

Tall Tales
Gone Short

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Short Stories by Short People

Who Says Adults Have to Write All the Good Stories?

Got Stories?

Tall Tales Gone Short

Fifty-seven Stories by
Sixth-grade Students of
Berkshire Middle School

Daniel Fisher, Editor

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Title by Jacob Rubin.

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Mr. Fisher hopes each author in this volume feels the pride of accomplishment that comes from a job well done. And he knows that this is just the beginning of great things to come.

From a guy with a tie who has said it before:

Today, sixth-grade; tomorrow, the world!

CLUE ME IN

King Amenhotep IV

In KING AMENHOTEP IV, Christy Giacosa tells the tale of the disappearance of two small boys in ancient Egypt. The boys' sisters show that not all children are helpless, though, when they put their heads together to address the crisis.

“The royal family from Nubie is arriving today, King Amenhotep IV!”

This message had just arrived. My father, Amenhotep IV, king of Egypt, and my mother, Nefertiti, were sitting on their thrones made of gold. Next to them were four of their servants, holding cups and dishes full of food and wine in case they were hungry. In front of them was a line of people waiting to talk to their king. Sitting on the floor, scribes were writing down every word of the short conversation the king had with the people. Two guards were near the door watching that everyone was safe. I, Nefertiab, was hiding behind a statue of Osiris, an Egyptian god. I am not allowed to hear what they are saying. Mother says that I am too young to hear what is happening in Egypt.

“I’ll go tell the children about this.”

When I heard my mother say this, I ran to my room, because if she found me listening, I would be punished. My mom came in and told me, “Nefertiab, Danios, the king of Nubie, and his family are arriving today. His visit is very important because he is going to help us if there is any war. There is going to be a party in their honor. Change into your party clothes and come to the entrance to wait for them.”

“Yes, Mom.”

When she left, I changed into my green dress, my necklaces and bracelets, and my crown made from gold and decorated with

blue, red and green gemstones. When I was ready, I went to the entrance to wait for our guests. Dad and Akhenaton, my younger brother, were already there. Mom came a few minutes later.

We didn't have to wait a long time before our guests arrived. Danios introduced his family to us. His wife was tall and had black hair and black eyes. Her name is Ahoure. They have two kids, Nekao and his older sister, Arsinoe.

We led them to the ballroom where the party was going to take place. Almost every noble family of Egypt came to our party. I introduced Arsinoe to my friends and we played Seneth and other Egyptian games. It was the greatest party ever! When everyone left, I was so tired that I fell asleep as soon as I was on my bed.

“Where is Nekao?”

“I don't know; are you sure he is not in his bedroom?”

These shouts woke me up the next morning. Everyone was shouting, running and looking for Nekao. I said, “Maybe he is in Akhenaton's bedroom playing with him.”

Everyone went to Akhenaton's bedroom. We discovered Nekao was not the only one missing. *Akhenaton was missing, too!*

My father ordered all his servants to look for them. Arsinoe and I decided we were going to look for them outside. When we were outside we looked around the garden, but the only suspicious thing we found were three pairs of footprints leading to the place where the servants live.

“Nefertiab, these little footsteps could be our brothers! But whose are the other ones?”

“They must be one of our servants', since they are going to the servants' house.”

“We can make your servants walk here, and the one whose footsteps fit is probably the one who has kidnapped our brothers!”

We ran inside to tell our parents what we were planning to do.

“That's a very good idea. But I think some guards and I should be there in case the person who is guilty tries to escape. We

will hide behind some plants so we won't be noticed," said my father.

We went back outside with Danios, my father, and four guards. I ordered all the servants to come and to put their feet in the footprints. One of them asked, "Why, Princess, do we have to do this? Has something happened?"

"Yes, but I won't say more. Next, please!"

The next servant was a man named Antaref. His feet seemed to fit perfectly.

"You are the one who kidnapped our brothers!"

"N...no, it's, it's not me!" he said, shaking his head. But we knew it *was* him. Danios, my father, and the guards came out of their hiding. Antaref tried to escape, but they caught him. They forced him to say where he hid the boys. "They are in the servants' house, in my closet."

My father ordered two guards to go to the servants' house and bring the boys.

"Why did you kidnap them?" he demanded. But Antaref wouldn't say anything more.

At that moment, the guard arrived with Nekao and Akhenaton. We were so happy to see them and to know that they were safe! We all hugged each other for a moment.

"Girls, please take Nekao and Akhenaton to the palace with their mothers that are waiting."

When mom and Ahoure saw them, they cried with joy. Then, Danios and my father came to join us. We were all very happy to be together. I knew we would not see Antaref again.

The Mystery of the Hallucinations

*People all over town are seeing things! In **THE MYSTERY OF THE HALLUCINATIONS** by **Jacob Rubin**, is it only a matter of time before everyone is affected?*

It looks like it's there, it seems to be there, you're sure that it's there, but it really isn't there. These hallucinations fooled the neighborhood of Bush Lake. Bush Lake was a small neighborhood in Tampa, Florida. There were many palm trees, some small and some as tall as a house. The climate was as hot as a desert. Luckily there was a lake. But the weather was the last thing on people's minds. Every day people would cry for help. The neighborhood would hear and come out, but when the neighbors got there, there was nothing to be found.

I'm Issac. I am a thirteen-year-old boy with curly blond hair. I am tall for my age and very strong. I wear my lucky blue cap all the time. My best friend, Jeff, and I are trying to solve this hallucination mystery. Jeff is my age, and a little taller than me with wavy brown hair. He wears a red cap all the time. We both do everything together: baseball, basketball, riding bicycles, you name it. Now we had another thing to do that was far more important. We had a mystery to solve.

"Help!" we heard a man cry. *"A monster is after me!"*

Jeff and I went to investigate. The man looked crazy. We thought he was drunk. He brought almost all the neighborhood to that spot. *"The monster is over there!"* he yelled. But there was only a tree. We knew he was hallucinating since everyone has been.

“It disappeared,” he said. We explained to him that he was hallucinating. “But it seemed so real,” he said. We told him that many people have been seeing strange creatures. He wanted to know what was causing it. But we didn’t have a clue.

We were on the case. First, Jeff typed up some possible suspects. We knew the guilty person would not have seen the hallucinations. But we could only find a couple of people who fit that description—our neighbors, Brian Lance, Anthony Walker, Nicholas Jones, and our own parents. We knew it wasn’t our parents, so we crossed them off the list.

The first person we went to was Brian Lance. Brian was a tall, bald man and sort of chubby. He wore a lime green shirt with a white sun hat. We asked him if he knew anything about these hallucinations. He didn’t have a clue about them. We were surprised, since almost the whole neighborhood was there when this happened. He claimed that he just gotten back from vacation. That would make sense since he didn’t hallucinate. But he could have been lying. We asked him for proof that he was on vacation. Right away he pulled out a plane receipt that was from Los Angeles, California. That was enough proof that he wasn’t causing it. We crossed him off the list and went to the next person.

The next person was Anthony Walker. Anthony was a nervous man who was kind of short and stubby. He wore a big black shirt that covered most of his body. He also had really thin hair. We asked him if he knew about these hallucinations. He did, and he was worried that he would be the next victim. He’d seen all the people who saw the hallucinations. He wanted to find a way to protect himself. We couldn’t get a lot of information from him so we went on to the last suspect.

The last suspect was Nicholas Jones. Nicholas was tall and kind of strict. He wore a bright red shirt with big blue jeans. Jeff noticed a lot of cans of Germ Be Gone. As a 13-year-old kid, I know that these disinfectants are poisonous. Nicholas was starting to look suspicious. We finally got to him. I asked him if he knew about these hallucinations. “I don’t have time to talk,” Nick yelled. “I just lost another case of disinfectants. What do you

want anyway?” he asked. We asked him if he knew about these hallucinations. “Yes,” he replied. “Ever since the hallucinations started happening, I’ve been losing cases of disinfectants. That’s why I couldn’t talk. I’ve got to go now.” He left the house with a case of disinfectants. He started to look even more suspicious. We decided to get on our bikes and follow him.

He put the cases in his big blue pick-up truck. When he headed off, so did we. It was hard to keep up with him, so we had to go faster. After a couple of miles, we got pretty tired. But we couldn’t stop. We were keeping up until we hit something made of metal.

We stopped to see what it was. It was an empty can of disinfectant. It just happened to be in front of the water plant.

It was a huge and loud place. We knew we were getting somewhere. We knew everyone in the neighborhood was hooked up to this water plant. The mystery is clear now. Now we have to wait until the cause of this returns to the scene of the crime.

We camped out in a group of trees on top of the hill. We used our binoculars that we always carry to keep an eye on the water plant. We were expecting Nick to show up since he had the truck of disinfectants. He could have been waiting for the right time to strike. That time seemed to be late at night. It was a good thing we were able to stay awake.

We saw a person in a huge overcoat walking toward the plant. We went to investigate. The guy was intelligent enough to get through the security, but so were we. Once through the security, the guy headed for the tanks that supply water for Bush Lake, but we didn’t know this. We didn’t know where we were.

We decided to split up. Jeff found his way to the security room. I was still wandering through the plant. I got a message from Jeff that the guy was heading for a tank with the address 4976 Bush Lake Rd. *That was my address!*

I had to think of something fast. The guy was reaching for the hose that leads to the tank. Then, I found a huge button that said ALARM. Without thinking, I pushed it. Then a loud siren came on. We could hear the siren from all over the plant.

After that, the guy froze for a minute. We went off to try and catch him. When we got there, he was attempting to try to poison the tank again. Right before he put it in, I ran up to stop him. I ran right by him, but luckily I managed to get his coat. "Now you are exposed, Nick!" I yelled. But when I looked at him, there was no Nick. As a matter of fact it was...Anthony?

"Yes, it's me," Anthony said in an evil voice. "I stole the disinfectants from that sucker Nick, and now it's going to your brain."

"But why?" I asked.

"The neighborhood always thought I was crazy! They would call me names like chicken or scaredy cat, but look who is crazy now!" Anthony said.

"I still think you are crazy," I pointed out.

He started to walk towards us slowly. We started to slowly back up.

He was starting to get closer. He was putting the disinfectant in front of our faces. He was about to spray until..."Freeze!" It was the police. It was about time they showed up. They asked us what was the problem.

"That man is the cause of a crime," we told them. They asked us if we had any evidence of his crimes. We thought for a second. "The tape!" I said out loud. We went to the security room. We got the tape of Anthony committing the crime. They handcuffed him and took him away.

When we were exiting the plant, we ran into Nick. He heard what was happening and hurried over. We told him that we had thought he was causing this, but now we knew he was innocent.

"No," Nick laughed. "I work at a disinfectant factory and I was delivering a couple of cases to a store nearby." We felt stupid thinking it was him who was causing it. So then we went off.

The next day was pretty normal, only there was no cry for help. Everyone was happy to hear that the problem was solved. Everything was back to normal, and finally there were no more hallucinations.

"Hey, was that a strange creature over there?" I asked. "Oh, who cares?"

THE DARK SIDE

The Hook Man Hike

*This trek in the woods is no walk in the park. You will understand once you read **THE HOOK MAN HIKE**, by **Nicholas Crosthwaite**.*

One day I was sitting around doing nothing, and I had a great idea. I asked my mom if my friends and I could go on a hike for two days. She said yes, so I went to go tell my friends that we could go on the two-day hike without grownups. But we would have to start packing right now. They were all excited. We started packing and we were done the next day. In the morning we had breakfast and we were on our way.

When we got to our campsite we set up our tent and a fire. We had lunch and went on our first hike. After a while we thought someone was following us. We didn't see anyone but we just felt like someone was there. It was getting dark and we were getting scared so we went back to camp. When we got there, we all talked and we thought that it was our imagination. But it really wasn't.

On the second day, we went on a really long hike. We left in the morning and at lunchtime we stopped to have lunch. After that we all knew that someone really was following us, but we didn't know who. So we decided to set a trap.

The first trap did not work so we set another one. We used lots of rope and we got the guy. When we came up to him in the trap, we saw that it was Hatched Handed Harry. Hatched Handed Harry has been living in the woods for one hundred years. He has a hatchet for his right hand. He doesn't wear any shoes or shirt and his feet are really hairy.

When we were looking at him, he all of a sudden started chopping at the rope with his hatchet hand and he started to get

free. We were so scared we ran back to the campsite as fast as lightning.

We told everyone our story, but no one ever believed us, and we never went camping again.

Sun from Both Sides

*An orphan looks for answers about her parents. But will she be able to handle the awful truth? The answer lies in **SUN FROM BOTH SIDES**, by **Nora Hana Dagher**.*

January 16, 1930

Whoosh, whoosh. The dark, chilly wind drifted through the misty midnight air. The Pine-tree Prison was standing taller than ever. The big black bricks were gleaming under the bright, silvery moon. Inside the prison it was usually so quiet you could hear a pin drop. The only sound you could hear on this particular night was the ringing snores of the security guard snoozing in a fold-up chair, facing the big long steel bars of the prison cells with a car magazine draped over his chest and his navy blue security hat over his eyes.

All the prisoners were asleep except one. This prisoner was different from any of the other prisoners because he was a murderer. In fact, he was a very clever murderer. This murderer killed anyone even if they didn't deserve to be killed. He killed them for the fun of it. This murderer was famous for luring his victims into a trap before actually attempting to kill them. On this evening the murderer was planning his very clever escape.

The murderer's steel gray eyes looked around his cell for some shred of information on how to escape this cold, dreaded place, until his eyes rested on a small window on the very top of the wall. This window was sealed shut. The murderer flung back his long black mane of stringy, dry, hair, and attempted to jump up to the window.

But after five minutes of trying, it was very clear that this attempt wasn't going to work. As the murderer sat there racking

his brain for clever ideas about escape, something hit him. He could attempt to dig a hole through the mud ground and tunnel out. Yes, that's what he would do! He would start digging tonight, right here, right now.

The murderer set to work. He dug and dug with his hands for three days and three nights. Each morning he would hide his hole with a blanket. He told his fellow prison-mates about this wonderful attempt. They all seemed interested, and they all agreed to cover for him when he was out into the world. Then after days of digging and nights without rest, he finally came to the surface.

Gasping for breath, the murderer pushed himself up. Before he ran off into the wind, he stood motionless but deep in thought about who he should kill next. He thought about his previous enemies, the Freedmans! Of course; the ones he hated the most were the people who had gotten him into jail in the first place. Then he finally came to his senses and ran off into the night, his black hair flapping wildly behind him.

Two weeks after the murderer's sudden escape, people started panicking. The story was all over the radio and on the front page of newspapers, and almost everybody who was anybody was talking about it. The media were having a field day. Certain places, such as schools and orphanages, were taking extra precautions due to the murderer's escape. Eventually, the murderer's escape became legendary; nobody knew what happened to him.

11 years later...

"Okay, children, time to come in!" screeched Mrs. Wilma at the top of her lungs. Kathryn followed the pool of kids inside the orphanage. Mrs. Wilma led the kids into their rooms. Kathryn rushed into her room and jumped on her creaky wooden orphanage bed. She reached under her pillow and pulled out a box. She slowly opened the lid of her box and looked inside. Kathryn's whole body filled with warmth as she looked inside. It was a picture of her parents, the only thing left of them that she had, and she cared about it so much. The picture was still very beautiful to her, even though it was wrinkled, old, in black and white, and its edges had torn.

She was staring at the people, mesmerized by what she saw. “If only they were alive,” she said to herself, “then I would be the happiest person in the world.” Kathryn had been orphaned when she was a baby, so she really didn’t remember much about her parents. Sometimes she wondered what it would be like if they were alive, and felt she’d do anything to find out why they didn’t want her.

Drop after salty drop fell down Kathryn’s face. Then out of nowhere, a ball of light appeared and was flying around Kathryn’s head. Kathryn lifted her head and stretched out her hand. She touched the ball of light. Kathryn was lifted up to the ceiling. She felt a powerful warm feeling run throughout her body. The window opened, and outside, the trees whipped at the windowpane and the thunder boomed.

Kathryn was carried out of the window, out into the cold night. She spun around and around. Then she landed in a room where everything was still, absolutely still. “Where am I?” she said aloud.

Kathryn was in a living room. She got up and started to piece together everything that had just happened. “What was that ball of light, anyway? Why did it come to me and not any of the other children?” So many questions were swimming around in Kathryn’s head as she paced around the living room, looking for an explanation for why she was brought to this strange place.

Kathryn didn’t know where she was, but somehow in a very strange and dysfunctional way, she felt like she had been here before. As she was thinking, her eyes rested on a newspaper. “Hey, what’s this?” she said aloud. She ran over to the newspaper and scanned the front page back and forth. On the side of the paper just above the fold line was a picture of a man. This man had long, black, stringy, dry hair and he had steel gray eyes with scabs and scars all over his sunken face. He had a firm jaw and he looked as though he might just jump out from his picture and attack Kathryn. She took a seat on the nearest chair and read. The article went a little something like this:

Killer on the Loose

Yesterday at 11:00 P.M., the most dangerous prisoner escaped from the Pine-tree Prison. This prisoner is armed and dangerous. Schools and orphanages are taking extra precautions. "We can't have children exposed to this kind of danger," says the warden at the prison.

Almost everyone knows about the sudden escape of this murderer. We have been informed that nobody's been murdered yet, but people are urged to be on their guard. If you see anything suspicious, please come down to the printing room for the newspaper and inform us immediately. Policemen and the FBI are already on the case. This is a message to everyone out there: Keep your eyes peeled.

Kathryn finished the article, then sat in that very chair for the longest two minutes of her life. Was the killer the one who killed her parents? How did he kill her parents? Once again she couldn't control these thoughts, and they swam through Kathryn's head.

All of a sudden she heard a noise. She whipped her head around to the source of the noise. Sweat was dripping down her face. She quickly threw the newspaper down and dove under a table.

The door burst open and a man with black, stringy, dry hair stormed into the living room. Kathryn gasped and held her breath. "So it was the killer who killed my parents?" she said. But she quickly forgot that she had said something out loud. She stopped talking and waited for something to happen. All of a sudden a dirty, grimy hand thrust itself under the tablecloth and lifted it up, exposing all of Kathryn's face.

She stared at the killer, and the killer stared straight back at her, not moving or saying anything. His knuckles clenched into fists. His eyes started to water. Then he turned around and bolted into the kitchen. “Huh?” thought Kathryn. “Why didn’t he do anything?” Kathryn was so confused. But she just followed the killer into the kitchen to see what else he would do. The killer seemed to be scribbling frantically on a piece of paper.

Kathryn touched him. But surprisingly her hand went right through his arm. “I must be invisible,” she thought. Then the killer ran out the door. Kathryn jogged after him. He stuck the piece of paper that he wrote on in the mailbox. Then he ran away so nobody would notice him.

Kathryn went up to the mailbox and read the piece of paper. Its edges were torn badly and it was yellowing and wrinkled. The letter said to come to the printing room at 7:00 P.M. and meet someone there because the owners of the house had just won a prize. “This must be one of the killer’s evil schemes to kill someone,” she thought. Kathryn guessed who these people were who lived in this house, who these people were who were going to get killed, and who these people were who owned this front yard that Kathryn was standing in right now: These people must be her parents.

