “book” will be about?

¹ Which is kinda² good, because you need that to be a good couch potato.

² I only said it that way because it was lazy and really easy, which are both needed to being a good couch potato.

1. Ponies and unicorns¹
2. Monkeys growing beards
3. Developing quantum pure energy
4. Being physically fit
- or
5. Being a total screw-up with your life

The ways of the couch potato are not easy. Well, actually, they are, but the top 11 things about the couch potato are that:

1. You need a couch [to sit on (who would'a guessed that)].
2. You must enjoy the taste of potatoes (but not other couch potatoes; after all, you guys are already in danger due to exercise fads).
3. You need a PS2, PSP, X-Box, and an X-Box360.
4. You need video games for PS2, PSP, X-Box, and X-Box360 systems.
5. You need someone to mooch off of (for money...DUH).
6. You need junk food/soda [to eat (To eat the junk food: 1. Open bag; 2. Pick the junk food up; 3. Put in the mouth and chew) and to drink (To drink the soda: 1. Open the can; 2. Grab the can and lift to your mouth; 3. Drink the drink)].
7. You need countless hours of free time (To do so, quit all jobs you have, and abandon all social skills that you have).
8. NO REAL LIFE IS REQUIRED (so that you are not interrupted from your video games, which are too important)!

¹ Please don't say yes to number one.

9. You need super geeky friends (to hack games for you, so that if you can't bet a boss, they can make him have one health point at max).
10. You need Internet access, for cheat codes...DUH! (To get on the Internet, just go to the "Internet Explorer" program on your computer.)

And last:

11. A totally **UN**healthy obsession with video games is necessary. (That way you focus on the game, AND NOTHING LESS OR MORE!)

If you remember these tips, you should be a pretty good couch potato.

Question Number Two

Do you think that these tips will help you
to become a couch potato?

1. Yes
2. No¹

I told you it was short! But YOU didn't believe me. But who's in a book now, you or me...huh...huh... HUH?

¹If you said no, I pity you...a lot.

A SENSE
OF HUMOR

Me, Myself, and...Them?

*When there are 16 children in one family, even the simple things aren't so simple. **ME, MYSELF, AND...THEM?**, by **Kaitlin Fisher**, tells how one girl copes within one big ba-- well, one big family, anyway.*

I'm Elizabeth, a totally normal twelve-year-old girl. But trust me, as normal as I am, no one would ever want to switch places with me.

If there is one thing I hate, it's how big my "happy" family is. I have fifteen siblings! It's hard to be happy, and the fact that my parents are at work for most of the day doesn't make it any better. Even when they are home, with my family, I can never spend time with them. We need to make a line to talk to them! Since most of my free time is spent waiting in the line, my best friend, Elyse, let me borrow her laptop to use while I'm waiting. This story was even typed in line!

A few days ago, Elyse slept over. We woke up at 10:00 A.M. We went straight to the line, but by the time I got to the front (Elyse went home), it was already 3:00 P.M.!

We live in a house with only four bedrooms. For most people, that would be fine, but for us, it's a nightmare! We all sleep on the floor in sleeping bags. My parents share one room, so that leaves only three for my siblings and me. One room is shared by Ryan, Noah, Mark, Jake, Fred, and Ben. The next room is shared by Olivia, Lisa, Katie, Isabella, and Hanna. Lastly, I share a room with Gayle, Diane, Celia, and Abby.

Our car is tiny. Imagine fitting 16 people in a four-person car. We just lie on the seats, the floor, and even in the trunk, and pile on top of each other!

Space isn't the only problem. Every day at around 4:00 (my family knows that as "homework time"), there is a huge problem. It always goes something like this:

I go to the kitchen to get a snack (I'm always hungry at this time). On my way, I accidentally distract Ryan, Noah, Olivia, and Lisa. They decide that they are hungry, too. Mark, Celia, Isabella, and Katie are also getting a snack. Katie is pouring herself a cup of milk when Ben, Jake, and Fred sprint into the room. Ben runs into Katie, and she spills a full carton of milk on the floor. Ben backs up, and he knocks down Jake and Fred right into "Lake Milk." Their excuse is "We had to go as fast as we could. If we didn't, we wouldn't break our record." Then Hanna, Gayle, and Diane run into the room, trying to catch Ben, Jake, and Fred. This gets everyone, except Abby, into a food fight. All Abby ever does is complain about what gross things found their way to her homework. She's smart, but not quite smart enough to realize that if she didn't do her homework in the kitchen, nothing would be on it.

Unfortunately, that's the only obvious thing in this house (then again, my decision to try selling my siblings was pretty easy). That reminds me: If anyone you know would like another sibling, I'm selling them on eBay. They're on sale: buy one, get 14 free! PLEASE buy them!

The Night After *The Nutcracker*

In the world of live theater, the story backstage is often as engrossing as the one the audience comes to see. Colette Gaenssle give us a peek behind the scenes in THE NIGHT AFTER THE NUTCRACKER.

The following story is based on a real life experience.

The night of the third *Nutcracker* performance, Cast B was excited for its first show! At curtain, the snow tree angels went down into the basement with their group mom to get their wigs on. The girls in both Cast A and B ran down the familiar brick lined stairwells, leading the way. All of these lucky girls had auditioned way back in September to get a child's part in the show.

Soon, the half of the group that was in both of the casts, and therefore more experienced, were done, so the group mom of the night took them to the cluttered, pitch black surroundings of the backstage to get their costumes on. Once again, the girls were leading, even though that was the group mom's job. It was hard to move without bumping into a piece of scenery, but everything was still running smoothly.

The more experienced group was finishing up putting on its wings, when the girl next to me gasped suddenly, as if she had just been doused with icy water.

"What, Alexis?" I asked, alarmed.

"The group mom is new for the night, right?" she said.

"Yeah, so?" I replied.

“And this is Cast B’s first show.” (We were in Cast A and B.)

“Then—”

“—they don’t know where to go!” we chorused.

“This is horrible,” she added.

“What if they aren’t here in time?”

“I don’t even want to think about it! All those people out there, waiting,” she said slowly.

“They wouldn’t even wait!”

We went and tried to explain our predicament to the people in charge of the costumes, but they didn’t really listen, because one of the mice’s helmets wouldn’t fit on his head and was starting to break. They kept interrupting our babbling absent-mindedly with things like, “Oh that’s nice, dears,” and “Which TV show is that again?” They thought our desperate situation was a soap opera. It’s obvious that they weren’t any help.

“What are we going to do?” my friend cried desperately.

“We are going to go look for them!” I said firmly. If only I felt as sure as I sounded.

A couple of wrong turns later, we were panting with exhaustion, like a couple of dogs in the middle of July. How could we have lost our way? We’d done this six times before!

We had been seen by a pair of guards, and they knew we weren’t supposed to be running around the bowels of the Detroit Opera House. We were in big trouble. If only we hadn’t hit that dead-end....

“Hey, you kids, stop!” Guard #1 shouted hoarsely. He had been yelling at us for a while.

“Come here, now!” Guard #2 shouted, just as hoarsely.

“Quick, think of something!” Alexis hissed vehemently at me out of the corner of her mouth.

“Okay, okay, I’m thinking!” I shot back. I looked around at all the scenery in the hallway. Then an idea dawned on me. It would be a stretch, but it might work.

The guards were getting closer. It was time for my idea. "Follow my lead," I whispered to her. "*Gudentach! Je suis non anglaise.*"

"*Bonjour, comment allez vous?*"

"They don't speak English!" Guard #2 exclaimed.

"I can tell!" snapped Guard #1. "Maybe they're from the Kirov Ballet."

"But that show is next week!"

"Maybe they're just early!"

While the guards continued to argue like this, we slowly sneaked behind the pastel watercolor Chinese teapot, the richly colored Spanish fan, and various Victorian chairs and tables, until we were out of the hallway, when we broke into a run. A couple of *more* wrong turns later, we finally found an entrance to the wig room. The problem was, it was through the dressing room of Clara, the lead role.

There was another problem, too, that we didn't notice at first during our jubilation: guards. We tiptoed halfway through the room by ducking underneath her vanity and chairs and couches. (Dancers spend a lot of time in their dressing rooms in case you didn't know.) Then we saw *it*. Her costume was laid out on a table, just waiting to be put on.

"Don't—" I started, but it was already too late. As if mesmerized, Alexis walked like a sleepwalker to the costume and touched it. "Run!" I cried, because the guards had already seen her. We scurried out the door and into the wig room. After a quick survey of the room, we realized that the group mom hadn't been able to find her way back.

"What's going on?" the group asked, now clad in curly white wigs with buns and tinsel wreaths.

"No time to explain," I gasped between short breaths, due to a stitch in my side.

"Just follow us!" Alexis yelled. She was already halfway up the first flight of stairs. We sprinted up one, two, three, four flights of stairs to get backstage. And we were just in time, too. The rest of the group got its costumes on quickly and quietly, and we all grabbed our white, sparkly candles.

Suddenly, the duo of Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum (Guard #1 and Guard #2) came bursting into the backstage area.

“You!” Guard #1 exclaimed.

“Us?” we asked innocently.

“Yes, you. We’ve been chasing you hooligans around for quite some time!” cried Guard #2.

After they were promptly shushed by everyone present backstage, Guard #1 muttered, “I thought that was them for sure! Oh, well.” And they left.

The music for our cue started.

“The show must go on.”

OHHHH

*Have you heard the one about the two guys in the diss contest? It's no joke! **Muhannad Al-bakkour** tells the whole story in OHHHH.*

As Bob dissed Jay on the microphone, the crowd went wild. Then Jay dissed Bob and the crowd went wild, on and on and on. I think you know what this is: It's the famous diss game.

Let me tell you what it means. One person would diss another, and he would diss him back. It would go on for five minutes, and after, the crowd would take a vote for the best diss.

It was down to Bob and Tom.

After the game was over, the announcer said, "Tom won." Then they figured it was tied. So in two days they will have a rematch. It will be Tom versus Bob.

Both of them were scared about who would win. Both of them will practice all the time. But Bob's mom's birthday was on the day of the game!

Bob knew he had to quit. He called his mom, and his mom said quickly, "I want my birthday party to be at your concert, so you don't have to quit."

Bob said, "Sure! See you there!"

The day came. Bob glanced at the crowd, and then saw his mom. Then Tom saw his mom, too.

The referee said, "We are going to flip this around. The disses have to be about your opponent's mom."

Tom and Bob weren't pleased, but then the game began. Bob said, "Your momma so old that in the back seat of her

car the kids don't say, 'Are we there yet?'; they say, 'Is she dead yet?'"

Then Tom said, "Your momma so old, someone told her to act her age and she died."

Then Bob said, "Your momma so fat, she stepped into a air plane and it turned into a submarine."

Then Tom said, "Your momma's teeth are so yellow that the cars slow down when she smiles."

Then Bob said, "Your momma's breath smell so bad, she made a Tic Tac run away."

The five minutes were over, and then the crowd took their votes, and Bob won!

Bob's mother kissed Bob and told him this was the best birthday ever. As Bob's mom walked away, Bob wiped the slobber off his face.

SUPERNATURAL

The Bowels of the Dictionary

*Under ordinary circumstances, using the wrong word can land a person in a sticky situation. But in **THE BOWELS OF THE DICTIONARY** by Aaron Yost, imprecise word choice could get our hero killed!*

“War: a state or period of usu. open and declared armed fighting between states of nations,” I recited as I wrote it down. I was halfway through some social studies homework to define some vocabulary words. I moved on. *“Ensign,”* I said as I flipped through the dictionary, running my finger along each definition. *Entwine* and *entitlement* were some of the words. But once I hit the word *enter*, there was a bright flash, and I fell to my desk, unconscious.

Once my sight came back, I sat up. Doing social studies, the dictionary and *enter*. It all rushed back to me. But when I looked around, I wasn’t so sure. I seemed to be walking around in my own pocket dictionary. The backdrop was a parchment yellow. I was walking on the word *plain*, which seemed to stretch repeatedly for miles. But there was more.

Words were just floating around. They were all “A” words, so the first one I saw was *aardvark*. Being the curious person that I am, I reached out to touch it. Instantly in front of me was a living, breathing *aardvark*!

Both of us were startled, so much that I fell backwards, and that little *aardvark* started to run away. The black ink definition of an *aardvark* materialized in front of me. *“A large burrowing African mammal that eats insects with its sticky tongue.”* I began to

wonder if touching the word created something.... I reached out and touched the definition. Instantly, the aardvark disappeared. But I started to panic. I had no idea how to get out of my own pocket dictionary.

While I was pondering this mystery, I was looking at the “A” words. Half of them I never knew existed. *Anodyne, angstrom, asymptote* were also there. I kept looking: *atonal, archimandrite, algorithm*. I stopped cold. *Algorithm: a series of steps one follows to solve a problem*. I concentrated hard and touched the word.

A weathered piece of paper fell into my hands. The paper gave me the next step to solving the problem. What I needed to find was a *solution*. I wondered. The “S’s” seemed so far away. Realizing how far I had to go, I started to run. I was careful to avoid some words like *atomic bomb*. I didn’t want to know what might happen with the word *boom*. I was only in the “E’s” when I realized that I was tired and couldn’t run anymore. I collapsed, and in the process of getting up, I bumped my head on a word. Fearing the worst, I tilted my head up.

The word was *energy*. All of a sudden, I was up on my feet and sprinting again.

As I cleared the “E’s,” I wondered if I could use these words to my advantage. Beginning in the “F’s,” I ran into the word *fast*. Once I hit that, I was off like a bullet flying past words. *Frisk, glabrous, habituation, inertia, jerkin, and keratin*. Many of them were unknown to me as I sped through the alphabet: *Lawrencium, maelstrom, niche, opacity*.

I made sure to bump the word *power* while running though the “P’s.” I was getting closer as I passed *quixotic, rheostat, and serpentine*. The *solution* was near. I touched it. However, this time I passed through the word and spun around.

Standing where the word had been was a two-foot tall talking garden gnome. He had a short white beard, a red pointy hat, blue overalls, and a green shirt underneath.

“I will give you a solution for your problem,” he said mysteriously.

“I need to get out of my pocket dictionary,” I replied firmly. The gnome looked grave.

“No humans have ever escaped before the time limit ran out,” he said.

“Time limit?” I repeated flabbergasted. “What time?”

“When you come into a dictionary by touching the evil and dangerous word ‘*enter*,’ you have a ten-minute window of time before the word ‘*exit*’ disappears,” he said.

Checking my watch, I exclaimed, “I’ve been in here for nine minutes! I’d better get a move on.” While running back through the “R’s,” I stopped.

“If only I could teleport or transport back....” With that thought, I whipped around and sprinted toward the “T’s.”

I stopped in front of *teleport* and *telepathy*. I concentrated on the “D’s” and *destroy*. The gnome said it was dangerous. There was only one way to make it end forever. I touched *teleport*.

Instantly, I was in front of the word I wanted: *Destroy*. At *destruction*, I thought about the word *enter* and reached out.

Immediately, there was smoke to my left where the “E’s” were. Could I still make it in time if what the garden gnome said was true? I consulted my watch. I had ten seconds. I thought about the “E’s” wishing I could be there. But before I could move my legs, I was.

“I must still have that teleportation power,” I blurted out loud to myself.

I touched the word *exit* and passed through the exit portal that unfolded in front of me.

In a blinding flash, I was back in my own room, just in time to watch the word *enter* completely vanish off of my dictionary page.

Later, I was in a trance, thinking about teleporting around and how cool it was. Just then, magically, there was a flash, and I was sitting in the kitchen of my house. “That teleportation power must still exist in me.” I concentrated and flashed into my room.

Angrily thinking to myself, I counted off all of the words I should have made a stop at in the dictionary.

The Jersey Gets Wet

*A boy has a magical basketball jersey that lets him play like a superstar. He should never have let such a valuable item out of his sight, as we find out in **THE JERSEY GETS WET**, by **George Sharrak**.*

That evening I asked my mom if she knew where my jersey was. She said it was in my room. My dog was in the room, too. “Do you think the dog ripped it?” I said to my mom.

“I don’t know. You had better go check,” is what my mother told me.

I went into my room and realized what had happened. My dog didn’t rip my jersey, but he did slobber all over it. So I asked my mom if she would wash it for me, and she said, “Of course.”

The next day it was washed and cleaned. I put it on to go to school. When I got to school I was so excited for seventh hour so I could go and play basketball in gym and do an awesome job with my magical jersey.

It finally was seventh hour and I started playing basketball. But I was missing all my shots: layups, three-pointers, everything. It was ridiculous. I was trying to think so hard why this was happening. I was wearing my magical jersey, so what was the problem?

It took me until the next day to figure out what the problem was. I remembered that my dog had slobbered all over my jersey, so that must have been the problem. I was so angry and embarrassed that I never wanted to show my face in school again.

Karate Kid

*Kishomi's fondest dream is to beat his rival Mistmi in karate. In **KARATE KID** by Michael McCann, a little outside help may be the answer.*

"Start the fight, kids!" yelled the master. He teaches us to act like a tiger, move like a cheetah, and have the strength of a bear. He doesn't like us calling him Kakashi, because he had some issues with people with his name. I can't really explain all about it because he just won't talk about it. But one day he was so happy that by mistake he told us what I told you. Then he got furious at us and never said a word to us about his name since that day.

I am Kishomi; in English, my name is Jake. I am good at karate. But there is another: my rival, Mistmi, or in English, Gary. I have always hated him since we met in second grade. He used to tease me about nothing. He would make junk up about me to get everyone's attention.

"Again!" yelled the master.

I was fighting Gary all over again, but this time, I had a good feeling about my kicking his butt.

I jumped and kicked Gary. He blocked and nailed my stomach with a harsh slam of his fist. I fell to the floor with a slam. Then with the might I had left in me, I got up and struck like a bear right in his stomach. He fell to the floor.

I could hardly get up, and neither could he. When I finally stood up, Gary flew his feet in a circle and nailed me to the floor, slamming my face against the hard, strong floor. I was lying there with a big red mark on my head and a lump that went to the stars in space.

Later that day, I had my birthday with a lump on my head. I spent hours eating cake and fooling around. Then it was time to open the presents. I opened them all.

First, I got a chunk of coal from my brother. I told him, "This ain't Christmas, genius." He said "What? That can't be!" like he was being weirder than usual. Then I threw the coal at him and opened the next present.

I got a sweater. I moved on and got one more sweater. Then the next one was a sweater. I yelled, "What's with the sweaters, people?"

I finally opened my last present. I got Dust Candy. I said, "Well, it is weird, but at least it isn't a sweater."

When I went to bed, just before I was shutting off the lights I saw the candy on my bed. I decided to read the flavor of it. I read the label. It said:

Dust Candy

EAT SOME AND

SAY A WISH

AND

IT WILL BE GRANTED!

I said, "It says nothing about the flavor," but I had to try some since it said this grants you a wish.

It tasted so nasty that I can't even explain how bad it tasted. I spit it out, but I made a wish: "I wish I was a karate master."

The next morning, my mom yelled, "Time for karate!" I got ready and left.

There, I heard the same words as always: "Start the fight!" And guess who I was fighting? Never mind; it's way too simple. (For those of you who don't know: It was Gary! Who else would it be?)

I used the same tactics as always. I jumped and kicked him in his stomach to start the fight. He then jumped and nailed my face to the ground. Then I decided to nail a punch

on him. I threw a punch as hard as I could at him, and Gary flew against the wall like a ball. The fight was over in less than a minute. Finally, I was so happy, because I had never won a fight in karate.

But the next morning at karate, Gary came and said, "I know how you got that kind of strength to nail me to the wall."

I said, "What's my secret, dude?"

He pulled out a bag that said "Dust Candy."

I said, "That can't be good."

Let There Be Light

*Michael and Cooper have had a rough day at school. Now all they have to do is walk home—by way of the eighteenth century. America's most famous kite flier has a hand in their adventure in **LET THERE BE LIGHT**, by **Zack Kozlow**.*

Rain was pounding on the windows. It was the middle of November and Cooper was sitting in Science class. It was finally the end of the day. Cooper was feeling exhausted.

He had woken up late because his alarm did not go off. He missed the bus and had to walk to school. He was late for homeroom and was sent to the office. In first hour, he had an algebra test that he had forgotten to study for. Second hour was a disaster because his Japanese teacher gave him a zero for forgetting his name on an otherwise perfect test. Basically, it was a horrible day for Cooper. But now the horrible day was coming to an end. Cooper liked Science, and he was glad that his best friend Michael was in his class. His teacher, Mrs. Babble, was teaching a lesson about electricity and how it works. The class was also being taught how Benjamin Franklin tied a key to a kite and discovered electricity in the year 1752.

When the bell finally rang Cooper was thrilled to be out of school. It had been a day he would be happy to put behind him. He was planning to hang out with Michael and play some video games.

The two of them were walking home, goofing around. Cooper kept hitting Michael on the shoulder farthest away from him and laughing. He thought it was funny that after all this time Michael still looked over to see who was tapping

him. Michael was kicking Cooper the entire walk home because he had put a “kick me” sign on his back after the bell rang. They were laughing and pushing each other when Cooper noticed an eerie glow coming from the bushes. He stopped right in his tracks. He could not move. He wanted to check it out, but not alone.

“Michael, do you see what I see over there?”

The two began to slowly walk toward the bushes. As they approached, they were sucked into the bush.

They started falling down what seemed to be a never-ending pit. The pit looked like it was made of lava. It was the color of orange and red. The air around them felt as hot as a burning fire. They could hear a sizzling caused from the fiery lava. The walls started to close in on them. Just as it felt like they would melt and die, they were thrown out of the bush on their butts.

They stood up, dusted themselves off, and looked around. It seemed like everything was fine. They were beginning to feel some relief when they saw a man riding a horse down the very same street they were just walking on.

“Uhh, that is weird,” said Michael, looking at the strange man.

“Yeah, look at those ladies in puffy dresses! They look like pillows,” joked Cooper.

“Where is my house? We were just next to it,” asked Cooper.

“This is freaky! Look at the road. It’s made out of dirt!” said Michael.

“This doesn’t look like the place we were just standing,” Cooper said, scared.

“There is nothing that even looks familiar,” Michael said.

“I don’t know what we should do now!” Cooper said with panic in his voice.

Michael saw something that looked like a market up ahead. His stomach was growling and rumbling. He started to walk toward it, and Cooper followed. They approached the

old building with caution. They had had enough excitement for one day.

Michael looked in the window to see if anyone was there, and the only thing he could see was an old printing machine. They had learned about those things in History and he recognized it right away. He wondered why there would be an old printing machine in this place. His eyes made their way to a table closer to the door and he pushed his nose against the glass to see what the paper said. The only thing he could see was the date. It said May 5, 1752!

Michael screamed and jumped back, landing on Cooper's feet. They both fell in the dirt and Cooper turned to yell at Michael, but his friend looked like he had just seen a ghost.

"What?" said Cooper.

"The newspaper in that place said it was May 5, 1752," said Michael.

"What are you talking about? You need some sleep or something to eat," said Cooper.

"Take a look for yourself, you jerk," said Michael.

Cooper walked slowly up to the window and placed his hands on the glass. He looked slowly, because the way things were going he had a bad feeling about what he would find. He was so close to the window that he could see his breath fogging up the glass. Through the fog he could see "May 5, 1752" on the newspaper. He turned slowly toward Michael.

"You were right!" yelled Cooper with fear in his voice.

"I know I was," bragged Michael.

"Do you know what his means? We are stuck in the olden days and do not know how to go back," complained Cooper.

By now, Michael's stomach was grumbling. So, he began walking to find a snack. Cooper ran after Michael, but Michael ran far ahead of Cooper so that Cooper wouldn't stop him. Running full speed, Michael didn't notice that he was running into an apple tree. **BANG!** Michael crashed into the tree, causing an apple to fall off of the tree and onto Michael's head. Either the bang on the head or the sight of the apple gave Michael a wonderful idea for a snack.

“This might have to do for food right now, Cooper,” he said.

The boys sat down to eat. Michael took a big juicy bite of the shiny red apple. As they were eating, they both thought of ways to get out of the year 1752. It suddenly dawned on Cooper why the year sounded so familiar.

“In the year 1752, Benjamin Franklin discovered electricity,” mumbled Cooper.

“WHAT!” said Michael, still in a state of shock.

“As Mrs. Babble said, ‘In the year 1752, Benjamin Franklin discovered electricity!’” Cooper yelled this time.

“Maybe we are here to help Benjamin Franklin with something,” said Michael.

“I don’t know how we are going to get home. Maybe he can help us, too,” Cooper hoped.

The boys set off to find Benjamin Franklin. After walking through the dirt roads for so long their shoes were brown with mud, they stumbled upon an old brick house. They were happy to find a place to ask about the whereabouts of Mr. Franklin. They stood outside and heard a voice coming from inside. They looked at each other and nearly screamed. It was him.

“Ugh, I will never get this electricity thing done at this rate,” sighed Ben Franklin. At the moment, Ben was attempting to create electricity with a plank of wood attached to a rock on a bright sunny day. “I have been trying this for days and still I am getting nowhere!” complained Ben after a hard day’s work.

All of a sudden, Ben heard a knock at his door. He was frustrated, and he didn’t want anyone around, but being the man that he was, he opened the door. The visitors standing at the door were two young boys dressed very oddly. They had coats with strange words on them, and long denim pants! Ben stared at them for a while, cocking his head from side to side. When he finally spoke he was irritated. “What are you doing

here? Leave, shoo, before I send for the police!” screamed a frightened Benjamin Franklin.

“Calm down, Ben. You seem stressed out. Tell us what’s wrong,” said Cooper.

Ben stood quietly for a while. He actually did need someone to talk to. Maybe these two would be able to help. He decided to take a chance and tell them what he was working on.

“You might think I am crazy, but I believe that lightning can be used as a source of energy,” said Ben.

“Well, you might think that I am crazy, but I agree with you,” Michael said, trying to make Ben feel better.

“I need to find a way to prove that this energy exists. But I simply can’t find the proof!”

“Well, to start off, what have you been trying to use to discover the energy?” asked Cooper.

“According to my research, I must create this energy by tying a plank of wood to a rock on a bright sunny day,” Ben Franklin said, proud of his work. At that moment, Cooper pulled his science textbook out of his backpack and began reading:

Electricity is a wonderful element. Electricity is the physical phenomena arising from the behavior of electrons and protons that is caused by the attraction of particles with opposite charges and the repulsion of particles with the same charge. This was discovered by Ben Franklin when he tied a key to a kite in the middle of a thunderstorm and discovered electricity, in a painful way. See page 361 for more details.

Cooper shut the book.

“So, you are saying that my theory is backwards?” asked Ben Franklin.

“Yes, I guess so!” exclaimed Michael.

“And if you do not listen to us, people will use candles as light for the rest of eternity!” screamed Cooper.

“So instead of tying a plank of wood to a rock on a bright sunny day, I should tie a key to a kite during a thunderstorm?”

“Exactly,” said Cooper.

“I know I left it somewhere!” Ben said to himself. At the moment Ben was looking for a key. “I know I hide my door key somewhere, but I seem to have forgotten where.” Benjamin usually forgot where he kept his important household items, so he kept a notebook of things and where he kept them. Ben took the notebook out of his right pocket, and flipped to the **K** section of his notebook. He found the word key and right next to it, it said “your left pocket.” So Ben reached into his pocket and pulled out his key.

“How do you make a kite?” Cooper said to himself. Cooper was now trying to design and create a kite for Ben to fly. “Hmmm” thought Cooper. “If I get some paper out of my backpack, and twigs from that tree over there, I can create a kite!” So, he got to work. He flung his backpack down onto the grassy floor and took some paper out of his math binder. He then collected good, solid twigs from the nearby oak tree. He wrapped the paper over the sticks to make the base of the kite. To finish it off, he tied his belt around the base to make a tail. He looked around and smiled at his accomplishment.

“Rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain,” said Michael, over and over again for three hours straight. Michael even stood up and did his best rain dance. He was hoping that this was actually going to make it rain (even though he knew that none of this would work). Michael fell asleep in his chair and was woken by a clap of thunder.

“It’s time,” whispered Cooper in an eerie voice. Ben, Cooper, and Michael all walked outside. You could hear their feet squishing in the mud. Ben walked out with the kite and the key. Then, he tied the key to the kite.

“Here goes nothing,” Ben whispered to himself. He walked into a field and let the kite go. The kite went up, up,

up, and **BOOM!** The lightning struck the key and went through the kite like a snake slithering down a tree. All of a sudden, the world around the boys seemed as if it were closing in.

They started falling down what seemed to be a never-ending pit. They both recognized it as the pit that brought them back to the past. They held their breaths, waiting for the spinning to stop. They braced themselves for the heat. Michael heard Cooper yelling and held his breath. After what seemed like an hour they were thrown back out on their butts and back in the present. They stood up and inspected each other.

“You look fine. How do I look?” Cooper said to Michael.

“You don’t look too bad. You seem to have grown a long white beard,” Michael joked.

Cooper touched his chin and punched his friend’s arm. They stood there together trying to figure out what their next move should be, when they heard Cooper’s mother yelling from their house.

“We didn’t even miss dinner,” said Cooper.

“Saved the world from blackness and didn’t even miss a meal. We are amazing.”

The two high-fived and began running toward home.

“Beat you to the house,” said Michael.

“You’re on.”

At school the next day, the science lesson began with the invention of electricity. Mrs. Babble started to talk and Cooper and Michael paid close attention. It was a lesson they were very interested in.

Mrs. Babble began the class by saying, “Today we will discuss how Ben Franklin single-handedly discovered electricity.” Cooper smiled at Michael, and Michael smiled back.

The Lovely Spell

Take a tip from Paul's experience: Lock your doors! You wouldn't want to find yourself bedeviled by the magic of a sinister neighbor as he was in THE LOVELY SPELL, by Michele Snyder.

I finally got the house to myself with my dog Hermit. My mom was gone, just out of the driveway.

There was this extremely odd rhythm of knocking on the door. It was like *bong, bong, bonggggggggggg*, then a little sound of silence, then *pounddd—pound—poundddddd*! Then I heard another sound of silence. In a real deep and real loud voice, I heard, “Open up the door now!”

I was terrified. I didn't know what to do, so I grabbed Hermit. Then, I looked out the window to see if I knew whoever was there. It looked like the little old lady who lives in the woods, way back behind my house. I think she looks like a witch. She is probably here to talk to me about how I was supposed to take her trash out last week.

She yelled even louder and deeper, “*Open up the door now!*” I had no idea how deep a lady could make her voice. The doorknob started to turn, and then the door was open, thanks to my mom (she forgot to lock the door).

The little old lady was extremely mad at me, yet I didn't know why. She told me to take whatever I wanted with me, and come with her to her house. I said, “*No!*” I had to say no a couple of times, though. Then she grabbed me. I thought about screaming for help, but I didn't want to wake the neighbors.

Once we were at her house, I looked at it and I couldn't even tell whether it had a door or not. There were so many

vines on it. She asked me to come in, but I stayed outside. She brought two cups of milk and a table and chairs to sit and talk. When she went inside to get the cookies I took the milk and switched them, just in case she did something to mine, because I know she is a witch.

Once we sat down and started to talk, she all of a sudden started to shout at me about how I was supposed to take her trash out to the curb the night before garbage day. We were also talking about what my mom did for a living, and when she would be home. I looked at my watch. It was ten to five. I jumped up and ran as fast as I could home.

I was home with Hermit. We turned on the television and made a sandwich. I was eating dinner when my mom came in the house. She asked me if I wanted to open an early birthday present. I said sure.

My mom went to her room and came out with a bag the size of a mouse. Once I opened it, I screamed. There were tickets to the Rose Bowl, Texas versus USC. "I've wanted to get these tickets for ever and ever," I said. There were four of them. I would take my three favorite friends, Dan, Joe and Scott.

Once we were there, there was a huge line at the game. I kept getting pushed into my friends. I kept getting bumped into over and over.

My mother was asleep when I got home. She left me a note on the door to my bedroom. It said:

Paul-

There are some apples and peanut butter in the cellar. There is just a little bit of milk, not much. Tell me in the morning how the game went. If you're not hungry, just leave everything the way it is. There are some cookies in the cookie jar. You can

only have two, if you eat an apple and some peanut butter.

Love,
Mother

I wrote back to my mom:

Mother,

There is something really weird about me. I don't know what to do. When we were at the game, there was an extremely big mob of people. People kept bumping into others over and over. Well, I would get bumped into and I would freeze and I couldn't talk or anything. Then I would get bumped into and I would be able to move and talk. I don't know what to do. Help me!!

*Love,
Paul*

The next morning I told my mom all about the game. We talked about my note. We found out it was a spell. We just don't know how to break it. We worked and worked all week and still didn't figure out how to break the spell.

I went to the doctors and the doctor said, "You need to go to a therapy doctor." So we went there and that doctor said, "Sit down and we will fix that." The doctor said that I should stay in bed for a week, then come back in a week or two.

It turned out that I was a wizard! I had to lay the same spell on the person who laid it on me (the little old lady) and just make it two pushes instead of one. I was up for two whole nights studying books to find the spell.

Later that week I invited the witch on a picnic. We went to a park named Gun Dyer Park in Royal Oak. I cast the spell on her by putting this drop of flaming hot red stuff in her drink. My spell was gone and she could never get the spell taken away ever in her life. She couldn't lay another spell on anyone ever again.

The Magic Snow Globe

*The town of Snowden has been dreaming of a white Christmas for too long. In **THE MAGIC SNOW GLOBE** by **Maria Schweiss**, Rosy and her friends decide to do something about that.*

Many years ago, a snow witch cast a spell on the town of Snowden. From that day on, it never snowed again in the town. The children missed the white-covered trees, building snowmen, and making snow angels. The town folk were very unhappy, for they hadn't had a white Christmas in many years.

One night Little Rosy, who had never seen any snow, had a dream that she and her friends went on a journey through an unknown land. They were looking for something, something that would bring snow to their town. They were looking for some magic!

A beautiful fairy with sparkling rainbow-colored wings whispered to Rosy. "Find this magic snow globe and it will bring wondrous things to the town of Snowden." Rosy awoke just seconds after she heard the whisper. It seemed so real! At that moment Rosy knew she had to find this magical snow globe. She ran outside to tell her friends about her magical dream and what the fairy told her that night.

Rosy and her friends Bastien, Annabelle, and Jackson all packed their bags as fast as they could for their trip to a magical land to find that snow globe.

"We might be gone for several days, so we should pack some warm clothes and food," said Annabelle. If someone got the snow globe before they did, there would be no hope for the town of Snowden.

They set off very early in the morning before anyone was awake. They walked through town, passing by the gigantic sycamore tree decorated with glowing white lights in the Town Square. They walked by the market before old cranky Fred opened the fruit stands. They hurried past the church before the loud bells began to chime and awaken everyone in the town.

As they traveled farther, they came to a beautiful meadow with cows grazing. As they walked through the meadow, it became a magical land of fairies and trolls with snow glistening everywhere. Rosy and her friends were in awe of the beautiful snow-covered land that had once been a meadow just outside of town where they had spent hours playing. They were so excited to see the snow! They took a break to build a snowman and make snow angels!

After journeying all day they stopped at a sign that said “You are now in Fairy Land.”

“Fairy Land? I have never heard of such a place—it is probably a dream!” said Bastien. The children felt a strange magical feeling come over them as they entered Fairy Land. The children walked around a bit and they saw a troll with blue hair, and fairies with wings of all colors. At first the children were too afraid to greet them, but after awhile they realized that the fairies and trolls weren’t mean and scary, but friendly and kind.

“Do you know anything about a magical snow globe?” they asked a troll.

“No, but she might,” the troll answered, pointing to a fairy with green wings.

“Hi, my name is Melinda,” said the fairy.

“We were wondering if you knew anything about a magical snow globe,” Rosy asked.

“If you follow the magic fairy dust path until you see the edge of the Rondino River, you might find it,” replied Melinda. “It was left there many years ago by the snow witch and has been buried under the snow ever since.”

That morning they set off on the fairy dust path towards the Rondino River. They arrived in a town called Timberland. It was almost dark so they stayed in the Holly Night Inn. The Holly Night Inn was so beautiful. It was like a winter wonderland. In the lobby there were trays filled with sweets and treats! The children were famished after their long journey. They enjoyed every sweet delight before drifting off to sleep.

They woke up extra early the next morning and began their journey along the fairy dust path. After about an hour of traveling, they came across a pretty yellow unicorn.

“Could we please, please get a lift?” asked Jackson.

“Yes, indeed!” said the pretty yellow unicorn. They flew and flew until the yellow unicorn dropped to the ground from exhaustion. They continued their journey on foot.

Just before it got dark, they reached the Rondino River. Annabelle spotted something sparkling near the edge of the river.

“I FOUND IT! I FOUND IT!” she shouted. They all ran to look, but they couldn’t reach it.

“It must be buried under the snow,” said Bastien. So they all dug and dug till they hit something hard. It was the magical snow globe. Rosy picked up the snow globe and packed it tightly away in her knapsack.

The children began their journey home along the magic fairy dust path. It was much easier on the return trip because they knew where they were going. They once again spent a night at the Holly Night Inn and enjoyed a delightful dinner of sweets and treats! The next day they traveled back through the meadow and to their hometown of Snowden.

When they got home they shook the snow globe, and it started to snow really hard. Everyone in the town came running outside, and the children played in the snow all day. The town of Snowden finally had a white Christmas.

The Magic Watermelon

*Billy thought he found something ordinary, but it was really quite extraordinary. A farm boy finds that not all watermelons are the same in **THE MAGIC WATERMELON** by Allison Levine.*

On an ordinary day, on an ordinary farm, in an ordinary field, there was a watermelon. It had a lovely shade of green and was a flawless oval shape. It glistened like an emerald jewel in the sun. It was growing in the garden with many other watermelons. However, the others seemed dull and unoriginal in comparison. What nobody knew was this was no common watermelon. This was “the magic watermelon.”

Most watermelons are juicy and delicious. “The magic watermelon” is not only mouth-watering and delectable, but it will grant you one wish for every bite you take. However, if you eat a bite with a seed, that wish will never be granted.

One day a simple farm boy named Billy found this unusual watermelon while he was working in the field. Billy didn’t want this perfect watermelon to go to waste. He knew his family would enjoy eating this special treat for dessert. He tugged and tugged at it until it finally came off the vine.

His mother sliced the watermelon and put it on the table. She commented how red and juicy it looked. The whole family was anxious to dig into the scrumptious watermelon. First Billy’s baby sister took a bite. A few minutes later, Billy’s mother tripped over a new-looking pink blanket. Everyone wondered how it got there. Next, his father took a bite. Just then, there was a knock at the door. Two neighbor boys from a nearby farm offered to help work in the field. His father thought this was very strange since he really needed help

anyway. While they were all talking, Billy's father bit down on a hard seed.

Almost instantly the neighbor boys' mother showed up and said, "You young boys better get home right away. Your own father needs help on our farm."

Billy finally took a slice of watermelon. Right after Billy took a bite of the mouth-watering watermelon, his own dad said something very unusual.

"Billy," his dad said, " You have been working so hard lately. I think you need to take a break and go play."

Billy was confused. How did his dad read his mind to know he needed some freedom?

All during dessert, the wishes kept coming and going to his family. They would take bites, and wishes they were thinking would be granted. Sometimes, if someone happened to bite into a seed, the wish would disappear. No one knew "the magic watermelon" was responsible for all the good and bad luck. Everyone thought it was just a big coincidence. However, they all agreed it was the finest and most satisfying watermelon they had ever eaten.

Billy was just about to take the very last bite of the watermelon, and he was thinking that he wished he could go out to the garden and find another perfect watermelon just like this one. Little did he know that he would be able to get many more wishes from another watermelon. Billy wasn't paying attention while he was eating, and his teeth bit down and hit something rock hard.

I guess Billy won't ever find another "magic watermelon" again.

Taking It Back

*Like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, Zoey learns there truly is no place like home in **TAKING IT BACK**, by **Holly Sterling**. Will Zoey find her way back, too?*

Once there was a young girl who was very close to her grandmother.

“Grandma, tell me a story!” coaxed Zoey, smiling brightly up at the one she loved so much. “Tell me the one about the fairies!” she pleaded.

“All right,” said her grandma as she nestled little Zoey close up to her heart, “all right.”

There, squeezed into an old armchair, she began her story. Her brother interrupted the sweet moment and said there was no such thing as fairies. Her grandmother hugged Zoey tight, shooed her brother, who was happy to leave, and told her that there really were fairies. If you just believed in them, they would exist. She handed her a snow globe that was filled with water and little white pellets. She told her that if she shook it three times and closed her eyes and really wished, she could see whoever she wanted to see. When she opened her eyes, they would appear in the globe.

Ten years later, Zoey woke up from her dream, unable to smile at the memory of her grandmother because of the previous day’s events. The events washed over her, wrapping her in an unpleasant blanket.

The day had started out strangely, when she had quietly gone down the stairs to the kitchen. The familiar noise of her mom getting ready in the morning was missing. But she did her usual morning “get ready for school” routine.

When she had finished preparing for school, she noticed the keys were gone to the car, as well as the car itself. Although she was the first one up every day, her mom usually came down to see her off to school before going to work. She had not wanted to miss the bus, so she had gotten on it and gone to school without seeing her mother.

When Zoey arrived at school, she heard that because of another grade's testing, her schedule was going to change.

But little did I know that wasn't the biggest problem, thought Zoey, remembering that day.

Zoey had proceeded to Math class to find an "E" on her progress report. She didn't have enough time to think about it, for her other classes required a lot of thought.

The biggest change was when she was called down to the office on an "emergency" during her seventh hour history class. She was told to take her things, because she wouldn't be coming back.

As Zoey came to the front of the office, she saw her mom with puffy eyes, tear-stained cheeks and no makeup on whatsoever. *This has got to be bad,* Zoey had thought. *Mom with no makeup? Uh oh.*

Although she had no idea what had happened exactly, something told her in her gut that it was probably about her grandma, because she was old, frail, and getting over a stroke. As Zoey approached her mom with increasing caution, all she caught out of her mom's fumbled and confused voice was "Grandma" and "seriously sick."

Zoey remembered how her eyes had started to tear up and how her vision became blurry. As she remembered the full details, including being held in a tight hug, she remembered wanting to say goodbye or something that would keep her grandma in her memory forever. Zoey's mom had kissed the top of her head, then whispered into her ear what had happened while they moved toward the car.

The whole car ride had been silent. Zoey had been taking it all in, her mom clenching the steering wheel tightly, unable to speak.

When they came home her mom glanced at her watch, and opened her mouth as if to say something, but thought better of it and left Zoey staring off into space, thinking about her grandma. When she came back into reality she realized she was alone standing on her driveway. She started to feel scared, confused, and mad. Why would her mom just suddenly pick her up from school and then leave her alone at home?

She quickly calmed herself when she walked up to the front door and opened it. Zoey looked around, unsure of what to do. She decided to go into the computer room, since that was where the nearest phone was, and call her mom to ask her what the heck was going on. She picked up the phone to call her mom when she heard her grandma's funny little *bumph, bumph* of a cough.

That's weird, thought Zoey. The cough of what she assumed was her grandmother got louder and louder as she made her way closer and closer to her room upstairs. Hearing this made her a little uneasy. *Am I going mad?* she thought. *Although it would be possible for grandma to be here...well, sort of.* She dismissed the idea, not wanting to find out any more about what may have caused her to go mad.

Zoey was about to dial her mom's cell phone number when she heard a car pull in. She ran to the back door, which was by the kitchen, and noticed the kitchen was like a ghost town. The usual cereal and milk bowls from breakfast were nowhere to be seen. Her mom was usually so busy at work that the breakfast bowls would still be there until Zoey and her brother got home from school.

"That's odd," she said out loud without even realizing it.

"What's odd?" said her mom's voice from behind her.

"Mom!" cried Zoey "Oh, Mom, what's happened? I think I'm going insane and...and Grandma's sick, and like everyone is gonna die!" she wailed.

"Oh, honey!" Tears were coming to her mother's eyes as well, "Its okay."

"What's happened to Grandma? Why did you pick me up from school early?"

“Well,” sighed her mom, “why don’t we have some cocoa?” They made their way to the kitchen and her mom prepared the cocoa.

“Your grandma is very, very sick,” she said while getting the mugs down from the cupboard. “I went and spoke with the doctors, and since she was still getting over the first stroke, she is still pretty weak from this new one.” Her mom’s hands were shaking now, causing her to clink the mugs together. As she poured the milk onto the table (most of the milk went there, at least) she said that Grandma was going to spend her last days with them in their house so she could be with family for the time she had left. “Grandma is staying in your room,” she said “I already put some of your stuff down in the basement for you. Your alarm clock, some clothes, and that globe are already down there.”

“Why do you have to move me?” Zoey blurted, and then blushed. Grandma was sick after all; she probably shouldn’t have asked. But when she thought about it, this really confused her, because why would she be in her room if she were so sick?

“Well, because Grandma doesn’t have much time left on nature’s clock,” her mom told her, breathing slowly. “And the basement is no place for an 80-year-old woman. Even though it is re-modeled, it’s...dusty and...dark. Your brother’s room is too small for all of her breathing tanks. Don’t go and see her right now, either,” she said, eyeing Zoey suspiciously. “She is very tired from the car ride, which is normal for her condition. But you don’t need to hear any more; don’t worry about it, okay? Here, take this down to your new bedroom,” she said, handing her the cocoa mug. “Oh, there’s pizza in the freezer and your brother is at a friend’s house. I have to go and get Grandma’s medicine.”

She nodded her head, even though she knew she wasn’t going to eat the pizza. She was too upset to eat. As she went down to the basement, apparently where she was now supposed to sleep, she thought about her grandma. It hurt her

so much to hear about her being sick. She was so close to her it seemed unfair, like she didn't deserve this.

Why me? thought Zoey. *I didn't do anything wrong. I shouldn't have to deal with this. I have a science test tomorrow! I can't deal with this.* Tears were coming to her eye yet again.

As she sipped her cocoa, she reached over and grabbed the snow globe her grandmother had given her when she was four. Now she was too old for those silly stories about fairies. The globe didn't even work. She had tried it many times when she still believed. When she was forced to clean her room, she never threw it away because of her love for her grandmother. Thinking of her grandmother, she fell fast asleep, with the cocoa mug still clutched in her hand.

When she woke up she was covered in dried cocoa. And now, her fading dream being replaced by memories of the day before, she had an odd feeling of dread, like she shouldn't get up.

But the persistent buzz of the alarm clock forced her to get up and go upstairs. When she got upstairs she was surprised to find her mom awake and fuming.

"When were you going to tell me?" she asked, waving her math progress report high up in the air.

"I didn't...", she tried to say, but was cut off by her mom blowing off some steam. She was about to say, "I'll do better next time," when she realized that her mom had never yelled at her this way before. It was probably just the stress from her grandma. But the stress was not only consuming her mother; it was in Zoey as well. So Zoey told her exactly what was on her mind: that she shouldn't yell at her own children about some stupid grade. That just led her mother into another whole spew about how she shouldn't talk back. This only made Zoey give her a mean look and led her down the stairs, stomping all the way.

She ran to smash something, anything, to take her anger out. She reached out for the nearest item, which happened to be the snow globe, and tried to slam the door at the same time. But when she tried to slam the door, there was nothing

there to slam. Her hand felt nothing but thin air. And as she looked around her she saw not the dresser and comforter, but a tree and a boulder beside it. And as she wiggled her toes, expecting to feel the squish of the shag carpeting, she felt cold hard stone. Yes, it was stone beneath her feet, definitely stone.

"Toto, we are definitely not in Kansas anymore!" she said quietly to herself.

"Who are you, and who is Toto?" said a voice from behind her. The voice might never have been heard since the volume seemed to be turned way down, but the high pitch of it seemed to grab her attention. She forced herself to turn around and look at the strange creature that hovered before her. This thing looked like a young girl. It had long blonde hair protruding from an oval-shaped face that was human-looking, except its irises were a vibrant violet. The size of the creature was so small it could fit into her palm.

"Fairy," Zoey said quietly under her breath.

This can't be. This isn't physically possible. There is no such thing as fairies, she thought. At this point her whole world seemed to be spinning. Her grandma sick, bad test grade, a fairy thing that was real? All these new things overwhelmed her in an uncomfortable way. As she blacked out she heard a small high-pitched voice saying, "She's going black!"

When she regained consciousness, the fairy was hovering over her. As she opened her eyes fully, immediately she saw she was in some sort of cave. When all the events of the previous day came back to her, she realized that it was serious *déjà vu*. Only she wasn't even in the same house, nor in the same bed, and for all she knew she could be on an entirely different planet. As she let all that had happened sink in, especially that she was sitting on a piece of straw, she began to cry. The fairy didn't seem to care one bit. It just looked at her, her eyes saying, "Let's hear it."

Zoey found herself telling the small creature (through her hiccupping) everything that had happened. She talked about her grandma getting sick, how she got a bad grade on the math test, and how she had stormed downstairs. The fairy

nodded its little head and said she didn't know how to help her, and she didn't have the time either. But she did say that if she were to take back everything she said, she could probably get home.

This sent excitement up through Zoey's body. She had a chance at going home to spend time with her grandmother! It was then that she realized that the snow globe her grandmother had given her had been in her hand when she arrived here. She looked around curiously and accidentally whacked the very surprised fairy. This made Zoey laugh for the first time in ages, as the face of the fairy was funny when it got surprised. But soon her smile vanished, for she had no one to share this incident with. If only she could see someone from her family, just seeing them would make her feel better. Her eyes started to glaze over, drifting into a daydream.

Suddenly she jumped up, eyes locked on the globe. She ran across the cave floor to grab it. Although she did not know where she was going, or what she was going to do when she arrived there, she wanted to get away. *Run*, she thought. *Get away from here*. So, she ran and ran.

When finally she felt as though she could run no more, she sat down under what appeared to be a willow tree to take a rest. She decided since her legs hurt, she would look around from under the tree. The ground appeared to be concrete, yet trees were blooming. Also, she could see no other moving creatures. The fairy that she had seen before was the only actively moving thing. Confused at everything, she looked down at the only item she had. She closed her eyes and really truly wished to see her grandmother.

When she opened her eyes, the snow in the snow globe appeared to be forming some kind of tornado. Even though she had not shaken it at all, the white pellets were whirling around faster and faster until suddenly they stopped completely.

Inside the globe was a miniature scene of the hallway. She saw her mom pushing her grandmother in a wheelchair. Even from seeing just the little miniature, Zoey could tell her

grandmother was pale-faced. She looked limp and ever so small against the wheelchair. Zoey did not want to remember her grandmother that way, and in a surge of frustration she shook the globe.

She was now upset because she had ruined the vision. She closed her eyes and tried again. The snow in the globe remained motionless, which caused Zoey to cry. *How am I going to get home? I miss my family! I even miss my brother!*

She remembered what the fairy said. "If you were to take back everything you said, you could probably get home." Unable to think of a better idea, she shouted, "I didn't mean it! I take it all back!"

When she closed her eyes and reopened them, she realized that she was still under the willow tree, and nuts were now starting to fall on her head. "I have the worst luck!" she shouted aloud, as if that would make everything better. With that, she began to cry long, shuddering cries, and realized that the only thing in the world she wanted was to go home.

As she found herself closing her eyes and reopening them, she found that she was not touching cement, but real shag carpeting. "Oh, yes!" she exclaimed. "I *am* home." She couldn't believe that she had gotten what she wanted. She was home!

Three months later, Zoey was sitting in the kitchen, her grandmother still in a wheelchair. But now she didn't look as small against the back of the chair. Zoey was hand-feeding her, but proud that she was able to do such a thing, and that her grandmother could now eat more than just broth.

Her grandmother lived to be 95, outliving all of her doctor's predictions and living to see her great-grandchildren. When she did die, it was the right time and place. Zoey still has the globe, and when the kids are out of the house she still tries to make it work. It hasn't worked at all except when she was thrown into that strange place where fairies existed. She only told one person about it: not her dear husband, but her grandmother.

Her grandmother told her the whole reason she was in that world was because she had done something terribly wrong that she did not mean. She said that only a few people can go to that place: only people who still believe deep down. Whether her grandmother was right and she really did visit that place, or whether she and her grandmother are both complete lunatics, the truth remains. No one really knows what happened. No one can explain why when you go in the wood right by Zoey's house you can hear a little high-pitched but demanding voice.

A Wacky Story

How many stories include hockey and space aliens and a talking pig? This one does! Yann Quenaudon takes responsibility for
A WACKY STORY.

If Tommy had only known what was going to happen, he would have never wanted to play hockey.

When he was just a six-year-old boy, he had a dream, a dream to play AA Hockey. But there was one problem: He wasn't old enough. In one week it would be his birthday and he would turn seven. After his birthday, he could play. It seemed like that day would never come until...

"Wake up, Sleepy Head! Rise and shine."

"Five more minutes, Mom, please! It's seven in the morning on Saturday!"

"It's your birthday!"

"Okay, I'm up," said Tommy. Oh man, the day had finally come! "I can't believe it!" thought Tommy.

Today was the Big Day! Try-outs! Nervously, he stood there waiting on the ice for his turn. When it was finally his turn, he skated as fast as he could, shot the puck the hardest he had ever shot it, and scored. The next thing was to pass and score. After that, the coach made them do a checking drill where they skated up the boards and checked the other players while the other players, who are against the boards, tried to check them.

On the way home in the car, his mom swerved and almost hit what looked to Tommy like an alien ship. "Nah, it couldn't be! I must just be really tired!" thought Tommy.