She attempted to tear up the letter. But she couldn’t because she was invisible. “Darn.” Then she quickly ran to the backyard to see what other mischief the killer was planning to stir up next. The killer was nowhere to be found. Kathryn assumed that he was probably getting ready for this big murder at the newspaper office.

She wanted to go to the newspaper office and find out what the killer was planning. Maybe she could find a way to stop it. She just had one question. Where was the newspaper office?

As she was thinking this, she saw a man walk by. This man had vanilla white hair and big round glasses. He was carrying what looked like a mailbag and on the bag it said in big bold letters: **PROPERTY OF PRINTING ROOM.**

Kathryn decided to follow him because he looked like he probably worked at the printing press. She followed the mailman for five minutes until they arrived at the printing room. “I guess

being invisible has its advantages,” she thought. When she finally arrived at the printing room it was not what she had expected.

She had expected there to be shiny printing machines, letters, ink, and newspapers piled up, with fine wooden desks, and people busily working. But instead she saw people dead at their desks, and instead of ink the ink jars were filled with blood. Kathryn shuddered at the sight of this. The machines were broken to shreds and everything was messed up.

The killer had just finished smashing one of the printing machines. Kathryn whipped her head around to look for the mailman she had followed earlier. He was on the ground. He wasn't bleeding like everyone else. Kathryn figured that he had just fainted. The killer stood by the door and waited for his guests of honor (Kathryn's parents). Kathryn tried moving. But she just wouldn't budge. She was frozen to the spot and tears were starting to run down her cheeks. All of a sudden the door burst open and two people with happy faces walked in. It was a woman and a man. “These must be my parents,” Kathryn thought.

Kathryn knew what the killer was about to do because he had been holding a sharp knife. Kathryn let out a huge “Nooooooooooooo!” but nobody in the room heard her. Kathryn shut her eyes tightly, praying this was all a dream. But it wasn't, oh, it definitely wasn't. As soon as Kathryn opened her eyes she saw both her parents had been stabbed and they were both dead.

Kathryn wanted to remember her parents forever. She wanted to remember how they felt and looked, and she wanted more than a picture to remember her parents. She thought about what she could do to keep the memory of her parents alive in her heart. She could take something that belonged to them. But then again, she was invisible. Then she heard a noise; the killer had just walked out and had gone out into the cruel, cold, world.

Kathryn lay on the printing press floor. She didn't know what to feel or think. She just wished she could sink through the floor and never see the light of day again.

Hours later, Kathryn was back in her orphanage bed and nothing looked like it had changed. Her box was lying on her lap and inside the box were her mother's necklace and her father's

pocket watch. Kathryn lay her head on the pillow and cried herself to sleep.

Two months later...

“The adoption papers have been signed, and Kathryn Freedman is now adopted,” announced Mrs. Wilma. Ear-splitting cheers of all the orphanage kids rang throughout the room.

When Kathryn is with her new parents, it feels like a big black hole in her heart has been filled.

Find Hiiiiimmmm

*A strange disappearance takes a brother away from his three sisters. But in **FIND HIIIIIMMMM** by **Jacob Potoff**, the girls won't give up on their brother without a fight.*

January 8, 2004

Jake was walking down the sidewalk to his bus stop. The air was soft as a pillow, the darkness was as dark as a room, and it was cold, like being in a freezer. While he was walking down the sidewalk, he was thinking about what he did in the past in his childhood when his sisters were first born, and how happy he was. He stopped at Northgate Street for his bus. He thought that the moon was beautiful when he looked at it through the tree branches, and realized how dark it is in the morning. Then the bus came.

Once at school, he got off the bus and went to the entrance of the lockers. He wasn't thinking right for some weird reason, maybe because he was sleepy or because he didn't want to go to school. Then all of a sudden he vanished and was never seen again. Everyone that was behind him wondered where he had gone.

January 8, 2008

Jake's friends were at Groves High School and his sisters were at Greenfield Elementary. Alexis, Lindsey, and Rebecca were triplets. They were eight years old and still remembered Jake's disappearance. Alexis was the one that thought she was popular, Lindsey was the brain, and Rebecca had been Jake's best friend and pal. They had done everything together with each other.

That night they all had a lot of homework and they were really tired. But then all of a sudden Lindsey woke up and thought of something. “Hey, guys, what if we go looking for Jake and find out who took him?”

“No way, Lindsey; I might, like, break a fingernail again or, oh my gosh, I might have to redo my hair,” said Alexis.

“I think it’s be a great idea. Don’t you remember what great times we had together with him, girls? Oh, come on. Let’s go look for him.”

“Hmmm, ok,” said Lindsey and Alexis.

The next morning they went to all of Jake’s friends. They first went to Justin Krivda’s house and he didn’t know who took Jake. Then they went to Patrick Macallem’s house, but Patrick didn’t know, either. Friend by friend they searched, but no one knew where Jake was, so they just gave up. “It was a nice thought, Rebecca, but we can’t find Jake,” said Lindsey.

“Oh my gosh, I, like, just broke a fingernail,” said Alexis.

January 10, 2008

There were five more days until Jake’s birthday. Jake’s sisters wanted to do something good for their parents. Alexis thought of something. “Maybe if I get fake fingernails, then my real fingernails wouldn’t break.” Oops, sorry. Wrong sister. Rewind. Now, as I was saying, Lindsey thought of a way to look for Jake. “Girls, I just thought that maybe we have to go to the freeway.”

“The freeway?” said Rebecca.

“Yeah, because it’s mysterious.”

“Fine with me. When do we start?” said Rebecca.

“Now.”

Along they went, traveling farther and farther along the freeway. Every day was one step closer to finding out if Jake was still alive.

It had been 30 days. Suddenly they found a hole in the ground and were wondering where it led. The hole had bugs coming out of it.

“Where do you think it leads to?” said Rebecca

“I don’t know, but it might be where Jake is. Let’s go,” said Lindsey.

“I hope that there is a shopping mall in there, because I need to, like, get new clothes if I’m going down there,” said Alexis in a hopeful way. One by one, they went down into the hole. They didn’t come back for two days.

While Alexis, Lindsey, and Rebecca were down there, the world was turning into a disaster. The sky was bluer than blue and the flowers were so pretty that people always picked them. The birds were singing “tweet tweet” right until the flowers flew up to the sky to hit the birds. Then each bird went “caw caw” and flapped its wings hard. The sky then turned to white so that nobody would see anything. After that, every single bird in the world started to speak a different bird language. Some went “que que,” others went “chip chip,” other kinds in Africa went “chirp chirp,” “squeak squeak,” “quack quack,” “meow meow,” “woof woof,” “roar roar,” “caw caw,” “toot toot,” “chu chu,” “hoot hoot,” “neeeeeeeee neeeeeeeee,” and, last but not least, “How you doing?”

Then out came Jake with his sisters, going home for Jake’s birthday and to see all of his friends again! Then something went wrong after that. But that’s another story to write.

Boom! Boom! Slide!

*Two girls experience a dreadful night filled with danger. Will they both survive? Read **BOOM! BOOM! SLIDE!**, by **Katie Redmond**, to find out.*

On a cold, shimmering, dark night, two sisters named Sara and Emily were home alone. A news bulletin came up on the TV. It said, “A murderer and robber broke out of the Martzzville Jail.” It was the jail that the girls lived near.

Emily and Sara ran up to their room and locked the door. They waited for five minutes. Then Sara said, “I am going to make sure everything is all right. When I leave, lock the door and only open it if you hear three knocks on the door, ok?”

“Ok,” said Emily.

Emily waited for what seemed 20 minutes, but was only two. Then the power went out. Emily heard a lamp break and then a door was slammed. One minute later there was an ear-booming scream.

Not long after that, she heard BOOM! BOOM! *Slide!* BOOM! BOOM! *Slide!* Then came an awful silence. Without warning, something made three long, loud screeches on the door. Emily fainted.

She was awakened by a police officer. He was asking her all kinds of questions.

In the end, she found out what the “boom, boom, slides” were. They were from her sister. The man had hurt her feet and she couldn’t walk, so she dug her hands into the carpet and pulled herself to the door. Since she was too tired to knock, she dragged her hands on the door, trying to get in.

It was hard for Emily to go anywhere without her sister. But over time, Emily slowly got over it. In the time between, Emily was depressed.

Even though Emily lost her sister, she believes that her sister is still alive somehow.

Middle

A boy and his family make the move from their old neighborhood to live in a new house, but end up where no one anticipated. In MIDDLE, by Eric Singer, see what strange force turns this trip into the ultimate relocation.

“Waaa waad!”

“Ha, ha, you can’t get it,” I said to my little brother as he was reaching for his green apple sucker, which I was dangling just out of reach. I have to admit that it was pretty weak, but I said it anyway. “He took mine, so now I’m going to take his.”

I said this as my mother turned around and looked me squarely in the eyes. She said, “Jordan, give him the sucker now, and you won’t be punished.”

I was feeling good that day so I made a smart-aleck remark. I said, “And if I don’t...?”

At that point, she interrupted me and said, “When we get to the new house you will go straight to your room where you will stay until I get there.” And that pretty much ruined it for the rest of the way.

I’m writing this autobiography from a place that is neither heaven nor hell. I’m writing this from a place called Middle. For a place that not many people have heard of, this place is pretty crowded. This place is just like earth, but nothing bad happens here because the ruler controls your mind. So in that case, you might believe that everyone is pretty much the same. *Wrong*. Everybody is different. Things may look the same, but nothing and no one truly is. All right, you get the picture. Being dead isn’t really so awfully bad, but sometimes I wish that I were alive. Enough of this talk about dead and Middle. Let’s get back to the story.

The closer we got to the house, the more relieved I was beginning to feel. We had been in the car for nearly four hours. I knew we were getting close when we passed the Moo Cow Dairy Farm with the silo that looked like a tall Gateway box. Next, I saw the Cheese Factory Museum, which I overheard my parents laughing about last week. Finally, we passed by the Next-Door Inn. A block later we stopped in front of a huge house. It looked like one of those southern colonial homes, like some plantation house. The only problem was that this was in Wisconsin. It had a big elegant front door, huge pillars, and gleaming white shutters. I was so excited to go inside, I almost peed in my pants.

When we finally opened the front door and peered inside, it looked like it hadn't been lived in for a thousand years. I guess you really can't tell a book by its cover. I say this because it seemed more like a jungle than somewhere my family might live. There were strange sounds coming at us from every direction, and cobwebs so terrible that it was hard to see, let alone close the door. As we stepped in the center of the foyer, I heard my dad whisper a little joke. I guess he must have thought it was funny. He said, "Looks like we have a little cleaning up to do." But even more strange, I felt eyes boring into my shoulder blades. I turned around but there was nobody there.

"Jordan," my mom said, "quickly go up to your room. You'll know which one it is." So I slowly and carefully went up the stairs and found the room marked "Jordan" with a bright yellow Post-It note on the closed door.

I was up there for about fifteen minutes, wondering why we drove four hours for this, when I heard a faint chuckle. I ignored it, thinking I was hearing things. But thinking back, I wish I had gone to tell my parents. Oh boy, do I wish I had told my parents.

Anyway, that night wasn't too bad, but there was odd moaning from the first floor. When I woke up the next morning, I found my father on the phone talking to the hotel that we had passed on the way here. (My parents had heard the moaning as well.) He said that he wanted a room for four and that we would be there for several nights.

A couple of days later, we came back to the house. It seemed the same, but something was different, very different. There was muffled music and it sounded like a piano. It sounded like “Chopsticks,” an old family favorite. We went in search of the piano room, where we were greeted by our worst nightmare.

My brother started crying and I was so stunned I couldn’t move. It was as if my feet were pinned to the floor. I saw a headless man. There was blood spattered all over his almost transparent body. I immediately assumed that he was a ghost. I had guessed correctly. He turned around and said, “I must never be discovered.” It was a voice like none I have ever heard before or again since that day. It was high-pitched and raspy. He said it again, only much louder this time. It seemed like hours before anyone moved, and even my brother had stopped crying and was still and quiet. Finally the ghost got up, snapped his fingers, and before I knew what had happened, I found myself in the entrance line for Middle. The rest of my family was all in line for heaven. Guess I should have done a bit less sucker dangling and been a wee bit nicer to my mom after all.

So that is my story, and how I ended up here in the first place. If there is a happy ending to this, I guess it’s that I never did have to clean all those nasty cobwebs.

Life Is Like That

Two Ordinary Guys

In TWO ORDINARY GUYS by Chris Andersen, an immature and self-possessed 25-year-old must save his brother from what seems like certain death. Will Max make it in time?

“*Aaarriba! Rriba!*” Max shouted as he attempted to do the disco. “Bring it to the left now, oh, oh; to the right now, oh, oh; waaay back to the left now, oh, oh.”

“Shut up, will you?” Chris shouted. “We have to keep an eye out for those suicide bombers.”

“Okay, Captain Point-out-the-obvious,” Max replied girlishly.

“Why are you doing the disco, anyway?” Chris scolded. “There’s no one else around, so why are you?”

“Because I’m special,” Max replied. There was then an awkward silence.

A civilian walked out of a building and trudged away from Max and Chris. Chris stole a glance at Max and he saw that his eyes were blankly following a mosquito. Knowing Max, Chris muttered under his breath, “Please don’t do anything stupid, please don’t.”

“Whaja say?” Max asked. Just then Max spotted the civilian. He appeared to be giving him an evil look. Max yelled, “Stop that Nazi!” He jumped atop a nearby car and fired at the man several times. Thankfully, the man avoided the bullets whizzing past him and safely bunkered into a nearby building. “Ha, ha, ha,” Max laughed. “You know, I bet that was Hitler’s brother-in-law or something,” he remarked proudly.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Chris shouted. “We’re supposed to question civilians, not shoot at them, you idiot! You are the most irresponsible, stupid, and outright crazy person I

know. What would have happened if you actually hit the guy?” Chris said angrily. “Now get down from—”

BOOM! The car Max was on exploded, and he was sent flying through the air. It was a horrible sight. Max, however, acted like he had planned it and was enjoying it. He stuck his arm out and sang, “I’m Superman, flying through the air.” Even though Chris was sure Max had air in his head, he hit the ground with a really big THUD.

“Oh no, Max,” Chris cried. He rushed over to Max and asked, “Are you okay? Max, come on, wake up!” No answer. “Come on, wake up.” Still no answer. “I miss you already, *Maaaaaaax!*”

“Whaaaaat?” Max replied.

“Max!” Chris cried out. “You’re alive.”

“Well, duh...tricked ya, didn’t I? I never knew you cared.”

“Yeah, neither did I,” Chris answered while helping Max to his feet. “Come on. Let’s pack up, head back to camp, and catch the plane for home.”

“But Chris, shouldn’t we find out who blew up the car?” Max questioned.

“You’re right,” Chris answered. He narrowed his eyes and scanned the terrain carefully. All of a sudden he spotted the person that Max had shot at, and he could see that he was wearing an evil smile. “Come on, Max,” Chris said, “we’re going bogie hunting.”

Chris tensed up like a tiger ready to pounce. He then sprinted toward the man in an attempt to catch him. The suspect got a worried look on his face and ran around the corner of a building with Chris quickly in pursuit. Max, finally noticing that he was missing something, decided to go another way.

The suspect twisted and turned around many buildings. Chris noticed that the buildings were gritty-looking, with large holes in the walls for windows. The sand turned into dust as he ran faster than he ever thought he could. He followed the man to a long, wide alley where he could not make any turns to try to confuse him.

About halfway through the stretch, Chris stopped and complained, "I'm never going to catch him."

All of a sudden, Max came out of nowhere, tripped over a rock, and fell right into the guy, making him fall down and hit his head, knocking him unconscious.

Chris rushed over and helped Max to his feet again. "I knew that your stupidity would come in handy some day," Chris remarked sarcastically. "Let's drag him back with us."

Back at camp, Chris checked the still-unconscious man in for interrogation, and they were soon on their way back home to the good old U.S.A. Max and Chris decided to visit their mother in Michigan.

On the plane, Max began to make fun of Chris because he actually thought Max was dead. Even though Chris had scolded him for being irresponsible, Max was happy that Chris still cared about him. Max's insults lasted the entire flight home. Before they knew it, they were home.

"Mom!" Max and Chris shouted together in unison.

"Sons!" their mother replied. "Is it really you? I thought you were due next week. Oh, I'm so happy to see you two. Come in, come in."

"I love what you've done with the place," Chris said.

"Yes, it was your father's idea. How would you boys like to stay for the week since your father's out of town on business? I could use the company."

"Sure," they both agreed.

"Why are you boys home so early?" Mom asked. "I was supposed to pick you up at the airport in a week. That's why your father's not here. We thought you were coming home later."

"Well, we got sent home early with some other guys because of Max," Chris began to whisper. "Max did his you-know-what dance on a tank, so that the entire camp could see him."

"Oh," his mother said.

After about three days of being at his mother's house, Chris got a call and found out that the person he chased was awake and would only talk to him. Chris said his goodbyes and was off, back to the airport. On the way, something went terribly wrong.

* * *

“He’s been kidnapped!” Jack said frantically.

“I don’t care, just a few more minutes,” Max answered sleepily.

“Chris, your brother, has been *kidnapped!*”

“Jack,” Max said, surprised, “what are you doing here?”

“Like I said, your brother’s been kidnapped” Jack was a very close friend of Chris’s.

“Last night I saw him going to the airport, and he stopped. I don’t know why. He got out of the car. I was going to go over to him to say hi, but this guy came out from behind him and whacked him on the head with what looked like a two-by-four and dragged him into another car and drove away. I followed him to an old apartment building in downtown Detroit and I think we should try to get him back. Come on, throw some clothes on and let’s go.”

Once in Jack’s car, Jack pulled out two pistols. He gave one to Max as he explained that he thought Chris had been taken by a hit man known as Sirhc.

Max was a bit scared being in Detroit. He had heard that there were many crimes committed there and he also knew that there were many gangs that might even kill someone. Max finally reached the apartment building and climbed to the top with Jack, where they found Chris and Sirhc.

“Sirhc, give me my brother back,” Max shouted bravely.

“No, I’m going to kill him.” Sirhc picked up an axe and was about to bring it down on Chris’s neck when Max screamed, “No, you don’t!” Max drew the gun and fired it at Sirhc.

Max rushed over to Chris’s drugged body and said, “It’s going to be all right.”

“And cut,” someone yelled from behind a wall. “Beautiful. I love ya.” About twenty or so other people became visible in the room, including three cameramen, as bright lights went on over them and the walls of the room collapsed.

Chris stood up and said, “Sit down. I’ll explain everything. It’s a movie, and the biggest prank ever pulled on one person. We

did it for two reasons. One, so we could send it in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. But, we mainly did it to try to get you serious.

“You know, not many 25-year-olds still like and collect Pokemon cards. You should try acting more like an adult than a five-year-old. Didn’t you think all of this was strange, since all of the events, like my being kidnapped, would never happen?”

“I can’t believe you actually did this to me,” Max said. “I still don’t understand why you would do such a cruel thing to me. I mean, make me think that you were kidnapped? I thought you were actually going to die.”