That night he could not sleep. He was so excited and nervous at the same time to know if he had made it! The next day after lunch, he rushed outside to look in the mail. He searched it carefully. Then he dropped a letter. He picked it up to see what it was about. It was a hockey letter, all right. He took it inside and this is what he read:

Dear Tommy,

I want to thank you for trying out. I'd like to let you know you made the team, The Bombers. Come to the rink at 12:00 on Saturday!

But little did he know that the weirdest thing was about to happen.

Tommy went there on Saturday and met the team. Practice was long and hard. Tommy was extremely tired but also very excited for the first game the next week.

Tommy kept thinking about some of the other kids on the team. There was Sam Wong, who went by Sammy. He was the team clown, always joking, friendly and light-hearted. He'd made a point to welcome Tommy to the team since Sam was a returning player. Then there was Casey Natesman, a smart boy with blond hair. He was smart but really nervous, too, and sometimes a little moody or unpredictable. There were so many others, but it would take more time to get to know them all.

The week went by quickly as Tommy always practiced very hard every day until the first game. (But I'll bet you won't believe what happened next.)

In the locker room just before the game, they were lining up to get on the ice. The team started to walk out onto the ice, when a bright green glow came down from the ceiling and the team started to float up into the air! Higher and higher they floated, screaming in terror. One by one their body parts

vanished. The green light disappeared, and so did the hockey team.

Yep, they got abducted by aliens, all right! (I told you that you probably wouldn't believe what happened to them.) So the game was not going to take place. It was worse than the previous season's Red Wings' disappointment! And worse still, Tommy had no idea where he was, along with the rest of the team.

Standing in front of them were little, slimy green aliens. The aliens said, "Greetings, Earthlings. We come from Planet Velux."

"ALIENS!" the team cried out. "What do you want?"

"We don't know, but we think we want to annihilate you. Isn't that what we're supposed to do? In any event, we decided to abduct someone, and it turned out to be your team. And we're not letting you go."

"Please, we were just about to start our first hockey game."

"HOCKEY! We play that all the time. The game where you throw a ball and tackle people?"

"Ahhhh...no."

"Go ahead and look around," said the aliens. "You may as well, since you're going to be here for a while. But don't touch anything."

The teammates looked at one another. They weren't sure which way to go at first. The ship seemed very large with many long passageways. It had lights of all different colors and appeared very welcoming...until they stumbled into a room with a strange, large, cannon-like looking thing. It had a label, which Tommy read aloud. "Death Ray for Annihilating – For Use on Humans."

"Quick! Run!" they all shouted together. They raced out of that room and went further down the colorful corridor bursting in crimsons and cranberry shades of light. The boys could almost like this place if they hadn't stumbled upon the Death Ray. (You won't believe what they found next!)

Sammy found a room filled with endless junk. It looked like human stuff, which was unsettling. Sam's comedian attitude had vanished. He became dead silent and his hair was all spiked up. Casey said that he was going to get them home. But sadly, that seemed unlikely. He seemed to be going brain-dead, perhaps from fear. Or maybe the aliens were projecting beams designed to confuse and disarm them.

"What's all this junk for?" exclaimed Sam.

"Don't know. We've never been in this room," said the aliens who suddenly appeared again out of thin air. Clearly, they were being watched!

Sam, followed by the others, began to look around less timidly. He had never seen anything like it and neither had they. There were piles and piles of junk. Tommy said that it made his bedroom back home look tidy.

Sam suddenly caught a glimpse of a shiny piggy bank. He picked it up. But at the same time as he picked it up, unpredictable Casey came walking by and saw it, too. He rushed in there and tried to take it from Sam. Not only was he unpredictable, but also impulsive and aggressive. While they struggled, the piggy bank dropped to the floor. Though it did not break, it began to shake and rattle and out came a flying pig named Porky.

"Who rubbed the piggy bank?" questioned Porky.

"We did, Mister Genie Pig, sir." Instinctively, they knew he was a genie. After all, every one of them had seen *Aladdin* or read the book. When you meet a genie, you know it.

Since they found the magic bank, the pig told them they could have three wishes. Even though they thought they could get home to Earth with the wishes, there is always someone around to screw things up. There was one boy who did just that. He was shorter and a little chunkier than everyone else. His name was Toby but everybody called him "Tubby" for obvious reasons. Boy, did he love chocolate! That's almost all he ever ate. And pucks! He was the Bomber's goalie and he really ate pucks whole! They hardly ever got by him. Terrible Tubby rarely messed things up for his teammates, but

today was certainly different from most days. Exceptions were now the rule!

“I wish for a very...”

“No, don’t do it!”

“...a very, very big plate of brownies!” So that was a waste of a wish. Tommy, Sam, Casey and the others just sighed.

Then another kid messed up their chances of getting home. He didn’t mean to mess it up, but he did. Poor Jake Samuels only cared about his hair and hockey.

“I wish for a...”

“NO! DON’T!” the team cried out.

“...giant bottle of hair spray!” said Jake.

“You have wasted two of your wishes and you only have one more. Use it wisely,” admonished Porky.

“I wish that we could all go home,” said Tommy quickly. It was their third and final wish.

“Home it is, then,” cried Porky the Genie.

BAM! Suddenly they were back on the ice in the blink of an eye! Even though it seemed like they had been gone forever, they came back with enough time to warm up. It was as though they had never left. Everyone in the arena was frozen in time and now came back to life just as the team came back.

“Where are we?” asked the team. The announcer began to call their names and numbers as they skated out onto the ice. At first they thought that they might cry or that their parents would rush up to them to ask about the abduction, but everyone acted as though nothing at all had happened.

They quickly gathered together near the bench and decided to discuss the “event” later. They even began to wonder, in just moments, if they hadn’t imagined the whole episode. The crowd and the opposing team were waiting. They skated out on the rink and got things going. The Bombers were back. The game was intense, almost as intense as an alien abduction...but Tommy’s team won, with a score of 4 to 3.

Getting home, Tommy thought that the whole day was really weird. Fiction couldn't be stranger than this reality. Aliens, a genie pig...what else? After that, Tommy had had enough hockey for a while. Out in space, the Death Ray and the aliens cheered for the Bombers. "We'll see you soon, Tommy, Sam, Bobby and Casey."

Tobey had left his brownies behind on the alien spaceship. "Let's eat!" said the aliens.

TAKING CHARGE

Betrayal!

*The painful truth is that some friendships don't last. It's even worse when one friend turns on another. Inspired by a real-life broken friendship, **Laurel Cerier** addresses this sad circumstance in **BETRAYAL!***

"What's wrong, Julz? Did you buy the wrong thing for lunch?" she sniggered.

"HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME? WHAT DID I EVER DO TO YOU?" I yelled at the top of my lungs! She looked into my eyes as though she had no clue as to why I was yelling at her.

"What's going on? What're you talking about?" she asked in a relaxed tone. I stared at her face as though it were the ugliest thing in the entire universe.

"You can quit the act! You know what you did!"

"No, as a matter of fact, I don't. Please, do tell," she dramatically pleaded. With an angry voice, I shouted at her, "You know exactly what I'm talking about!"

But of course, she avoided saying the truth, and continued, "Nope, I'm afraid not."

With frustration running through my veins, I threw my lunch directly at her face, and told her, "And no, I got the perfect lunch!"

Now you're probably wondering, what could cause such an uproar in the cafeteria? Who are these people? Why is one girl mad at the other? Let's start from the beginning, when no one was yelling—well, at least not in the cafeteria.

When I was about four years old, I went to a daycare called Pat's. That's the place where I met my best friend, Jessica. Jessica and I played together with other kids every now and then, but that was it. Finally I decided to introduce myself (I'm not really a shy person). From the moment we agreed to be friends, it seemed we were destined to be best friends forever. We did everything together. We played house together, teeter-totter, car driver, puppy land, everything.

Then came kindergarten. We were put into separate classes, and missed each other so, so very much, even though we went to each other's house every day.

In first grade, Jessica and I were put into the same class again! We continued our tradition of doing everything together, and enjoyed each other's company. I especially enjoyed Jessica's company, for my parents started to disagree a lot. They kept bickering at each other, and that may not seem like much, but coming home to it every day is tough on a first grader. My mom kept telling my dad he should stop drinking (not that I knew what that meant at the time) and concentrate on work. My dad would argue that it soothed him, which made the matter worse. Jessica was a great friend that year.

From all of the fun of first grade, second grade came very quickly. Sadly, the two of us had once more been separated. We missed each other, but as the year slowly crept by, Jessica and I would only say "hello" in the halls, play at recess when we could, and eat together at lunch. We did the same things in third grade, but even a bit less. Being put in separate classes was causing our friendship to become a little less important. Eventually, we were barely talking to each other.

In fourth grade Jessica and I were able to enjoy each other's company once again, but that year, she started to get attached to some of my closest friends. They were a bit more interested in her than in me. Even so, Jessica was still by my side as my parents fought on, though that didn't seem to be her biggest concern. At that time, I wasn't aware of it.

Our relationship in fifth grade was barely different than in fourth. I lost one friend, Christine Genkins, because she liked Jessica more, and all she wanted to do was hang around with Jessica.

In sixth grade, the year middle school starts, by the time of the second marking period Jessica was one of the most popular girls in the entire school. It seemed to me that she had everything she wanted: boys, good looks, and most importantly, lots of friends. But I was still her best friend. At this point my parents were fighting like crazy! Every night when I'd fall asleep, there would still be this sound of yelling. It was getting to me, and I was really upset. This continued throughout seventh and eighth grades, and Jessica was always by my side. I relied on her to comfort me.

By the time high school came Jessica had more friends than ever, and too much popularity for her own good. Eventually that was basically all she cared about besides good grades. Listening to me talk about my fighting parents didn't really interest her anymore. I didn't really interest her anymore. Jessica started to turn her back on me. Eventually she started to manipulate the few friends I had to dislike me, to not be my friend anymore. Slowly, one by one they left me on my own during my freshman year.

I was so lonely that I soon fell into a depression. My grades started to slip, I ate way more junk food than healthy, and I always wanted to be alone. On top of that, my parents were still fighting. If both of them were home, all you could hear was shouting. It was so loud, I couldn't even think. I just couldn't take it anymore! I wasn't the happy person I had once been. My life was falling apart.

I spent one and a half months of the next summer just watching TV or doing nothing. Just the summer before that, I had been swimming, playing tennis, going to camps, and just plain having fun!

My parents finally started to pay attention. My mom decided that I might cheer up a bit if we went to the mall together, so that's what we did. We went to all kinds of

shops, which actually did cheer me up a bit. I felt happy for once. When my mom said that she was going to go get coffee at a little café, she let me roam around some. I decided to go into a jewelry shop to get something for my mom because she had given me such a nice day.

The first thing I saw when I stepped into the shop was a tall, slim guy with blue eyes and wavy brown hair who was looking at a cute pair of earrings. I walked up to him (as I said before, I'm not shy) and said to him in a joke-ish sort of way, "Are those for you?"

A little startled by my sudden appearance, he replied, "Oh, no...they're for my little sister. Her birthday's in a week. Who are you?"

"I'm Julz, Julz Stevenson."

He looked at me as if he had just figured something out. Suddenly he told me, "I'm Brian Kence. Don't you go to Brenston High?"

"Yeah; yeah, I do. How'd you know?"

"I've seen your name in the directory."

"Oh."

I paused for a second. I had never seen this guy at my school before, or at least I didn't remember it. But then again he never said he went there. "So, you go to Brenston, too?"

"Yeah, something we have in common."

"I guess so. It's funny, you know, how we go to the same school and all." *Oh, what a stupid thing to say*, I was saying to myself in my head as I felt my cheeks warming to the color pink. *If you were going to say something, say something sensible. Why did you have to say that?*

There was silence for about a minute, so even though I had just said something that I found embarrassing, I continued the conversation.

"So what grade are you in?"

"I'm going to be a sophomore. You?"

"Same. Wow, it just keeps becoming more coincidental." *Great, just great. Another stupid comment.* Now my cheeks were

hot and red with humiliation. Even though I hadn't said something *that* embarrassing, at the time, it was humiliating.

I decided that before I said anything more stupid, I should leave, so I said, "Well, I guess I'll see you at school then. Bye," and walked out of the door, forgetting about getting a gift for my mom.

But even though I was embarrassed, I was happy. It was the first time I had been with a person and felt as if I were with a close friend in a long time. It was refreshing. At that moment, I knew that my depression was gone for a while.

During the first week of school, I sat with Brian at lunch; we talked about all kinds of things, and had a great time. Finally my heart spoke out and I asked him if he wanted to be my boyfriend. His answer: "Yeah. You know I've been wanting to ask the same thing, but I didn't know how to. This is great. I'm *really* glad you asked."

For the next year I felt as if I were living a dream. I was as happy as ever, and so was Brian. Brian was the football team quarterback and captain, and I was at every single game. He loved how I encouraged him, and I loved that. We were the perfect couple that year. Not only that, but Brian had become my best friend, too. My parents were still fighting, and I could talk to him about it. He wouldn't just listen, though; he would give me advice and comfort me.

But someone had been keeping an eye on us. It was the someone who used to be the person that did this for me, and then turned her back on me. One time Jessica gave me a dirty look when Brian and I were passing through the hall in school. I had a bad feeling, but ignored it.

The next year Brian and I were still together. But in the third marking period a girl that had once been my friend, Christine Genkins (who happened to be one of Jessica's best friends), said to me in a very snotty, sarcastic tone, "Who's gonna win?"

"What?" I replied.

She looked at me and told me, “You started a gambling pool; you know, having a bunch of people bet that our football team and *your* boyfriend lose the games. What did you think I was talking about? I can’t believe you would do this to such a sweet guy. Brian doesn’t deserve this.”

Stunned, I looked at her and asked, “Gambling? Who told you that?”

Christine quickly said, “Jessica, duh! You told her. She said so.”

I couldn’t have been angrier! I went straight to the cafeteria where lunch was taking place, and bought some spaghetti. I saw Jessica sitting with Brian. She seemed to have just finished telling Brian the story of my gambling pool. “I just can’t believe she would do something like that,” I heard Brian say.

Then Jessica replied, “Well, according to her, she was just *pretending* to like you. We’ve been best friends since forever, and she tells me everything. She just didn’t want you to know that we’re best friends because then you would think she thought she was so popular, and it would ‘ruin the plan,’ so to speak. I wouldn’t lie. She told me all about how she *truly* feels about you. She was saying that you were nothing to her. But I thought what she was saying was wrong. That’s why I told you. You don’t deserve someone as awful as that. I would *never* do something like that to you. Obviously she would, though. Stay away.”

He looked at her with his dreamy eyes and said, “You’re right. I believe you. I mean, she did always seem to take advantage of me. She always wore a bragging smile in the hallways. And now that I think about it, she did seem to like me more as a trophy than a true boyfriend. You know, as if I’m the reason she wasn’t ‘low class’ anymore. Wow. Talking to you really makes me realize who she really was. It makes me realize what how she acted really means. And it makes sense. Yeah, that’s why I believe you.”

Jessica nodded.

"I guess I'll just have to get over it," he continued. "I mean, why should I like her if she doesn't like me, or respect me?" Jessica spotted me but continued so that Brian wouldn't suspect anything. "You shouldn't. You need someone that will *truly* care for you."

I couldn't listen to any more of this nonsense. I walked over to her table to tell her off, but before I had a chance to say anything, I heard her say, "What's wrong Julz? Did you buy the wrong thing for lunch?" And that's when I yelled. Jessica had not only taken the one thing that I truly loved away from me because of her jealousy, but made everyone believe that I had done something illegal and incredibly immoral!

Later that week, Jessica walked into the bathroom where I was washing my hands. In the reflection of the mirror in front of me I could see that she looked as if she didn't mean to do what she did in any way, shape, or form. "Well, since you're here, I'll say what I've got to say. I'm so sorry, Julz. I...I was only thinking about myself when I did what I did. I don't know what came over me. Well, yeah, I did. I guess that I was just jealous. Please forgive me."

I looked into her innocent-looking eyes and replied, "Don't know what came over you? Just jealous? No, I don't think so. You had no right to do what you did! You knew exactly what you were doing, and you didn't think of me at all!"

"Please," she pleaded. "I know what I did to you was way out of order. I'll tell everyone, including Brian, that none of it was true and that I was really jealous, and was only thinking of myself. I'll tell them that I don't deserve Brian."

I found it strange how Jessica suddenly had a change of heart, but I was still incredibly angry. "You're right you don't! I didn't deserve what you did to me!"

She still continued. "What I did was wrong and I told some of my closer friends what really happened. They didn't like it. They knew I liked Brian, but they didn't think I'd go

this extreme. They want me to fix everything. They said that if I didn't, they wouldn't be a part of my 'posse.' And to tell you the truth, I may be the leader of my group, but without them, everything for me will only go downhill. So I'm putting everything right, okay?"

I heaved a big sigh. I knew that things between us would only get worse if I didn't forgive her, and I, personally, didn't want any more trouble. After a long silence I said, "Okay, but it won't happen again, all right?" She nodded with thanks, and we set off.

Jessica and I aren't friends anymore, but we are friendly with each other. We resolved our problems and I decided to get on with life. After we talked, Jessica told Brian the truth, and that I knew what they had said in the conversation I had overheard. He came begging for forgiveness, and pleading for me to be his girlfriend again, but if he *thought* that was how I felt for all that time, then I felt I shouldn't be with him.

Life is pretty good now. I have a boyfriend, Rob Murphy, that I *know* I can trust, and who is a *true* best friend.

All I have to say now is if you have a close friend, cherish the moments you have, because she or he might not always be there for you. And if she or he betrays you as Jessica did to me, you can get through it. It may not be easy, but that's life.

From Compton to Harvard

*It's a long way FROM COMPTON TO HARVARD, and not just in miles. **Christian Ross** explains how one young man made the journey.*

There was a boy named Billy Jackson. He lived in Compton, California. He wanted to get a better education, so he asked his parents to change his school. His parents said yes.

He went to a better school. He got such a good education that when it was time to go to college, he chose Harvard and was accepted.

Billy played on the basketball team and was selected as the number one pick in the next draft. Billy went to the Atlanta Hawks. He had a rookie record 16.5 points per game and was selected to play at the All-Star game.

Billy got traded to the Detroit Pistons with his best friend Chauncey Billups. On the Pistons he averaged 20.5 points, five assists, and 6.7 rebounds per game.

Billy and Chauncey had a lot of fun together. They had the best relationship anyone could have in the NBA.

Billy went back to Harvard to talk to the basketball team and motivate the players. Billy also went to Compton to give ten million dollars to the city for schools. Billy loves giving back to the community. He is considered one of the greatest players in the NBA ever to play.

Dreams...

*A problem with running toward something can occur when one is running away from something at the same time. Stephanie thinks she knows which way to run in **DREAMS...** by Erica Sandler, but she may not have things quite figured out yet.*

As I dropped my books on my bed, I heard fighting downstairs. Those typical noises were from my parents. My heart beats as fast as a racehorse when this happens.

SMASH! The front door slammed shut. All of a sudden, outside my window, smoke rose up. There's no fire, just my dad smoking. I always hear about people dying because of smoking cigarettes and getting cancer from them, and I feel so uncomfortable when my dad does this!

Knock. "Come in."

My mom walked into my room and sat on my bed. "Stephanie, your dad and I have been having many arguments lately. We just have problems that we need to figure out. You know that we both love you very much."

She walked slowly to my door and I ran to shut it. I fell to the floor hysterically crying. *I wish that I could leave all my problems behind*, I thought. My life is terrible! I mean, my parents fight, and they don't even pay any attention to me. I feel like just running away. I ran to my bed, put my pillow over my head, and started crying even more. What could get me out of here?

Maybe if I were famous, I wouldn't have to rot in this stupid place I call a "home," where the worst people in the world live. I love singing, and ever since I was seven, I've been singing in the shower every single time I take one. I've

been to concerts, I've watched VH1, and I think an 18-year-old is old enough to handle it in the music business. I wouldn't have any parents, any rules, and nobody to control me but myself. That was my dream; I was just wishing it would come true.

That night, I was thinking about everything that had happened. I was so tired of hearing my parents fighting, and of my dad smoking, and I especially hated it when my dad drank. He drank A LOT every time there was a good sports game on television, especially the Philadelphia 76ers. He would slur his words a lot because he was so drunk. I disliked that so much! My dad has way more issues than my mother. My mother just tries to calm him down, but apparently that doesn't work.

Did I mention that I live in a small town in Pennsylvania? Well, I do. I decided to turn on the TV and happened to see on VH1 that they were going around to the places in New York City where the celebrities go. "NEW YORK CITY IS WHERE MOST SINGERS START THEIR CAREERS!"

Wait a minute! That's it! I could drive to New York City, and sing, and start my career! This is my chance. I live close to it, so why not take a HUMONGOUS chance?

I hopped onto my computer chair and searched for a map to New York City from Pennsylvania. Tons of sites came up, but I just picked one and printed it out. I planned to sneak out in the middle of the night. Maybe then I could get respect from my parents.

Slowly, at 12:30 A.M., I took my cell phone, my microphone case, my wireless speaker, and the car keys, and ran into the garage to get into the car. I felt really weird doing this. If my parents found out, they would go nuts on me! I felt sad, mad, and anxious to get out of my house. I had better get going if I were ever going to be in the spotlight. I could hear the crowd cheering, "STEPHANIE! STEPHANIE!"

Later in the day, about 5:30 A.M., tired as could be, I passed by a huge sign that said WELCOME TO NEW YORK CITY. I really did make it! There was excitement rushing through my body as fast as lightning. I thought I might as well park the car and start performing!

Driving down the street, I saw a parking spot. It was right across the street from the Total Request Live studio! That's where they play music videos and famous celebrities go and talk to the audience and the hosts. I got out of the car, looked for others coming down the street, and ran across. I found a spot right in front of the studio door! I opened my microphone case, put the wireless speaker in front of it, and away I went! People passed by me so many times, but nobody had given me money.

RING! My phone was ringing. The caller ID said HOME. Of course I was going to ignore the call, because the people calling me were inconsiderate and ungrateful.

This one man passed me, and he looked really suspicious, like he was up to no good. I knew this was wrong, but I decided to follow him. I didn't know what had gotten into me. I felt it was wrong and right. He ran into a dark alley behind the Studio A building and I saw this little girl, who happened to look thirteen, shaking against the wall. What was he going to do to her? I started to hear them talk. "I've asked you once, and I'm not going to ask you again. Where is the money?" The man asked angrily.

"I'm poor, sir! I only have enough money to buy my family food, sir! I'm very sorry!" The girl looked like she was about to throw up, she was shaking so badly.

"Do you want to see your grave today?"

"No, sir! Please, no!"

BOOM! Smoke rose from where they were standing. "Oh my gosh!" I said to myself.

The smoke cleared, and the only thing I could see was the girl, lying on the ground, dead.

"SOMEONE CALL THE POLICE! SOMEONE CALL RIGHT NOW! THERE IS A GIRL DEAD! SOMEONE

CALL 911!" Tons of people started to gather around. I took out my cell phone, called 911, and the ambulance came right away and took her.

This city was way too dangerous for me. I couldn't help thinking to myself that I was stupid in the first place to even go there. I was going home. I ran across the street just in time to see my car being towed away! I started to cry. Could my life get any worse? I decided to do the best thing for myself; I would call home.

"Hello," two voices answered my home phone.

"Hi, Mom and Dad. It's me."

"Oh my goodness! Stephanie! How could you run off like that? Your father and I were scared to death. Why would you do a thing like that?"

"Now, Stacey, don't yell at Stephanie. She did it for some really good reason...I think."

"Oh, Rob! Shut up!"

I was so upset by that I went ballistic. "*See! This* is why I did it! I'm *tired* of you two fighting, swearing, drinking, smoking, *everything!* I never got any respect from you two, none! I *never* got to talk to you about *anything!* My grades, my school, my friends, and even my *life!* All you would worry about is yourself. My parents are supposed to *love* me!" I went speechless. I couldn't believe I just said that. I cried even harder, although I didn't cry into the phone.

"Stephanie, honey! We both love you so very much! We never knew you felt this way," my mother replied.

"Well, you never knew because you never took the time to even talk to me!" By now I was crying into the phone. "I just would like one of you to please come and get me. Please. I'm on 13th Street and Broadway. I will talk to you then."

"We'll both come and get you, and we will have a very serious talk about what we have been doing wrong. We love you!" I didn't answer. Should I?

"Um, I love you, too." Just saying those words made me feel that after that conversation, my life was going to change completely.

Some hours later a car pulled up. It was my parents. We sat on the side by the Studio 7 shop and talked for a very long time. I told my dad about how I felt when he smoked, drank, and swore all the time. I told my mom that she never paid any attention to me. We talked about everything that was going on.

Soon after that, my father went into rehab to stop smoking and for drinking, and my parents went to marriage counseling and worked all their problems out. They love each other so much. Now we are finally one big happy family, and my life is now peaceful, calm, and much more quiet.

Fate

*Life throws curveballs, some more serious than others. In **FATE** by **Alexis Barkin**, Emily faces her share and then some, and tries to make sense of it all.*

3-5-05

It was horrible...and to me it happened at the speed of light, a speed that was so horrible that I had to sit down and think. That moment was so painful that I had to calm down and let tears pour out of me. No one knew this depth of sadness I concealed but me, myself, and I.

I climbed the stairs that led my way onto the bus to camp Secrow. The bus was full of shouting and screaming girls. I sat down quickly and placed my headphones over my ears as the music from my iPod silenced the crowd. I looked out my window and started to search for my family, but no one was there. They had already left.

Someone tapped my shoulder. I spun around. Across the aisle from me sat Becky Rod. "Hey," I said, smiling a fake smile that I knew...so well.

She laughed, throwing her head back, as her curly red hair flung into the air. This is how she greets someone; she's not quite normal, but who is? "So what happened this year?" Obviously I wasn't going to tell that big mouth the whole truth.

“Nothing much; you know, doctor appointments and stuff.”

She raised her eyebrow. “Oh, well, you got your hair back from when you had cancer,” she pointed out. My horrible hair, my pixie cut hair.

“Yeah, I lost my hair from chemo a few years ago,” I said.

“Well... I like your new cut,” she smiled. *Doubt it; how can she think that when she has beautiful red locks?* I thought as I looked up and stared out my window where I noticed a different pair of eyes staring at me, a little boy’s. He glared at me and smiled a familiar smile, my mom’s. I turned away, frightened; it seemed as if she was always...everywhere.

We were four hours into the five-hour-long trip and Becky fell asleep, as usual snoring so loudly that even if I turned my iPod up to the highest volume possible, I could still hear her unpleasant, piggish noises. A lot of the girls on the bus were in this huge argument over something little; I think it was who won the Acornopian award last year (the camp made up the word for an award that is given away to any cabin for any strange reason). Most of them were shrieking, some were crying, and some were just getting down and dirty as girls opened their bags to find Band-Aids to cover their newly found injuries.

“Sit down! All this commotion is driving me crazy!” screamed the bus driver from the front seat who looked stressed and annoyed with all the girls. Her face was turning red and it looked as if her head was going to pop off!

That’s camp for you. I guess you could say it’s just another ordinary sleepover camp, but that would be a HUGE white lie. I opened my journal and began to write.

6-18-05

Right now I’m on the bus, and believe me it’s not quite what I call peaceful here. As the shouting rings in my ears I

feel as if I want to just...let go of this... excitement. But my toes keep tingling and my heart keeps thumping louder and louder over the shouting. My pulse is going faster and faster over the 30-miles-per-hour speed limit. I'm excited, but how? When everything goes SO wrong, how can someone like me be excited? How can I feel anything but guilt?

I reached down to grab a magazine as a large something-filled balloon came flying into the air aimed at me, but it landed on Becky. She jumped, squirmed, and immediately the whole bus was silent. This was going to get ugly.

She flung up two fists in the air facing the back of the bus. "Okay, now whoever threw that mud-filled balloon is gonna pay!" The girls scrambled behind seats in fright. After all, Becky broke someone's wrist last year "accidentally" in an arm war. "That's what I thought." She smiled at me, waiting for the right moment to pounce on Kendra Recoat (the queen of mud-filled water balloons). I watched as Becky reached down into her bag and took out a huge mud-balloon. She stood up and eyed the crowd.

"Who threw that balloon?" The bus driver quickly glanced at us and then back at the road in an instant. "Whoever threw the balloon is going to get caught!" She took one final glance at us. "You, sit down this instant! NOW!" she said while pointing at Becky.

"Fine, Kendra will get it. Tonight! She'll get it! Ha, ha, ha!" she said with eyes large with thrill.

"Shut up!" I couldn't stand her constant laugh. She glared at me as if she won the battle. What a freak, but the good type, you know?

We settled down into our cabin as the counselors introduced themselves. "Why did I come to camp again?" Becky whispered to make the point that she was bored.

"Because it's fun and you would have no other way to spend the summer."

"Ha, and what would you be doing? Spending your days watching reruns of *Degrassi*, which is, by the way, the worst show of all-time." We started to listen to the counselors again.

"So, welcome, and we hope you enjoy your stay!"

"Yeah, not with her around," Becky whispered as I elbowed her. "Yeah, same thing with you... just kidding." She ran to the bunks and observed each one as if something were going to pull her in. "I call this one!"

"You do that." I placed my duffel on top of the bottom bunk across the way. As I started to unpack my bag there was a notebook sitting on top of my pajamas. I flipped the cover of it and inside was my mother's handwriting.

2-8-05

My Dearest Emily,

As you know I went to the same camp you are at right now! I hope you enjoy this new notebook, since you love writing. I am excited to see how much you'll change in a whole month. I'm not sure I can wait that long, can you? Write to me every day, and if you don't I will write to you twice as much. I promise, and that'll get on your nerves really quickly.

*With lots of love, your annoying mother
xoxoxo*

Tears started to trickle down my cheek. I felt the page as if it was mystical and held power. I quickly ripped it out and thumbtacked it to the wall that stood blank behind me: my first letter.

“Hey, Leah, over here,” shouted Ginta from across the cabin. I looked over to where Ginta was standing and saw Leah. They were laughing. I wish I could have joined in, but I didn’t want to embarrass myself with a wet, red face.

“Hey, Emily, glad you came back this year. Is the cancer gone?” Jacky questioned from behind me. Letting my attention focus in on her, I quickly wiped my face with my hand and turned around.

“Yeah, pretty much. I still have a chance of it coming back.”

“G-d forbid.” Jacky started to unpack her duffle from across the way. “Hope the counselors won’t find this.” Jacky unzipped a small carry-on filled to the top with gum and Skittles.

“Yeah, right; knowing your luck they will.”

“Thanks. Glad you’re supporting me,” she said sarcastically.

As night began to fall, the bell rang and we headed down to the theater cabin, over the large hills with a scent of barbeque sauce that filled the air. We all sat on benches as our first evening program began.

“Listen up! Tonight you are bonding with your cabin members!” Katy attempted to scream over the loud noises.

“I didn’t come to camp to be bored!” screamed one of the boys from across the way.

“We didn’t come to camp to hear you complaining.”

“Johnny, seriously, did you have some gas or is that a skunk?” another boy said.

“...and then Kelly killed the dog right in front of him!”

“Do you like my nails? I got them done yesterday! This year’s black is pink.”

“Isn’t it always?”

“...in her opinion!”

The room was filling up with laughter and voices from familiar faces and from people I had never seen before.

The girls in our cabin faced each other, the same old girls from years and years ago. "This is totally pointless," Becky announced. "I decided to prank cabin G-8. Now who's in?"

"Depends on what we're doing," Denise said doubtfully.

"First, I decided to chew lots and lots of gum, all of us." Becky obviously planned this a long time ago. She unrolled a chart. "See, here." She pointed to a list of steps for the "big" prank. "Next we'll string the gum like cobwebs over everyone's things and bunks. Then for Kendra we'll take my huge mud balloon and place it on her rug." She smiled brilliantly at this "master plan."

"We'll get caught," Denise said.

Denise DOES have a point, I secretly thought as my mind was deciding which path to take.

"Don't worry; we'll do it at three A.M."

I guess we won't get caught, but aren't counselors back by three?

"You know if this does go wrong, we'll never set foot in this camp again," Denise replied.

"It won't, Denise. If you're so worried, stay in the cabin by yourself."

"Don't worry, I will, at three A.M."

"Fine, now who's in?"

Should I risk it? I mean, I love camp. If I could never come back it would be horrible. Then again, live life to your fullest.

Everyone said "I" but Denise. "Okay, then, it is set. Tonight at three: revenge!" Becky laughed. Predictable, right?

6-18-05

My heart feels fear as if it wants to slow down and wait. My mind is on the revenge, ready to play the game of danger. Tonight is the night where we play that game.... Who knows? If we

get caught we'll never be able to come back. If we get away with it we'll be waiting for G-8 to strike back.

I got awoken with a tap on the shoulder. "What is it?"

"I thought you said you were in."

"I am, Becky. I'm just so exhausted and dizzy."

"Hurry up. Everyone's ready."

"Fine. Hold on." I got dressed in a hoodie and sweatpants. I checked the time and it was exactly three A.M. The room started to spin, but I stepped out onto the porch where all the girls were standing, even Denise trying not to slow us down.

"The game begins!" Becky said spookily as she appeared from the shadows. "Are you ready?" Each of us nodded, scared to death, but excited at the same time. "Kerry's on rounds tonight. She's already asleep, but to be on the safe side we are going to cross the lake."

"All right, let's go!" Leah screeched.

"Do you have the gum?" Becky asked Jacky. Jacky nodded, holding up a huge bag of gum. Jacky passed out four pieces of gum to each person.

"We're set," Jacky announced.

"Okay, let's go!" I stepped off the porch feeling as if I were going to faint.

"Hey, are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Ginta, just a bit nauseous."

"I'm scared, too." We started to cross the lake as my eyesight got blurry. I felt as if I were getting sucked into a nightmare as that horrible moment came back. Sirens started to fill my ears and I felt the coldness of my mom's hand in mine. I stared at her as she spoke to me...weakly. "Tell your sister and father I said good-bye. I will always be here for all of you," she whispered as her eyes started to get smaller. "You have to remember that, okay?" She started to twirl my curl around her finger as I came down closer to her, knowing

that the end was near. My mom's finger stopped and I cried over her, squeezing her hand so tightly that it became white.

I looked out to my right and there was her car, crushed. Blood was splattered all over the scene where my mother spoke her last words. I stood up and watched as they carried my mom away on a large stretcher. A car pulled up to me with my sister in a car seat in the back and my dad in the front.

"Emily, jump in, jump in."

"Dad, it's my fault! I killed her! I did!"

"Emily, please just come into the car. It's not your fault."

"I did it; I was mad at her! Then she looked at me and it all stopped! We lost control! I saw the other car about to hit her side in the front. I just sat in the back and did absolutely nothing!"

I quickly opened up the door and sat down. The car started to move and I felt as if a blade of tears was struck through my heart. My legs felt like Jell-O and I stared out my window. I thought it was a dream. I thought she was going to be at the house when we arrived, to greet us, but no; it was as real as reality comes.

I started to see a light very bright in the windshield, but this wasn't how the story went. The light got brighter and brighter. Suddenly I was standing, not sure of where I was, as the bright light shadowed a figure coming closer and closer to me in the distance. She was singing a beautiful song.

It was my mother. No longer was she hurt, no longer did she feel pain, but today she was well. She was smiling. She was alive.

"Are my hands cold?"

I felt her hands; they were warm and no longer white. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I had that fight. I didn't mean to...um...kill you."

She smoothed down my pixie cut hair. "Emily, don't blame yourself. This was certainly going to happen one day. Fate made this happen." Her large brown eyes became larger as if she were alive, my mother, alive.

I touched my hair, which she recently smoothed down. "I wish this were real, but it's not, not really. It's just a dream."

She turned her back to me, suddenly saddened at what I had said, saddened that I thought this wasn't real. "Good-bye, my dearest Emily," said my mother as she began to walk away with words trailing behind. "Guilt isn't your punishment. You didn't do anything, and it's just bringing you down." She started to fade as my eyes reopened and I found myself lying in the infirmary at camp. There next to me was my journal. I opened it and wrote.

6-19-05

The strangest thing happened to me tonight. It was a night I will NEVER FORGET, but I will always treasure it, forever. It was a nightmare as my mother's horrible story of death replayed in my head like a broken record. But the most spectacular thing happened to me, too. I saw my mother. She told me not to have worries, and not to be guilty. I've been feeling guilty for her death this whole time, but I realized death comes and you have to accept it, no matter if it's yours, or not.

I heard my door creak open.

"Hey! How are you feeling?" Becky appeared from the shadows.

"I feel like I'm floating on a marshmallow. How do you think I feel?"

"I'm not sure, maybe like when you broke your leg a few years ago water skiing."

"Yeah, I think that pretty much covers it."

Becky bent over, and wild red hair dangled onto my bed. She said, “You never told me your mom died.”

I looked her straight in the eye. “It’s a long story.”

“I have the time. Where do you think I’m going, back to cabin G-8 to complete unfinished business?”

“That was my first guess.”

The Happiness Box

Holly has something precious that no one else has—until it disappears. Aurianne Vienney shows us how Holly becomes a detective in her attempt to recover **THE HAPPINESS BOX.**

“Hurry up, Holly! You’re going to be late for the bus!” shouted my mom.

“Mom, I don’t know where my happiness box is.”

“Don’t worry! We’ll find it after school,” she answered.

Let me present myself. My name is Holly, and I have an older sister named Stephanie. I have a happiness box, and it is unique in the world. My dad brought it back from China. But, you see, the box was so difficult to make that the makers of this box promised that it would be the first and last they ever made. The result: They burned the papers on how to make this special object.

I need that box to be happy. This morning, I wanted to put it in my backpack like I always do, but it turned out that I had lost it. Now, let me tell my story.

Once at school, I went in my first hour class: math. We had a test the day before, and I saw that I got a failing grade. Later in the day, I got mad at myself because I had forgotten my lunch at home. My friend, Catherine, asked where my happiness box went because I was so mad. I told her I couldn’t find it (she is the only one who knows about it). The rest of the day went all wrong: I fell off my chair, I got a pop quiz, and I missed my bus for the way back home.

Back at home, I tried to find my box by searching my entire house. I didn’t find my precious box. The next morning (Saturday), I put up posters saying:

Box lost:
-red with blue little dots
-it says "happy" on it
Please return to:
2665 E. Snickers
Toledo, Ohio
Tel: 419 248 2112

Days after days went by. Nobody called.

One day, my Mom sent me to the store next to our house. Before going to the store, I wanted to take a walk. When I was in the middle of the city, I saw a sign on my favorite store (it was Dunham's). It said that the store had moved to another street. I looked at the window. Nobody was there, so I decided to go take a look. I walked to the back, and suddenly stopped. I heard a voice talking.

I tried to let that voice lead me where it came from. I walked up to a door that said "Staff Only," and I watched what was going on in there by looking in the keyhole. What I saw was spectacular. There were two men talking to each other.

"That little girl put up signs because she lost her box!" said the first one.

"We've got to be careful now," said the other one.

"When we find the secret of how we can make this box, we will become famous! Let's go tell the chief about it, Bill."

Wait! Bill was one of the plumbers who repaired my bathroom! The plumber and Bill looked exactly the same. It's obvious! One of them stole my magic box while the other one was "repairing my bathroom"! I know the other man's name: Philippe.

I was surprised about this conversation. I heard after that they would meet at 2:00 P.M. at the same place.

I told Stephanie what happened, and asked her if she could cover for me so Mom wouldn't suspect a thing. She said it was okay.

The next day, I followed them, hiding from tree to tree, behind cars, in the stores, etc. Finally, we got to the junkyard of the city. I didn't know why we were there, but I quickly found out. The "plumbers" were typing a password on the radio channels' numbers of a red Corvette. Suddenly, the front seat of the Corvette slid backwards, and a trap door opened. They weren't careful, because they left the trap door open. When they were gone, it was my turn to go in.

I didn't close the trap because I didn't want them to hear it or find the trapdoor different than how they left it. Then, I slowly went down the wooden ladder. The three men's backs were facing me. Perfect.

Once inside, I saw them talking with another man. Apparently, he was the chief. He bossed around Bill and Philippe.

When I was off the ladder, I went in a little room where they couldn't see me. The room had no lights, and the walls were black. That room made me shudder. I did see that in the room there were a lot of tools to make things. I could see the men, but they couldn't see me. So far, it was going great.

They were trying to open the box, but couldn't. I wasn't surprised, because my box needed a key to be opened, which was in a drawer of my table near my bed. Apparently, they were stupid. They didn't steal the key!

The chief started to get impatient. "This box has too many secrets! It's impossible to open without the key!"

"Maybe we should try to open it tomorrow with a pin or something. It's getting late, chief," said Bill.

"Bill's right. It's already 6:30 P.M.," added Philippe.

Six-thirty P.M.! My mom was going to kill me! I had better get back, because Mom could find out that Stephanie is covering for me. I had to get *my* box back and go home.

I was lucky: The men went up the ladder. When there was no more noise, I sneaked out of the tool room and got out of

the basement. I decided I would go quickly to a store and buy a box that was red and had blue dots. I took some paint and painted “HAPPY” on the box. I hurried down the ladder, grabbed my box, put back the fake one, and went as fast as possible to get to my house.

After all this, I found my way back home. I couldn’t wait to tell Catherine my adventure.

The Letter Girl

*A girl who is not sure of her place in the world must suddenly come to grips with who she is. In **THE LETTER GIRL** by **Sarah Blume**, Sophie must rely on herself if she is to overcome the biggest challenge of her life.*

I have always wondered what a letter is. The dictionary describes a letter (not the letter like “F”) as a direct or personal written or printed message addressed to a person or organization. But, in my opinion, a letter isn’t only a piece of mail. It can be anything. It can be a note about your feelings, like a journal. What I do is, if I am someplace else, I like to write down everything that is around me, and what is happening. Then, I mail it to home, and when I get home, I have mail. See, I am homeschooled, so I don’t really get to see a lot of kids, and I am always busy. I don’t get that much mail, but I feel so alive when I do get some. Once I look back at what I have written, though, often I find it to sound silly.

My name is Sophie Smith. I am twelve years old, and was born November 17, 1835. I have brown eyes, and short brown hair. My father says that all I need is to wear brown clothes every day; then I would be a unique girl.

On January 23, 1847, my mum called me inside, and said that my grandma wrote me a letter. I rushed inside because what to other people seems like just a piece of mail is a prized possession to me. And here is what it said:

Dear Sophie Paige Smith,

I haven't seen you in a while, and I want to spend some time with you. So, in two weeks if you want to see me, meet me in London right next door to the Barber Shop, which is two blocks down from the train station. If you are not sure where to go, then ask Tom who sells the tickets at the station. His father works with your father and has a very nice house across the street. He is the nicest gentleman, so don't be afraid to ask him. Hope you come, darling!

~Grandma Martha

P.S. Be careful! There are some bad people out there!

So I ran quickly inside, and went around to the back porch to find my mum. My mum stays at home and homeschools me, and my father owns a huge company where they make tools and weapons and sell them all across England. So I guess you could say that our family is pretty wealthy.

My mum looked at the letter and told me that she would think about it. But I know that saying that she would “think about it” usually means no. So I begged her and gave her my puppy dog face (which she thinks is adorable), and finally she said yes! I jumped around the whole room for about 20 minutes. My mum got out a piece of paper, and started to write a letter to my grandma to tell her that I was coming.

Two weeks went by and I had my notepad, a few envelopes, my pen, some clothes, my ticket, and a blanket for the train. When we got to the train station my mum and father kissed me bye, and I was off to a place I had never seen: London.

The train ride was so boring that it felt like I was in a totally white room for hours. All I did was basically watch other people sleep, eat, and talk. Then I fell asleep, and about

a half hour later, the train stopped, and I instantly woke up. We were finally there!

When I got out of the train station, I had no idea where to go. I started looking for Tom, and right in front of me was a desk for tickets. I went up to the desk and saw Tom standing there, but he was looking around, sweating terribly.

“Do you know where the Barber Shop is?” I asked.

“Um...uh, sure; you go stra-”

And before I knew it he was gone in a flash. I didn’t know what had just happened. I started looking around, and I saw one man who had a wrinkly face, a long beard, an old hat covering his hair, some ripped-up gray pants, and a dirty brown coat, with patched dirty black dress shoes. He was sitting on a bench, looking around, too. When I walked up to him, he stared at me.

“Do you know where the Barber Shop is?” I asked.

“Sure I do,” he replied. “Do you want me to take you there?”

Before I could respond, he grabbed me and shoved me into a small wooden box that smelled like onions that were rotting in there for years. I probably was screaming for about five minutes straight.

It was dark and cold in there, and I was scared half to death. Then I started thinking of all of the things that he would do to me, which made me really terrified.

It was about 20 minutes, which felt like an hour, until I felt a *THUD*. I squeezed my eyes, and when I opened them, the box was open. The man tied me up so I couldn’t speak or budge one little bit. Then he lifted me out of the box and carried me to an old, disgusting shed. He brought me in, tied me to a pole, and untied my mouth.

“Do you have any idea why you are here?” he asked.

“No,” I responded.

“Look at the clothes you’re wearing,” he said.

I looked at my outfit. I had my pink dress on, and some black dress shoes that had just been cleaned.

“What about them?” I asked.

“Normally, what people are wearing tells how they live. You have nice clean clothes, and I have dirty, ripped up clothes. I barely have any money, while you are rich. Am I right?”

“Yes,” I said innocently.

“So...I was hoping that I could have some money. And if I can’t, I will—” he paused for a moment, smiling, “—KILL YOU!”

Suddenly, I started not feeling well. My heart was pounding, I was sweating, and I felt like I was about to throw up.

Before I knew it, I opened my eyes and I saw that I was lying in a puddle of vomit. I could barely see, but I think I saw a man that had a tag that said “London Train Station.” And right below that, it had a nametag that said “Tom.” I read the letter that my grandma sent me that was lying on the floor right in front of me. She had said to ask Tom, who worked at the station. He was tied up in the next room.

“So what’s your decision?”

Then I saw the man holding a knife, pointed at me.

“Uh, um, um...umm...um...I will give you the money. But since I don’t have any right now, I need to send a letter to my grandma so she can mail you some money.” That was a big lie. I started thinking of a plan. It took a few minutes, but I finally got one that might work.

“Okay, but make it quick!” he demanded.

I slipped out a piece of paper and wrote:

Dear Grandma Martha,

I am stuck in an old shed with a scary man who is making me give him money. Come tomorrow and bring the police. HELP!

~Sophie

I took an envelope, put the note in it, and addressed it. I set it down, and before I could even stretch out my legs, I fell asleep.

In the morning, I woke up and saw that my note to my grandma had been read and torn apart. The only thing that would make me feel better was to write a letter. I wrote about what had happened so far in London, and how I felt. It ended up to be six pages long. I stuffed it in my pocket, and started to think of ways to escape.

I didn't know where that man was, so I thought it was safe to get up and see if I could open the door. I hadn't stood up in two days. I opened the door, and saw some houses and a sign that said "Volem St." That name sounded familiar to me. I remembered that it was my grandma's street!

Before I knew it, I was running so fast toward my grandma's house that my shoes came off. I quickly looked back, and saw that the scary man was chasing me. I ran so much faster that my socks came off this time. I had no place to go but to hide from him. I ran quickly behind a bush and sat down, gasping for breath.

"Sophie!" I heard someone say. "Sophie!"

Before I knew it, I saw my grandma run up to me and hug me. I was so happy to see her that I hugged her 50 times harder.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

Instead of explaining everything, I gave her some of my letters. We went to the police, and right when we got out of the police station we saw the kidnapper. As he started to make a run for it, he got arrested.

When we walked out of the police station, I saw my parents sitting on the bench, and right before I could tell my grandma, they were crying and giving me hugs and kisses.

I ended up going straight home. But we planned another trip to go see Grandma, except this time my parents are coming.

About one week later, I saw that I had more than one piece of mail. My grandma had sent me a letter. She wrote in the letter of how proud she was of me for getting through the rough time of when I was kidnapped. The others were from me. And when I read them they didn't sound silly anymore. Then, I saw that the newspaper was on the ground. I picked it up and it said that a worker at the train station, named Tom, got kidnapped, and right before the kidnapper got arrested, he shot him.

I was so surprised at what had happened. I didn't know what to think. But then, I figured out that if I hadn't escaped, my mother and father would be on their way to my funeral right now. I started to run quickly inside, but then I saw that I had dropped my grandma's letter. I picked it up, and underneath it was a certificate. It was a certificate of bravery. It said "for Sophie Paige Smith."

Love Walks Alone

*A man's love for his wife should keep him at home with her, shouldn't it? Perhaps you will clarify that answer after reading **LOVE WALKS ALONE**, by **Kaleigh Leisa Passarelli**.*

It was the second week of July, and that meant it was Cherry Festival time in Traverse City, Michigan. I went with my Mom, Dad, Travis and Tessa up to my Papa and Grandma's house in a town not far from Traverse City called Cedar. We were waiting for the day the festival started, so we decided to go on a hike up Indian Mountain. This is across the street from my Papa and Grandma's house on Lake Leelanau. Indian Mountain is a beautiful place with tall cedar trees on the top of the mountain. We love to go walking up there and smell the cedar trees and look out over the blue waters of the lake.

We had our hiking staffs, but we still had to be careful going down hills because there were snake holes in the ground. We usually go down one path that curves off to the right. Today there was a snake with frog legs sticking out of its mouth on the path in our way. We did not want the snake to see us. It was so disgusting to see the snake eating the frog. We decided to go a different way, so we turned onto a path that was not very worn in the tall green grass to see what was there.

We found a brown wooden house with a green roof way back in the woods. There was a cleared area around the house. The house had a porch that wrapped around it. A man lived there, and he was outside taking care of his garden. There were roses that climbed up a fence. We felt a little lost

in the woods because we had never gone this way before today. The man was very surprised to see people back here.

The man was as tall as my dad and had a big, bushy, grayish-black beard. He said his name was Joe. He wore an old dark red hat and blue jeans, a white shirt that needed ironing, and some patched garden gloves. He told us how to get back to the top of Indian Mountain. To be polite, I asked him if he was going to the Cherry Festival.

He said he would never go there again because there were too many painful memories for him. It turned out that he had met his wife, Crystal, at the Cherry Festival 22 years before. Mom asked where she was now. Joe said she had died a few years ago, and they had been married a long time. He missed her so much he never went anywhere, because she was buried behind the house in the woods. He didn't want to leave her alone. In fact, he never even left his house or yard in the woods!

Dad asked him how he ate, and he said he grew most of his food in the garden, and then canned it for the winter. Joe would shoot deer and other small animals for meat. He also had a friend who brought him supplies once a year. In return he gave him meat from deer he shot on his land during hunting season.

We noticed a fence around the house and garden. I started to touch the fence because I saw a flower on it, and I wanted to pick it. Joe told me not to touch the fence because it was electrified! The motorized gate was open in the fence, and we went into the garden through it.

Joe said he set up the electrical fence himself. The fence kept out the animals that lived in the woods that wanted the food growing in the garden. He made the electricity strong, with a very high voltage that is not usually used in electric fences. The shock could make a bear run away, but if a person touched it he or she would be knocked out for several hours. He first set it up when he married his wife.

Tessa asked, "What happened to her?"

Joe said that it had rained and rained, and Crystal went outside at night to look at the stars when the rain finally stopped. She stepped in a snake hole and tried to regain her balance when she hit the electrical fence. Crystal grabbed the fence while trying not to fall down. As she was trying to get her foot out of the snake hole, the other foot went into a puddle and she fell. She died of the shock through the fence. So ever since then he lived alone. Joe said, "I blame myself for her death because I put the fence up. I didn't follow the directions about how much voltage should be in the fence. There was too much voltage to keep away the deer and bears."

We talked to the man for a long, long time. We noticed a yellow dog that was limping very badly moving out of the hot sun to get under the shady trees. I asked Joe what the dog's name was and he said, "Her name is Dandelion, and she was my wife's dog."

Travis asked, "Why is Dandelion limping so badly?"

Joe answered, "A few days ago a porcupine dug a hole under the fence and got through. Dandelion likes to chase porcupines. So she started to chase the porcupine, and that dog knows a lot of things. Dandelion knows a porcupine could hurt her if the quills hit her and got in deep. She cornered the porcupine and I came to knock it out, so I could get it out of the garden or the house. Dandelion was gaining on this one porcupine that always comes back. Dandelion and the porcupine were getting near a corner in the garden and Dandelion slowed up. If the porcupine turned or rolled up in a ball she would be able to stop. The porcupine went straight on and so did Dandelion, when all of a sudden Dandelion's back left leg was caught in a snake hole!"

I asked, "What happened after that?"

Joe replied, "Then her leg pulled her back, and as that happened she let out a long howl. I came running fast because she would usually have the porcupine for me by then. I saw her lying there trying to get her leg out of the snake hole, but she could not do it by herself. I picked her up and

got her leg out of the snake hole and brought her into the house. She had a scratch on her leg, and it was bleeding a little. There probably was some rough wood by the fence. I cleaned the wound and bandaged it as best I could,” he finished.

Travis asked him, “Have you seen a vet for the dog?”

Joe said, “No, because I do not want to leave my wife alone in the woods, and I fixed the leg as much as I could.”

Tessa said, “Do you love that dog? And how much?”

Joe said, “I love that dog a whole lot. It is as close as I can get to be next to my wife, because it was her dog.”

Dad said, “Come with us and bring Dandelion with you. We can take her to a vet who can help her. Then if there is an infection the vet can stop it so the dog will not die. Her leg looks swollen and looks like it is about to explode.”

Joe said, “I don’t know. Then I would have to leave my wife alone.”

I said, “Look at Dandelion, and think: Wouldn’t Crystal want to have a vet see Dandelion so she can get well?”