“Well, it wasn’t just me. The whole town thought you were very irresponsible. We wanted to set you straight,” Chris replied.

The director, who shouted out “Cut,” came over to them and said, “I think I’ll call the movie *Two Ordinary Guys*.”

Miss Amy Lucklessia

*A lonely girl finds there is a whole world waiting for her outside her backyard. Life becomes full of promise when Amy stops worrying about what others think in **MISS AMY LUCKLESSIA**, by **Austin Bell**.*

Amy Lucklessia lives in the city of Los Angeles with her family and her cat, Tiny. Amy is tall with flowing, raven-black hair and emerald eyes. Her cat, Tiny, has one brown eye and one green eye. Tiny loved paying with his chicken-flavored catnip ball in the yard with Amy. Tiny was all that Amy had. She was lonely.

Amy's plight started when she was younger. She was always getting hurt.... physically! She was always on the run from creatures on her nature shows. But that was in her early 20's. Now she was in college, and all the other girls made fun of her (they had seen her nature show). They called her a fashion disaster and a "nobody" who was always attacked by something.

She was hurt. No one understood how she felt. Her life was full of pain and heartache. Not only was she luckless, but friendless.

Amy told her 65-year-old mom that she was sick of the other overly-made-up, price-is-right, Beverly Hills-90210, going-nowhere girls treating her like dirt. So they flew to Rome to visit Rosette, Amy's cousin.

Rosette was a sweet teenaged girl with raven hair like Amy's, but she had blue, glowing eyes. Rome was beautiful, and Amy made so many friends there. When she had to go she missed her new friends: people who didn't hate her because of some stupid nature show.

And I know now that I shouldn't care what people think. I'm Austin Bell, and I should only care about what's in my heart. This story is how I feel.

The Surprise Birthday Party

*Clarise can hardly believe that her mother is keeping her from playing in the most important baseball game of the season—and on her birthday, too! Find out what's really going on in **THE SURPRISE BIRTHDAY PARTY**, by **Katie Bromley**.*

“Clarise, dinner is ready!”

I was in my room playing my favorite video game, and being absolutely ecstatic that school had finally let out. I ran downstairs to see my favorite food sitting on the table. My family sat down and started digging in. My family is my little sister, my dad, my mom, and I. We started talking about our day, when my mom suddenly told us that my grandparents were coming to town to visit, TOMORROW.

I was happy my grandparents were coming down, but I had a big baseball game the next day and I knew my grandparents wouldn't want to go. I asked my mom if I would still be able to go to my baseball game, but I already knew the answer.

“Clarise, please tell me how often you get to see your grandparents.”

“But, Mom, tomorrow's the biggest baseball game of the season, and they need me there to help, and anyway they already told me that we could go to the ice cream store after the game to celebrate my birthday!”

“You're not going, and that's final!”

I was so mad with my mom. I stomped upstairs, growling angrily as I did it. I ran upstairs to type to my best friend, Talu Yokino. Talu lives in Japan and although we have only met one time, we type to each other every day about anything and everything. Here's what I typed to her:

Dear Talu,

I have a very big problem. I have a huge baseball game tomorrow and it's my birthday and my grandparents are coming into town to visit so I can't go! Please help me get through this horrorfest.

Yours truly,
Clarise

I decided to take a nap and clear my head. When I woke up, there was a new message in my inbox. I checked and saw it was Talu's reply.

Dear Clarise,

I am very sorry about your not being able to go to your baseball game. I guess that you should just try to enjoy your birthday as best you can.

Yours truly,
Talu

It was pretty late and I was getting tired, so I went to sleep hoping that I could at least try to enjoy my birthday.

The next day I woke up very hungry. Usually, my mom brings up my birthday breakfast. I guessed that she had gotten a late start and decided I would give her a few minutes. After ten minutes of waiting, I decided to go see what was going on. I quickly went downstairs to see if anything was wrong, but when I got down there, no one was in sight. Just when I was going to go upstairs to see if they were still in bed, everyone jumped out and screamed "SURPRISE!"

Everyone was there: my mom, my dad, my younger sister, all of my friends from school, my whole baseball team, and my very best friend that I had only met once, Talu. I ran to her and she told me that she couldn't *not* come to my birthday. I asked my mom what had happened and she told me, "I had the idea for a

surprise birthday party for you one month ago. I called all your friends and your baseball team and told them what was going to happen. They all agreed and said that they could make it. Then your grandparents called and asked if they could come down for your party. I said, 'Sure,' and that's where I got the great excuse for your not being able to go to the baseball game. Then the day that you started talking about Talu, I decided that it would be great to see if she could come. Her parents said yes and this is how I got the great idea for your party."

After we had cake, played games, and unwrapped presents, my parents said that since it was my birthday and I had been looking forward to the game for a month now, I and all of my guests could go to the game.

My team won the game 11-2, and since my friends had promised to go have ice cream with me, we all went out and had a great time eating our ice cream.

That day, after everyone had gone except for Talu (who was going to stay with us for a week), I went upstairs and thought about how happy I was that I had the perfect party with all of my friends. Next year, if my mom tells me that my grandparents are coming down or that I am sick even if I don't feel like it, I'll know that my mom is throwing me a surprise birthday party.

A Day Not Too Old

*What should have been a day of harmless fun for a group of young friends turns into a tragic event that the narrator will never forget. Trevor recalls a friendship cut short in **A DAY NOT TOO OLD**, by **Seth Alexander Castiglione**.*

Hi. I'm Trevor Daniels. I am about to tell you a story of a time when I was nine. Back then, I lived in my old state of Texas. It was a state of great plains and beautiful skies. Let me tell you about my friends.

Let's start with Jack. Jack had blond, army-style hair; it was as blond as the sands of the Sahara itself. He always wore a tank top and blue "Jimmy Dens" jeans. K.P. was born and raised on a farm. And Jim, he was just a punk. He always had just enough nerve to ruin our day or anything else we were doing.

It was going to be a warm day in the Texas sun. I had woken up, eaten breakfast and had gotten ready for the last day of school before the summer break. By nine o'clock, we were all seated in our classroom chairs, ready to take the last test of the year. That is, everyone was ready except for Jack and Jimmy, who were talking as usual in the back of the class.

"Jack!" said Mrs. Pertrune. "How many times do I have to tell you? *Don't talk at the beginning of a test!*"

"Sure, whatever you *say*, Mrs. Boss," said Jack in a way he really shouldn't have.

"That's *it*, Jack! Detention, now! And you too, Jimmy—get!"

"*I was... I was...*!" said Jim, in a stumbling sort of way.

As Jim was getting up, he looked back at Jack and whispered something through the air.

Finally the hands of the clock made it to 3:30. The last second of the last minute of an entire year of school had passed. I was so happy that I actually felt sick. It was like an entire year's worth of nerves suddenly split open—like an avalanche let loose.

“Hey,” said K.P.

“Yeah?” I answered, hoping that whatever he was going to ask wasn't about Jim or Jack.

“How would you like to play baseball? After the game we could go to old Jenkin's gas station and have a soda.”

“I thought the guys were in detention,” I said.

“Well, they escaped from detention,” said K.P.

“That's Jack and Jim for you!” I said, trying to go with the flow.

“All right; so are you coming?”

“Yeah, of course,” I said.

It was quite a game. Almost everyone was there, including Jack and Jim. Even the custodian came by to run the scoreboard. The scoreboard itself was going wild—the scores were changing so fast, they were almost a blur.

“Hey, Jack, bet you can't hit this one!” Jim said.

“Just watch me!” said Jack.

BAM! The ball went flying.

“Yeah, I got this ball!” screamed Jack at the top of his lungs.

I guess either because Jim hadn't hit anything yet that afternoon or because he was still a little mad at Jack for getting him in trouble before the test, he yelled back, “Shut up, man! You sound like a dying cat!” Then, thinking better of himself, he laughed, “Ah, what the heck. My mom would have found something to kill me about anyway.”

With his pointer finger aimed directly at Jack, Jim said, “You're off the hook, man, but just this once!”

We finished the game and headed home. Before I fell asleep under my Captain Blastoid covers, I went over the day again in my mind: the test, Jack and Jim getting kicked out of class, the way they almost got in a fight during the game, the way they had made up. I kept thinking of all the horrible things that could have happened if they hadn't made up.

“It must have been all the Coke I drank,” I said to myself. I closed my eyes and did my best to think of better things.

The next morning the beautiful Texas skies rolled over the prairie land we called our home. The morning was so beautiful, I couldn’t possibly imagine what was about to happen or how my friends and I would suffer until the trees rot away.

Jack, Jim, and a couple of other guys were in the parking lot of the 7/11 as I rode up on my bike. “Over here! *Now!*” waved Jim. I rode over to where Jim was taking us, behind a red van in the parking lot. I got off my bike, letting it fall to the ground. Jack had a scared look in his eye. I had never seen a look in his eyes like that before. Jim picked him up by the collar and pushed him to the ground, staring at him. From where I was, Jim was between Jack and me.

Then out of nowhere, BAM! A loud gunshot blasted through the air. I looked down and saw that Jack had been shot! “*Jim!*” I thought. Maybe they hadn’t made up after all! Maybe Jim was just faking before, waiting till now to get his revenge!

Turning around to face me, Jim looked as shocked as I was. It *wasn’t* Jim who shot him, but a thug in a drive-by. Jim had seen the car circle around before. That’s why he was taking us over behind the van. He wanted to save us, not get back at Jack!

I knelt on my knees near Jack’s side. “Trevor,” he said, “you are going to do great things...”

To this day I remember how my best friend died before my eyes. It is a pain I will remember for all time, only now, I am the one saying, “No, Jack. It’s you. You would have grown up to do great things.”

I Should Have Minded My Business

*A witness to a crime knows the right thing to do, but he is afraid of the consequences if he testifies. In **I SHOULD HAVE MINDED MY BUSINESS** by **Raphael Egziabher**, it turns out that consequences come from all sides.*

You know, my life was good. I wouldn't be where I am if I minded my business.

It all started five years ago in Detroit. I was playing basketball with my home dog, Roy. "Yo, as Roy makes a breakaway, he moves left, then right, and shoots..." Roy said.

"Misses!" I said as I caught the rebound. "Boy, you act like you got game, but you don't," I said. "Let me show you how to play." I started to dribble to the net. I faked the shot and took the ball to the rim, then slam-dunked the ball.

"Lucky breakaway," Roy panted tiredly. Then Roy shot from the three-point line and the ball went into the next yard.

I went into Mr. Saper's yard and grabbed the ball and was almost out of there when I heard a gunshot. And, of course, I wanted to know what happened, so I went into Mr. Saper's house. This is when my life was changed forever. I saw two men arguing. One of them was Mr. Saper. And they were arguing about drugs and money. The other man was armed with a nine-millimeter gun.

"I'll get you the money by next week," Mr. S said. "Just give me the drugs, Steve," Mr. Saper begged.

"Oh, no, your time is up," Steve said happily. He pulled out his gun and fired it three times.

I ran out of there like my life depended on it, which it did. I told Roy what happened, then I called the police on the phone.

“A car pulled out of the driveway,” Roy panted.

The police arrived a few of minutes later. Steve came back to the scene one minute after the police arrived. The police asked me what had happened. I opened my mouth but didn’t say a word because Steve stared me down. The police left and so did Steve. Then I found a note for me.

Dear Kid,

Don't u tell anyone what happened. I will kill u and your family and friends. u see what happened to the guy will happen to u cause I don't play like that u hear me.

*Your murderer
Steve*

I hid myself in my room in the dark for days. Six weeks later, they caught Steve. The police dropped by and asked me to testify. I refused.

“Why won’t you testify?” Roy asked angrily.

“Because he will kill us if we testify,” I said in a very scared manner.

The next day, Roy was found dead. The police said he died from his throat being silt. Then it hit me: The drug dealer is free while Roy is dead.

I called the police and told them I would testify. They then decided to put me in the witness protection program. We went to the court. After the prosecutor showed some evidence, I was called to the stand. I was scared but happy, knowing I could set this man behind bars for what he did. I was asked what I had seen. I answered. It shook everyone and the jury. He was convicted and sentenced to life behind bars.

So everyone won except for Steve, my and Roy's families, and Mr. Saper's family. I lost something important for doing the right thing. But never be afraid to tell anyone or do anything when something like this happens, even though it will cost you.

Operation: Phantom

*A hunt for a stolen supercomputer leads searchers around the world. Stay on your toes if you want to keep up with the action in **OPERATION: PHANTOM**, by **Aggrey Ellis-Sangmuah**.*

It was an ordinary Monday at about 8:00 A.M. at the Pentagon. Coffee was being delivered to the workers. All of a sudden they heard—BOOM!—and the lights went out. When the lights came on, it was found that the computer server for the Secret Missions Department of the Pentagon was stolen. It was taken from a high security glass case. In the server were documents for a top secret landing on Mars.

All over the country, planes, trains, ships, cars and trucks were searched frantically by stern soldiers. Searches turned up nothing, so the Coast Guard cutters started to patrol the long coasts, looking for ships trying to sneak away.

A fifteen-million-dollar reward was offered for the computer's safe return. "Have you seen any suspicious activity in your neighborhood lately?" soldiers in public places prompted any passerby. Everyone said no.

They did not know that a freight train transported the computer to San Diego, where it stayed for a few days at the house of David Johnson, a multimillionaire. It was taken from his home to a hideaway in the middle of the night. Mr. Johnson put the computer on a speedboat. "Be careful with it," he told his henchmen.

"Good to see you," said the captain of the *Dolphin* when the speedboat finally reached its destination, an offshore submarine. "Sound the alarm," he told the lieutenant commander. Soon the submarine was cruising underwater at approximately 28 knots.

“We will try to sneak into the lagoon undetected at night,” said the captain.

The captain did not know that the submarine had been sighted earlier in the day by the *H.M.C.S. Kingston’s* sonar while it was returning to the Canadian Forces base at Esquimalt, British Columbia. The Canadian Navy reported this find to American authorities, which then took action.

Operation Phantom occurred that night when a U.S Navy S.E.A.L. team landed on an aircraft carrier in the area of the submarine. The crew of the ship wished them good luck as they rowed to the submarine.

“Go! Go! Go!” shouted the commander as they scrambled out of the rubber dinghy. Silently they crept aboard the submarine. They captured the guard of the server and replaced him with an imposter. They took the server and rowed back to the ship. “Congratulations!” said Captain John Smith as the team returned to the carrier.

“Sixteen million sounds okay,” said David Johnson as he sold the computer to the prime minister of the United States of Eurasia. “It will be delivered tomorrow at the lagoon on the northern coast of China,” he said, and hung up. When the empty container was delivered the next day, the prime minister threw a fit.

Computer experts at the FBI discovered that the computer had nothing on it. The two leaders died the next day of shock after finding out that they fought over a blank computer. The world then formed into one huge super nation. Even evil people were forgiven. Eventually, the world got along peacefully.

The Adventure of the Paper Boy

*Thursday is the day to deliver the papers. Let's see how it goes in **THE ADVENTURE OF THE PAPER BOY**, by **Ryan Feist**.*

The alarm clock rang and I woke up with a start. I looked at the calendar and it was Thursday, the day to deliver the *Eccentric* newspaper to my well-known customers. I slowly got my 11-year-old body out of bed and got dressed for the day. I walked downstairs and into the kitchen. BARK, BARK! "I scared my dog half to death," I thought to myself.

My dad had been wakened by Lucy's bark. He came in and asked if I wanted a ride in the car instead of riding my bike to deliver the papers, but I said no because I need to get some exercise.

I headed out of the garage with my bike and the paper bag on my shoulder and started toward my first customer.

My customer was walking to the bathroom when he glanced out the front window and saw me. He jumped at the sight of me and ran back to the hallway where he came from. I dashed to the front porch and quickly dropped the paper off. I then hurried back to my bike and hopped on it. I pedaled as fast as I could to the next customer and dropped the paper off.

While I was going to the next house, I could hear sirens in the distance. I thought that it could have been because the man I scared thought I was a burglar and called his burglar alarm company. While I was busy listening I didn't notice there was ice in front of my next customer's house.

I had just turned around when I saw the ice on the ground. I squeezed on the brakes and I slid into the ice. I swerved around on the ice for a little bit and then I slipped and fell down. I landed on my knee! I yelped and tried to get off the cold ice so I wouldn't get cold. When I got off the ice, it was painful to walk to my customer's house. I slowly walked back to my bike and started going again. The feeling of pain wore away after a little while.

While I was going to the next house, I noticed the snow was coming down a lot heavier than when I started out delivering. The snow was getting in my bag full of newspapers. I tried to cover it up as I went, but it was too hard to steer and watch where I was going while covering the newspaper bag.

I spotted a piece of cardboard lying on the side of the road. I went over to the cardboard and picked it up. It had some pepperonis on it and there was a little grease on it as well. I thought, "Why is this cardboard out here on the side of the road?" I spotted an outline of a garbage can on the other side of the road. I said to myself, "Today is Thursday, so it must be trash day for our street." I put the cardboard on the top of my paper bag with the pepperonis and grease on top so it wouldn't get the papers messy.

I was riding my bike to the last house when a dog came out of nowhere and started chasing me. I said to myself, "What is going on with that dog?" I tried to speed up, but my last house was coming up fast. At my customer's house, I had to stop. When I turned around, I saw the dog trying to grab the pizza box. Since I was at my last customer's house, I gave the pizza box to the dog. The dog might have chased me because he smelt the food on the box. I delivered the last paper and started back home.

When I got back home I found my brother, Scott, and my sister, Jacqueline, awake and waiting to eat breakfast at the table. My mom was making some bacon and my dad was making pancakes. Mom asked me if I knew anything about the alarm company coming to the neighbor's house. "Ahhhhh, no," I said.

Dad asked me how the paper route went. I said, "It was just like a normal Thursday."

A Dog and His Boy

*How far would you go to find your missing pet? In **A DOG AND HIS BOY** by Carr Freeman, Bill leaps into action and never looks back as he hunts for his stolen puppy.*

Bill was panic-stricken as he ran all through the house looking for his dog. “Duke! Duke!” he called. But it became obvious that Duke was gone. He was nowhere to be found.

Bill Strong had just graduated from high school and had been accepted to a college in his home state of North Carolina. The day of graduation, he received a dog from his mom and dad as a present. It was a West Highland terrier (Westie), and the cutest thing anybody had ever seen. His hair was white and fluffy and his eyes were large and black. He was about the size of a shoebox. Bill chose “Duke” for the name and spent almost every single second of his spare time with that puppy. You could tell he loved him a lot.

But one day in his mostly uneventful life, Bill went out for basketball tryouts (he’s six-foot-three and you couldn’t blame him for that). That’s when this awful thing happened. Now his puppy was missing! Bill went out frantically looking for the dog, so worried about where he might be. “Duke! Duke! Duke!”

Finally, after what seemed like hours of walking and running, Bill spotted Duke at the shoreline of the Outer Banks. But Duke was not alone! As Bill had eventually suspected, his puppy had been dognapped! It was the man who had stolen dogs all around the east coast! His picture and name were in all of the papers. “Jake Thomas Is on the Loose,” the headlines would say. That was not the only problem right now, though. The criminal and Duke were getting ready to board a ship!