Joe looked at Dandelion, who was lying down. She let out a whimper because of her leg. She seemed to say to Joe, “It’s me, Crystal. Please take Dandelion down to see a vet so she can get better. The leg is infected and it is stiffening her up. She is very sick. Would you do it for me?”

Joe mumbled, “But then I would have to leave you alone while I am gone. And I do not want you to be alone.”

Another whimper seemed to say, “You will not leave me alone because I will be with you in spirit. You must hurry to the vet so Dandelion can live.”

Joe mumbled, “Okay, I’ll go for you and Dandelion.” Then Joe said to us, “Okay, let’s go. We need to hurry, or Dandelion may die.”

So we walked down the mountain and got our van. Joe followed us with Dandelion in his truck. We drove down the mountain really fast to Traverse City and found a vet. The vet said that we got Dandelion there in the nick of time, and that the leg was broken and infected by a very poisonous snake.

The vet said that the snake hole probably still had a snake in it that bit Dandelion. That explained the cut and the blood Joe had seen. Then the dog broke her leg trying to get out of the hole and away from the snake. The vet told Joe that Dandelion needed an antidote for the snake venom, and then he would do an emergency surgery on the leg. Also the vet said that Dandelion would have to take medicine for a month to be sure the infection was completely out. The operation to fix the leg would take two hours to do.

After Joe said good-bye to Dandelion before the vet took her to do the operation, he was sad and so was Dandelion. Joe had told her what was going to happen. I suggested to Joe that he go to the Cherry Festival while he waited for the operation to be over. Joe said yes.

It turned out that he had a very nice day. Joe saw lots of old friends in the Open Space by Traverse Bay and realized he had been very lonely. The vet was able to fix Dandelion's leg. Dandelion was going to be fine.

The next morning we went back up Indian Mountain to see how Dandelion was doing. We found out that Joe had driven home and an old friend had come with him to help with Dandelion. Now Joe was taking down the electrical fence with his old friend. Dandelion looked a lot happier and wagged her tail when she saw us. She even limped over to us to lick my hand. Joe stopped staying in his house all day. Joe started seeing his other old friends again.

The moral of this story is this: True love should be kept in the heart, but it shouldn't make you want to stop living—hold on to love every day, and enjoy every day of your life.

The Man Who Changed Our Life

*Members of a family who are just getting by find that one person can have a dramatic influence on all of them in **THE MAN WHO CHANGED OUR LIFE**, by **Stefanie Kueck**.*

“I want a horse,” Becky said.

That’s what she has been saying since she was three. I know that because she is my little sister, who is only eight years old now.

My dad died when I was only five, and my mom is a single mom. My mom has a hardworking job to keep the family moving. We don’t have a lot of money. We live in a tiny apartment on the third level. But the good side is if we need to find each other, we don’t need to yell; we just need to look in the other two rooms. My grandpa lives with us. It is the best because he is always spoiling us like crazy.

My mom went to work really early this morning so she could come home early, because some boy that she worked with asked her out. I hope she comes soon, because he will be here in a half hour.

“Hello, you guys. How was your day?” Mom asked.

“Good. And yours?” I asked back.

“Good. Thank you for asking.”

“You should probably start to get ready,” I suggested.

“Oh, my. I should, shouldn’t I?”

"He will be here in half an hour," I said.

Ding, Dong, Ding, Dong, Ding.

"He's here!" I yelled.

"So am I. Come in, Tom."

"Are you ready to go, Lisa?" Tom asked.

"I am. Are you ready?"

"Ready."

"Bye, sweetie."

"Bye mom."

There they go on their first date.

Wow, they must be having a lot of fun. They have been out for the whole night. It is midnight.

"Goodbye, Tom. That was nice. I hope we can do it again."

"I bet we can. Tomorrow, same time? But bring the family, okay?"

"That sounds great."

Later that night

"I'm home."

"Hi, Mom. How was it?"

"It was great. We are going to do it tomorrow with the whole family. You should head to bed."

"Good night, Mom"

"Good night."

The next night

"Are you guys ready to go? Tom is here!" Mom screamed at the top of her lungs.

"I have not cleared this with your mom, Becky, but I have a surprise for you," whispered Tom.

"I love surprises."

"It is outside. Open the gate."

"It's—it's—it's—a-a-a-a...horse!"

“Your sister told me how much you love horses. The horse would stay at my farm. Is that okay?

“That’s fine!”

It ends like a fairy tale. Mom and Tom got married, Becky got a horse, and she and I got a new dad.

Manhattan's Girl

*Andy has always dreamed of fame and fortune. In **MANHATTAN'S GIRL**, by **Abby Walker**, it is an unforeseen obstacle that convinces her to try to turn her dream into reality.*

Andy couldn't wait until 3:03. The afternoon bell would ring and kids would come raging out of their classrooms, anxious to get out of school. Better yet, it was a Friday afternoon, and that was the day that Andy and her best friend Danny took their weekly walk into Central Park and went on the big rocks to chat about EVERYTHING.

Ding, ding, ding. The afternoon bell rang, and as Andy predicted, kids came raging out of their classrooms. Andy met Danny in front of the school and hopped on the nearest subway.

Wait a minute. Let me rewind and go back to introduce you to Andy. Andrea Staminal is sixteen years of age and goes to LaGuardia High School of Arts. Andrea prefers to be called Andy. Andy has a dream to be an actress. Now back to where I was.

When Andy and Danny got to the subway stop nearest to Central Park, they started to walk. When they got to their usual spot, they started to talk.

"So how was your day?" Andy asked Danny, trying to jokingly sound like her mother.

"As usual, BORING!" Danny replied laughing.

All of a sudden Danny's phone rang. Andy loved her ring tone. It was by My Chemical Romance. That was their favorite band. Danny picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

Danny said, “Hey, Mom.... what.... but I.... fine.... Bye, Mom.” Danny hung up her phone.

“Who was that?” Andy asked Danny.

“My mom. She said she had some important business to take care of and couldn’t have me at the house tonight,” said Danny.

“Well, you can stay with me tonight,” Andy said.

“Thanks!” Danny said.

As Andy and Danny walked home, they decided to stop for Chinese food. They stopped at a restaurant called Ollie’s. “Yum, that was delicious!” Andy said, giggling.

“Yeah!” Danny agreed.

When they got to Andy’s house, Andy’s mom was pleased to see Danny. They went to Andy’s very own “Chill Room,” as she called it. They turned on My Chemical Romance and listened, sitting in the poster-covered room with fuzzy carpets and chairs, electric green walls, a faux zebra carpet, a fuzzy purple chair, a fuzzy blue chair, a funky fuchsia sofa, and of course, window and door beaded curtains.

At about 10:00, Danny crashed and fell asleep. Andy’s parents called Andy over quietly.

“Andy, we need to speak to you,” they said.

“What is it?” Andy asked.

“Well, your father and I meant to tell you before, but you seemed so happy.... Andy...we’re moving to Maine,” Andy’s parents told her.

Andy was speechless. She didn’t say a word the rest of the time she was awake, and when she got in bed she cried herself to sleep.

The next morning Danny woke up and Andy’s first reaction was, “Danny, I’m moving to Maine.”

Danny started to scream, literally. Danny went storming down the stairs and out the door. Andy was so upset at her parents for doing this to her.

Weeks went by, and finally the day came that she was going to Maine.

“Mom, you know I have a dream of acting. No famous actresses are discovered in MAINE!” Andy yelled.

“Andy, you’re sixteen years old. That’s way too old to be having these tantrums!” her mother yelled.

The drive to Maine was about eight hours, and excruciating. It was Sunday, and that very next day she would start her new school.

It was 5:00, and Andy’s alarm clock went off. She missed Danny already. She opened her closet and thought to herself, “Well, since I’m here and not going back, this is my chance to be a completely different person. I can start fresh, and the new me must make a good impression.” She rummaged through her new walk-in closet. She picked out an adorable new T-shirt she had just got. It was black and it had a little zombie boy, and a little girl with hearts around her. They’re holding hands and it says “Zombies make better boyfriends.” She had her new black and white swirled hard-tails, and her hair got straightened and put in a low, loose ponytail. She was ready for her first day of school.

Her mom tried to offer her breakfast, but despite the fact that Andy was starving, at the spur of the moment she remembered she was mad at her mom and dad, and refused to eat or speak to either of them. Andy secretly grabbed a breakfast bar and dashed out the door to catch the bus.

When she got on the bus, all the kids stared at her. All the kids in front were little cliques of prep girls, in the middle were nerds, and sitting in back were groups of Goth people. She quick grabbed an open seat in back, trying to hide herself.

When she got to school she went to the office to explain to the staff that she was a new student. Registering took so long that Andy literally was there until finally the LUNCH bell rang! Andy sighed and walked to the cafeteria. She sat alone at a table in back. She looked around curiously, watching other kids glare at her. Andy knew they were talking about her.

Finally the afternoon bell rang, and she walked to her locker to get her things. So far her first day at this new school

stunk. When she found a seat on the bus, she crouched up into a ball on her seat. Once again kids glared at her. She buried her face in her lap. She could feel the tears coming.

She got home and finished her homework in a flash. She sat on her new couch and re-thought out her whole day. Tears were streaming down her face like waterfalls. Andy's mom came downstairs and first noticed Andy's tears.

"Andy, dear, what's wrong?" Andy's mother asked her.

"Mom, I hate this new life. I want to go back to Manhattan, to my old house, to my old school, with my old friends!" Andy went storming upstairs, tears still falling down her face, but this time they were falling harder than before...much harder.

It was 9:00 and Andy decided to IM Danny. They each made a promise to keep in touch.

Andy's and Danny's conversation on IM:

ManhattansGirl556: DANNY!

MCRfanDR0945: ANΔΨ!

ManhattansGirl556: OMG I MISS U SOO MUCH!!!!

MCRfanDR0945: ΔITTO

ManhattansGirl556: ☹

MCRfanDR0945: ???

ManhattansGirl566: I hate it here...it stinks!

MCRfanDR0945: ωηψ?

ManhattansGirl556: the ppl here are soo rude and my house is too big!

MCRfanDR0945: οη...

ManhattansGirl556: I'm gonna run away from here and start a new life back in Manhattan as an actress!

MCRfanDR0945: ω/ε

ManhattansGirl556: not kidding I'm really serious!

MCRfanDR0945: τηατ□σ πατηετιχ Ανδψ!

ManhattansGirl556: I HATE U DANNY UR NO HELP
AT ALL POOP U!

ManhattansGirl556 has signed offline.

Andy packed ALL of her things and took all of her money. She took her clothes, money, food, EVERYTHING! Andy's parents were already asleep. She left a very sweet note where they would find it and left them her cell phone number. She left to catch a luxury bus to Westchester.

Her bus ride was very long. All she saw was snow. She decided to take a light nap. When the bus finally got to where she needed to go, she took a long ride into Manhattan. Still all she saw was snow.

"Wow, I wonder if the schools will be open today," Andy thought to herself. When she arrived, she paid the taxi driver and smelled the cold crisp air of the city. The first thing she did was call Danny's house, although it was 7:00 A.M. Andy dialed her number.

"Hello?" a groggy voice said. Andy knew it was Danny

"DANNY! YEA, YOU'RE AWAKE!" Andy screamed.

"What is it?" Danny asked.

"Guess what, Danny? I'm in the city right now!" Andy said excitedly.

"WHAT!" Danny screamed. "GET OVER HERE NOW!"

"Okay, I'll be right there!" Andy said and hung up her phone.

She walked to Danny's house. They gave each other a big hug and went inside. They went to find an apartment. Then Danny thought, "You can rent the room in Darion's apartment." Danny's cousin Darion was so nice that she let Andy move in that very day. Andy had saved up so much money from summer jobs, chores, and babysitting that she could pay for the room. The room was a decent size but still cozy: her living room.

Andy and Danny turned on the TV. “Today is one of the snowiest days of the year and today LaGuardia High School of Arts is closed,” the news reporter said. “Yes!” they both screamed. Today was Andy’s chance to look for her new job.

Andy and Danny searched all day and finally found one that was an acting career, perfect for Andy. Andy tried out for a part in her first play. The play she would perform was called *Mama Mia* and would be performed in April. Andy was so excited. She would start working the next day. Right then her mother called. Andy picked up.

“Hello?” she said.

“Andrea Staminal, where are you? We’ve been looking for you all day!” Andy’s mom screamed.

“Didn’t you get my note? I’m in Manhattan, and I’ve got my new home and everything! It’s great!” she replied.

“Oh my gosh, you’re in Manhattan and you have a new home?” her mother screamed.

“Yeah. I’m staying in Danny’s cousin Darion’s spare room, okay?” Andy said.

“Okay, honey, but oh my gosh; your father and I are coming right over there to take you home, okay?” said her mother.

“Mom, no! I love this new life; it’s just what I’ve always wanted. Please, Mom?” Andy said.

The phone conversation lasted for about 20 minutes. Her mom was very nervous but glad Andy was okay. Finally, they each said goodbye and Andy went home. Andy quickly went to sleep.

Andy started going to work four days a week and made very good money. Finally one day when it was time to go home, her director asked to speak to her. Her boss asked her if she would like to star in a new movie coming out called *One Of A Kind*. He said she would play the main character, Leslie. She immediately said yes.

That night she decided to throw a party to celebrate her new job! After everyone went home she cleaned up and had a

hot cup of cocoa with marshmallows in it. After her hot cocoa, she went to sleep.

Months went by. Finally the shooting of her movie was going to take place. She was nervous the whole time she was in front of the camera, but at the same time she was having so much fun. In back were all her friends and family. Andy was especially surprised to see her parents.

After the final shooting everyone complimented her fabulous work. When the movie came out in theatres, people started to notice Andy, and asked her for her autograph. These riots started to get bigger and bigger. For a while she had to stay with Danny. She helped her out.

One foggy morning she went to get the mail. She was shocked to see a magazine with her on the cover. She couldn't believe it. She went and talked to the magazine editor, and asked him why she was on the cover of the magazine. He told her that he wanted to hire her for their number one model. It had a wonderful wage, but Andy couldn't take it. She loved her acting career much more than being a twig used for show. Everything in Andy's life turned out wonderfully, and as Andy always says...

"My love for acting will always be a part of me."

Natalie's Adventure

*Temptation is everywhere, even in the form of a best friend. Natalie has to decide what payoff is most important to her in **NATALIE'S ADVENTURE**, by **Nicole Johnson**.*

My life is so boring. Nothing exciting ever happened, until one day. I was getting out of the subway and I saw a man rushing to get out. He was running and dropped his briefcase.

"Excuse me, sir," I said. "You dropped your briefcase." Then I picked up the briefcase, looked up, and he was gone. I was on my way to school so I did not have time to catch up with him. Therefore, I just kept the briefcase with me. Then I got to school.

"Hi, Emily," I said.

"Hey, Natalie."

"What's that?"

"It's a briefcase."

"I know that, but what's inside it?"

"I don't know."

"Open it."

"No!" I said. "It isn't mine"

"Then why do you have it?" asked Emily. "Oh my gosh, did you steal it?"

"No! A man dropped it and I picked it up."

"Without returning it?"

"He was gone when I picked it up and I had to get to school, so I just took it."

"Okay, then open it."

"No. It's not mine."

"We can just look inside it for a second. Please?"

"Okay, fine." I opened the case and it was filled with money. "Oh my gosh!" Then I closed it right away, hoping no one, especially a teacher, saw it.

"That's a lot of money!" said Emily.

"I know."

"No—I mean a lot of money."

"I know. Just be quiet before someone hears you."

"Okay, fine."

Ring! Ring! Ring!

"That's the bell. Got to go."

"Okay. I'll be at your house after school."

"Okay, bye."

"Bye."

Later at my house, Emily and I were thinking about what to do with the money. "Let's turn in to the police," I said.

"We could do that," said Emily "or we could keep it."

"Where could we keep it? Our parents would definitely find out!"

"Fine. I guess we'll turn it in to the police."

"We don't have any school next week. We'll do it then."

"Okay. Now that we have that all planned out, I need to get home for dinner."

"Okay, bye. See you tomorrow."

"You, too."

That next week while Emily and I were on our way to the police station, I saw the same man leaving the subway.

"Emily, that's him!"

"Who?"

"The man from the subway! That's the man who dropped this briefcase!" I ran over there and got right in front of him and said, "Hi, I'm Natalie."

"Hi," the man said in an annoyed, hesitating voice

"I know you don't know me, but..."

"I really don't time for this. I'm busy right now. I'm looking for something very important."

"With one minute I think I might have what you're looking for." I handed him the briefcase.

“My goodness!” he said in amazement. “Where did you find this?”

“Last week you dropped it getting off the train. I would have given it to you, but I had to get to school and you were already gone.”

“Thank you so very much. I’m speechless!”

“You’re welcome.”

“Thank you, really. How can I repay you?”

“Oh, no need.”

“No, I must. Here, take this.”

He handed me an envelope, and as soon as I looked back up, he was gone.

“Hey, what’s that?” said Emily

I opened the envelope and there was about a thousand dollars in fifties.

“Its money, I think about a thousand dollars!”

“Wow, that’s a lot of money!”

“I know.”

“No—I mean a lot of money.”

“I know, Emily,” I said as I stood there.

Maybe my life is not that boring.

Nothing Good Comes from Evil

*A feud between two groups of girls escalates in **NOTHING GOOD COMES FROM EVIL**, by Maddie Jursek. Will they call a truce before things get out of hand?*

“Oh my god! I love the jeans!” Lizzie cried to her friend Lindsay. They were known as the “double Ls” at school. Nobody messed with the two. In fact, everybody kept their distance. Lindsay and Lizzie were the type of people who acted as if they were the only people in the world that mattered, and it was best just to back off so they wouldn’t trip you or do something bad to you.

“Look who it is,” Lindsay said to her companion, Lizzie. “The mayors of Nerd Land!” They threw themselves into a fit of laughter that lasted all the way down the hall.

Clara saw them as brats. How dare they say that to her and her friends? She felt as though she was a pot of water hitting the boiling point. “And to think in elementary school we used to be friends with them,” Clara told her friends Kari and Rebecca.

“They were nice in elementary school,” was Rebecca’s reply. “Now they turned into—” she had to think about it “—into monsters!”

Later that day, Rebecca was sitting in her seat in math, thinking about her plan to do something awful to the double Ls. She never thought of something. She hoped that Clara and Kari were having better luck.

“Rebecca,” Mrs. Dixon said.

“What?”

“The answer, please.”

“Can you repeat the question?”

“Define a polygon. Or you can pass”

“I pass.” She felt her face get hot. She probably looked as though she put too much blush on.

That night, Clara, Rebecca and Kari were studying for their science test at Clara’s house. “Kids, I am going to the market. I’ll be back in a half hour,” Clara’s grandma called upstairs.

As soon as they heard the car engine start up, they hopped onto the Internet. They started emailing to Lizzie and Lindsay, saying, “We declare a war. Surrender now or die trying.” Of course this wasn’t a bloody war, but a war of words.

As Clara, Kari, and Rebecca walked down the hall to lunch the next day, they saw Lizzie and Lindsay walk past them. “Did you get the email? You know, I don’t see any white surrender flags!” Kari said, high-fiving all of her friends.

“Oh, you are so on!” Lizzie said back through gritted teeth.

The next few days were all snobbish remarks to the other group of girls. They would find notes in their lockers from their competitors saying, “Eat my poop!” or “Dead is when you aren’t alive. That will be you!” But the worst thing that they did was this: Lizzie and Lindsay filled three balloons with water and took them to school. They put a rubber band on the top so no water would leak out but would come off easily. During passing time, they took the balloons to Kari’s, Clara’s, and Rebecca’s lockers. On the top of each locker was a small hole about the size of a nickel. They took off the rubber band and dumped all the water into their lockers, ruining all their papers and binders.

When Kari found her locker like this, she started crying like a faucet. The double Ls saw this and a wall of guilt built up inside of them, like a wall of fog that won’t go away in the midst of morning. So, during noon recess in the library, they

approached Clara, Rebecca, and Kari. They decided to make a peace treaty. It went something like this:

*We, **Lizzie Monk**, Lindsay Elliot, Clara Stargood, Rebecca Elliot, and Kari Jonai agree to make peace between us. We will not do anything that will hurt us physically or mentally.*

“Oh boy, why did we have to do that?” Rebecca asked Kari. She felt as if she was an avalanche, and had finally given in to Mother Nature’s force, losing the challenge.

“They were willing to stop, so we allowed it,” Kari replied.

“Just walk away,” Clara said, joining in the conversation.

If anybody learned a lesson this week, they all learned that nothing good comes from evil.

The Perfect Night

*Even on her birthday, Kathryn does not get what she wants. She is due for a change. **Lauren Hextell** relates what happens in **THE PERFECT NIGHT**.*

“Happy birthday to you,” sang Julia. “Okay, let’s go!”

“We have another hour before the concert starts! Also, the concert is just around the corner,” Kathryn said.

“Okay. Well...I’ll be in the car,” said Julia.

“Stop rushing me!” yelled Kathryn. Just as Kathryn finished her sentence, the door slammed.

Kathryn shoved all of her makeup into a bag, grabbed her purse, and ran out the door and into the car. “Why do we always have to listen to all the music you like?”

“Because it’s my car. Unless you would like to walk; then you could listen to whatever you like,” Julia said.

“Okay, I will,” Kathryn said. She got out of the car and walked towards the concert. She heard the warm-up band playing in the warm summer evening.

As she got close to the concert, she saw more people than she expected. Then she saw her sister. “Julie! Over here!”

They both went to the front and asked the man where their seats were. “What you are going to do is go down this hallway and take a left till you get to the second door. Then take the stairs till you find your seat.”

“Thank you,” Kathryn said.

Before they knew it, it was halfway through the show.

“Isn’t this fun?” Julia asked.

“No. I already told you I don’t like Chris Brown,” Kathryn moaned.

“Well...” Julia did not finish her sentence. Instead, she was looking over her shoulder.

“Well, what?” Kathryn asked. Kathryn followed her eyes to a man standing in front of her.

“Excuse me, miss. Do you have the time?” the man asked.

“Y-yes. It’s 8:35,” Kathryn said.

“Thank you,” said the man. After that, the man just stood next to Kathryn for five minutes.

“How do you like the concert so far?” Kathryn asked him.

“Chris Brown is really not my favorite. My company just gave me the ticket, so why waste a 120 dollar ticket?”

“It’s my birthday, so I had to go...just to make my sister happy.”

“Happy birthday. I’m sorry, but I have to go.... Nice meeting you,” said the man.

“Nice meeting you, too,” Kathryn said in a loud voice.

Julia was still staring at the man as he walked away.

“HA!” Kathryn yelled. “Now I guess you don’t get all that you want!”

Romantically In Love

Is it love at first sight? Elizabeth comes to realize what true love is in
ROMANTICALLY IN LOVE, by *Anna Halldorson*.

There was once a magical world where a prince, princess and their twin children, a boy and a girl, lived. This loving family lived happily ever after.

Actually, the real story isn't exactly like that. Hi, my name is Elizabeth, and I am the princess. I'm going to tell you the *real* story.

As a younger woman, I was very lonely. I lived by myself in a small apartment, and my friends were too busy to spend time with me. Then I met a man that I thought was my true love. His name was Shawn. At first sight, Shawn and I fell in love. We spent so much time together and became the best of friends.

Shawn invited me to his parents' house. He asked me to put something in the left pocket of his jacket when we arrived, but he forgot that he left the key to his briefcase in there.

When I put his wallet in his jacket, I felt something cold with thick edges. It turned out to be a small silver key. I took it out, then went over to Shawn and asked him what the key was for. He replied, "Oh, that goes to my briefcase."

I admit that I was little suspicious of what was inside the briefcase, so I opened it with the small key. Then I quickly turned my head to check what Shawn was doing. I saw that he wasn't paying attention, so I opened the brown briefcase and found it filled with illegal drugs. It looked like Shawn was a drug dealer, a man who sold dangerous drugs for a job! There were all sorts of drugs, including marijuana, inhaler drug

products, and cocaine. It looked as if Shawn was selling these drugs. I knew that even though I loved Shawn, I had to tell the police.

I went on the police department website and found out Shawn was wanted for selling illegal drugs. I called the police and told them I had found Shawn, and I described what I had seen in his briefcase. The police came straight over when they got the address. When the police arrived, they thanked me for helping them find Shawn and gave me an award of \$1,000.

I went home feeling naïve for dating and trusting Shawn. When I got home I went straight to bed. The next morning, I woke up early to take a jog around the park to clear my thoughts about Shawn.

While jogging around the park, I saw a man who I considered the most handsome guy in all of New York. He started walking toward me, and when we got close enough, he asked what my name was.

“Elizabeth,” I replied. “What’s yours?”

He answered, “My name is Alex.” Alex talked with a British accent. He asked me if I would go out to dinner with him, in order to get to know each other better. I said yes, and we went to the most expensive, five-star restaurant in town. We spent so much time together after the first date. Alex asked me if I would go to a ball with him in his home country. I happily said yes, and we started preparing for the trip.

I started packing while watching the news one day. I heard that Shawn had escaped from prison, so I hurried over to Alex’s house with my luggage. I was very scared that night because I thought Shawn might find me, and I didn’t know what he would do to me because I had turned him into the police.

The next morning, Alex and I got ready to go to the airport, when I saw Shawn running from the cops. I told Alex, and we got into the limo. After we were settled, we drove to the airport. I was so relieved with my new sense of security.

On the way to the airport, Alex told me that he was a prince. This scared me a little, and I was both happy and nervous at the same time. We got to the airport, got on the plane, and flew to England. I was also relieved to know because I wanted to be guarded from Shawn. Because Alex was a prince, he had regular bodyguards to help protect him. As long as I was with Alex, I felt like I would be safe.

We got to the airport, got on the plane, and flew to England. I was much more comfortable flying away from America, even with strangers, because I knew that Shawn wouldn't be able to find me.

When we landed in England, everybody was cheering and taking pictures. Alex and I just smiled at the crowd. We got to Alex's house and changed into our formal outfits and went to the ball.

During the ball, Alex proposed to me, asking if I would marry him and share a happy life with him. Excitedly, I yelled, "Yes! Yes! Yes!" because I knew that our love would last forever.

Following the ball, we went straight to sleep. We had to get up early the next day in order to get back to New York. We only stayed for one day so that we could go to the ball. The next morning, we flew back to New York, and Shawn saw me with Alex. His heart was broken.

Shawn had just gotten out of court. He owed a lot of money to people, but he had stopped selling drugs and still loved me more than anything. He once again had a clean slate.

Alex and I were married on August 23, 2000, which was also my birthday. We had twins on February 7, 2004, and after the twins were born, we moved to England to pursue an easier lifestyle. Ever since then, we have lived a wonderful life together in our mansion. Although my life has been magnificent, I have had some tragic times I have had to overcome.