Bill Strong ran for his life to get on the boat. But he was too late. The doors were closed. Right after he took one last look, he ran to the other dock to check to see if he could get on board there. “Already booked,” the captain said.

Bill’s worst fear had come true. He was horrified. He ran to the police and told them about Jake. They tried to get the boat back, but there was no signal. Still, Bill did not give up. He ran down the beach looking for a way to catch up to them.

Finally, he saw a small speedboat. It belonged to a fisherman who was there digging clams. Bill begged him to take him out to track down Duke. He explained his problem as quickly as he could. Without waiting even one second longer, they both jumped into the glorified dinghy. The fisherman started the motor and off they went.

Bill kept his eyes glued in one direction. After he and the fisherman had been riding for about a half hour in the dangerous Atlantic, the passenger ship was finally in good view. Bill was very anxious, and had his mind set on getting on that large vessel. Pretty soon they were in very close proximity—actually right up next to it. But how was Bill going to get on? The fisherman tried to help Bill climb up, but that didn’t seem to work.

Bill had to think fast. Then he realized there was only one way. He spotted a rope dangling off the side of the very huge bow. He was going to have to jump to grab it. If he missed, it could be a big problem. But it was a risk he had to take.

Bill started to get onto the edge of the skiff. “1, 2, 3,” he counted. Then he jumped. He caught the rope! He pulled himself up slowly, climbed over the edge of the massive watercraft and plopped on the floor of the main deck.

Bill waved the fisherman on and looked all around the ship for Jake the criminal. He could not find him at first. He kept looking and finally he spotted Jake casually helping himself to the food buffet. Duke didn’t appear to be anywhere in sight.

Bill went up to Jake, looked him in the eye, and said that he wanted his puppy back. Of course, Jake denied knowing anything about the dog. Bill was furious. “Oh no, you’re not going to get

away with this!” he said. Then Bill Strong pulled out his two-way radio, about to call the police.

“Okay, okay,” Jake said. But before Jake could do anything, Duke stuck his nose out of Jake’s oversized pocket. He had been in there all along. (That shows how small he was.)

It seemed surprising at the time, but Jake Thomas gave Duke back to Bill without an argument. Jake didn’t have much of a choice, though, since he was essentially captive in the vast ocean. So not only did Bill get his puppy back, but he also immediately turned Jake in to the authorities on the ship.

Bill was ecstatic that he found his dog. But there was still one worry that he had. How would he know if Jake Thomas had harmed Duke in any way? How could he get back to North Carolina in a hurry to have Duke checked by the vet? Well, soon he had his answers. Since Jake Thomas was such a criminal, this became a very big incident with the police, who sent a Coast Guard helicopter to pick up Jake. He was going to be punished for stealing all the other dogs, too. So Bill and Duke rode with the criminal in the copter back to shore. That was pretty awkward! As soon as they arrived, Bill went to the vet and found that, luckily, there was nothing wrong with Duke.

When Bill and Duke got home, they tracked down the fisherman who was such a great help. Then they all went to Bill’s house where his mom made a clam chowder meal for everyone.

“I hope that nothing like this ever happens again,” said Bill with a smile. “With Jake Thomas in jail, all dogs are a lot safer. And I’ll be happy to return to my uneventful life. But there will be one difference,” he said as he looked at his dog. “From now on, puppy, you’re going to basketball practice with me. In fact, our team is going to be named after you—Duke Basketball.”

Home Again

*A boy who has been treated as an orphan begins to hope that his family is somewhere waiting for him. In the company of a loyal friend, he goes in search of the truth in HOME AGAIN, by **Brandon C. Miller**.*

The Whitlaws were very excited as they loaded the boat for their trip. Mr. Whitlaw had packed and gotten everything ready for their cruise.

Mr. Whitlaw's wife, daughter, and two sons boarded the boat. The parents put their youngest son, Gary (who was not even a year old), on the lowest floor of the boat. The other children, 11-year-old fraternal twins Ryan and Sarah, stayed with their parents.

The family had planned on this vacation lasting two weeks. But at the beginning of the second week, they met a tidal wave. The waves were huge. One was so large that it hit the Whitlaw's boat. It split the boat exactly in the middle, separating Gary from the rest of his family.

"Gary!" shouted Mrs. Whitlaw. She tried to jump from her side of the boat onto the part of the boat where Gary was. But Ryan and Sarah were holding her back.

"Mom, we don't want you to die!" Sarah exclaimed.

"But your brother is out there, Sarah, and he needs me!" Mrs. Whitlaw shouted. By this time, though, they could barely see the part of the boat that contained little Gary. It was slowly drifting further and further away from them.

The Coast Guard rescued the Whitlaw parents and the twins. But the rescuers were unsuccessful in locating Gary or the remains of the other half of the boat.

The Whitlaws were sorrowful about the loss of little Gary. Eventually, life went on for the Whitlaw parents as well as Ryan

and Sarah, but he always remained in the backs of their minds. And Mrs. Whitlaw refused to believe that Gary had died in that terrible storm, even though she had no evidence to prove that he was alive.

But Gary was alive. Gary was found by a childless couple who rescued him from the ocean and kept him hidden from all outsiders. They were afraid that Gary would be taken away from them and given back to his real parents. But when the childless couple died, Gary was discovered and placed in an orphanage in California. When he arrived at the orphanage, Gary was told that the people who raised him were not his real parents. The news made him very curious about his real family.

By this time, Gary's real family had moved to New York. Many years had passed, and the twins, Ryan and Sarah, were now 28 years old. They were unaware of Gary's whereabouts, of course. Gary's family had given up hope that he would ever be found.

Gary made one friend while in the orphanage. Her name was Jena, but everybody called her J.J. She was Gary's size, and she wore a black shirt, blue jeans, and big boots. J.J. had long black hair, and she always wore a ponytail.

J.J. and Gary often talked about finding Gary's real parents and going home with them. He had seen a television program about the Whitlaws recently. On the show, the Whitlaws talked about their missing son and how he had never been found. Gary began to think that maybe he might be their missing son. He figured he was about the same age as their son would be. Gary and J.J. were almost eighteen years old, and Gary was becoming more anxious about leaving the orphanage. Then one day, Gary came up with a suggestion for J.J.

"Hey, J.J., you ever think about bustin' out of this place?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I think I want to find my parents."

"Mrs. King doesn't take kindly to sneaking out," J.J. said.

"I was thinking of asking you to come along with me."

"I don't know," J.J. replied hesitantly.

"You're too worried about getting caught."

“Well, I am a little nervous about it.”

“All we have to do is wait until Mrs. King goes to sleep. Then we can sneak out of the window in the dorm.”

“But what happens if we get caught?”

“We’ll worry about that if it happens,” Gary replied.

“I think your plan is stupid, Gary.”

“So you’re saying that I’m stupid?”

“No, I’m not saying that. Okay, I’ll go with you,” J.J. agreed reluctantly.

“Yes!” Gary exclaimed.

That night, Gary and Jena each packed their belongings into their backpacks and snuck out the back window of the dorm, using everyone’s blankets as a rope to lower them to the ground. The climb down was tiring, and they were exhausted when they got to the bottom. They were dressed in all black clothing so they wouldn’t be noticed as much in the dark.

“I’m so tired from climbing down; I don’t know if I can go any further.”

“J.J., we made it this far without getting caught. So far we’re doing okay. You’ll feel better once we get away from here and hop on a train going east to New York.”

“I can hardly wait,” J.J. said sarcastically.

“Why aren’t you excited about all of this?”

“I just don’t want to get caught or killed.”

“I guess I can understand why you’re scared. But if we’re going, we need to get out of here now before we get caught.”

Gary and J.J. left the orphanage and began their journey east. They were stowaways on many trains and buses, sneaking on whenever the conductor or bus driver was busy doing other things.

Because they had no money, they often ended up sneaking food out of stores in their pockets. One day, Gary and J.J. went to a place called Bob’s Diner. They snuck into the diner and stuffed packaged food from the counter into their backpacks without getting caught by the security camera. As they ran out of the diner and into the street, a car came speeding up. The driver of the car honked the car horn and yelled, “Get out of the road!” but it was

too late. He hit Jena, knocking her all the way across the road. She fell on the ground hard.

Both the driver and Gary ran over to Jena. “Is she okay?” Gary asked.

“I don’t know yet. She’s unconscious and we don’t know if she has any broken bones. I’m a doctor, so I can help. We need to get her to the hospital right away. We’ll also have to notify her parents.”

“J.J. doesn’t have any parents. She’s an orphan. I thought I was, too, until I found out that the people who raised me weren’t my real parents.”

“Well, let’s get her to the hospital so we can find out what her injuries are. We’ll worry about the rest later.”

Gary took a look at the doctor’s face. He looked very familiar. He could see some similarities in his and the doctor’s faces, but he just passed it off as coincidence.

The ambulance arrived and took Jena to the hospital, and the doctor followed the ambulance to the hospital in his car. He invited Gary to ride along with him.

After J.J. got settled in at the hospital, it was discovered that she just had a few bruises and scratches, but the hospital staff wanted her to stay in the hospital overnight to make sure that she was okay. Gary had been sitting in the hospital waiting room the whole time, waiting to hear any news about his best friend.

The doctor who was the driver of the car walked over to Gary. “I have some good news about your friend J.J. She only has a few cuts and bruises, and she’ll be okay. The doctors want her to stay in the hospital and rest tonight, though. Since you have no place to stay, would you like to stay at my house tonight? I have an extra bedroom where you can get some rest. By the way, what did you say your name was?”

“It’s Gary. And you never told me your name.”

“My name is Ryan Whitlaw. I live in a house just outside of town. I live by myself, and I would enjoy the company.”

“Well, it’s just for one night, and if you promise to take me to see J.J. early tomorrow morning, I’ll come with you.”

Ryan and Gary left the hospital to go to Ryan's house. As they approached Ryan's house, Gary could see just how magnificent this house was. It was larger than any house he had ever seen. Ryan led Gary into the house, and Gary thought that he was in heaven. The downstairs living room area had really expensive-looking couches and coffee tables that he had only seen in magazines and on TV. And upstairs there was a game room that had all kinds of games in it: a pool table, ping pong table, arcade games, a slot machine, several video game units with all sorts of video games—every type of game that a child would want to play. The bathrooms were as large as one of the bedrooms that he and some of the other abandoned children slept in at the orphanage. And, of course, the bedrooms were as large as the living room area downstairs. Up at the very top of the house, there was an attic room that had a skylight window where the stars shone through at night. Also in the attic were a couch, a bed, and a nightstand with a lamp on it. The room seemed nice and quiet, so Gary thought he would ask to sleep in this room.

“So, Gary, how do you like my house?”

“It's really big. I've never seen anything like it.”

“Now that you've seen the whole house, which bedroom would you like to sleep in?”

“If it's okay with you, I would like to sleep in the attic. I like the ceiling that has the view of the sky, and I'm not really sleepy right now, so I can do some stargazing until I go to sleep.”

“There are some books about the stars in that old trunk over in the corner, just in case you get curious about the stars you're gazing at. By the way, are you hungry? There's plenty to eat in the refrigerator downstairs. You could make yourself a sandwich and bring it up here to the attic.”

“I'm not really hungry right now, Doc, but thanks anyway. I'm still worried about J.J. She's all alone in that hospital room tonight. I was the one who talked her into leaving the orphanage, and I don't want her to think that I deserted her.”

“Why did you leave the orphanage?”

“I wanted to leave because I believe that my real parents are still alive. I found out that the people who raised me were not my

real parents. I saw this television program recently about a family whose son has been missing for a long time, and he would be about my age by now. I thought maybe I could find that family and see if I was their long-lost son.”

“You know that is a long shot, Gary.”

“I know. But maybe the family will like me and J.J. and take us in anyway. Maybe they’ll give us jobs. They look like they have lots of money. I wouldn’t even mind being treated like one of their servants. They probably get paid very well.”

“Well, we can talk more about this in the morning. And we also need to let the orphanage know that you and J.J. are all right. Right now, I’m going to make myself a snack and go to bed. This has been a long night for me, too. Good night, Gary.”

“Good night, Doc. See you in the morning.”

Gary turned down the bed and took off his clothing down to his underwear. He lay down on his back and looked up at the stars. *The sky sure is pretty tonight*, Gary thought to himself. He decided to look in one of the star books in the trunk to see if he could figure out the arrangement in the sky.

As Gary was looking through the trunk, he stumbled across an old photograph book. The pictures were of a young family: a mother, father, brother, sister, and a baby. The writing underneath the picture said, “Mom, Dad, Ryan, Sarah, and baby Gary.” *Baby Gary*, he thought to himself. *No, it’s just a coincidence.* Some of the later pages had newspaper clippings of a search for a missing baby. As Gary read the articles, he discovered it was the baby, Gary. Could it be? He couldn’t wait to ask Dr. Ryan in the morning. *Wait a minute*, Gary thought, *what did Dr. Ryan say his last name was? Could he be part of the Whitlaw family that I saw on television?*

Gary ran down the stairs and searched through all the bedrooms until he found Dr. Ryan’s bedroom. He knocked on the closed door. “Doc, are you in there? It’s me, Gary. I need to ask you a question.”

“Huh? Gary? OK, I’ll be right there. Give me a minute.” Dr. Ryan soon opened the door. He was in his pajamas and robe. “Is anything wrong?”

“What did you say your last name was?”

“It’s Whitlaw. Why did you need to know that right this minute?”

“Because I think we’re related. I was looking for some of those star books that you mentioned, and I found this photo album. It had a picture of your family in it. You had a baby brother named Gray that ended up missing. Did you ever find him?”

“No, we never did. The authorities tried to tell us that he was dead, but my mother has always believed he is alive, even to this day.”

“How old would he be now?”

“Gary would be almost eighteen years old. He was not quite a year old when the accident happened.”

“I am almost eighteen years old. And I don’t know who my parents are. And, if the two of us were to look into a mirror together, you would see that we resemble each other a lot.”

Dr. Ryan couldn’t believe his ears. After all these years—to finally find his long-lost baby brother! He grabbed Gary’s hand and pulled him toward the mirror in his bedroom. Sure enough, when he took a good look at himself and Gary in the mirror, he found a striking resemblance. *I’ll have to call my parents and Sarah and break this news to them, Dr. Ryan thought. But what if he’s really not my brother Gary? How will we know? Surely there are DNA tests that can be run to help us figure this out. It would be great if we could finally reunite with “baby” Gary and put the years of sadness behind us.*

Since neither Ryan nor Gary could sleep after Gary’s discovery, they spent the rest of the night talking. Gary told Ryan what life was like for him and J.J. at the orphanage, and Ryan told Gary what his and his twin sister Sarah’s lives were like without their baby brother. Ryan decided that he would break the news to his sister Sarah first, and then after they were pretty sure that Gary really was their brother, he would tell his parents.

Morning arrived more rapidly than Gary and Ryan had expected. Each of them showered and dressed, and Ryan loaned Gary some clean clothes to wear. They ate a quick breakfast and drove back to the hospital to see about J.J. When they got there, J.J. had just finished breakfast, and the doctors and nurses were

waiting for Dr. Ryan to arrive to decide what to do about her release.

Gary had told Dr. Ryan the name of the orphanage where he and Jena stayed, and Dr. Ryan called Mrs. King, the orphanage director. Dr. Ryan explained what had happened, and he and Mrs. King agreed that Ryan would take care of them until Jena was well enough to return to the orphanage. Ryan did not tell Mrs. King about his and Gary's possible family link. He wanted to wait until he was certain that Gary was his brother.

Jena left the hospital with Gary and Dr. Ryan, and all of them returned to Dr. Ryan's house. After they arrived there, Ryan went upstairs to his room to call his sister, Sarah, while Gary and J.J. talked about what had happened with Gary and Ryan the previous night.

"But Gary, what will happen to me if you find out that these people are your family? They might send me back to the orphanage. They would have no reason to keep me, too."

"J.J., if they throw you out, I'll leave with you. You and I are best friends, and I wouldn't let anything bad happen to you. We're both almost eighteen. We could get jobs and try to get a place of our own."

"We'll see. I should still probably go back to the orphanage. In the meantime, I'm still kind of tired. I think I'll take a little nap."

Dr. Ryan let J.J. stay in the bedroom that his niece, Mimi, usually stayed in while she was visiting him. He had already arranged with Sarah, who was married and lived in Detroit, for her and Mimi to come and meet Gary.

Sarah and Mimi came to visit the next day, and Dr. Ryan picked them up from the airport. Ryan introduced Sarah and Mimi to Gary and J.J. and helped them get settled in the guest rooms. Sarah was very excited to meet Gary, but Mimi was just a little jealous. Mimi usually got all of her uncle's attention, and this day he was a little preoccupied.

"I just want you to know," Mimi told Jena and Gary, "that the room you're staying in is *my* room. When I'm here, I am the boss

and my uncle lets me do whatever I want. So you'll have to do what I say, got it?"

"Mimi! You should be nice to Uncle Ryan's guests. That is no way to act."

"I'm sorry, Mommy. I just wanted to let them know that I'm Uncle Ryan's favorite niece."

"You're my *only* niece," Ryan said.

Ryan and Sarah talked most of the day. They also talked with Gary. They decided to schedule the DNA test that Gary would need to take to determine whether he was really their brother. Gary was going to have the tests done the next day, and Dr. Ryan would use his influence to get the test results quickly.

The next day came and went very fast. Gary had the DNA test done, and the hospital said it could get the results for Ryan and Sara by the next day. Gary, Ryan, and Sarah were very anxious for the results.

While they were all eating breakfast the following morning, the phone rang. Ryan answered it. "Hello, this is Dr. Ryan Whitlaw."

"Dr. Whitlaw, we have the results of the DNA test for you."

"What did you find out?"

"This young man, Gary, has DNA that is very similar to yours and your sister's. This young man is probably your long-lost brother."

"Thank you for the info. We'll let him know." Ryan hung up the phone.

"Well, what did they say?" Gary wanted to know.

"Sorry, Gary. The results are in. I guess you're not—an orphan. You are our brother!"

Gary didn't know what to do. So many emotions were running through his mind. All of a sudden he got up, walked over to Ryan, and gave him a big hug. "I finally have a family! I always knew I had a family somewhere that loved me."

"Now Sarah and I need to call our parents and tell them the good news," Ryan said.

Ryan and Sarah talked to their parents, and their parents made arrangements for a private jet to bring all of them—Ryan, Sarah,

Mimi, Gary, and J.J.—to New York. They were going to leave the next day, and they would all stay in the Whitlaw’s huge apartment.

The plane ride seemed to last forever. Even though it was the first time Gary had ridden in a plane, his mind wasn’t concentrating on the plane ride. He was thinking about meeting his parents. *Do they still love me? Will they want me to stay with them? What if they don’t want me? Will I have to go back to the orphanage?*

At the airport in New York, the Whitlaws were also waiting with anticipation. Mrs. Whitlaw had been through several boxes of Kleenex since receiving the news from Ryan that her baby son, Gary, had been found, and he was almost a grown man. She had missed all of his childhood years, and worse, he had had to live them in an orphanage! How could she make it up to Gary for all of those years that they were apart?