Special Delivery

*Random C. Stars knows that those big brown trucks don't deliver babies. But she can't help wondering if her siblings' jokes contain a grain of truth in **SPECIAL DELIVERY**, by Zoë Marrich-Simon.*

People tell me that I just don't fit in with my family. Between five children and a mom and dad, things get really crazy. Seven people live in our house of three bedrooms and one (and I do mean one) bathroom, and it creates pure chaos. The name I live up to in the house is "UPS." it's "UPS" because I don't fit in with our family. My brothers and sisters think the UPS guy came and dropped me off, but my real name is Random C. Stars.

I have a two pet raccoons named Mattie and Boah. They are my best friends because no one likes me at my school. They go everywhere with me but to school. My dad, Ben, is a lawyer; my mom, Jane, is a writer for the local newspaper; there are my two brothers—Bobby, 16, and Stew (short for Stanford), ten; and my two sisters—Clair, 13, and "Baby" Grace (who is three and a half and not such a baby anymore). Plop me in between Clair and Stew at 11 years old.

Most days I am taunted by bullies, and sometimes a teacher will come out to save me like a baby in dire need. They never seem to look happy when they save my butt from a pounding, but when I've been shoved in a locker with one of those combination locks, a janitor has to take a blowtorch and get the lock off. When my glasses have gotten dissected by some hurtful kids, the only thing for me to do is the Harry Potter look with tape around the nosepiece.

I think my mom even looks at me differently from all the

other kids in our family. Maybe it's the way she treats me. Weird things happen when I'm around, like when we are in a restaurant: People look at me funny, like I have something written on my forehead, but I know I don't. It's just weird.

Then I started thinking about the name my family had labeled me with, as in *What if the UPS guy did drop me off at my house? What if he did and everyone knew but me? What if they came for me, wanting me back? Would my parents give me up? What if I belonged to a different family? Who is that other family? Is it someone I know? Are they from a different world?* My brothers and sisters continued taunting me with the name "UPS."

All this worrying has gotten me very nervous. Like all kids would do when they are worried about life and if their family is really their family, I asked my mom. My mom looked at me like I was crazy. But I didn't think she was giving me the real answer. So I did my research at the library about baby mix-ups and how often they occur.

Then one night I had the weirdest dream. I was in the arms of not my mom, but some other lady that looked just like me. Suddenly I was in the arms of a lady who was plump and round and holding another baby. It was a nurse. We were in a nursery. The day after, the lady who was holding me took home the other baby that the nurse was holding. I realized there was a mix-up with babies. Then I woke up.

I was not in my bed or my house. Then I just started screaming my head off like I had just seen the scariest movie in the world. The lady from my dream was in my room, but it was not my room.

In a soft voice she said, "Hello, I'm your birth mother, and there was a mix-up in the hospital." I was just shocked.

"My mom told me that she was my birth mother," I said.

"She was wrong," she said. "There was a nurse who put you in the wrong cradle in the nursery. I am your Mom if you want me to be," she said

Like a flash of lightning, I bolted right up in my bed, thinking over what happened in my dream. After a while I realized it was all in my head. Then it was back to bed for me.

That Dumb Brochure

In THAT DUMB BROCHURE by Asia Ross, an overweight boy is dreading a stay at “fat camp.” Once he arrives, will his negative attitude make him miserable?

“Mom, what’s for breakfast?” That’s a question I ask my mom every day, because I always hope she will say a big jumbo breakfast. When my mom makes big jumbo breakfasts, she makes bacon, eggs, sausage, grits, toast, and her famous blueberry pancakes. Every time she makes it, I end up eating a lot, sometimes a bit much. That’s the problem.

Anyway, I knew my mom wasn’t making breakfast, so I left and decided to eat breakfast at school. Everybody always looks at me and talks about me and calls me names. My real name is Jason Daniels, I weigh 180 pounds, and I’m nine years old.

When the bell rang I left the cafeteria and saw this bully coming my way and smiling with his crew. I had no other choice but to turn to the office. I turned right and went into the office. I told Mrs. Kelly I didn’t feel well. She called my mom and told her to come pick me up. After 45 minutes of waiting, my mother finally showed up.

“Hi, honey. How do you feel? I came as soon as I could. If you would have told me you didn’t feel well this morning, I would have left you at home.”

“Sorry. When I walked outside the door I felt fine, but when I got to school I felt bad.” I felt bad about lying to my mom, but I just couldn’t handle Thomas.

“Come on, let’s get you home.” The ride home was quiet. As soon as we got home the phone rang, and I answered it.

“Hello....Hi, Grandma, how are you?”

“I’m fine. I just wanted to tell I will be arriving at your house in exactly five minutes.”

“Okay, bye, Grandma.”

“Bye, Justin.”

I called out, “Mom, that was Grandma. She’ll be here in five minutes. I’ll just wait for her by the door.”

Honk, honk.

Every time Grandma honks, that means she’s right on time. I went outside to help her with her bags.

“Hi, Grandma.”

“Hi, Justin. Get this bag. Hurry up so I can give you your surprise.” I hurried and ran inside to see my surprise.

“Justin, call your parents down so I can give you your surprise.”

“Mom, Dad, Grandma’s here.”

“Hi, Mom,” said my mom and dad.

Grandma said, “I just got this brochure from a store and I wanted to give it to Justin. It’s a brochure for a fat camp. I figured he would need it. This would help him out a lot.”

My mom said, “When does it start?”

“It starts tomorrow, but the bus comes tomorrow at 12:30. I’m sure he could make it.”

“Okay, Justin, go upstairs and pack.”

“But, Mom, I don’t want to go!”

“Justin, it doesn’t matter. You’re going and that’s the end of it. By the way, how long is it?” Mom asked.

Grandma said, “It’s only three days. It’s not so bad. You’ll lose weight and you’ll come back a new man. You can continue to lose weight. Hurry so you won’t miss dinner I’m preparing for tonight.”

As soon as she said that I hurried upstairs and started packing so I wouldn’t miss dinner. Her dinners are so good, I wouldn’t want to miss one for anything in the world. I want to eat it all sometimes. I feel like I do.

“That dumb brochure,” I thought. “I don’t want to go to a stupid camp.”

After dinner, I felt so stuffed. I felt like I ate the whole dinner by myself.

The next morning, I didn't even feel like going anywhere. But I grabbed my bag and my mom and I left.

When we got to the bus I saw a whole bunch of other kids who looked like me. "Bye, Mom," I said as I got on the bus.

When we got to the camp, we got settled into our cabins. I had to share a cabin with a boy who looked ten times my size. I decided to take the top bunk.

When we all got settled in, we went to lunch. The menu was tofu salad and watermelon, and to drink we had water. I just ate the watermelon. "This stuff looks disgusting," I said out loud. I got out of my seat to throw my stuff away. One by one everyone started to get up.

Already the day was going horribly. It became worse. After lunch we had to exercise. We had to run an obstacle course. We were split up into two groups of five. Everybody on our team had to run, and I was first. I started. When I ran up a slide I felt I was going to fall. After we were all done, he told us what we got. I got 1:07. He said I was the fastest. I was proud to hear that.

After exercising we worked up an appetite, so we had dinner. It really wasn't all that great. We were having oat burgers and cranberry juice. I just had cranberry juice.

Afterwards we were all tired, and it was time for bed.

When I woke up, I was so happy that I was leaving bright and early the next day. When we woke up we had to eat breakfast. This menu was a little bit better than the one the day before. It read: orange juice and eggs. I ate all of my food.

After that we went to our cabin. There we watched a movie and had popcorn. We watched so many movies we lost track of time. We passed our lunch. We all ran to lunch hoping we had something good. It was just a ham sandwich. When we got done with lunch we had to exercise.

We played team dodgeball. Our team won. I couldn't believe it. Two days of victory. After dodgeball we went

swimming. We were all a little nervous since we didn't have shirts on. We had to do laps up and down. It was exhausting. After that we ate dinner.

For dinner we had cheeseburgers and fries. I guess our work paid off. After, we had to go to bed.

When we woke up the parents were already there. As soon as I woke up I got my things and left. My mom, dad, and grandma were happy to see me. When we got home we weighed me in.

I was so happy that I weighed 175 pounds. I lost five pounds!

And I said it was a dumb brochure.

The Time I Got a Horse

*In **THE TIME I GOT A HORSE**, Sarah Vaughan tells of a girl with a loving family and a house full of animal friends.*

I have such a fun time in the country with my mom, dad, aunt, brothers and sisters. My brothers and sisters are Derek, who is 19; Brandy, who is 17; Billy, who's ten; and Bryon and Raven, both six. Bryon and Raven are twins. I'm 16.

Every day, Derek and I have to drive the younger kids to school.

Everyone has a horse, and one of my horse's names is Sparkle. I also have four cats, ten kittens, four dogs, ten pugs, three guinea pigs and five horses. My bedroom is large and I have a king size bed that Raven and I share. Brandy is also in my room. She only has a twin size bed, but all of the dogs and my golden retriever just had puppies, so I have to have my animals.

My favorite horse, which was Buddy, died on my birthday. I got a lot of gifts and hugs. My friends stayed the night, and after, my aunt got me a horse. But he looked about like Buddy. I named this horse Rusty because of his color. Rusty is getting trained, but is a little crazy sometimes—like Buddy. All of my horses are trained, and I have a good time with them.

“Yes”

It seems like such a simple word. But the use of one short word has serious consequences for Andrea in “YES,” by Sydney Niles.

“Yes.” I hate that word. I hate how one word can change a life, how it can burn all of your dreams away. I hate how it can take a life away, just like that.

The day my so-called “friends” pressured me to take a puff was one I have replayed in my head over and over again. I had practiced for that split second when your friends ask you to “just try it,” to say no. I had decided that I would say no to drugs. But for that split second that my friends asked me to “just try it,” I thought about popularity, about happiness, and about the pain that I was going through at home. It did help, for a while. But I have learned the hard way that drugs don’t solve problems; they create them.

September 22, 1997, was the day I said yes. My friends and I were sitting in the parking lot after soccer practice. There was me, Andrea, and my two best friends, Jennifer and Allie. Allie was going to drive all of us home after we were done hanging out. Jennifer had brought marijuana, but we didn’t know it. After a minute, she pulled a joint out. First she offered Allie a puff.

She responded, “No thanks.”

But Jennifer wouldn’t give up, “Come on, everyone’s doing it,” she pushed.

“Well, I’ll try one,” Allie answered insecurely.

Then Jennifer held another out in my direction and asked, “Are you in, Andrea?”

That was my one chance to turn down drugs, and save myself from them. But, I didn't think about that. Instead, I thought about popularity, and my relationship between my friends and me. After all, we had been friends since kindergarten. And I wasn't going to let a little piece of rolled up paper get between us. I had also known that my mom smoked, but I didn't know that she wanted to stop, and it was so addicting. She tried her first cigarette when she was 15.

So, I responded, not realizing what I was doing, "Yes."

I didn't like the taste. It was disgusting. We all went home, and vowed not to tell anyone. My mom didn't notice the smell on my clothes because she also smoked.

My mom and I talked a lot. I think this is because she was lonely, because she is a single mom. And I also have told her everything since the day I was born, and I have never lied to her. We are very close.

The next day when I got home, she was still at work, and she had left her cigarettes out on the counter. I smoked one. It tasted better than the pot, so I smoked another. She didn't even notice the missing two cigarettes when she got home.

Then the next day, I told my mom that I didn't feel good, so she let me stay home from school. While she was at work, I smoked a cigarette. I did the same thing, day after day, until she realized that I wasn't sick, and that her cigarettes were disappearing. I was busted.

I had lost my mom's trust. These were her exact words: "I thought I could trust you to stay home alone without hiding my cigarettes, and without you lying to me." Her face was sad; I could tell by the way her voice quivered, and her eyes looked glossed over. I could tell she was hurt and disappointed.

We talked a lot that night. She admitted to being a bad example by smoking in front of me. We both decided to quit, and encourage each other, because we knew it would be hard. She succeeded, but I couldn't. It was too addicting. She knew how hard it was to quit. It had already become part of my life.

I smoked until I was 60, 44 years after I tried my first cigarette. Then I went in for my physical, and was diagnosed

with lung cancer. The surgeons tried radiation, but that didn't work, and I didn't want to try chemotherapy. If I took chemotherapy, I could feel sick for years, and even die. So I went to a last resort: surgery. Although the surgery went well, I now suffer from a disease called emphysema. With emphysema I cannot breathe on my own. I need an oxygen tank and pump just to get through one day.

Smoking has changed my life, and if I had thought about the long-term effect on my life it would have, I would have never said the simple word: "Yes."

TRUE TO LIFE

Lincoln Hill

*The fun of a snowy day can't last forever. But in **LINCOLN HILL** by **Melissa Pace**, the fun, unfortunately, ends almost as soon as it begins.*

One cold winter night, the snow was swiftly falling. I watched as it covered the ground. While I was watching, my mind was full of ideas of fun things to do in the snow the next day.

The next morning my neighbors and I decided that we wanted to go sledding. My mom dropped us off at Lincoln Hill and told us she would be back in one hour. I thought it was going to be a great day. But what started out as a fun winter outing ended painfully.

I was having a grand old time sledding down the hill on toboggans and saucers. I could feel the cold wind smack against my face as I flew down the hill. I felt warm, but my hands and feet were getting cold. My neighbor Taylor and I would jump on a sled and speed down to the bottom of the hill. It was so much fun!

All of a sudden, we hit a huge bump and I flew off the sled, landing in the snow. I felt like I was being thrown into ice-cold water! I was lying on the ground with my face in the snow, not aware that some other girls were coming down the hill, until—*wham!* They ran right into my head. I saw stars.

When I got up, I felt like my head weighted 10,000 pounds and was going to explode! My hat and mittens were strewn all over the snow.

After gathering up my belongings, I started walking up the hill, trying to hold back my tears. I could feel the lump in

my throat. With every step I took, I felt a sharp pain. My head hurt so much. I sat down to wait for my mom. When my mom picked us up she determined that I was fine except for my throbbing headache.

Unfortunately, that evening we were having friends over with small children. All they wanted to do was to play, and loudly. The next thing I knew, I was getting hit in the head with a bouncy ball by Kevin, the little boy who was visiting. He wanted to play catch but had forgotten to tell me. Would this day ever end?

Finally our company left, and I was relieved to lie down and get some sleep.

I will never forget that day at Lincoln Hill.

Miracle 2

*How many miraculous comebacks can one team pull off? In **MIRACLE 2** by **Michael A. Ryan, III**, read about a team that hopes it hasn't reached its limit.*

My favorite hockey game was during my first year playing hockey. That season my team's record was 32 wins, one loss and one tie. We were the best team in the league and every other team wanted to beat us.

We won the first playoff game. The second game was tougher and we only won by one goal with seconds left in the third period. The winning goal was scored with one-tenth of a second left on the clock. It was a miracle.

The third game was another tough one, but we pulled it out with a 2 to 1 win. The fourth game went into overtime. With 0:10 left on the clock, we were on a power play. Our best player got the puck and took it down the ice and scored. We won again. That was one of our toughest games we ever played. Though we were all excited when we got back to the locker room, we were also exhausted.

Then it was time for the main event, the championship game. The crowd was wild. They were cheering and whistling. I heard air horns, cowbells and other noisemakers. It was the loudest I have ever heard it. We were ready, pumped up and nervous.

The referee dropped the puck and the game was on. I stretched out and blocked a couple of shots. I was going to play my best no matter what happened so I could hold my head high.

The first period ended and we were up by one. The other team came back strong in the second and third period and scored two goals. They were now ahead by one but there was a lot of time left on the clock.

We needed two goals to win. Coach called my team to the bench. He told us he was confident that we could win this game. He said, "Listen to the crowd chant 'Bulldogs.' Use that enthusiasm to energize yourselves." We needed to stay strong, play our positions, and pass the puck quickly. On "Three, Bulldogs!" we broke and skated back to center ice. All of us were determined to win.

We did just what the coach told us to do. The puck dropped and one of my teammates got it. He looked for another player down ice and passed it off. That player headed to the net, faked out the goalie, and scored the tying goal. We went nuts, but we also knew the game was not over.

There were two minutes left on the clock. Again, we get ahold of the puck and start passing. They could not cover us and they chased the puck. We took it down to their net and took a shot and the goalie blocked it. Then another shot was also blocked. Finally, after the third shot was blocked another teammate got the rebound and sent it into the net. We went wild.

Now all we had to do was keep them away from our net and not get any penalties. The crowd was loud. They were stomping their feet and screaming. There were less than 30 seconds left on the clock.

The puck dropped for the final time of the championship game. We controlled the puck the entire time. Finally, the buzzer sounded and the game was over. The team piled on top of me. We all threw our gloves into the air. *WE WERE THE CHAMPIONS!* This was the best day of my life.

My Big Brother

*"It's not fair!" cries one sibling about another. **MY BIG BROTHER**, by **Cheyenne Stone**, is a story on the theme of sibling rivalry, but with a twist.*

Have you ever met someone that is spoiled, lazy, and thinks he can tell anybody what to do any time he feels like it? Well, I have, and it isn't much fun. So, if you haven't ever met someone like that, you had better get ready for Hobbes, my monster big brother.

As you already know, Hobbes is spoiled. It's no joke. He gets to sleep in my parents' room whenever he wants. If he has a bad dream, he just snuggles right in. Now, for a boy, is that really acceptable? No!

Hobbes also always gets birthday bashes with friends, and cake and presents. I thought for birthdays boys were supposed to, well, you know, do other stuff.

Even though these things might sound bad, listen to this. He has no chores! And I could keep on going and going.

Well, there is so much more to tell about Hobbes. Let's move on to his hobbies. Hobbes likes to play outside, eat, play with his friends, eat, and like all boys do, SLEEP! When Hobbes eats, he for sure eats like a slob. He gets his food all over the place and leaves it there for everyone else to clean up: most likely, me!

Like I said, Hobbes is always sleeping. It's odd. He doesn't sleep in his bed; instead, he usually sleeps in my parents' bed or on my parents' floor. Hobbes doesn't only sleep during the night. Usually, it's *never* during the night. It's

during the day! My mom says that all good boys need their sleep. It gets on my nerves.

Even though Hobbes is spoiled and lazy, people still want to be his friend. It's unbelievable! Hobbes's friends are Thor, Jagger, Daisy, Charlie, Charlie, Sammy, Bailey, Zelda and Teddy. Hobbes is really respectful to his friends and is always kind. I guess that's why his friends like him.

On top of being lazy and spoiled, Hobbes thinks he is the king of the house. He walks around like he owns the place. And my parents let him. If you think reading this is bad, think about living with him!

Even though Hobbes is spoiled, lazy and thinks he is the king, I still love him. After all, he is still my big brother. Oh yeah, one more thing. Hobbes is a dog. Did I forget to mention that? Oops, sorry.

My Star-Studded Night

Friends need to help friends through the hard times. The members of one dance troupe stand together through the stress of a dance competition in **MY STAR-STUDED NIGHT**, *by Gabriella Harnadek.*

Bzzzzzzzz! *Bzzzzzzzz!* *Bzzzzzzzz!* That was the sound of my alarm clock going off at 6:00 A.M. on a Saturday! My mom sprang out of bed and raced to wake me up. After about 15 minutes of her shaking me and desperately trying to wake me up, I opened my eyes. “Gabriella, get up right this instant. We’re already behind schedule and I don’t want Annette to get mad!” my mother shouted at me furiously. Annette is my dance teacher, and my mom was right: She would get mad if I didn’t get there on time.

After a quick shower and some last-minute problems (like almost forgetting my dance shoes), we were ready to go. I grabbed my dance bag, my duffle bag and my suitcase. I hurried to the car, almost tripping the whole way because I was still a little asleep. After all of our bags were in the car, we headed off to the fiercest dance competition of my life.

After about an hour of what seemed like never-ending driving, we finally got to the Hyatt Regency in Dearborn where my friends and I would be staying and competing for the next two days. As we entered the huge hotel, we were surrounded by over one hundred overbearing mothers with their daughters. A quiet “Gabriella! Gabby! Gabriella!” came from above. I looked up and felt comfort when I saw my dance friends Brenna, Brianna, Marisa, Polly, Katie, and Carly. “Hey, you guys,” I screamed as I met them at the bottom of the stairs. A few minutes later my other great dance friend,

Allison, arrived. We all had to pee out of our nervousness, so we decided to go to the bathroom.

We stood talking by the bathroom sinks while waiting to go to the bathroom. “We will never get scholarships from the clinics here if the kids from Juliana’s Dance Academy are here,” Katie said. “I mean, they’re the best studio around and—”

She was cut off by Brenna saying, “Uh, you guys!”

We all shifted our eyes over to two girls standing over by the toilet stalls. Guess what? Well, you probably know, but those girls were from Juliana’s!

We all jetted out of there as fast as we could. Most of the other studios around were very stuck up and rude to people from (what they thought as) their archenemy studios. Allison, Marisa, and I went back to where our parents’ were talking to Annette and the rest of the Annette and Company staff, while Brenna, Brianna, and Katie went to apologize. Carly and Polly got settled in the room where we were going to be dancing.

Our brave friends came back from the hard task of making the girls believe we were sorry, looking pretty defeated. “Oy vey! Those girls were so mean!” Brianna exclaimed.

“Yeah, we were just apologizing to them and they just turned and walked out like Nicole Ritchie and Paris Hilton,” Katie said, unbelieving.

“We probably shouldn’t talk about this anymore. Or other people from other studios,” Brenna said cautiously. We decided not to think about what happened anymore and just go to the “Juniors” ballroom.

At the end of our last clinic, I went up to my friend Allison’s room so we could straighten our hair together. It was so hectic for me to go up to my room and get changed in time to go to Marisa’s room to put on our makeup as a whole group. My mother noticed once I was already in Marisa’s room that I forgot my hairclip in our room, so she said she would be waiting in the hotel lobby with it.

Once backstage when the competition was under way, things didn't go much better. Since my dance, "This Joint Is Jumpin'," was the second number of the show, we had to be next to the stage behind a folding wall before the show even started. Brianna said that she felt ready to puke and Allison felt like she had one hundred butterflies fluttering around in her stomach. Once again out of our nervousness we all had to pee, but there was no time anymore. We were already here and there was no turning back.

"Please welcome to the stage 'This Joint Is Jumpin',' a junior tap number," the voice of Joe Tremaine, creator of the Tremaine Dance Competitions, boomed through the ballroom. Oy vey! I was about to faint, and I know that everyone else felt the same way.

"Do, do, do, do, do, woohoo!" The music echoed through the room. Toe, hop, step, step, shuffle, hop, cross, step, clap. Everything was going amazingly and I was smiling bigger than ever before. "Ba, Boom!" was the last note played in the song, and we all waited patiently for the lights to come back on so we could walk off stage, but Katie was already gone.

We were all backstage when Katie burst into tears, wailing, "My leotard strap snapped in half! It fell down!" Uh oh. The whole group was thinking the same thing at the same time. Katie felt terrible and thought she ruined our dance. A ton of moms came backstage to reassure her that it looked great and we were fabulous.

It was the moment we had all waited for all night. It was the awards. All of the "Juniors" from Annette and Company joined hands in a kind of good luck meditating circle. After giving out about six awards (that were all second place or third place) Joe Tremaine said, "And first place junior tap group goes to..." —we had our fingers crossed— "...This joint is Jumpin'!" he exclaimed. We all started to cry hysterically, and Joe Tremaine actually had to quiet us down. "Best junior showmanship goes to..." My whole group wasn't even paying attention, because we were too excited for getting the first

place award, until he said, “It goes to ‘This Joint Is Jumpin’!” I was so happy that I had to pinch myself a few times to make sure I wasn’t dreaming.

After the awards we all went to eat at a candy restaurant. This was a restaurant that served normal food, but a buffet table had tons and tons of any kind of candy imaginable. As you can guess, this was a lot more fun for the children that were so happy to have just won a dance competition than to the parents who were watching what they ate and trying not to have so much sugar. While our parents and relatives were talking, we all decided to parade around the hotel with our newly-won “Best of Show” trophy. It is about as tall as from my foot all the way up to my waist. And just trust me on this one, my legs are not short. So, we left our families eating and we went up to Brenna’s room so she could get her sweatshirt.

We took the elevator up to the ninth floor where we danced up and down the hallways. Suddenly, there was a loud “Shut up! We’re trying to sleep!” from the tenth floor right above. We were afraid the maker of the loud voice had a gun, so we ducked under a balcony that surrounded the hotel lobby. If we were too loud we could be heard again.

We waited while Brenna cautiously knocked on her door. She was afraid the booming voice would get mad at her. She slowly went in and got her sweatshirt, and we quietly ran back to the glass elevator and ducked down to the tinted part of that also.

That night I thought about how great that day had been, even if a few minor things happened. Well, I know one thing for sure. Katie was wrong when she said that Juliana’s was the best studio around, because Annette and Company. definitely stole the show. That night was definitely my star-studded night.

Swimming with Sharks in the Sea

And you thought your "big fish" story was exciting! Blaine Stannard offers his true account of how he was affected by **SWIMMING WITH SHARKS IN THE SEA.**

Have you ever been on a relaxing tropical vacation? This summer I thought I was going on one. But instead of lying on the beach soaking up the sun, I was deep in the murky depths of the ocean with my heart pounding in my chest.

We have a tradition in my family. Every summer a different member of the family gets to decide what we do on our vacation. You never know what to expect. This summer it was *my* turn to pick the trip, and I wanted to make this the best vacation ever. And since I had been planning for months, I thought at least *I* knew what to expect. But I was wrong.

The destination I chose was the Bahamas. There were two things about going to the Bahamas that would make this a really exciting trip. One, we would get to fly our own plane over the ocean. Secondly, we could go to some of the best dive sites in the world. I have always loved the ocean. In fourth grade I won a gold medal in the district Science Olympiad meet for oceanography, and ever since then I wanted to be an oceanographer.

After months of planning and waiting, the time finally came to leave on our trip. In a small airplane it is impossible to make a trip of that length on one tank of gas. For this reason, we made many stops on our way to our destination.

My favorite landing point was Key Largo, where I had a chance to practice snorkeling in salt water near shore before we got to the open water of the Bahamas. My practice was cut short, though, because Hurricane Dennis took a turn towards Florida and we had to evacuate. My dad always keeps a close eye on the weather when we fly, so we were able to head north and wait out the storm at Universal Studios in Orlando. After the weather cleared and it was safe to fly, we finally started the last leg of our trip...the Bahamas. This is where my life would be changed forever.

The flight there was spectacular. The open air and the freedom of flying on our own over the ocean made it seem unreal. As we flew from Florida to the Bahamas, I could see the color of the water change from the dark blue open water to the turquoise reefs and back again to the open water. Before we set out, my whole family had been apprehensive because we had never flown over the ocean. We also knew we would be flying through the Bermuda Triangle! As it turns out, we didn't vanish. And there never really was anything to worry about. After refueling in Florida, there was only a short period of time when we couldn't see land. But even flying over the ominous Bermuda Triangle couldn't match what happened next.

The really exciting part actually happened after we landed on Elbow Cay Island in Abacos, Bahamas. It was late when we landed, so we went straight to the hotel.