The plane finally landed, and everyone got off. When Gary got off the plane, Mrs. Whitlaw immediately saw the resemblance to his older brother, Ryan. She wanted to run up to him and give him a great big hug, but she waited.

Ryan walked Gary over to Mr. and Mrs. Whitlaw. “Mom, Dad, this is Gary. Gary, this is Mom and Dad. They are very happy to see you again.”

“Hi,” Gary said shyly.

Mrs. Whitlaw couldn’t resist the urge any longer. She grabbed Gary and held him tight. “I’ve missed you so much. You don’t know how many nights I cried myself to sleep thinking about you. I always knew that you were alive. I never gave up hope.”

Gary started crying along with his mother. “All my dreams are coming true, too. I had always hoped that I would find my parents. And what’s even better, I have a brother, sister, and niece, too. My only other wish is that you can find a place for J.J. here, too.”

“I’ve been thinking about that, Gary,” J.J. said. “I think that I should go back to the orphanage. I’m almost eighteen years old now, and I could help Mrs. King with the younger children.”

“But J.J., I’ll miss you so much. You’re my best friend, and we’ve been together so long.”

“I think I can help you with that,” Mr. Whitlaw said. “We’ll donate some computers to the orphanage so that you and J.J. can keep in touch with each other through the Internet. And J.J. is welcome to call you collect any time she wants to, Gary. And, of course, you can visit each other from time to time.”

J.J. did go back to California and work at the orphanage with Mrs. King. But she and Gary continued to be best friends, and they talked to each other constantly on the Internet. Gary eventually became an author and wrote a book about his experiences. The book was published and made the best-seller list. But nothing could top the feeling that Gary had about finding his family. He was truly *home again*.

The Snowboard Accident

*When the chairlift stops on the last ski run of the day, three resourceful boys think nothing of leaping to the snow. But in **THE SNOWBOARD ACCIDENT** by **Pat C. Rooney**, an avalanche occurs while they're on the mountain—and that is just the beginning of the boys' troubles.*

It was a very cold night when Patrick, Shaun, and Alex were sitting on the chairlift at the biggest mountain in Colorado. They were very close to the top, when the chair lift stopped! It was the last run of the night. There was no one behind them. They waited for fifteen minutes for the chair lift to start again, then they waited thirty minutes.

Since they were so close to the top, they finally decided to jump. Alex put on his skies, jumped first, and landed. All of a sudden the chair lift slid back. Patrick jumped off as fast as he could. The lift went back further and didn't stop. Shaun jumped and front flipped into the soft, powdery snow. It was already 10:30 P.M. and pitch black outside.

Luckily they each had a tent in their backpacks. They decided to use Alex's tent. Patrick said, "Let's go to bed."

Around 2:30 in the morning, there was a rumble and then an avalanche! They rolled down the hill and got stuck about one foot under the snow. Luckily none of the snow got in the tent, but the tent was smashed.

In about ten minutes, two of the three were close to passing out when they heard sniffing noises. They mumbled and now the search and rescue team was digging. The team found the teens, but for some strange reason they put the kids on the sleds and brought them *up* the mountain. Their rescuers put them in the

house the ski patrol stayed at in the backcountry, then left. By the morning, the boys were almost in mint condition.

The boys started to get suspicious of their rescuers when they saw big guns and knives. Now the ski patrol rescuers returned. They tied the boys to chairs and left again, but they hid the skis and snowboards in the basement of the hut. There were stolen skis and snowboards everywhere in the hut. The “ski patrollers” were thieves!

Patrick had a snowboard tool in his pocket that he had forgotten about because he was too worried. Alex said, “Pat, don’t you have that tool in your pocket?”

Patrick said, “Yeah!” He got it out and sort of screwed it into the rope by pressing on it. He freed himself, and then freed Shaun. While he was working on Alex’s string the doorknob turned. Just in time, he got Alex free and they all ran down to the basement and didn’t turn the lights on.

The door opened and the bad guys didn’t sound too happy. They searched the basement and found the skis and snowboards. The basement door opened and one bad guy ran down the stairs. He opened the basement door and the bad guy said to one of his partners, “Get on the skis. We don’t want those kids talking about what they saw in the hut.”

The kids jumped out of the window and skied down to the highway, but it was one mile away. The bad guy was behind them. It would take them at least twenty minutes to get down. They couldn’t even see the highway because it was so far away.

They were going as fast as they could, and Patrick looked back. Shaun and the bad guy were nowhere to be found. Through their walkie-talkies Alex and Patrick said together, “Where’s Shaun and the bad guy?” They decided to keep going and get help.

But the bad guy in the woods was really chasing Shaun. All of a sudden Shaun saw a cliff and said to himself, “Jump it; the bad guy won’t.” And that’s just what he did. Shaun decided to add a little of his own touch to it so he did a Mctwist and landed it. His friends also saw him land it! But he wasn’t right about the other thing, because the bad guy took the jump and landed it, too.

His friends decided to help him because he had been on the run from the bad guy for at least two thousand feet now. They got as close as they could to the bad guy and yelled out something dumb to him. He looked back at them and fell down!

Now they could see the lodge because they figured out that Shaun went into the woods, which would take them back to the lodge.

But there is one terribly bad thing. The avalanche had hit the lodge and pretty much covered it up. In ten minutes they got to the lodge and looked for their parents. They were nowhere to be found. Alex yelled, “Mom!” and then heard a voice. They dug down and everybody in the lodge was there!

They helped them get out. The bad guys were found, the lodge was fixed up, and no one was hurt. The families were very happy.

One Great Life...I Guess

ONE GREAT LIFE...I GUESS, by *Sammi Small*, is the story of the daughter of a wealthy celebrity—or is it? When the mother's wealth disappears, Riley's life changes drastically—or does it?

My name is Riley. My mom, Sherry, is a big time actress. She always takes me with her for her red carpet events. My mom and I have a really close relationship.

Of course I have a dad, Steve. He is never home because of his job. Oh, and my annoying brother doesn't live with us. He is different from the family. He doesn't like all of the fame. He lives with his very best friend and pretends not to be part of the family, unless he needs money, of course!

My house is huge. I call it my princess mansion. It is so glamorous. I think everyone at my school is jealous of me except for my friends, because they love me for who I am and not for money. I have a gorgeous room. It's pink and white, just like a real princess's room.

A lot of people think I am gorgeous, so I am going to be a model when I'm older, although my mom wants me to be a singer. I mean, I have a good voice, too!

"Go to bed, hun. We have a big day ahead of us," my mother yelled from downstairs.

"Ok, Mom...goodnight, I love you," I told her.

"Love you, too!" my mom said nicely.

I got up at 8:00 and couldn't go back to bed. Only Phil, our cook, was up. He made me pancakes, then I went back to bed and woke up at 11:15. "Riley, you only have 20 minutes to get ready. You woke up way too late," my mom screamed, half tired.

“Ok, I will be ready soon,” I told my mom. I got ready to go pick out my outfit for the red carpet. I couldn’t wait!

We got to the mall and I saw the prettiest dress ever. It was a tube top dress from Bebe. It was black with pink ribbon around the top of it. My mom let me buy the dress just as long as I could help her find a dress. I found a dress for my mom, but she said she couldn’t buy it because Jennifer Lopez already wore it. After an hour or so walking around Bebe, we saw a really cute halter dress with a slit at the bottom right corner.

We went to the cash register to buy our dresses. I couldn’t wait to buy our shoes to go with our dresses. The lady at the register told us the amount as my mom was looking for her credit card. She couldn’t find it, so she looked for money in her wallet, which was nowhere to be found, either. We put the dresses on hold and went home to get the credit card.

At home, my mom searched for her credit card without success. We looked for money, but there was none. We went to the bank and there was no money in our bank account. My mom called the police to tell them we had been robbed. They said they would try to find the robber.

My mom didn’t have her acting career for a while. She worked at a bank in Hollywood for two months or so....

“Abbh....what was that?” I screamed during class.

“What is your problem? Come on, we have to get to our next class,” my friend yelled.

“Ok....”

That was the most amazing yet crazy daydream yet. But am I really poor?

Winning It All

*During summer football camp, two friends find that hard work and fun go hand in hand in **WINNING IT ALL**, by **Ron Wexler**.*

The bell at Roswell Elementary rang for the last time in the school year. “School is out—summer break is here!” shouted Chris to his best friend, Blake. The two boys had been together since first grade, and they just graduated from fifth grade in Mrs. Smith’s class.

Chris and Blake lived in the same neighborhood and rode the same bus to school every day. They had many things they liked doing together, such as playing video games, playing ball, and riding roller blades. They were both nervous waiting for summer to come so they could spend some time together at camp.

When Chris got off the school bus on his way to the front door of his house, he picked up the mail. Most of the mail items were magazines and bills mailed to his parents. But then, he noticed that one of the envelopes had his name on it. It was sent from a football camp that he and his friend Blake tried out for a few months earlier. Chris was really excited and nervous to open the letter to see if he had made the summer camp team. He was hoping to get in because it would be a great challenge to play with other kids on a team.

When he opened the letter, he noticed right away that on the top it said in bold letters: “Congratulations—you have made the team!” The letter also included some other details about the camp team, but Chris was too excited to go on reading it. He right away reached for the phone and called Blake. “Blake—great news,” said Chris. “I made the summer camp football team!” Blake said that

he also just got a letter from the camp telling him that he made the team as well.

Camp was going to start in three days. Both boys got really busy getting ready for the camp. They bought the football gear, and prepared their bags for the big day.

The morning of the first day of camp came, and they left the house early. Chris and Blake were really nervous about meeting their coaches and teammates, but also excited to go to camp. On the way to the camp, they passed by some farms and apple orchards. Camp was right past the apple orchard in an old school far away from the city.

At camp, most of the kids looked excited about the camp, just like Chris and Blake were. The coaches gathered all the kids and told them the rules of the camp, and right after, they were all ready for the first practice. The practice went great for Chris, but not for Blake, because he hated running. The practice was much harder than the two boys expected. In fact, it was almost like boot camp. At the end of practice the coach announced that the name of their team would be the Bengals, and the first game would be the next day at noon, sharp. "Don't be late!" he shouted in a deep and scary voice.

Back home, Chris and Blake were really worn-out. They were both talking about how tiring practice was on the hot day. They were both looking forward to their first game at camp, but they knew that they would have to practice hard for every game.

On the day of the first game, the coach told the players to try their hardest. He said to the team, "Listen up, Bengals: There are only four games we have to win to get to the championship game. And we can all do it as a team!" Chris and Blake knew that the challenge was great, but with their teammates they were ready to go out and do their best.

The score in the game was close, and both teams were playing hard. All the parents were standing on their feet and rooting for their favorite team. The Bengals won their first game.

The next few days went by fast. The kids were practicing and playing games among themselves. The Bengals turned out to be the best team in camp. For the rest of the camp they won every

game. They were finally ready for the final game—*The Five Star Championship Game!*

The championship game would be played between the Bengals and the Eagles. On the day of the game, the camp director talked to both teams, saying how proud he was seeing their teamwork and loyalty. Chris and Blake went to the sidelines one more time so that their parents could wish them good luck.

The Bengals fell behind during the first half of the game. At half time the coach told the team how proud he was with their teamwork all summer, but now was not the time to slack off. Blake got up and told the kids on his team that they could win the game if they played harder, and they should not give up now.

During the second half, the Bengals came back and won the game, 20 to 17. Right after the game the whole team and their families had a party in the school gym right next to the field. Chris and Blake were really happy to be part of their team. They realized that all that hard work and playing as a team had finally paid off.

Fantastic!

How I Did Not Make This Story

*Anyone who has been teaching for a while thinks he or she has heard every excuse in the book. But **HOW I DID NOT MAKE THIS STORY**, by **Eliza Bauer**, presents a unique excuse, written specifically for this book.*

“Mom, I don’t want to write a story. I don’t want to be in a book! I don’t need any more homework!” Eliza screamed as she ran to her room.

“I want you to be in the book. It will remind you and your friends about this year!” Eliza’s mom, known as Mom, screamed. Meanwhile, in the room next to Eliza’s, there was someone trying to do homework in peace.

“Shut up! I’m trying to do homework!” A.J. yelled.

But Eliza knew her brother was pretending to be Aragorn and waving a stick around. “Maybe I will write a story about him,” thought Eliza. “‘My Stupid Brother,’ by Eliza Bauer.”

The next day at school, Eliza was bored as usual, but something was happening she didn’t know. Bob, the evil magician, was thinking evil thoughts. “I, Bob the Magician, am thinking evil thoughts! Ha, ha, ha! Let’s see who my next victim will be. Grizzly bears will now attack Eliza Bauer, even though I don’t know why!”

“*Eliza!* Are you awake?” Mr. Fisher yelled over the rest of the crazy class.

“ROOAARR!”

“Eliza, go to the office! That was inappropriate.”

“ROOOOOOAAAAARRR!”

“Now, Eliza, that is the last...aaaaabbb!” Mr. Fisher screamed as a hundred grizzly bears ran up to the window.

“Ruuuuuuu!” screamed Adam.

Everyone ran to the door, but stopped when they saw a sign the bears were holding up. “Give us Eliza,” everyone read in unison. Then began the looking. Everyone was looking for Eliza so they could throw her out the window to the grizzly bears. But it was too late. Eliza was already on the run. She was trying to find a good place to hide.

Now everyone was running. The word got out that bears wanted Eliza.

Meanwhile at the police station, the racket had gone out. “Grizzly bears want Eliza Bauer. Man, people will do anything these days. Well, we are too busy eating donuts, so we can’t help.” The police officers were way too busy eating donuts.

Soon, even Eliza’s mom knew that bears were after her daughter. “My daughter is being chased by bears! Nooooo!” Mom sobbed. “Whoever did this is in big trouble!”

Bob the Magician was now, for some unknown reason, thinking good thoughts. “I, Bob the Magician, am not thinking bad thoughts anymore. I will now send a billion butterflies after Eliza!”

Everyone was looking for Eliza. But everyone stopped as the sky turned black with a billion things flying overhead. Butterflies were coming to save Eliza! Suddenly, Eliza was picked out of her tree by the butterflies, and carried to Hawaii.

“So, Mr. Fisher, that is why my story is not done!” Eliza said. “You can see my tan!”

“You are excused,” Mr. Fisher said while limping to his chair (he had gotten a bad bite from a butterfly).

Meanwhile, Bob just decided to not be a magician, and settled down and retired with his butterflies and grizzly bears and went to Florida. Bob became a major adopter of crocodiles and alligators.

The End

(But not really. I’m just sick of typing)

Rion

*These are dark times in the kingdom of Rion, but one young man aims to change that. The story of how Amon must battle the forces of evil and avenge his father's murder is told by **Frederick Carington** in **RION**.*

Anor was a famous war general of Rion. He was leading a resistance of troops against Baranone. Baranone was a sinister mutant who was bent on controlling the whole world. He commanded a castle from which he wreaked havoc throughout the land. Anor defeated Baranone in a battle, but Baranone still remained captain of the castle.

That night, Anor was murdered by Baranone's minions, leaving behind an infant son. Anor's son, Amon, has devoted his life to finding the person who assassinated his father.

"Charge!" yelled Amon. Rion was leading another assault on Londonore. Amon thought that the king of Londonore, a neighboring town, had sent the assassins who murdered Anor. Suddenly the sky turned dark, and to the east over the hill Amon saw packs of demons, deformed mutants and dragons.

Amon's troops were forced back to Rion where they suffered many attacks of goblin hordes. Amon captured a goblin hostage and tortured him until he confessed that he had been sent by Baranone. Immediately, Amon realized that it wasn't Londonore who had murdered his father. It was Baranone. Baranone's castle

was located in Farlin. Farlin is in the middle of a mountain range. Amon still had one question: Why did Baranone do it?

Amon and his men set out for Farlin. They had to go through Zardong Forest. Zardong Forest was known for mysterious disappearances, so he had to take extra precautions. They asked Londonore for aid. Londonore would give them aid only if they promised not to destroy their town anymore. They received 3,000 infantry, adding to their 7,000 infantry and 500 archers.

Once they reached Zardong Forest, they were stunned by its grace. The trees were tall and thick with bushy leaves. When they got deeper into the forest, absolutely no light shone through the top of the trees.

At that moment, they heard rustling nearby. Out of nowhere, centaurs were surrounding them. Some had palomino coats and some were just white. They were holding bows cocked back. They had swords and shields hanging on their torsos.

One of the centaurs spoke out, "Who are you, and why do you trespass in Zardong Forest?" He was obviously the commander. He had beautiful long black hair that swayed in the wind.

"We are seeking aid in our battle, and permission to pass through Zardong Forest. I am Amon of Rion. Baranone, the king of Farlin, sent out assassins who murdered my father, Anor, the respected war general."

Right then, a younger centaur stumbled through the brush. "What's going on here?"

"My Lord, why are you out here?" asked the centaur commander. "You might be in grave danger. This is Amon, son of Anor, from Rion. He is requesting aid, and permission to pass through with his army."

The King said, "He may pass through, and you can lead your cavalry so he may defeat Baranone."

"How did you know I was fighting . . .? Never mind. You must have overheard. Thank you, my Lord," Amon said with gratitude.

Amon set off for Farlin with 10,000 infantry, 700 centaur cavalry and 500 archers. At dawn they made their stand against

Farlin. The 10,000 infantry emerged from the shadows of Zardong Forest and approached the hill that lay between them and the northern gates of the castle. They were led by Amon, and they were lined up farther than the eye could see. The archers were dispatched to the east and west to attack both sides of the fortress. The centaurs looped around south to attack the southern gates.

Once the infantry got to the bottom of the hill, the sun was glimmering off their armor and swords. As they approached the castle gates, the 700 cavalry charged down the hills toward the southern gate. The centaurs' hair was streaming behind them in the wind. Their hooves crunched on the dewy grass and mud flew over their torsos. Once they reached the southern gates, the archers fired. Arrows were flying every which way. The goblins in the castle responded with their own arrows. The castle was strong and the battle raged on all day.

On the second day the southern gates were breached. The centaurs' continuous pounding finally broke the gates. The centaurs charged in, their spears flying furiously at the goblins. The goblins fled to the center keep. The centaurs swept around the outer wall of the castle, killing all the goblins they found. The infantry barged through the northern gates and began attacking the keep.

On the third day all the remaining goblins were in the keep. They were surrounded by Amon's troops. The centaurs beat on the doors. The archers shot at the windows. The infantry tried desperately to throw rocks into the keep. The siege carried on throughout the morning. Suddenly, the centaurs hooves and the infantry's rocks knocked down the gates. Amon's infantry stormed in, slaughtering countless goblins.

The battle lasted for three days. Amon proved victorious. Baranone was killed in battle. The casualties were great, especially for the infantry. After the battle, Amon's forces departed for home. Amon followed the centaurs back to Zardong Forest to talk to the king. "Thank you so much for your aid in my battle," said Amon.

“Don’t worry. It was our pleasure,” said the king. “My father was also murdered by goblins. I felt your pain. That is why I let you pass and gave you aid.”

“Thank you so much. I don’t know how I can ever repay you,” said Amon with gratitude. There was a bond between the young centaur king and Amon. They had both lost their fathers to goblins. They became friends and allies.

Amon journeyed off to Londonore. “I’m so sorry, King,” said Amon. “We had false information that led us to believe that you murdered my father.”

“I’ve captured goblins myself, and I understand about false information,” said the King. “Thank you for beating him. He was becoming a real pest.” Amon and the king of Londonore signed a peace treaty vowing never to attack each other again. The king sent an escort to accompany Amon home. The three provinces, Rion, Londonore and Zardong, made an oath of peace with one another. Amon lived a peaceful life, knowing that he had avenged his father’s death.

The Magic Malady

*Wait a minute! Could all of those Harry Potter books actually be biographies? J.K. Rowling has some explaining to do in **THE MAGIC MALADY**, by **Kathryn E. Couger**.*

Rita Skeeter, ex-reporter for the *Daily Prophet*, rushed into a muggle nail shop for her usual banana-colored nail.

“The usual nail color, Rita, darling?” asked a plump lady with blue hair.

“Yes, Suzan, the usual color!” Rita said with a lively smile. She loved the nail-shop gossip almost as much as she had loved bus gossip when she grew up with her muggle parents.

As Rita sat down, she heard a woman say to her daughter who was waiting patiently for her mom to get her hair permed, “Bethany Timmis, you sit down right now, and I’ll read to you that book that Nanny got you, no matter how much you hate this series.”

“Okay, Mom,” the girl said, while pulling out a gigantic blue book that had metallic-like letters that flashed in the light:

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

Rita felt her heart stop, and her breathing got very slow. Could it be the same Harry Potter as the one who was at Hogwarts right now? No, it couldn’t be! Harry isn’t that stupid.

“Sweetie, will ya please stop shakin’ ya hands? It’s annoyin’ me!” said the “new” woman who had never done Rita’s hands before.

“Oh, *my gosh*, will you look at the time? It is almost 12:00. I have to meet someone for lunch!” Rita was up and out of the door in two seconds. She really didn’t have to meet someone for lunch, but she had to have a reason to get out of that place. *Oh no*, she thought to

herself as she ran into the nearest bookstore. "I hope that that was just a phony, about a different Harry Potter!" she mumbled to herself.

She finally made it to the "Books on Magic" aisle (this was a very detailed bookstore; it even had aisles for every type of cheese!). As she walked, she saw plenty of books, but not the Harry Potter series. *Oh no*, she thought to herself. Rita ran up to a man with the bookstore logo on his shirt and asked, "Do you happen to have any Harry Potter books in the storage area?"

"Uh, yeah, I think so... I'll go back there and check." A few minutes later he popped out carrying what Rita thought was what this entire store had in storage. "We have, like, hardcover, soft cover, squishy cover, cyber cover and, uh...special edition!"

Rita sighed. "The hardcover series would be fine, thanks!"

She picked up all the books in the series and ran for the cash register. The woman there was wearing a flowery dress, made from a curtain; Rita knew at once that during her free time she watched soap operas.

"Would you like to purchase that series, Dear?" asked the woman in a nasally voice. Rita nodded serenely. *How slow were muggles?*

"How about that gift card, Hun?"

"Um, not today; I am in a bit of a hurry," babbled Rita.

"Fine, then I guess it would be \$73.78 with tax."

That was a lot for a stupid series of books. But Rita had to get out of this place as soon as possible, so she ignored the price and charged it on her muggle credit card for special use.

Rita still had some errands to run. Dinner doesn't buy itself, you know!

Once the shops were far from sight, Rita apparated to her apartment in Diagon Alley. A very cheap apartment it was, too, I might add. (It was on top of a store that sold dung.) And she started on those books. The first one, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, took her about three hours to read (it took her so long because she flinched every single time they mentioned Voldemort's name, and if you have read the first book, you know that they mention Voldemort's name *a lot* of times). Then she started on the second book.

During the time she was learning all of Harry Potter's secrets, her heart grew kinder towards him. So this was what Harry Potter had to deal with every single day in his first and second years at Hogwarts!

After the clock struck two in the morning, she felt weary and went to bed. In the morning she woke up, made a quick cup of coffee, and, being unemployed, read the rest of the Harry Potter books. She herself was mentioned in these books once or twice, and knowing that these tidbits were true, she had to suspect that the rest of the stories were true, also.

Rita sighed as she opened her door and smelled the fresh smell of dung—a very unpleasant smell to smell first thing in the morning. As she walked down the steps and opened the door to the Dung Store, the elderly witch at the counter greeted her with a grunt. It reminded Rita very much so of how Vernon Dursley had greeted Harry almost every morning. Rita felt pity on Harry just this once, though.

Rita did her daily routines, and then ate dinner. Before she went to bed, she thought about the Harry Potter books. Who should she tell? Rita wondered about this for a while, and then she fell asleep. She was woken up in the middle of the night by a strange noise, like a popping noise. Rita opened her eyes to find something glowing above her bed.

“Boo... I'm the ghost of Siriusness! I tell you the choices in your life and what you should follow! I come in peace!” The ghost had a gaunt face and reminded Rita of someone that she could not place.

“Why are you here?” asked Rita suspiciously. “Have I seen you before?”

“You might have...,” said the ghost. *“For I am Sirius Black!”*

“You mean that you're the great master of evil?” asked Rita, getting quite scared now.

“No, that is a common misconception. I am Sirius Black, Harry Potter's godfather,” said Sirius's ghost.

“Ah, and how are you supposed to make me believe that you didn't do those horrible deeds?” asked Rita.

“Well... that is a quite long story! A bit too long to tell right now, and anyway, I am here to show you what you should do, and what should happen if you don't do what I tell you to do!” said Sirius.

“*What?*” All that babbling had confused Rita.

“To put it simply, do what I say, or face the consequences,” said Sirius.

“Okay, so tell me what to do!” said Rita.

“Well, first you shall find the Minister of Magic and tell him what has happened. Next, you shall find J.K. Rowling and stop her from her bad doings. And third, you will make me a bologna sandwich, with extra mayo,” Said Sirius.

“Seriously?” asked Rita.

“*I am the ghost of Siriusness!*” boomed Sirius. “Just kidding about the last one. But all the rest are Sirius!”

“Okay, will you please go away now? *I am trying to sleep!*” said Rita.

“Ah...yes! But remember: *Don't be* disrupted by your sleep! Teeheeeheeee!”

“Whaa... does that mea...?” Rita was interrupted by a small pop and Sirius the ghost disappeared.

“Whatever,” Rita mumbled to herself, as she remembered how tired she was and fell asleep.

* * *

Rita woke up the next morning from a terrible dream. All these muggles had taken over the witch and wizard towns and had the inhabitants as their slaves. When she had fully awakened, she found a note on her bedside table that read:

This is what will happen if you don't do what I told you to do!

Rita read the note over again and realized (even with her groggy head) whom it was from. Rita quickly got dressed, longing to go back to those books to start reading them a second time, but she knew that she had to see the Minister of Magic first.

As she got outside, she soon saw that it was a gray day like most in England. She apparated to the Ministry building. It was quite a big building. Rita had been here often, being that she had worked for the *Daily Prophet*. Soon after she entered the building she saw the woman at the front desk and asked, “May I please see Cornelius Fudge?”

“One second, please,” said the woman, and she sent a memo up to the Minister of Magic.

A short, stout man in a pinstriped suit, hat included, came bounding down the hallway. “Ah! Rita, I haven’t seen you around here for a while.”

“Minister, I have something very important to show you!” said Rita urgently.

“Yes, yes, Rita; let’s just go into the meeting room over here.” He gestured to the chamber-like hallway on the right, so Rita followed him down the hallway.

They turned into a candlelit room and Rita brought out the book series of Harry Potter. Fudge glanced down at the books on the table and his beady eyes bulged out so far that Rita wouldn’t have been surprised if they had come out of his head at that second.

“Wha...?” Fudge couldn’t find his voice for a minute after the shock of seeing the books on the table. “Is this some sort of trick, Rita?”

“Oh, no, minister. I found this series of books in a book store back in Berlin yesterday. I read the whole series last night. And you probably won’t believe this, but it was that Squib* J.K. Rowling who wrote this series! She is that poor one who lives in Scotland! We have to go and find her really quickly!”

“Yes, that would be the logical thing to do here,” said Fudge, smartly puffing out of his pipe.

“Then we’re off!” said Rita. And with a swish of her cloak she was off.

Fudge, soon muttering under his breath, “Why can’t we do this later?” was off, too.

* * *

They appeared in a dark, large room at the end of a dank corridor that smelled like mildew.

“It seems as if we’re in a mansion,” squeaked a terrified Rita.

* **Squib:** a non-magical creature with magical parents.

“Yes, the basement of a mansion. Let’s check out what is up the stairs!”

They crept up the steps and gasped at what they saw. It was a gigantic great-hall, and it had marble floors with gold crown molding and base molding. They looked up and saw giant silver-lined portraits of J.K herself. And there was a gigantic gold chair!

“Jeez, I wouldn’t want to sit in that chair; it would hurt my tush!” said Fudge happily.

“It looks like the Vanderbilt estate!” Rita gasped.

“So it does, so it does,” said Fudge excitedly.

“*Who is here?*” asked a cold, strict voice from above.

“Erm... well, we are actually here to see J.K.,” said Rita, now trembling.

“And who are you?” asked the cold voice again.

“Well...erm... I am Rita Skeeter and this is... er...,” Rita trailed off.

“Cornelius Fudge! Minister of Magic!” said Fudge ecstatically.

“Oh... well, if you’re the minister of something, then I guess you can come in to see J.K.,” said the voice, whose owner was now coming down the steps. She looked stricter than anyone that you would ever want to meet, even in her maid costume. “I’ll go upstairs then and get her. You can stay on the couch and eat a crumpet if you want.”

“Okay” said Rita, regaining her voice.

They heard thumping up the stairs, a small yell, and only one thumping sound coming down the steps.

“Ahhh, *yes!* So it *is* you, Cornelius!” said J.K Rowling, coming from the corridor on the left of the room.

“Yes, J.K, it is me, and Rita and I would like a word with you about your making of the Harry Potter series.”

J.K. Rowling’s smile vanished and she suddenly looked grave. “In what way would you like to talk about it, Cornelius?”

“Well, the way you wrote the books.... Why did you make them true? Even if you are a Squib, there is no reason that we shouldn’t send you to Askaban, the wizarding jail!”

“Well, the thing is, I am not really a Squib...” said J.K. nervously.

“You are not a witch or wizard; how could you not be a Squib?” asked Fudge. Rita was just perplexed with this whole conversation. It sounded like a whole lot of droning on and on for her.

“Well, I have just recently discovered this new ability. I am a metamorphic!” said J.K., turning her hair short, blond, and curly.

“*Oh my*, you really *are* metamorphic!” Rita yelped, nearly falling off of her chair.

Fudge seemed lost for words. “But J.K., why did you write the books? You seem to have enough power and glory right now... *don't you?*” Fudge was getting madder by the second, and J.K. seemed to sense his anger, for she was backing away.

“You see, Fudge, this is all a misunderstanding! I wrote the books to help business! No muggle actually believes this stuff! They just buy the books for a good read, and the reason that I made the books was so I could help my parents. They're neighbors with the Weasleys, you know, in a very poor community, and they don't have very much money themselves, so I had to help them. You see, I am not a very good writer in the first place, but if I write in a muggle book, and muggles think that this stuff isn't true, what problem do we have here? Please, Rita, Fudge: *Don't take out your wands!* I am hopeless against magic!” J.K. looked helpless after she said this, and Fudge really did seem to feel a little sorry for her.

“Very well, J.K., very well. I'll be going now. We're going to send some dementors to take you away to Azkaban for some further checking.” Fudge looked happy because of the discipline that was going to happen to J.K. Rowling.

“*But*, but... Fudge!” moaned J.K.

“No comments from Fudge right now,” Rita said smartly, as she and Fudge turned on their heels and walked out of the door. They went back to the ministry building, where they wrote a *Daily Prophet* article about J.K. Rowling. Luckily, Rita got rehired at the ministry building, and now she is the writer/editor for the *Daily Prophet*, a magical newspaper.

The Leak of Secrets of Harry Potter

By Reporter Rita Skeeter

Harry Potter is innocent! He is not the crazed teen that we thought he was. Actually, the crazy person was Squib J.K. Rowling. She was leaking everything to muggles through a popular series known as the "Harry Potter" series. In this series, we were told of many things that Harry himself didn't tell us. Although muggles didn't believe the series was true, we were all still at great risk of being found out. We are all very sorry for Harry, living all of these years as the bad guy. As for J.K., she is being investigated and is staying at the wizarding jail Azkaban right now. If you do not believe a word we are saying, then go to any muggle bookstore and check out the series yourself.

How the U.S.A. Went Bankrupt

In HOW THE U.S.A. WENT BANKRUPT by Trevor Daniel, people have come to rely on an unusual superhero when they are in trouble. Unfortunately, help doesn't come cheaply!

DEDICATED TO JEFFERY N. DOUGHERTY – MY BABY BROTHER

“Ahhh!”

“Aliens are attacking Washington, D.C.!”

“Where is the baby that saved us last time?”

“Look, there he is.”

It's true; there he is, flying through the sky.

ZZZZAAAAPP! The aliens are shooting at the baby.

“Have no fear. I will save you,” said the baby.

The baby is a superhero that likes to save the day. The last time he won, he got paid with money and got two wishes. The baby's parents were very happy, but the problem is all the parents have to pay the baby. The United States doesn't have the kind of money to pay the baby, so the parents have to pay the rest.

“I am going to make my wish now,” said the baby. “I wish for all the babies to get two wishes. But all of the babies have to be less than two years old.

“I will always protect you guys when you're in trouble,” said the baby. “And right now, you are in big trouble.”

Thump! The baby lands on the ground. WHACK! SLAP! POW! “I will defeat all you aliens.”

“Retreat!” cry the aliens.

“You are all sissies,” said the baby.

After the battle, the President arrives. “I can not pay you again,” says the President. “But I will give you a gift. I will give you a very rare ring. This ring can control one person of your choice.”

“I don’t want to have a slave,” said the baby. “I only want to let babies roam free, and not have people tell them what to do.

“I would like you to meet my friend, Mr. President. This baby’s name is Jeffrey N. Dougherty. This baby is a very smart baby.”

A mom from Michigan comes up to the President. “I hate you, Mr. President, because you paid him and he is sucking all of our money away. Now that you have done this, we have lost 100 billion dollars.”

“Are you saying this baby has been paid with everybody’s money? But that would mean that he has made over 100 *trillion*, not billion dollars,” said the President. “Oh, boy.”

“So I guess you made a big mistake,” said the mom.

“Yes, I have noticed that now,” said the President. “I guess we are going to have to do something. We can’t make the U.S.A. bankrupt.”

The President went up to the baby and said, “The U.S. is going bankrupt because we are paying you too much money. We can’t afford it anymore.”

The baby looks surprised. “I didn’t know I was taking all this money.” The baby thinks for a minute. “Don’t I have one more wish?” he asks the President.

The President nods.

“Well, with my last wish, I will give everyone’s money back.”

All the parents are very happy to hear this. The baby becomes even more loved.

Many years later, he becomes President of the United States.

Mailmen Attack

It's getting so you can't trust anyone anymore. In MAILMEN ATTACK by Blaise Foyolle, even the letter carriers have an evil agenda.

"Jester, you know that you have to walk the dog," said Jester's mother. "You were the one who wanted Kono."

"Ma!" yelled Jester. "The dog is a loser. I would never have gotten him if I knew he read minds."

"Jester!" his mother yelled back. "Why did you say we should get a pet at the mind-reading pet store?"

"I know, I know," said Jester. "Should I take Kono to the post office and back?"

"Yes," said Jester's mother. Then she sneered, "Because that's the way to the comic book store."

Jester and Kono walked six blocks until they could see the new sign that told the city's name. It said "Taco Box" in big blue letters. The sign was just put up, and then all of a sudden the sign snapped in half and fell. Three more blocks and they reached the post office.

Jester and Kono saw three mailmen, Buck, Bucko, and Bucksnot Popcorn. The three mailmen were dumber than dirt.

"Heck, Kono, you're even smarter than them," said Jester

"Hey, is it July 23, 2004?" said Buck

"Well, no, but you actually know something!" said Jester. "Kono, I take back what I said."

Meanwhile, the mailmen were eating hotdogs.

"Can you pass the mustard?" said Bucko, thinking of a plan to take the Duh National Bank's money and then take the mayor. Then he would order the city to name one of them as mayor.

“Bucko, you havin’ fun with the mustard?” said Bucksnot, half-laughing. Bucko was covered head to toe in mustard.

Jester and Kono walked eight blocks back before they walked into a comic book store.

* * *

Buck suddenly raced into a cop car while the cops were looking at teacups and trading socks. Buck rocketed the car straight into the bank’s vault. The next thing, there was a huge, gaping hole in the wall. Bucksnot shot through the hole and started gathering the money. Next Bucko came to help with the money. They had to work fast because the cops were on their tail. Amazingly, the Popcorn Brothers got to their hideout without a trace of mustard.

* * *

Jester came out of the comic book store with his nose in a comic book called *The Adventure of M&M Man and Super Glory*. Jester was so busy reading the comic book, he didn’t even see the mess, like the hole in the wall of the bank, or the cop cars racing up and down the street. Kono, though, was very alert. Once he saw the hole in the wall, he rushed over to the boss of the bank, who was a man who didn’t like talking to the so-called “police” force of complete idiots. He was hiding behind a mustard stand. The boss was so shaken up, he couldn’t say a thing. So Kono read the mind of the boss.

“It was the Popcorn Brothers... I wish I had popcorn... They robbed me... I saw them head over to Ofax where the mayor was... Oh, man, I need new pants.”

Kono ran over to Jester and bit him to knock some sense into him. Finally, Jester looked around and saw the hole and the mess. Jester decided to follow Kono, to help the cops catch the Popcorn Brothers.

Jester followed Kono to the only tree in the city, Ofax. No one knew why the tree was called that, but they did call the tree

that. Jester tapped the tree, and suddenly the tree exploded in fear. There were the Popcorn Brothers, huddled up with the mustard and the mayor.

“We’ve, uh, the mayor,” Buck yelled in a dumb sort of way to the city, “and we want you, uh... the city, to vote Bucksnot, Bucko, or... or, uh, who else, OH, me, Buck, for mayor! Or else we uh... uh...what do we do? Yeah, we’ll kill duh mayor!”

Most of the people in the city thought all of the politicians were a bunch of crooks, but they never figured out why. They were impressed so much by the three mayoral candidates who actually admitted they were crooks that they thought the least they could do was vote for them. So the votes began.

Buck got 50 votes, Bucko got 50 votes, and Bucksnot got 50 votes. Once the Popcorn Brothers heard this, they were in the street fighting. The mayor toppled away during the fight. Bucko gave Buck the old one-two. Bucksnot tackled Bucko right over Buck. Suddenly there were flames! Okay, let’s back up. Buck snot tackled Bucko right over Buck into a puddle, and suddenly there were flames! There were no more Popcorn Brothers.