Early in the morning we walked down the winding road to Hope Town Harbor where we were going to board the snorkel boat. The tour company was called Froggy's. For this trip, they would take us on a boat to a dive site.

We loaded up our gear, and got on the boat. The scenery on the long boat ride there was breathtaking. The water was so crystal clear that I could see all the way to the bottom. Seeing the underwater world below made me want to jump in even more.

Once we arrived at the dive site, we were just about to put on our masks and jump in when someone yelled, "Shark!"

The guide said, “Oh yeah, I forgot to mention that we’re in Shark Alley. But don’t worry; they’re Caribbean Reef sharks. Even though they have been known to attack divers on occasion, they’re not likely to harm you.”

Oh, *now* he tells us, I thought. We’re out in the middle of the ocean, miles away from any land, with unknown perils lurking in the depths. This is intimidating enough in itself. And then the guide “remembers” there are ten-foot long sharks in the water!

With these thoughts racing through my head, I almost didn’t jump in. But before I could talk myself out of it, I found myself in the water with everyone else. I’m not sure how it happened, but there I was.

The water was so clear that it created an optical illusion. From above it had looked no more than 15 feet deep, but once I was in the water I could see that it was at least 50 feet deep! I felt my heart skip a beat, but I quickly found my courage and my diving partners (my mom and dad) and took off for the reef.

What I saw was like something out of my wildest dreams. The dull sandy bottom turned into a jungle of corals and fish of every shape, color, and size, and then...the shadow of a ten-foot shark! Now that *really* scared me. As I looked closer, I could see that there wasn’t just one, but three sharks! I had read about how fierce sharks can be, and I had heard about them attacking people. I swam close enough to see them, but made sure to keep my distance. The ten-foot shark had cloudy grey skin and a snow-white belly. Its teeth were pearly white with red specks (I think it was blood!) and it had a look of contentment, as if it had just eaten. This made me feel a little better, because sharks only eat once in a while. But I wasn’t taking any chances. I knew what those razor sharp teeth and bone crushing jaws could do to me. One diver got right down next to it and swam along with it! I thought the shark was going to attack him, but it didn’t even seem to notice him.

I was able to overcome my fear once I saw that the sharks weren't bothering anyone. To get a better vantage point, I swam a little closer to them. Mesmerized, I watched as the sharks swam with a smooth, side-to-side motion while patrolling the reef with their menacing presence. Surprisingly, the nearby fish didn't seem too bothered by them. But, as I looked closer, I could see that every time the sharks made a sudden movement, the fish darted away. Even though the sharks never actually ate a fish (which I had been hoping for so I could really see them in action!), it was still fascinating to watch them react in their natural surroundings.

After a while, the sharks swam away. This left me free to go exploring. In every nook and cranny there were crabs, barracuda, lobster (yum!), and even the occasional octopus or eel! The eels were a little creepy, but after seeing the sharks it would take a lot more than that to scare me. I wanted to keep exploring, but I heard the bell. It was time to go back to the boat and, eventually, home.

When I had first planned this trip, I had expected to see coral and fish, but not in such vivid color and wide varieties. And, I had no idea I was going to get so close to sharks. It almost seemed like I was watching a documentary on the Discovery Channel instead of actually being there. If I would have known I was going to be swimming with sharks in the sea, I might have let fear keep me from taking the plunge of my life. Instead, I have been inspired to become a certified scuba diver and will begin lessons in a few months. Who knows where *this* journey may lead?

TWO HEADS

F.V.O.—

Ferrets Versus Owls

F.V.O. - FERRETS VERSUS OWLS, by *Lukas K. Nicola*, is the first of two connected stories by different authors (the second story immediately follows in this volume). In this first installment, the battle between ferrets and owls is joined.

“My people, sons and daughters of Ferreto. It has been one year since we have entered our new home. You are the strength in my paw, the holders of my dreams. Through the time you have given me, I have rebuilt our nation, I have rebuilt our strength, I have rebuilt our pride. Through them we shall launch an invasion on the President Tree. There we will monitor every owl on the planet. Then we will eliminate every owl from the face of the earth!”

The crowd burst into applause as Blackfoot stepped off the stage. He had just finished giving his army a war speech. Blackfoot was the highest-ranking general and leader of the S.F.L., or Supreme Ferret League. Ferreto was the sewer system below New York. Blackfoot had turned it into the remaining ferrets’ home and stronghold.

Hob, Jill, Albino and S.E.C.F. were waiting for him. Hob was a highly-trained commando and Blackfoot recruited him. Jill was a special operations commando who had met up with Blackfoot on a raid of an owl stronghold. S.E.C.F., or Supreme Executive Chairman Ferret, had joined the S.F.L. after his parents were killed by owls, and was extremely loyal to Blackfoot. Albino was a hacker and weapon specialist, and had joined Blackfoot several years into the war. The war with

owls had begun ten years before. The species hated each other, because they each thought they were superior over other species.

“Very good speech, Blackfoot,” said Albino.

“Jill, Hob, and Albino, this is our next plan: We launch an attack on the owl arctic base, which has the shield generator for the President Tree. Albino, you will then hack the system to disable the shields. You will be permitted to command the Albino Division.” The Albino Division was made up of albino ferrets, which had white fur. “Then you will radio me when the task is complete. Inform me if anything unusual occurs,” said Blackfoot.

“Yes, sir,” replied Jill, Hob, and Albino. Hob and Jill went to the armory to gather their ferret machine guns and ferret Gatling guns. Albino went to get his hacking equipment. Then they all headed for the arctic base.

“Sir, we’re approaching the enemy compound,” reported a soldier. The strike unit was being transported in a ferret transport vehicle. The team consisted of ten albino ferrets plus Hob, Jill, and Albino. The unit unloaded and began to move in on the base. “Look out for snowies,” said Jill.

“Enemy spotted,” said Hob. Hob then attached a silencer to his machine gun and fired his weapon. *Teet teet!* The snowy owl dropped to the ground dead. Hob gave the hand movement for “move out.”

The unit got to the base entrance. Then the security door slammed shut. “Dang! Get some explosives in here ASAP,” said Hob. Albino returned with the explosives and Hob blew the doors open. The unit entered the base.

Bang bang bang! The owls inside the base started shooting at the ferrets. Two soldiers fell to the ground. Hob took out his minigun. *Ratatatatatatatatat!* All but one owl fell to the ground dead. The remaining owl drew his knife and attacked Albino. Albino dove out of the way and kicked the owl to the ground. The owl was wounded so he flew away, but Albino drew his pistol and shot the owl.

Then a door opened behind them and ten Elite Owl Commandos, clad in heavy armor, entered the room. They fired their shotguns, which dropped seven ferrets. *Bang!* A bullet whizzed through the air and hit Jill in the shoulder. She was wounded but still shot down the owls. Because of their bulletproof armor, they rose back up and attacked Hob. Hob started firing at them but the armor protected them, so Hob, Albino, and Jill ran into the next room and locked the door.

After navigating through the many tunnels that mainly made up the compound, Jill finally found their way through the tunnels and located the door. Hob went over to the door and pushed. The door didn't budge. He stepped back and body-slammed the door. All Hob received from that was a guaranteed sore shoulder for a week.

Hob then noticed that there was a console in the corner. Jill couldn't help but snicker and muttered something to Albino. "Oh, shut up," wined Hob, rubbing his shoulder.

He went over to the console and tried to open the door. "Please input the security code" said the terminal.

"Uh...Um... owl pellets," tried Hob. Jill chuckled. Owl pellets were bits of bone and fur that owls regurgitated.

"Access denied," said the terminal.

Hob turned red in the face. He then did something Jill didn't expect. He walked over and got out his F.G.G. He smashed the console to bits with the butt of his gun. "Access granted," said the console.

The door opened. Albino saw the console and began hacking. "The shields are down, Blackfoot," radioed Albino.

"Good job, team. Return to base," replied Blackfoot.

Just then, Hob saw an owl run through the back door. The owl took off in a helicopter and flew away toward the President Tree. Hob fired off a few shots at it, but he missed.

He ran to a snowmobile that was parked outside and drove after the helicopter. He chased it throughout the icecap until finally he cornered the helicopter in a mountainous canyon. They started fighting, one with a helicopter and the other with a snowmobile. The mysterious pilot locked on and

fired five missiles. Hob started to swerve around and around, the missiles coming closer. They almost hit Hob but he leaned to his right side and the snowmobile dodged them. *I can't do this by myself*, Hob thought.

Just then Jill came running up and jumped on the snowmobile, mounting the gun emplacement on the rear. Jill started firing on the helicopter. *Ratatatatatatatatata! Ratatatatatatatata!* She hit the helicopter with extreme precision. The helicopter fled toward the mountains.

Hob and Jill followed the helicopter via a mountain pass until Hob and Jill came to a dead-end in the mountain. Jill shot a hole in the side of the mountain with her gun. Then the helicopter pulled up in front of the hole.

This helicopter had a space in the middle so that the soldiers could rappel down. Hob had only one chance at this. He drove the snowmobile directly through the center part of the helicopter. On his way through, he saw the pilot was a barn owl. The helicopter was thrown off balance and the propeller hit the wall, causing the helicopter to begin to spiral toward the ground. The owl jumped out of the cockpit and flew toward the direction of the President Tree.

Jill, Hob, and Albino were in the debriefing room with Blackfoot. "So you're telling me you saw an owl fly away in a helicopter?" said Blackfoot. He was stupefied.

"Yes," said Hob. "Jill and I chased it, but the owl got away. And sir, just so you know, it was a barn owl."

"Aresha," muttered Blackfoot. Aresha was the leader of the Owl army. "Gentle ferrets, you just missed a chance to eliminate the owl leader. You are now dismissed," said Blackfoot.

"Hob, Jill, Albino, and S.E.C.F., please report to the main command center," a speaker announced. They went to the command center where Blackfoot was.

"This motion should crush the owl Alliance once and for all," said Blackfoot.

“Should?” asked Hob.

“Yes, it should, Hob,” replied Blackfoot. “With the owls’ shields down, we can attack the President Tree. Do not cause owl casualties unless necessary. We want to possibly force them into surrender. Now go to the tree and make me proud,” said Blackfoot.

The attack unit was at the main entrance of the tree. The tree was a giant oak tree that was hollowed out. All the remaining owls came to the tree for safety. The halls had red carpet and golden chandeliers suspended from the ceiling. The combat zone was hot and lead was flying everywhere. *Ratatatatatatatatatatata. Bang bang bang boom!* The owls at the main entrance were killed.

Blackfoot was accompanying the raid, which was unusual. Blackfoot had once visited the President Tree and tried to negotiate, but the attempt failed. *He must want to see the owls’ defeat*, thought Hob.

“We’re almost to where Aresha is,” said Blackfoot. Just then an elite troop of owls rushed into the room. Blackfoot took out his desert eagle. *BLAM BANG BANG BANG BOOM!* All the owls fell to the floor with one bullet imbedded in each chest.

Blackfoot kicked open the door. More owls ran into the room. This time they were accompanied by a tank! “Everybody take cover!” Hob shouted.

The tank’s machine gunner started firing at them. *Ratatatatatatatatatatata!* Hob ordered a demolitionist to take out the tank. But when the demolitionist ran out, he was blown to pieces by a tank shell. “Jill and Blackfoot, cover me!” Hob ordered.

“But I give the orders around here,” said Blackfoot in a pouting voice.

“Just do it,” said Hob. He took one of the helmets of the owls and ran to the tank. He climbed on top of it and plugged the tank shell hole with it. The tank fired, blowing up the top half of the tank. The ferrets cheered.

They moved on. Blackfoot had been thinking about the war and didn't want to fight anymore, because he was losing fellow ferrets. Aresha saw Blackfoot and stepped back against the wall.

The owl guards raised their weapons. "Shoot me or my team and Aresha dies," said Blackfoot, raising his weapon.

Aresha waved her hand and the guards lowered their weapons. Blackfoot walked over to Aresha and threw his pistol to the ground.

Aresha looked up. "What do you want?" she asked.

"Nothing except for the surrender of your army," replied Blackfoot.

"What are the terms?" she asked.

"We unite and live in peace. No more war, but on one condition," said Blackfoot. "You will make your army show us your technology and weapons," said Blackfoot.

"Not quite the terms I had expected," said Aresha.

"Team, leave. Same with you owls," said Blackfoot. Everyone left the room. "Aresha, I don't want to fight anymore," said Blackfoot. He held out his paw. "Truce?"

"Truce," Aresha replied. Blackfoot and Aresha henceforth began to lead the owls and ferrets to a united nation.

"My people, ferrets and owls alike. We are now united. We will work in harmony, live together and work together. Aresha and I promise to let our species live together in peace, and we will not break that promise."

Blackfoot and Aresha left the stage. She smiled at Blackfoot "We are destined for each other," said Aresha.

"That we are, Aresha. That we are." And henceforth, Aresha and Blackfoot led the Supreme Ferret and Owl League to stop many criminals from causing harm to the citizens of the President Tree.

The Revenge of the Legend

*With the owls and ferrets united as one nation, the biggest threats to their society now come from within. **THE REVENGE OF THE LEGEND**, by **Loïc Sharma**, continues the saga of Blackfoot and Aresha—begun in the previous story of this volume—as they battle against one such danger.*

Prologue

The President Tree stood out from the sunset. There never really was a president, but it was named after the greatest owl ever, Urnla Presidente. Urnla was the only warrior who had the power to fight against an eagle. At least, he was the only one who did and won. He had been the Aresha, clan leader of the owls. Once an owl becomes an Aresha, it becomes his name, kind of like Caesar. All the good and loyal owls to Aresha lived in or near the President Tree.

Recently the ferrets had moved into the great Tree, after a war against the owls. The owls had abandoned their second-to-main-base in the arctic to work on the President Tree, since it was becoming a major owl residence. The ferrets had helped the owls a lot with their up-to-date technology, such as heat-sensing-opening-doors, radio-controlled-mining-pods, and this year's big hit: flying vehicles. They would have made enough to sell by now, if they hadn't had problems such as robbers.

Friday the 13th

Friday the 13th was the day upon which the owls' future economies depended. A decision was due whether or to not stop the industries to make the new flying vehicles. They had found a couple thousand robbers trying to steal the parts and blueprints of the new vehicles. They had captured all of them except the most successful one.

The F.B.I. (Ferrets Bureau of Investigations) agent pointed at a plasma TV showing a hamster on video image taken by a security camera. "Luckily, we got a good snapshot of his face. Do you see that spot? Well, the facial relief shows him concentrating. Either the hamster was trying to cover evidence, or he lost his focus for some unknown reason. That probably means that some evidence is down there. The F.B.I. is down there looking for anything that will help us find the hamster. We ran a test and it's a male. They will call anytime now to keep us up-to-date.

"Now let me introduce this new, beautiful, ingenious object: this magnetic-DNA-pulse. It is programmed to attack only a male hamster. The magnetic-DNA-pulse will send a pulse to him, injecting optimal electronic shock to paralyze the victim for exactly two minutes. The paralyzed victim will sleep for about one minute and thirty seconds. It also sounds an alarm, and if the prey gets away, it will follow the prey. It is called a magnetic-DNA-pulse because once the shock penetrates the foe's body, it will run tests of everything from toe to the head. After that, the chemical that runs the test sends out a smoke, which the magnetic-DNA-pulse will recognize as the complete DNA. The magnetic-DNA-pulse will send a message to our F.B.I. giving them a full DNA analysis. It will also show them what the target looks like. Also with this picture," he said, pointing once again at the TV, "it's going to do a match-up, and if it matches, the magnetic-DNA-pulse will continually shock the victim. The magnetic-DNA-pulse will do all that in less than one minute and thirty seconds. That's about when the target will wake." The F.B.I. agent took a sip of water, and sat down.

The O.B.I. (Owl Bureau of Investigation) General stood and asked, "What did the robber steal exactly?"

"About seventeen flaps needed to steer any ships our—"

"I mean something important."

"Well, the flaps cost about 30 thousand dollars each, the five engines were 78 trillion dollars each, eighteen flying-shuttles are worth about 120 to 300 trillion dollars depending on the size—"

"I get the point. You are telling me that just one hamster stole enough junk to become a trillionaire?"

Before the F.B.I. agent could respond, the telephone rang. The F.B.I. agent picked it up, listened, and then hung up.

"I have good news. We now know that the male hamster is planning a robbery tonight in the minor garage #7gI1. Also we have narrowed down the suspects, because we have found a strand of hair on the floor. We believe that this hamster is a hamster going by the name of 'Gibbles.' They are still running tests with the DNA to learn more about the suspect. The F.B.I is ordered to put the magnetic-DNA-pulse in the minor garage #7gI1."

Later that day, around midnight, something moved about next to the door to the minor garage #7gI1. It opened the door with a wire (don't ask me how). The figure slowly went in and checked its surroundings. Then when it was sure it was safe, he crept in slowly. He set an explosive at the door; in case someone closed the door, it would save time. He walked closer to the parts box. This was way too easy....

That's when the magnetic-DNA-pulse attacked. The bolt threw the hamster back, and he groaned. He could hear the droid saying something....

He blacked out for about one minute. When he woke he heard the droid saying, "Target recovering; will repeat process." An alarm had gone off. He was in deep trouble.

He could start moving. The droid was now counting the seconds: "55..." He moved his hand in his jacket. "56..." He

could feel the throwing knife in his pocket. “57...” He took it out. “58...” He knew he wouldn’t be able to throw the knife until he had recovered. “59...” He gripped the blade harder. “60!” He threw the blade with all his might.

The blade caught the electricity full on, making the knife more dangerous. It hit the droid, making the droid explode.

He slowly stood up and massaged his limbs. He looked towards the door. It was closed and locked. He listened closely and heard a soft noise. They had planned well, but he had a Plan B. He looked up: perfect. There was a window. He took a piece of metal from the garbage pile, chucked it at the window, and broke it. Then he used his grappling hook and climbed up. Once up, he did two things.

First, he looked down at the outside of the door that he would have blown up if he hadn’t heard the noise. He was right. About ten magnetic-guard-droids were there. The subsequent thing he did was he went back down and took his prize, the parts. Then he climbed back up. He detonated the explosive he had set at the door. The droids’ heat-sensor cameras were disturbed because of the explosion, so they didn’t notice the hamster going away in the dark.

The hamster had escaped into a warehouse. The F.B.I. team, soon after the escape, recognized that the escape route that the hamster had used was an underground tunnel. The two things that they still pondered was how did the hamster learn to dig like this (it was obviously done by a ferret), and where did the hamster go? There were no prints in the tunnel or the entrance, no detectable smells, nor signs of a hamster ever being there.

Back at the President Tree, Albino, the head of the new F.M.I. (Ferret Military Intelligence), had been studying owls very closely. Apparently their wings produced some kind of energy that lifted the air under them, pushing them up. So they had made the first plane, which they perfected, and could hold almost 200 passengers. They invented autopilot, then

planes with no wings. As technology got even better, the plane could finally go over ten times the speed of light.

Now they had one main problem. These planes were perfect, but they cost a fortune. Plus, at the rate they were losing their equipment, they were going to go bankrupt.

But eventually they invented a plane that almost everyone could afford, which only took one thousand dollars to make. It was simple: The two jet engines on the front were connected by a physic power (owls had recently found that if you changed the DNA of an atom, you could get a kind of wire that was indestructible and invisible) with a kind of hot-looking aerodynamic cockpit where only one or two people could fit.

With this finished, Albino worked on another project: a plane with jet engines that could blast a non-toxic kind of fire. The fire wasn't destructive, and it could easily propel a flying vehicle. The device had radars, equipment for underwater activities, and more. The ferrets planned an exploration to the underwater depths of the Xhaxhu Lake. He had no way of knowing that the vehicle wouldn't be used exactly as planned....

Albino looked in the model plane to see if everything was okay, since he was going to soon test it out. He looked in the energy module to check whether or not it would last for the whole flight. To his horror he saw the last thing he wanted to see. "Everyone take cover! There's a bomb in the model plane!" yelled Albino.

The bomb blew up later, thirty seconds before the planned starting time of the landing procedure. Luckily, no one was hurt.

Meanwhile, a small figure walked stealthily in a dark and smelly cave, located south of the President Tree. The cool air was filled with evil. Gibbles didn't exactly like his new master, but the pay was rewarding. His negotiated payment was half the parts he stole and free lodging. Gibbles stole parts from the President Tree and gave them to his master, which gave

him almost everything he needed. With the parts, he improved the “tiny lodge” he owned (the “lodge” was about twice the size of the White House).

He entered the room where his master sat in his chair, watching the cameras of the President Tree. Sometimes the master hacked the Tree’s mainframe computer system for information that he needed, but recently his brother was upgrading the Spyware. Gibbles thought that his master might soon have to get rid of Albino...

His master, a ferret, supplied the training and the money needed for the robberies. At first the ferret gave him a lot of parts, but over time gradually lowered the amount of parts given. It looked like the master took the parts for two reasons: to make things such as bombs, equipment, droids, guns, and grenades; and simply to take most of the owls’ and ferrets’ equipment. When they ran out of equipment and went bankrupt, he planned to attack them. Then he could rule the owls’ and ferrets’ territory. After that he would make the thousand survivors into slaves, and send them to conquer the world.

The evil ferret was in a foul mood. The bomb had been stopped before killing Albino. He needed Albino dead in order to go on with his plan. He played and replayed the camera record, showing him the plane exploding with no one next to or in it. Each time he saw it he became angrier.

“There is a slight change of plan, Gibbles. We will assassinate Albino tonight. This is what you need to do....”

Aresha quickly sounded the alarm. More parts had been stolen. She called the F.B.I. and the O.B.I. and the best of the best came: Barley, crazy for blood; Tuaq, Albino’s twin and one of the best hackers right after Albino; and Piggy, the best demolition guy you could ever find. Only Piggy and Barley were owls. Tuaq was a ferret. The team of three and Aresha started off right away looking for the hamster again.

“The hamster is probably still here. He probably went down the corridor 4B, because that’s where the door is for the outer layer of the Tree.” Aresha might be a small barn owl, but she didn’t have any fat, just muscles. Those two features made her a very agile and fast flyer. With one stroke of her wings she was flying full speed towards the corridor. The others had difficulty following.

Aresha turned a corner and bumped right into the burglar. The hamster got back to his feet and reached for his bag. Aresha had recovered while he still was falling, but Gibbles rolled over and threw a net towards the Aresha and the O.B.I. and F.B.I. They all stumbled down, but Tuaq ripped the bag with his claws and they all scurried out. Aresha, once out, pinned down Gibbles.

The hamster wouldn’t have made it if his master hadn’t planned perfectly. A ball of fury jumped across the room and knocked down everyone but the Aresha and Gibbles.

Aresha had long enough to recognize the enemy: a ferret. But it was not any ferret. It was Albino’s older brother, who had been exiled from the Tree for his negative and dangerous behavior. It was Fred the Evil Ferret (scary name, isn’t it?). They had been rivals for a long time, but on the same side until Fred chopped down a big part of the Tree. After that he had been exiled. Albino and his twin never knew that Fred was their brother, but they knew the tales of Fred.

The ferret silently moved around and stepped in front of the hamster.

“Run! Remember, I’ll need you later!” he hissed to Gibbles. The hamster ran and safely made it out. Fred backed away slowly towards the exit. Aresha waited for some defense to lower. Fred turned back to look behind him. With incredible speed Aresha lunged forward. With even more speed the ferret dodged and slammed the door on the owl and raced outside.

The F.B.I. and the O.B.I. had already sent some troops after the ferret. Tuaq, Barley and Piggy helped Aresha up, and they all started after Fred. Once outside, the owl had the

advantage. Aresha, Barley, and Piggy flew after the ferret. They followed him to the hangar, desperately trying to catch up. Tuaq called Albino and told him to get ready because a suspect was coming, but didn't mention it was his brother.

Albino saw the suspect come towards him. He decided to hide in the plane planned for the expedition. His brother climbed in a ship, too, knowing that he was being watched. They were both good fliers: In no time he was off the ground, flying southward.

Albino went into flying mode and waited until his brother took off. Now there was no way Fred would win. Albino followed him at a high speed. Fred took a loop and went straight for Albino. So much for his stealth. Albino dodged and banged his brother's ship. Fred wasn't ready for that. His ship moved upwards, but the momentum was too great. The ship crashed.

But Fred wasn't done yet. He hopped out of the ship and ran towards the lake. Aresha had seen Albino try to stop Fred. She took a sharp turn and went straight for the evil ferret. Using her hunting instincts, she caught up with Fred and savagely took him down. They wrestled for a while until Barley arrived. Barley and Aresha together had no problem against the ferret. They held him down while Tuaq put the handcuffs on Fred.

Gibbles watched the scene from far away, well hidden. The plan had failed. But it was not over yet...

Back at the President Tree, things continued to go missing. Everyone knew who it was now. If they, the people of the President Tree, ever got the chance, they would capture the hamster and make him pay.

Albino moved all his valuable discoveries, personal items, and things needed to survive into the main hangar. He activated all the traps, security systems, and anything else that he could lay his paws on that could be used as security. Unless you knew all the traps and the security, there was almost no way you could go in the main hangar without sounding the alarm.

With all the parts he had supposedly inherited from Fred, Gibbles decided to upgrade his ways of stealing, which would get him more profit...especially since his master was in prison. Gibbles strapped on the new armor with all kinds of equipment: security hackers, laser beam, night goggles, even a jet pack. He was going to set off a kind of a bomb that would trigger an electromagnetic pulse in the middle of the Tree. He would have around ten minutes of no electricity, meaning no lights. With that accomplished, he would put on his night goggles and steal everything once and for all! He would be the richest hamster in the world! He almost couldn't resist thinking of what he could get. But now was not the time. His master had probably been planning something: revenge.

He entered the President Tree quietly and set the bomb for three seconds. He ran silently and stealthily towards a dark corner. He waited until he heard electricity bursting. Instantly, all lights turned off and doors closed.

The hamster put on the goggles and entered the hangar. With part one completed, he went to the second step. He needed to go through the lasers. He took out a special sprayer. After spraying his night-vision goggles, he could see all the laser beams. Now for the tough part: He had to dodge some, and for those that were too hard to dodge, he put mirrors to deflect the lasers in a different way.

After the tiring dodging, he reached a door. Just to be on the safe side, he took out his laser beam and grappling hook. He attached his grappling hook on the door, and with the laser beam melted away the door's hinges. Then he lowered the door about half way. He peered in.

Just as he suspected, a laser had been put right behind the door. He put down his last mirror, deflecting the laser beam. Then, slowly he continued lowering the door until it touched the ground, making no noise.

Gibbles entered the room and saw to his horror something he didn't think he could go through: a laser wall. Just behind it was a lighted flashing button that read *Security Laser Wall*. Gibbles took out his lucky throwing knife (ever

since it destroyed the magnetic-DNA-pulse, it became his lucky knife) and threw it into the laser wall. It was truly his lucky knife, for its well-polished blade reflected the laser wall perfectly on the button, which turned off the laser wall and turned off all the laser beams behind Gibbles.