“I guess popcorn and water don’t mix!” said Jester

The mayor gave Jester an award and a fine of \$2,100 for damaging the city tree. The award was \$100.99. Kono got a lifetime supply of dog treats (and then got really fat).

The only problem is that the cops never found the money.

Like all stories, this one ends with Jester and Kono living happily ever after until they died of old age.

(This message is brought to you by *Mountain Dew* and *Windex*.)

The Golden Treasure Room

*When two archeologists run afoul of a curse, their very lives are immediately at risk. It will take all of their skill and strength if they are to survive what they uncover in **THE GOLDEN TREASURE ROOM**, by **Matt Franklin**.*

David Reynolds felt the dry desert heat surround him like a pack of hungry wolves. He wanted to get away from the desert so much. All he could think of was his nice air-conditioned home in Los Angeles, California, but he had to do his job. He needed money, and this was his first big archeology job with his business partner, John Zuza. Their orders, assigned by a very rich Saudi Arabian named Hussi Nassit, were to find anything unusual or rare in the exact coordinates they were about to search.

First, they set up camp, and then they rigorously started searching. After about a half-hour of searching in the extreme heat, they were both drenched in sweat. Finally, John tiredly said, "I'm calling it quits. You should, too. We can search again later when it cools down. If I spend one more minute in this heat, I'm gonna melt."

David replied, "Okay. You go on ahead. I feel like I'm gonna get lucky soon."

So John went into his air-conditioned tent, and David started working harder than he ever had before. He worked through the whole area, and as he was searching through the last few sections, he stepped on a large soft spot. Now that was weird. All the other ground surrounding the soft spot was made of solid rock. He actually found something on this first check of the area!

Excitedly, he ran over to John, and explained to him about what he had found. Then, they both raced over to the soft spot,

and David grabbed his pick. He hit the pick on the soft spot, and the ground beneath them trembled and gave way. The last thing he remembered was his and John's screaming as they both fell into the darkness below.

David finally woke up, awakened by his nightmares that he now knew were only too real, and looked around. What he saw sucked the air right out of him. He was in a room that was glowing with bright-yellow light. The room contained billions of dollars worth of gold.

David hastily tried to wake up John, but he was still unconscious from the fall, so he began exploring the strange room by himself.

As he walked around, he was amazed by what he found. There were gold goblets, gold pottery, gold jewelry, and almost anything else gold you could think of, all made of gold. There was one thing in particular, though, that David admired more than anything else in the room.

It was the most amazing sword David had ever seen, and it was clutched by a brilliant shimmering gold statue of the Egyptian god Anubis. David used to collect swords, but he had to stop the hobby, as it was too expensive to continue. Out of all the swords David had ever seen, this sword was by far the most beautiful.

It was the only thing in the room that wasn't bright yellow. But, amazingly, it was still made of gold just like everything else, except that its blade was painted dark blue for decoration. The thing that really got David's attention, though, was not the blue color, but the glowing red dragon etched in the hilt of the sword.

If dragons ever existed, David would imagine that they would look exactly like the image that he saw on the sword.

David was still admiring the sword when a strange voice boomed through the room. "Ahh, another admirer of the sword Daz'ro," said the strange voice. David slowly turned around, and to his horror, he saw a headless warrior with gold armor covering every part of his body. The gleaming warrior without a face then spoke again.

He said, "If you have any ideas of taking that sword or anything else in this room, wipe them from your mind. I know

Nassit sent you. He has been trying to steal from this room for 30 years, but all of his workers have died by my hand. I am the guardian of this treasure room, and I will protect it with my life. I can't let any of Nassit's men escape this room. Goodbye, Nassit's worker number 325."

At the exact ending of that sentence, the faceless warrior quickly pulled out a shimmering red sword, and rushed to attack David. He had to find something to defend himself with, and quickly. His eyes locked on Daz'ro, and David rushed over to the sword. Luckily, he had taken fencing lessons during the time he collected swords, so he knew how to use the weapon. As he picked it up, he was surprised at how little it weighed. But, David didn't have time to think about it as he swung Daz'ro out just in time to defend the faceless warrior's attack. The fight then began.

The cling and clang of the colliding swords woke John up. He looked for where the noise was coming from, and saw David and a strange warrior fighting with swords. By the looks of it, David was definitely the worse of the two swordsmen, and John knew that if he didn't do something fast, he wouldn't have a friend named David anymore. John quickly searched for something to help, and he found it. It was a gold sword at the far corner of the area where he landed from the fall. He then snuck behind the faceless warrior, and got ready to strike him in the head. Right before he was about to strike, John saw David motion something to him.

David's hand went across his throat, he shook his head "no," and then his hand went across his chest while he nodded "yes."

John got the point. He now knew that the strange warrior had no face, so he couldn't strike at his head. John had to strike at the warrior's back, as he was behind him. He pulled the sword all the way back, and swung as hard as he could. The blow sent a shock through John as he hit the hard gold armor. It must have had a much bigger shock on the faceless warrior, though, as he fell to the ground and lay there motionless.

David saw the faceless warrior fall, and ran over to thank John for saving his life. He said, "John, if you weren't here right now, I

would be just like that faceless warrior, no longer living. Thanks, thanks a lot.”

John then replied, “Well, if you hadn’t been fighting, I wouldn’t have woken up, and we’d both be dead. You also told me to hit the warrior in the chest, and not the head. I should be thanking you.”

“Can we please stop talking about dying now? I want to get out of this stupid room,” exclaimed David.

And so they started climbing out of the room through the hole they had fallen through. They were surprised to see that the drop had only been 30 feet.

When they got to the surface, they dumped out all their bags, went back down to the room, and filled every inch of every bag with gold, including Daz’ro and the faceless warrior’s sword, carrying them one at a time back to the tents.

They then sold all the gold, except the two swords, to Hussi Nassit, and also told him that the room was no longer guarded. Hussi gratefully gave them each 10 billion dollars.

Now that they were billionaires, John and David bought mansions for themselves and a new building for business, where Daz’ro and the faceless warrior’s sword still stand on guard to this day.

Pig Pal

*It might seem odd that in **PIG PAL**, by **Sam Grusin**, a boy could be mistaken for a pig. Of course, that only seems odd in this world....*

“Brian, it’s time for school,” yelled his mother.

“I’m goin’, I’m goin’,” said Brian.

“You’ll miss the air tube,” said his mother.

It was the year 2230. Brian was a 12-year-old boy with piglet pink hair. He and his mother lived in a space station in the 1990’s sector.

On his way to the air tube stop, he heard a gun shot. Suddenly he felt his hair spilt into two and he dove to the ground.

“Sorry, partner,” said a booming voice from the woods. A hunter came striding from the woods with a shotgun in his hands. “Thought you were a pig and I had a hankerin’ for bacon,” said the hunter. “Did you know that your hair is as pink as a piglet?” said the hunter as he laughed heartily.

“Yes, I know that!” Brian said angrily. “Everyone says that!” As the hunter walked away, Brian noticed he dropped a strange jewel. “Hey, wait!” yelled Brian. But it was too late. He was gone.

Brian decided to return the jewel. His quest to give the jewel to the hunter led him to a mysterious lake with a strange swirling mist wrapping it in fog. The strangest of all was that it was forged into a perfect circle, yet looked natural. Deep below the lake, a voice rang out. “Intergalactic transport device ready for testing.”

Brian started to walk away when he heard a strange low eerie screeching noise. He turned around and before his eyes he saw the misty lake turn into a swirling whirlpool filled with colors of blue, purple, green, and yellow. Brian soon became entranced by the mystical lake and fell in. He could feel himself being dragged into the

very bottom of the lake, which was a dark hole. Just as all light had faded away, he fell unconscious.

When he awoke, he was on a strange new planet. The planet had red soil-like sand on a desert, green shrubs which dotted up in random places, no trees that looked like what he would call trees, distinguishable cities with strange skyscrapers, and, strangest of all, everywhere there were statues of what looked to be pigs with wings and hands.

Suddenly, as Brian was surveying his surroundings, there was a rustle in the bushes. “Who’s there?” called Brian nervously.

“Are you a spy for Nocab?” defensively asked a strange voice.

“Who’s Nocab? Where am I? And I’m no spy,” said Brian to the bushes.

Out from the bushes came what looked like an elderly pig on its haunches with a walking stick and glasses. “Nocab is our evil king and we are the telgip, a rebel tribe who wants to overthrow King Nocab,” said the pig.

“I didn’t know that pigs could talk,” said Brian inquisitively.

“I told you I am of the telgip and you are our savior,” said the pig.

“Savior? I didn’t hear anything about being a savior,” said Brian.

“Just come to our village and we’ll explain everything,” said the pig.

It seemed like hours just walking along. Brian complained, “How do I know that you are leading me to a village?” as he tried to get away from the pig, who had a surprising grip. As Brian and the pig walked along, Brian being half-dragged, Brian could see on the horizon what looked to be a rudimentary farming village.

As the pig led Brian into the village, Brian saw that the houses were made of log timber. There were also log timber markets, a library, a monastery, and a metal and concrete building that appeared to have been built without a door.

“Hey! If you have a building made of concrete, why are all of your other buildings made of wood?” Brian yelled, pointing to the metal building.

“I am *not* allowed to talk about that,” said the pig defensively. “Now what is your name?”

“Brian; what’s yours?” said Brian.

“My name is Mahs,” said the pig. “Back to the matter at hand: You must free us from the reign of King Nocab. He is a tyrant.”

“Wait a second. I don’t want to be a savior and overthrow a king. That sounds dangerous. All I want to do is look for a way to get home,” said Brian.

“There is no way for you to get home that is in existence at the time being,” said Mahs.

“You mean I’m stuck on this planet with smelly pigs for the rest of my life?” yelled Brian.

“Watch what you say about pigs,” said Mahs “But let’s make a deal. You kill the king and we’ll make a device to let you get home. Deal?”

“Deal,” said Brian.

“We will help you defeat the king by enhancing your body. Now it is getting late,” said Mahs. “I’ll show you to your cabin.” Mahs led Brian to a wooden house where there was a dinner laid out of beef brisket, broccoli, mashed potatoes, and water. “Now eat this, and go to sleep. You’ll have a big day tomorrow,” said Mahs. Brian, who was already tired, ate about half of the food and fell into a deep sleep.

“Brian, wake up. It’s time for your training,” said Mahs.

“Training? What training?” said Brian, still half asleep. “Can’t I eat something?”

“No, it won’t do any good, and like I said, we’ll explain everything,” Mahs said.

Brian was led to the big metal and concrete building, still in his pajamas, where Mahs said something in a strange tongue. Suddenly, a door was forged out of an outline of green light and opened by two pigs. They walked down a long staircase that led to what looked like a weapons lab crossed with a firing range.

“This is where we develop our most advanced weapons, and where you will be trained to your limits.” Before Brian could respond, he was swept into a reclined chair with wires sticking out of the back of the chair. There his hands, feet, chest, and head were locked down into the chair. A helmet was placed down on his head with a visor,

which was then closed. There was a bright flash of light, and when Brian reappeared, he looked and felt like a fully trained infantry soldier. The only thing that was the same was that his hair was still bright pink.

“Whoa!” explained Brian. “What just happened to me?”

“We enhanced your body to its full potential as a soldier,” said Mahs. “Now it’s time for your weapon training.”

“What?” said Brian, and again there was a flash of bright light. When Brian reappeared, he looked like a soldier fully equipped with all sorts of weaponry.

“We’ve equipped you with our most advanced weaponry,” said Mahs. Mahs started to explain all the weapons, like a pair of light axes, pig feed grenades, a grapple gun, and a pig hunting dog. “We’ll lead you to the capital city of Nocab where you will have to infiltrate the tyrant’s place to find and eliminate our ‘king,’” said Mahs.

“If I don’t live to come back, send my body to my family,” said Brian with a tear in his eye. “Ok, lead the way.” Mahs had already assembled a strike team to guide Brian to the city.

“This is the farthest I can lead you on your journey,” said Mahs.

“Quickly, now,” said one of the strike pigs.

“Goodbye, Mahs,” said Brian as he started to walk away towards the city.

“We’ll fight off the guards to the entrance of the city. All you have to worry about is the king,” said one of the pigs.

They made their way to the city very fast. Once there, the strike team went into action. They quickly threw pig feed grenades, which made the guards vulnerable to their strikes of axes. As Brian ran into the city, he realized what the intensity of the patrols were. There were pigs walking everywhere. His first encounter with a pig was easy; he just let go of the dog and the dog killed the pig.

He made his way to the courtyard of the palace. Outlined by walls, there was no way in to the door. But Brian had already devised a plan to get in. He molded his hair to look just like a pig and crouched so that only his hair was showing. He slowly walked down the wall until he reached the base of the ceiling. He shot his grapple gun on the ceiling and climbed up. He used his axes to make a hole in the roof.

He jumped down into the throne room of King Nocab. There he saw the horror of King Nocab himself: a huge wild bore with gigantic tusks, wings, four arms, and two big gleaming blades in his hands.

Thoughts ran through Brian's head like, "How can I take down this monster? What happens to the people if I fail? And what happens if I die?"

"So you are the *savior* that the telgip could round up?" said Nocab in a booming, sarcastic voice.

"I will destroy you, evil scum!" yelled Brian as he quickly tried to take a hack at his head. King Nocab deflected his strike with one of the giant swords. Then Brian fired his grapple gun at the ceiling and came down on Nocab's head, swinging his axes. Nocab put one sword above his head while the other was swinging at him. Brian barely escaped. When he landed he felt a trickle of blood on his cheek.

If you were watching the battle from a distance, you would see a blur—which was Brian—attacking a giant pig who was barely moving. At last Brian saw his moment. He jumped at the rear of King Nocab, who turned around and cried out in pain. He fell on his knees. Brian quickly embedded his ax in Nocab's head. He knew that he was dead when he dropped his swords.

He dragged his own body (half dead from the fight) back to the village. There he met Mahs and asked, "Now how do I get home?"

"Right this way," said Mahs. He led Brian through the streets (where all of the pigs in the village were cheering the sight of their *savoir*) back to the metal building. Once inside, he found a circle with spikes sticking out of it, generating electricity. "All you have to do is walk through the circle and you will be back in your own world," said Mahs.

"Goodbye, Mahs," said Brian, stepping through the circle.

"Brian, it's time for school. You'll miss the air tube!" said his mother.

"Whoa," exclaimed Brian, "*déjà vu!*"

Fantasy Frontier

*Jack and his sister, Jackie, are unexpectedly propelled on a journey that leads to a battle against a most unexpected opponent. With his new friend, Cheep, Jack must defeat an iron-fisted ruler in **FANTASY FRONTIER**, by **Justin Krivda**.*

CLANG!

“Oof!”

“Arg!”

“Jack, Jack, you *idiot!* Have you *no* sense of dignity? Is there any sanity in this brain? *Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!*” my brain screamed at me. How did I get to doing this for a living, when it seems like just yesterday that I was sitting in my quiet, peaceful chair, dreaming of becoming something great—like a lawyer—and watching the TV back home in Pollop? I thought, *Pollop, Pollop, Pollop, Pollop, Pollop, Pollop*,...the name of my homeland echoing in my head.

CLANG!

“Owww!”

“Why won’t you die?”

WHIZ!

I snapped out of my trance, awakened by the throbbing in my arms. I also can’t think straight because of all this gosh darn racket from these pestering little buggers!

Sorry about the interruptions. We—Cheep and I—are in the middle of hacking away at crazy monkeys made out of Ogel Super Evil building-block model-builders that bring your creations to life

came to meet me at the front door, we went outside to see what we could see.

OOOOOF!

This time—instead of coming to a cool, crisp, black night sky—as soon as we stepped off our front porch, we were instantly teleported to a desert island! We had no idea who brought us there, what we were doing there, where we were, when we would go back home, why we were there, or how we got there.

I made sure that she was OK, and that no bones were broken. Then we surveyed our surroundings and came to the conclusion that... *we had no idea what to do!*

We started to run around in circles and scream our heads off (not the best thing to do). Anyway, we were running, and running, and running, *until...*

I pointed to the sky and shouted, “Hey, Jackie, stop running for a second! It’s a bird, no; it’s a plane.... *Abb!* It’s a—”

CLUNK!

“Ow!” I screamed out in pain. A shiny blue and red and jeweled sheath—I guess for Ruffle—fell on my skyward-stretched arm and opened the skin on my wound even more. Now, the cut on my arm was bleeding badly, and what’s worse, it was dripping onto my shirt! My brand-new shirt!

Jackie came over to where I was standing to see what had caused the commotion. “This better be important,” she muttered. “I was in the middle of my 16th circle!”

When she saw my intensely bleeding arm, she reached out to touch it. Almost instantly, in the spot on my arm that she touched, the blood was gone! In its place was new skin, surrounded by fading, sparkling light. She put her whole hand on my arm and new skin took the place of the blood. There was no trace of the wound ever being there except the bit of dried blood left on Ruffle.

“H-h-h-h-how d-did you d-do that?” I stammered.

“I h-h-have n-no id-d-ea!” she stammered right back.

After we overcame the event that had just taken place, we took a better grip on what was happening. On further

take control of me and use my body as something to right wrongs with! The feeling was sensational and scary, fun and strange, exhilarating but exhausting. For perhaps the first time, I felt like I had a whole lot of good potential. Then again, I could have just been given a limited supply of superhuman strength because I was trying to prevent myself from getting killed! (I like the first one better!) However, I was *very surprised* that I was still alive, and frantically made sure that all of my limbs were intact, and that my head was still on my shoulders. Hey, you never know: I could have lost an arm, then been driven crazy, and thought that I was AOK!

When I finally came to the long-awaited dock, there were five ships, all lined up in a row. On the side of the ships were engraved their names—I think. (Of course, the markings might not have been there, and I could just have been delirious!) There was *Neat-o*, *Hello*, *Burrito*, *Nacho*, and *Pleasant-o*. I decided to pick the coolest sounding name, *Burrito*. (I thought that maybe if I needed an escape route, I could “kick in the afterburners!” For those of you who don’t know—now is when you roar with laughter... come on, you can do it, I know you can!)

Almost in a trance, I stumbled aboard the ship. Once I put my hands on the captain’s wheel, I suddenly became braver, more ready, and more enthused about what I was about to do. I don’t know what came over me, but, man, was I ready!

On my way to the isle Jackie spoke of, I encountered many other creatures that had no purpose but to kill me. This time, they were all water element-based, since I was sailing the ocean. They came and barred the path of *Burrito*, and not even the “afterburners”—*Eeeeeenwwmm, farts! Gross!*—could get through the monsters!

There were octopuses, sea monkeys, fish, and even blue slime-balls! The blue slime-balls were tough, because in the water, I was slower and couldn’t beat Ruffle into their faces very well. They, however, had an advantage, and could easily avoid my attacks. Still, the sea monkeys were the hardest to vanquish. They were super fast, and no matter how many I destroyed, more just popped up! They weren’t very strong, but it was like being poked

a lot in the same place—after a while, it starts to hurt! I strived to put my energy in Ruffle as I battled my way through the never-ending wall of devilish creatures, but it was no use.