There was a computer on the wall and behind it were, in a metal cage, the parts that he needed. Gibbles put in his laser beam and ruined the computer's password memory. Next he put in some wires that connected to the password memory, and the computer gave him a list of all the passwords for the computer and their uses. He wrote down the useful ones on his notepad. He was starting his hacking process. He silently entered the code to open the metal cage: Donottypethispasswordforitdoes
notworkbelieveme1943869467493. *Tough luck on people who want to memorize that*, thought Gibbles.

He entered the code. He shouldn't have. Albino was smarter than to let people hack into his computer. He had put up a special device for any hacker to show him the first password ever to all files to the President Tree. (Did I mention that Albino cheated in all the classes he found difficult?)

The alarm sounded. Hurriedly, Aresha took Albino and headed toward the sound. Gibbles had barely the time to hide and see Aresha to know that he was in big trouble. He quickly turned on the jet pack. He flew across the Tree into the open air. Almost every owl was following him for revenge over his or her lost money. Gibbles turned his jet pack slightly towards the ground. Aresha, who was up for a good race, plunged towards Gibbles, still gaining speed.

Meanwhile, Blackfoot had been warned of another attack from Gibbles. Quickly he entered his S.H. (Silenced Hummer, a Hummer used by the F.B.I. because it makes no sound), and went southward after Gibbles. Gibbles was losing ground and fast. Blackfoot pressed the invisibility button, instantly cloaking him from both radar and animals' eyes. Once

Blackfoot was right under Gibbles, he launched a rocket aimed at the jetpack.

Gibbles apparently heard or saw the rocket, because he unsuccessfully tried to dodge it. Gibbles was flung out of control towards the ground. Luckily, he was cushioned by a small bush. He threw off the jetpack and took out a radio-controlled rocket launcher. He shot the first rocket and aimed it at the Hummer's exhaust pipe, which would blow the car up. But Blackfoot had experience; he turned slightly to the right, dodging the shot, which crashed in the ground, throwing the car on its right side.

Quickly Gibbles reloaded and shot again at the car. Blackfoot thought for a split second, and then ejected the seat to his right. Since the car wasn't a convertible, the seat ejected out of the door. This threw the car back on its wheels. Then Blackfoot dodged the shot.

"Man, he's good! I wonder where he learned how to drive," muttered Gibbles as he reloaded with his last rocket and shot it. Blackfoot was getting tired of this. He did a quick turn to the right. The rocket was coming now towards the left side of the car. He quickly opened the door and jumped out of the car. The rocket went in the car through the left door and out by the right door without damaging the car at all.

Gibbles was now defenseless. He looked left and right for an idea. "*He's driving me crazy!*" thought Gibbles, who threw a punch at Blackfoot. Blackfoot grabbed the hamster's arm, twisted it, threw Gibbles to the ground, and then handcuffed him. Gibbles didn't even struggle anymore, seeing that the ferret was way more powerful than him.

Gibbles was sentenced to 50 years imprisonment. Gibbles started a charity for hamsters, even though he was in jail. He called it the G.C.H., also known as Gibbles' Charity for Hamsters. He lived later on in another prison that was way more comfortable than his old house. His charity was a big hit, and he had enough money to pay the debt that he owed from stealing the equipment (Gibbles lost a couple trillion dollars that day).

Gibbles had done so much that the government ran a test on him to see if he still had bad intentions. He didn't have any, so he was released early. Later on, the gerbils attacked the now-united ferret, owl, and hamster community. Gibbles served bravely in the war and was very useful in getting information. He also saved Blackfoot and Aresha, but that's a different story.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

The Battle for the Scythe

*When demons and monsters play a grudge match on the hardwood, it's for keeps! The all-American game of basketball will never be the same after **THE BATTLE FOR THE SCYTHE**, by **Zach Neistein**.*

It was a dark and stormy night, perfect for a basketball game at Madison Circle Garden of Death, home of the Red Eyed Devils. The final game of the playoffs was about to start. The game was between the Red Eyed Devils and the Green Backed Frankensteins. Everybody came, mortal and immortal, from near and far to watch the big game. The Red Eyed Devils' star player, "Magic" Pitchfork, had carried the Devils all the way to the finals. The Frankensteins' Milt "The Screw" Chamberlain, the greatest Frankenstein ever created, had carried the Frankensteins to the top. Both of these players averaged over a whumping nine points per game.

The teams were all prepped and waiting in their locker rooms. This would be the last game of the MBA (Monster Basketball Association) season, and they all wanted to carry the Golden Scythe home. This scythe has been said to have mystical powers, but no one knows what they are. Some say it will give you eternal life. Others say that you get unlimited gold coins.

The fans were all out to show their appreciation. They either wore their bolt hats and their stilts for the

Frankensteins, or they had their pitchforks and fake red tails to support the Devils.

The announcer was ready to announce the starting line-ups, and the whole place was jumping (when I say jumping, I mean jumping). "And now it's time to meet and greet your starting line-ups. Over on my left, here come the Devils, led by their coach, the Devil himself, who has fired up his team this year! He is followed by number 12, from Fire State Township, the one, the only Dragon still living, 'Magic' Bob Pitchfork. Pitchfork has never missed a shot, due to the fact he has telekinetic powers! Next we have number 45, Pipsy Jenkins, the shortest and the only one that can fly, and finally 'Bigfoot,' who I'm informed only has to take two steps to cross the court!

"Now give a warm welcome to the Green Backed Frankensteins, lead by their coach Dr. Frankenstein; followed by Bob Bolt, who can dunk from the three point arc; Sal Screw, who can extend his arms to dunk, block, and steal; and last but not least, Milt 'The Screw' Chamberlain, who can run so fast that you would think it was just the wind."

"BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO," screamed the crowd, for this was not their team to root for.

"Here goes the tip-off to start the final game. It's the Devils with the ball!"

It's bucket after bucket. Finally the first half ended with the score 16-14, the Devils in the lead. "What a high-scoring half due to Chamberlain's ten points and Pitchfork's nine points," the announcer commented.

"Now starts the second half. The Frankensteins have the ball. Beautiful passing and...THEY SCORE! Now they pass the ball: Bolt, to Screw, up to Chamberlain, alley-oop—SCORE!"

The Devils call timeout with one minute left. The coaches have to talk up a strategy with their players.

"The Devils have the ball with a tie score, 30-30. Bigfoot to Pitchfork, time running down, only time for one last possession. Bigfoot to Pipsy, he drives with a nice between-

the-legs crossover, kicks out to Pitchfork, and it's all over! But wait, what's this? Chamberlain comes out of nowhere and blocks the shot. He's got the ball—three...two...one. He puts up the prayer, hits the front rim. It's spinning around the basket one time, two times, three times and... IT'S IN, THE FRANKENSTEINS WIN! THEY CAME FROM BEHIND AND DID IT AND CHAMBERLAIN IS THE HERO! NOW, HE'LL TAKE HOME THE SCYTHER AND THE MOST VALUABLE MONSTER AWARD!" the announcer yelled.

Five days later, Chamberlain was just sitting around, playing with the scythe, wondering what its mystical powers are. Suddenly he dropped it. It shattered into one million pieces. He soon had the answer to his question. Milt "The Screw" Chamberlain is now diagnosed with the Grim Reaper's Curse, the worst of them all. It makes you radioactive until you look like the Grim Reaper's bottom! His curiosity is now satisfied.

The Cockroach Invasion

*On a certain level, mankind has been at war with insects for eons. But in **THE COCKROACH INVASION** by **Philippe Vos**, the bugs fight back!*

There once was a little kid named Mikey who was very smart in the field of science. He was even smarter than his teacher in science.

Mikey had a pet cockroach. One day something horrible happened. His cockroach rammed a hole through the side of his cage with the little stick Mikey had given him. It turned out that this was no ordinary cockroach, but an ex-paratrooper with special training in swamp survival who sold his services as a mercenary.

Mikey looked everywhere for his pet cockroach. One afternoon, he went to the swamp. When Mikey got there, he found that there was no longer the old broken down house, but instead a base full of cockroaches in military training. He didn't dare approach, for there was his neighbor's shotgun being used as cannon.

The next day, Mikey saw cockroach aircraft and battle tanks everywhere around the base. Little Mikey thought this had gone too far. So he used an undetectable complex cockroach bomb and threw it into the base. Then he tore off so he wouldn't get caught. The next day he went to the police.

At first, the police laughed at Mikey. About a week later, two cops went to investigate, but they disappeared. Eight days later, armored trucks brought supplies to the cockroaches from the other swamps nearby. A cockroach rifle is a wooden dart with swamp juices and mud at the tip inside a long

hollow tube. The armored trucks also brought food and other supplies like mini-sandbags and soldiers. One month after that, the cockroaches invaded the town.

Over three million of them came with tanks, cannons, artillery, aircrafts and foot soldiers. A cockroach tank is two feet high and five feet long with a 12-gauge shotgun mounted on the top. There were about 700 tanks, 1000 artillery, 400 aircrafts, and 200 to 300 cannons. Each piece of artillery is a huge cannon with great explosion capacity.

“Attack!” ordered the cockroach general. They knocked down people’s front doors and ate everything in sight. They bombed the police station with the standard cockroach bomb: huge swamp rocks the size of hard hats. They also fired cannons at the fire station and blew up the ambulances. On the other hand, cops used cars to run over the cockroaches, but failed because there were cracks in the road, which provided cover for the enemy.

“Attack!” yelled the police lieutenant. Cockroaches were flying everywhere. Cops were falling one by one. *BOOM!* No more police station.

“AHHH.” A piercing noise rang out of the mayor’s office. “I HATE COCKROACHES!” The mayor turned desks over and barricaded the doors and equipped himself with his two trusty fly swatters.

People ran everywhere. Cockroaches ran everywhere. Just as the five-star cockroach general was about to give order to launch the nuclear warhead, Mikey appeared.

Mikey was carrying a white flag of surrender and a huge cake. He gave the cake to the general and told him that, since the cockroaches had won the war on the town, he wanted to surrender to him and serve as his public relations officer to help communicate with the humans. The general was super happy. It was like he was in control, and now Mikey would be his pet.

As it turns out, Mikey was no ordinary little kid. In fact, he was a gifted little wiz kid with superhuman intellectual abilities in math and science. He had created an organic,

undetectable cockroach poison that he baked into the victory cake. The general and all of his officers died eating the cake. The mayor gave Mikey a medal of honor and the town paid for him to go to college and study math and science.

A Day in a Life of a Barbie Doll

*Life in the world of a fashion doll is busier than you might think! Take a peek through **A DAY IN A LIFE OF A BARBIE DOLL**, by Sarah Stempien.*

Hi. My name is Barbie! About two weeks ago, I was sitting on the shelf at the toy store.

“Look over there!” A little girl came in, picked me up, and gave me to the cashier. *Kerplunk* went the box as it got dropped into the bag and brought to the car.

The next thing I knew, I saw a huge white beautiful house. It was amazing!

I was carried up some stairs. I was placed in a hard cold plastic bed. As I lay there, I could hear a big panting noise coming up the stairs. I turned my head to the side and there I saw a huge hairy dog coming towards me. The dog started to lick me.

“Eeww!”

Then, to the rescue, the little girl came in and picked me up off the bed. She brought me away from the hairy monster.

Shortly after the dog incident, my clothes were changed fifty times. After that, I was put in a big purple van and given a ride around the house. What a ride!

I was changed into a sparkly hot pink bathing suit to go swimming. The girl put long pretty braids in my hair, and I was given a long, warm, luxurious bath in the sink. After my bath, I went to the grand hotel to meet my friends Kayla, Christie, Tereasa, and Ken.

I went back to the pink house for dinner, where the little girl made me spaghetti and pizza. Yummy!

I got my pajamas on and was put in the hard pink plastic bed.

And that is the end of the day in the life of me, Barbie!

Rosella and the Frog

*It can be a bumpy road on the way to finding a new friend. Rosella receives help in this regard from an unusual source in **ROSELLA AND THE FROG**, by *Angelina Esho*.*

Rosella was always a popular girl in school. Everybody wanted to be Rosella's friend, even people she didn't know! There was always a problem with an odd girl named Sabrina. She wanted Rosella to be her role model. Rosella said no because she didn't know Sabrina. Sabrina said, "I know you don't know me, but I thought that we could get to know each other."

"No," said Rosella, "I DON'T WANT TO BE YOUR FRIEND. JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!"

Sabrina got really angry and made a rumor that Rosella liked a guy that picked his boogers. His name was "Booger Boy" because he would pick his boogers in front of everyone and didn't care.

Rosella got really embarrassed and said, "No, I don't like him. Sabrina is a big, fat liar." Sabrina and Rosella both got called down to the office.

The principal said, "What is going on with you two girls? I hope you girls are not fighting."

"No, we aren't fighting. We are sorry," said both of the girls.

But later, Rosella said, "I am not sorry. I mean it. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?"

"Whatever, Rosella. You're pathetic," said Sabrina.

"Fine; be that way, Sabrina. But whatever I want, I get. So don't think you're cool. Got it?"

The next day at school, Rosella was still Booger Boy's girlfriend. She was walking to the bus, and she saw a frog named Prince Charming. Rosella and Prince Charming got an idea. They started a rumor that Sabrina picked her nose.

Everyone called her "Booger Girl." Rosella was happy, and Sabrina got stuck with Booger Boy.

Later, Rosella felt bad for Sabrina and said that she was sorry. Sabrina said, "Me, too." They became friends and had the time of their lives together.

Six Train?

*If there are hidden creatures among us who want to remain that way, there seems no better place to hole up than a subway system. But in **SIX TRAIN?** by Allie Rubin, a concealed monster comes to wonder about all that she is hiding from.*

Here in New York City, there are many ways to get from one place to another. One option is a car, but living here, car ownership is not necessary. You could always walk or ride your bike, and there's always a taxi, bus, or subway available just around the corner. I've only experienced riding in a subway. Actually, I don't think I've ever even left the subway.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Gertrude Michelle Tryskan, Gertie for short, proud member of the Hybglochen species. I am a lovely shade of fuchsia, and I am thirty-eight thousand, four hundred sixty-two years old—in monster years, that is. I'm almost twelve in human years. I live alone on the six train on the Lexington Avenue line. I used to have parents...well, I still do have parents; I just don't know where they are. When I was around sixteen thousand years old, they relocated to the R, another train that remained unexplained. I'm not one hundred percent sure why they *did* relocate, though. Something about "responsibility" and "You need to move on" and "Every Hybglochen does the same at this age...." I used to miss them horribly, but it's been over twenty thousand years since they left.

I guess you could call me a robber, but I don't think that's the appropriate word. I mean, robbers steal things, and don't return them. I steal things, but I return them...well, sort of. I start by sitting under a bench full of people. Slowly, slowly, I

reach out my arm and sneak my hand into the sucker-who's-sitting-at-the-end-of-the-bench's pocket. I find what I can, pull back my loot, and retreat to the other end of the bench. With some people you find spare change and Metro cards, but with others, you can find keys, whole wallets, and cell phones. Occasionally I'll put some coins, the Metro card, or a credit card from someone's wallet in one of my body pockets. If I do this, I'll usually forget, find the credit card or quarters much later, and smirk at the other person's long-term loss.

Anyway, when the train stops, and people exit and enter, I'll toss some coins or keys out in the open. It can be quite interesting to see what people do. Some people will pocket their findings, while some people discuss with others which police station they're going to take them to. But the best is when someone walks out of the subway, then runs back in seconds later, panicked and muttering about their wallet or cell phone. Then, depending on what mood I'm in, I'll throw back the missing item, or keep it to myself and bite my tongue to keep from laughing. It's a tough business, taking and returning items completely unnoticed. Among many other special powers, Hybglochens have the ability to remain invisible to any monster or human—except, that is, for other Hybglochens. We can always see each other. I'm pretty sure you can become visible again; I just never have. I mean, why should I?

One day as I was examining the thirty-seven cents and gum wrapper I had just acquired, the train stopped and people got off. I found a bunch of papers with something printed on them. I dropped the coins and wrapper and grabbed the stack of papers. At the top of the first page, some seemingly unfamiliar symbols were printed. After a while, I recognized a resemblance between the symbols on the paper and the symbols and the walls of the subway, Metro cards, human currency, credit cards, and basically everything else I'd ever taken from a human. After much reflection, I thought I understood the meaning of these symbols. I came up with many possibilities, but after dwelling on these possibilities for some time, I realized that only one was realistic. My hypothesis

was that these symbols were used for some sort of communication among humans.

Once I was content with my assumption, I began to drift into sleep. A small, screaming human jolted me awake again, and I suddenly remembered my earlier findings. I searched around for them a little, then pulled them close to me. Slowly, I unfolded the papers and found many, many more symbols-of-human-communication written on them. For days that turned into months that turned into whole years, I sat with my head bent over these papers, taking minimal breaks to inhale nourishment from the air, and very rarely stopping to take something from someone's pocket. I began to wonder what life was like outside of the train.

As I studied the papers and thought about their possible meanings, my hunger for adventure beyond the subway grew and grew until it was simply unbearable. At one point, I was this close to casually walking off the train in the crowd of passengers. I decided against that action, because I needed a plan.

One day a man wearing a nice suit got on the train who had apparently just come from the gym. He was carrying a gray bag. He pushed it under the bench with no respect for my presence, and at the next stop got off the subway without it. I waited until the train started and stopped again to make sure he wasn't coming back. I opened the bag and as soon as I did it, a highly unpleasant odor was released within the train. Some people pretended not to notice, while others put on a show by holding their nose and making faces.

Carefully I reached into the bag and examined its contents. In it I found a t-shirt, shorts, socks, and sneakers, all of which smelled like sweat. I knew they were gross, but it was my only hope.

The next day, I pulled on the shirt and shorts, socks and shoes, and held my breath as I followed the crowd through the doors of the subway. I anticipated the reactions of the humans and was surprised to walk out of the train without any smirks,

pointing, or curious faces directed at me. I wondered why. Then I looked down.

My usually purplish and jelly-like body looked just like the people's I had seen on the subway. I had five fingers on each hand, two arms, and two legs! It was really strange. I put my hands on my face. I felt only one nose and two eyes, a mouth, and many teeth. At the top of my head I found these brown stringy-things. I finally realized what happened. I had turned into a human without even knowing it.

I saw benches that were similar to those on the subway, and I was about to crawl under one of them when I remembered my latest humanity. I copied the other people and sat *on* the bench rather than under it. While sitting, I mentally reviewed the possible motivation for my shape-shifting. I finally recalled something my parental units had told me as a young female Hybglochen. The more I thought about it, the more I remembered our conversation. It had started with my complaining to my parents that I was so fed up with being fuchsia.

One of my parental units had said, "Young Gertrude, fuchsia is a lovely color!" I continued to pout.

The other parental unit added, "Well, you don't have to be this way forever!"

The first one looked at the second with a facial expression that said, "Why did you just say that?"

The second one's face confessed, "It just slipped out!"

I looked up curiously from one parent to another. "What?"

My parents sighed, and one said, "We weren't going to tell you until you were a little older...but we Hybglochen's have a special power."

"We have the power to change into whatever form is socially or politically appropriate."

I still didn't get it.

"For example, let's say you were at a gathering, and you are the only Hybglochen there. Everyone else there is a Nustianopin. You'd feel very uncomfortable, so you'd shift into a Nustianopin without feeling a thing."

“Yes, Young Gertrude. It is a shame to be the odd one out. You know, Hybglochens are the only kind of monster who possesses such an ability. In all my years of living, I have never experienced one occurrence in which I did not fit in.”

“Dishonesty is the best policy!”

“Not only does this power help us feel more comfortable and part of the crowd, but it makes us great spies. Our wonderful ability and our natural neurological gift helped us Hybglochens to win the Monstrous War of 7164. We blended right in among the Pesawkees...”

So I guess now was a socially (or perhaps politically) crucial time to be a human. Fine by me! Anyway, all around me humans were holding bags and cups and cell phones. Just like in the subway, the people were all of different shapes, sizes, colors, dress, and actions. There were some people wearing nice clothes talking into cell phones walking briskly to the stairs or waiting for their train. There were others who were dressed kind of like me in dirty, smelly clothes and were calling to the other people, rattling cups of some kind. It was so overwhelming, being there with all these people, I didn't know what to do.

I forced myself to take long deep breaths until I finally pulled myself together again. I followed a crowd of people and stumbled up the stairs and out onto the open sidewalk.

The first thing I did was look up. When I did, I saw a big fiery yellow ball, but I could only look at it for a short period of time without hurting my eyes. I felt like I wanted to rip those heavy strings and my “new skin” off my body. I felt like I was boiling in a pot, like I was walking through fire. Water started dripping off of my face.

I looked around me and saw so much. First, there were the people. It was just like in the subway station. Everyone looked different! There were round people, stick-like people, people with their heads really high, close-to-the-ground people, talking people, running people.... There were so many! To the left of me there was a building with a bunch of different doors with

different things in the windows. One had books and toys, one had clothes, and one had benches like the ones in the subway, except these were different colors and seemed to be cushioned. There were all kinds of lights of different colors coming from the windows, some shaped into the symbols-of-human-communication, and some just glowing.

To the right of me there was more sidewalk, except this sidewalk was a step down, and was much wider and darker in color. Also, not many people walked on this one. Instead these boxes whizzed by, occasionally stopping all in unison. When they were stopped, I examined them closely and saw that they weren't quite boxes...they were more rectangular, but rounded. Some were taller or smaller or fatter, and they rested on round metal things that were surrounded by some black rubber. Where two fat sidewalks met, there was a square of thick rope hung above all the boxes on round metal things. Hanging from the thick ropes were yellow rectangular boxes with lights coming out of all the sides. The lights would switch from green, to yellow, to red, then back to green, and so on. After analyzing the situation for quite some time, I realized that when the lights were green and yellow the rounded rectangles moved, and when the lights were red, the rectangles stopped. It was very intriguing.

I started walking, occasionally turning when I wanted to. I saw even more people: some standing by tables with displays of purses or jewelry, some selling human nourishment, some walking in and out of the huge buildings, some sitting on the sidewalk, and some walking next to furry people that walked on four legs and were attached to a rope. I figured those must be another breed of human.

Eventually it grew darker and darker, and the fiery yellow ball was no longer visible. In its place came black. I continued to walk, but I began to feel fatigued. I sat down on the ground, my back against a wall. I looked around and did not recognize anything or anyone I saw. I began to panic when it became clear to me what had happened. I was lost—lost in New York City.

Just as I was beginning to lose all hope, an unhealthily skinny man walked by wearing clothes that did not fit him. He looked out of place and confused. Then it hit me. He must be another monster in disguise! Maybe he's a Hybglochen, too!

I scrambled to my feet and ran up to the man. "Fibdogle!" I said, which was Hybglochen for "hello!"

The "man" turned around.

"Belka donwob kandot awee?" This translated to "Can you help me?"

He just stared at me.

"Awee bogoga, belka donwob kandot awee?" ("I said, can you help me?") I took a step towards him.

The man pushed me to the ground, kicked my ribs, and ran away yelling something that I did not understand.

I had no idea why he reacted that way, or what I said that had made him so upset. I began to wonder if he really was a monster in disguise. Lying there on the sidewalk, I knew I had to do something.

I rolled against the building, horrified and trembling, trying to think up some sort of plan. Asking that person didn't help, and I worried that all humans would respond to me in the same way.

I decided to try one more time. But this time would be different. I'd wait for a friendly, well-dressed person to walk by, and when I approached him or her, I'd speak human. I looked up and down the sidewalk until I saw someone who fit my ideal description. Hurriedly, I mentally prepared my words.

I ran up to the human and said, "Six train?" I imitated the people I had heard from my days on the subway.

"What's that, now?" the person responded.

Terrified, I stood there speechless.

"You wanna go to the six train?" it said, probably noticing my confusion and loss of words.

I nodded, still not really understanding.

"Uptown or downtown?"

I nodded again, hoping this was the response it was looking for.

“Which one? Uptown or downtown?”

I just nodded.

“Listen, kid, I got places to go. Try going four blocks that way, and you’ll find the train there.”

I nodded, and the person walked away. Four blocks? What was that supposed to mean? I was so confused. Maybe I had to count to four...then what about blocks?

Hopelessly, I continued walking in the direction the person had pointed. At some point, I saw stairs similar to the ones I had emerged from earlier that day. Excited, I rushed down the stairs, bumping into many people along the way. When I reached the bottom of the stairs, I saw these thick, steel posts with what looked sort of like a pinwheel with three spokes attached to the side. I stepped back and watched other people swipe something from their bags or pants along the posts; then they’d walk through the pinwheel. It appeared to spin as they pushed it with their bodies. I looked closer until I recognized what they were swiping: Metro cards, something I have had much experience with. I checked my body pockets and...wait, where are my body pockets? Oh no! A pang of anxiety hit me like a rock as I paced back and forth.

I dropped to the ground in search of dropped Metro cards, but still, I found none! I searched all around the subway station, but no luck! I double-checked for body pockets or *something*. In doing so, my hand slipped into a kind of secret compartment in the shorts I was wearing. I found another on the other side of my body! I moved my hands around and found... a Metro card! I was about to jump out of my skin with excitement. I later wondered whether it was the shorts’ owner’s Metro card, or one that had been transferred from my body pocket when I became human.

I did exactly as everyone else did with a card, and I must have been the most excited one in that subway station. I saw a train pull up to a platform where a bunch of people waited. I was about to run and get on that train, but I remembered that the six train isn’t the only one. So, I did what I did before. “Six train?” I asked some innocent pedestrian.

"If you wanta know somethin' 'bout the trains, you best ask that guy over there," the person responded, pointing towards some sort of box containing a person.

I nodded and followed the human's finger to the booth.

"Can I help you?" said the person in the tall box.

Again, I repeated the only words I've ever said in human language. "Six train?"

"The six'll leave in a couple minutes."

I nodded.

"Anything else?" he asked, I later realized, because I did not move.

I stood there, confused, then I walked away.

There was a crowd of people waiting by the tracks, so I joined them. After a little while, a train arrived. "Six train?" I asked another person. I pointed to the train.

"Yeah," was its form of response.

I nodded and followed the crowd aboard. Everyone crammed in and sat down on the benches, or stood holding the poles. I, of course, did what I had done my whole life. I sat under the bench.

I hugged my knees to my chest and squeezed my eyes shut. As I was sitting, my lack of sleep and food over the past day caught up with me, and I began to feel drowsy. Slowly, I drifted into sleep.

When I awoke, I looked at my body and found it fuchsia again. At first I was a bit disoriented, wondering what had just happened to me. But then I remembered. And when I remembered, I was so relieved and happy to be home, back in the subway. I remembered the subway station and that stack of papers, the man's gym clothes and that fiery yellow ball, the lights and the Metro card, the rectangles on circles, and the only two words I had ever said to a human, in human language. "Six train?"

[Originally translated from Hybglochen]

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