I finally came up with the idea that if my sister could use some sort of magic, so could I. I took a deep breath, and imagined a small ball of energy—my energy, at the tip of my sword. When I opened my eyes, I saw a small ball of energy—my energy, at the tip of my sword! *OK, good*, I thought. That is when I imagined an electric streak coursing through Ruffle. Sure enough, when I opened my eyes, there was an electric streak coursing through Ruffle! I then used fierce baseball swings, hitting the little whatcha-ma-call-its. I broke through their sheer wall with such force I almost tumbled into a coral reef! After that, I learned how to harness my newfound power so that in the future, I wouldn't use so much energy that afterwards I would be pooped.

I finally arrived at Isle Cheep after circling it to admire the scenery. On one side, it was completely made of volcanoes—still active! Another was entirely made up of ice-mountains, while the third was giant sand dunes. I entered on the most welcoming side, the one with *bumongous mountain-sized trees* all along the side. I got off on the grass closest to a *gigantic* red carpet-like thing. I saw a bluish rooster in the middle. As I approached, he spoke, “I am Cheep! *Hear me roar!*”

We were engaged in a lethal battle. It lasted for over an hour! We fought sword for claw, magic for magic, foot for wing. It was the absolute hardest battle I had fought. I felt about ready to collapse and die, but somehow, I kept on battling. *How can he stand this?* I thought. I was bleeding and couldn't feel my fingers. But, even though we were weary, bloody, bruised, and scuffed up, I found the strength to drag myself over to kill him.

But right before the final blow was struck, he half-breathed, half-whispered, “I am defeated...I am not all that bad. My evil brother, King Squawk, conquered both of your worlds, and since he is so busy, he put me in charge of this one. I despise him and all his evil ways. Can I help you on your quest to destroy my brother?”

I was dumbstruck—this was one mystical rooster. I wasn't sure what to do. Then I heard Jackie's voice in my head: "Trust him, Jack.... He can be trusted." I decided to trust Jackie's word—just because I have witnessed her amazing powers in action—and despite all Cheep had done to me, I decided to spare his life and allow him to accompany me on my quest—and to this day, I do not regret it.

Amazingly, he healed us both, with just the blink of an eye. Apparently, he either had powers about a *bazzilatillion* times more powerful than my sister, or he had had a lot of practice! I didn't even bother to ask how. *Wow!* As soon as we were back on our feet, we fell back down, and went to sleep.

We didn't wake up until about 9:30 A.M. the next day. (We started sleeping at around 4:00 P.M. the day before, so we got about 17½ hours sleep.) As soon as I woke up, I found that my ship had been dragged onto shore, and was hovering on the ground, surrounded by near-blinding blue light—coming from Cheep! I sat up, and then, right before my eyes, my ship disappeared, and in its place was a new, beautiful airship!

Together, we first traveled back to my sister (who was still stuck on that island), and we all introduced each other properly. She was very pleased that I had followed her instructions, and treated Cheep with the utmost courtesy. She then told us of a secret portal that led to Loppol. Cheep seemed to have faint, disconnected memories of the portal. Cheep and I then set out to find it. We traveled in grand style in my new airship.

We only had to fight a few battles, but man! Even as a team, we had a hard time winning! Our opposition this time was Boids (bird-like critters), Poopa-Loopa-Troopas (flying turtles, each with a toilet for a shell), and Cy-Clouds (cloud monsters, each with one eye that shot devastating beams). We nearly got ourselves killed on more than one occasion. But, every time, Cheep's magic came through to make us as good as new. It was awesome, the feeling of accomplishing a goal such as defeating those horrible beasts.

When we finally reached the other land, Loppol, we came across many helpful people, such as natives—like Chief Yappaty-Yap-Yap Big Mouth and his tribe who told us how to track

Squawk's ever-moving tracks, and Mr. Goodmister and his family, who helped to lead us to the throne of the evil King Squawk.

We finally came to a fairly large island that we had been told was Squawk's current place of Supreme Commanderness, and where he currently gave his iron-fisted orders. We stumbled up the bank and saw an even larger island than we thought! Then both our gazes turned toward the center of the island. There, in the middle, was a *humongous* stretch of *purply grass*! But what was even more amazing was that there, sitting on his haunches in the grass, looming over us, was what looked to be a giant red replica of Cheep. Cheep said, "I remember that face. It is the face of my brother, the face of torment, *the face of pure evil!*"

Simultaneously, Cheep and I lunged for Squawk, our weapons drawn. All of a sudden, we were stopped in our tracks by what seemed to be a voice, a voice that only something of an evil nature could speak.

What was pretty amazing is Squawk looked happy (if that is even possible for a giant deformed evil rooster) to see his little brother.

"Haw-haw-haw! It's good to see you, little brother—you softhearted fool. Oooo! I am a girly-weakling, and I can't wait to be the one to slay the mighty Squawk! Haw-haw-haw! I see you have betrayed me, Cheep. Do you think you and your little friend can destroy me?" Then, to himself he whispered a little too loudly, "I always was the brighter one." He continued, *"Now, you and the kid will be obliterated! Don't you worry; I'll get you and your little friend, too! Hee-hee-hee-hee!"* He screeched in a deep rumbling bass voice and the sheer noise shattered my beautiful airship.

This battle was harder than every single battle we had fought before this, put together! It must have taken two days!

Even Cheep looked afraid within the first few minutes! Our magic combined only scratched the monster. We would do volleys where I would charge, stab Squawk five or six times with Ruffle, retreat, and then Cheep would slash him with his Spiked Metal Beak. This barely did more than the magic! All the while, Squawk would be giggling (if that is possible), then, he might crack his neck from side to side, and we would fly into the air, falling,

and getting even more bruised up. The power-hungry freak might also beat the air with his wings so hard that we would lose our balance, rendering ourselves helpless to his magic that was stronger than Cheep's by a long shot. We only had time for quick healings in between thrashings, and on top of that, Cheep's powers were dwindling.

Eventually, though, with some burst of "super human/super chicken strength" we sort of "borrowed" both worlds' energy, totally ignoring the pain that Squawk was causing us, and released it in one *gynormous* wave of energy—concentrated from Ruffle and Cheep's beak—that somehow overcame and destroyed the evil King Squawk. He disintegrated within a matter of seconds, but there were more important matters at hand.

I was deeply wounded, almost dead. Cheep, my buddy ol' pal, did all he could to keep us both alive. But his powers weren't enough. He took me back to my sister, Jackie, barely able to half-fly, half-teleport us back to the island she was on. My sister had obviously honed her skills during the many weeks we were gone, and as a magical team—a Mage and a Magic Chicken, mind you—they healed me completely. Jackie and Cheep later told me that it took them the better part of two days to fix me up.

As soon as I was well enough, I thoroughly cleaned my trusty Ruffle, all the while admiring how much we had bonded, and how much of a story I could tell about our adventure, and put it safely back in its sheath. As soon as I slid Ruffle into place, everything around us started to swirl and spin!

We all awoke to find ourselves in my home, each of us in a La-Z-Boy armchair in my family room—the TV still on from when Jackie had called me outside. *We were finally home!* We discovered that we all were back to our true, normal ages of ten years old (me), eight years old (Jackie), and one year old (Cheep).

To this day, we tell this story to all of our relatives—mine and Jackie's, and Cheep's. They don't believe it—that is, until I show them Ruffle, the last piece of my airship that remained (which was a gift from my great friend Cheep), and Jackie's and Cheep's mystical powers.

The Magic Gift

*A magical watch transports William to a future in turmoil. He must travel with his descendant, Pearson, to elude danger and find his way home in **THE MAGIC GIFT**, by **Vikram Mandelia**.*

Pearson looked across the wide, dusty, open desert. As far as the eye could see, there was only yellow, dusty sand.

“The Winger is near,” he mumbled. “We leave at nightfall.”

“But, sir, the Winger is continents away.”

“All the more reason to move. Alert the village, now!”

The Winger is a dragon that was born in the Alibi ocean. It will make one rotation around the earth, killing anybody in its way. (How violent!) Nobody knows why the heck it’s there, but they do know if they don’t get to the Alibi ocean, the Winger will stomp on them.

A million years earlier, William Cora was celebrating his 15th birthday.

“And from me, my grandson, I give you my watch which you have simply adored all your life. It has many secrets, so be careful.”

William was overjoyed. The watch was finally his. But even though he was happy, when he picked up the watch, something puzzled him. It was like he could see through the watch. It had an analog clock piece, three knobs that William guessed were for adjusting the time, and was made of wood. It also felt to him as if it had magic in it.

“Careful, William; that watch is the key to the past,” said his grandpa.

“What?” William thought. “The key to the past?”

His puzzlement only lasted a second, though. Perhaps he had gotten distracted. He put the watch on and looked at his grandpa. Quietly his grandpa sang:

*The seagulls fly.
The Earth is dry.
Not a drop of water vast.*

William thought they his grandpa, the one he admired and loved, had gone totally loony.

Pearson fixed his vest and picked up his cattle rope.

“*Nick, nick; ya!*” he yelled to the village mule, Betsy. Betsy was the only mule the village had left. Over the years, the village had fights and wars with other villages they came across. Pretty soon, all the mules they had were taken except Betsy.

Pearson looked down at his watch. It was made of wood and it had three knobs. The watch also had a wooden shell covering. It had never been opened before. He wanted to keep that world record going.

“*Nick, nick; stay,*” he ordered Betsy.

One million years earlier, William was slouching on the couch. It had been a long day of fun for him: opening presents, eating cake, having a huge party, the works. He was very tired. In fact, he immediately fell asleep. But as he drifted off, his hand hit the coffee table, which turned a knob on his watch....

Pearson felt a villager grab his wrist. The person told him that he was wanted at the village council. When the person let go and went off, Pearson saw that his watch was open. That person must have pushed the switch to open the watch!

All of a sudden, William was blinded in a flash-bang of smoke and dust. The air had suddenly thickened and before he knew it, the smoke had cleared away, exposing the harsh, wicked desert.

“The Winger is coming! Run!”

William, still groggy from his rest, did not have a clue where he was. He certainly was not at home. He rubbed the filth and grime off his hands, and felt that his watch wasn't there. *What!* was the only word in his mind. He was in the middle of nowhere and his best birthday gift was gone. Well, from books, William knew he was in a desert. But still, he didn't have the watch. *Where am I?* William thought.

Pearson was in rage. This was the first time the watch had opened in his lifetime. In his fury, he threw the watch on the ground. Right after, he picked it up, remembering his mother and father. His mother and father didn't get killed over a war for supplies, but that's what he wanted everyone to think. Nobody needed to now what had happened to them. The watch was given to him by his mother on his second birthday. That's all they needed to know. The truth is, his father left the village to reach the Alibi on his own when Pearson was born. His mother fought with him before he left. She lost.

Pearson walked into the council hut nobly and said, "I am here. All rise."

William did not know how long he would survive. He had no water and no food. He walked aimlessly, looking for people. While he walked he sang:

*The seagulls fly.
The Earth is dry.
Not a drop of water vast.
Sink holes and mudslides and sand color.
People do not exist,
Except for the ones that last.*

He walked around aimlessly for hours, thirsty and hungry and, most of all, tired. Soon, he spotted a little village in the distance. "People!" he thought. He started to run forward.

Pearson looked at all the council members in the hut. In English, this is what was said:

“I welcome you to a new council meeting. As you all know, the Winger is only a continent away. I already feel the storms coming, so I suggest we leave at nightfall.”

“Well, you’re the chief.”

“Then I guess we leave at nightfall.”

“But what about Betsy?”

“We will take her with—”

“And the children and women? They are too weak to walk miles.”

“They will have to if they want to survive. Tell the village to get ready.”

William was dying of thirst by the time he got to the village gates. He could hear the muffled hustling of the villagers. He walked up to the gate and knocked. It felt like he was in a dream. To his surprise, he heard yelling and running inside the gates.

“Kill the intruder!”

“Save the supplies!”

William only had a minute to wonder what was happening, when all of a sudden a tranquilizer dart hurtled right at him.

“Pearson, there is an intruder at the village silo!”

“Did they snipe him?”

“I’m not sure, but you should go take a look.”

Pearson ran to the silo to discover a young boy no older than 15.

“Kill him!” the other villagers chanted.

“Not just yet. Son,” Pearson said, looking at William, “who are you?”

“I’m William Cora,” said William in a sheepish voice. Pearson looked startled by the statement, but then took it back. “Where am I?” William asked.

“You are in the village of the Cookas. Some of us speak English, some speak cookish, but we all came from cooka manga land. In English, it means ‘the land of peace.’”

William had a thousand questions to ask, but Pearson was

about to leave. “Wait!” he called, faintly. “What is this place? I have never—”

“Remember the stories your grandpa told you and sang?”

“Yes, but—”

“They’re true.”

“So you mean this is the new world?”

“Yes. It is year—”

“I don’t want to steal supplies. I just want to go home.”

That moment a woman in a white apron walked into the room with a tray of tea and biscuits. “Here, drink this. You will feel better.”

William reluctantly took what was offered. After eating and drinking, he felt quite better. But he still was nervous.

“I want to go home. I want to see my mom and dad.”

“Okay, son, but where do you live?”

“In Pontiac, Michigan.”

Pearson did not understand. “What village is that?”

“What do you mean what village? I live in a house.”

Now Pearson was really confused. “A house. I have heard of them. But they haven’t been built for more than ten thousand years.”

It was William’s turn to be confused. “What year is it?”

“It is year 1,000,2004.”

“What! That’s one million years from my time!” Then William told Pearson about his watch.

“I have a watch just like that!” exclaimed Pearson.

He showed it to William. It did look like William’s. It had the same features except it had a fancy wooden covering.

“But look, William. There’s a secret to this watch. There is another watch just like this. If that watch’s knobs are turned, then the other watch’s covering will open, allowing the person to go forward or back in time.”

“The key to the past! He was right!”

“Who?”

But William didn’t hear him. He was mumbling on and on. “Well, I guess I turned one of the knobs. Then there was smoke.

Then I—” His voice trailed off. He was slowly understanding the situation. “Why did you jump back when I told you my name?”

“My last name is Cora, too.”

This was too much for William. He passed out.

William was suddenly awakened.

“I do!” someone shouted.

“Give them to me,” someone else said.

There was a lot of gossip and William was the center of it all.

“He’s from the past...he needs blankets...give him some stew....”

Then a very loud voice yelled, “Stop!” It came from Pearson. “It is nightfall. The Winger is approaching nearer. I’m the chief and I say we leave.”

“But the boy—”

“He is my ancestor. He will come with me.”

But some of the villagers disagreed with moving. There was an argument, and it ended up only Pearson and William were going to go.

“Pack your bags. Were leaving.”

“Where?”

“I’ll explain later. Come on!”

William didn’t know how it happened, but pretty soon he and Pearson were on the road. “Where are we going?”

“To Madame Salca. She is a fortuneteller. She will tell us which paths to take at the Alibi.”

“The who?”

Pearson explained all about the Winger, the Alibi, and the paths of the Alibi. “There are the past path, present path, and future path. You see, once you reach the Alibi, you can jump in one of these three paths and go to the future, past, or present. The present goes to when the Winger was born, the past returns to the time of mankind’s once-great technologies, and the future contains destinies for the brave.” They also talked about how they were related, the watch, and about both of their families.

They soon made camp, and in the morning, walked all over again.

They finally reached the castle. Pearson explained how most of the world either went back to being colonial or medieval.

Inside the castle, portraits of kings and queens lined the hallways.

They had to wait in line to talk to Madame Salca. “She is well-known,” said Pearson.

When it was their turn, William got a good look at her. She was a dark woman with baby blue eyes and pink lips. She wore green robes and spoke in a dry whisper.

“Ahhh! You two have come to see what path you take at the Alibi. Yes?”

“How did you know—”

“I know all, young man. Now hold out your palm. Ahhh! You will take the past path, but you might not get home.” William almost coughed up his underdone salmon. “My vision is unclear on you. You might. Maybe.”

Now it was Pearson’s turn. But just as Madame Salca was about to say “Ahhh!,” a storm kicked in. Rain clouds, black as night, rode the sky. Sheets of rain poured down.

“William, come on! The Winger is closer. We must go.”

“But what about—”

“She’s fine! She is probably in her cellar. Come on. Jump through the window. I’ll go first. Then you follow.” Pearson disappeared over the ledge, then bellowed to William to follow.

How they reach the Alibi was a routine of this repeated every day: Get up, eat, run, eat, run, eat, run, and sleep. The village had been surprisingly close to the Alibi. It only took a couple of months to reach it. This what they said at the Alibi:

“We’re here,” Pearson announced. “Finally here.”

“We did it!” William yelled joyfully. Sure enough, there was green water right at their toes.

“William?”

“Yes?”

“I want you to have my watch. You need a watch before any of this can ever happen again.”

Even though William did not understand, he felt like he did. “Thanks. I must take the past path to the time before I fell asleep on my 15th birthday.”

“And I must take the future path. My destiny craves more. Goodbye, William, my great times one million grandpa.”

“Goodbye, my great times one million grandson.”

William jumped into the shallow end of the sea, which was the past part. One second he was in water, then in the blink of an eye he was back at home on the couch.

Was it a dream? William looked down at his watch and smiled. No, it wasn't.

“...and that, my grandchild, is the story of my 15th birthday.”

“How do we know it's true, Grandpa?”

“Yeah, Grandpa William.”

William smiled. “You won't until I give you my watch on your 15th birthdays for you both to share.”

The children started to talk, but stopped when they heard their grandpa sing:

The seagulls fly.

The earth is dry.

Not a drop of water vast.

Sink holes and mudslides and sand galore.

And people do not exist.

Except for the ones that last.

America's Last Stand

Concerning AMERICA'S LAST STAND, author David Mattson writes, "Adolf Hitler was never born in Germany. There was no World War II, so there was no Pearl Harbor. The Soviet Union had grown into a great empire. This story takes place in 2090. None of this is real, and I hope you enjoy this story."

Joe was sweating as he climbed up the cargo net. He thought of what Captain Thomas had said: "The more you sweat in peacetime, the less blood in war." The Soviet army had slowly risen to power. Now it was gathering its forces in Moscow. Europe was getting ready for an assault. The Americans were preparing for a naval invasion.

"Faster!" said Corporal Clinger. Joe jumped to the ground as he came closer to the bottom of the net. Joe had been in the army for two months now. His platoon was assigned to the New York City regiment. The United States army had grown from 200,000 persons to almost 1,000,000 persons in one year. Joe Dort had been an army reservist, then was called up to a regular army unit.

As Joe was looking at the hanger, he saw an anti-gravity troop carrier came to a descent about 12 yards away. A pilot walked out and came over to him. "Hey! Are you the new trainee?"

"No. I'm Joe. I like to come and look at the planes once in a while."

"Oh, well, my name's Norman."

"Well, Norman, I like your plane. Is it yours?"

"No, I'm in the Air Force. I am assigned to the New York City regiment."

"I'm in that, too."

“You are?”

“Yeah, I got called up from the reserves.”

“Well, Joe, I’ve got to run. I suppose I’ll be seeing you around.”

“Yeah, see you later.”

* * *

Soviet Warmaster Jolick had been gathering forces in the west. He was hoping that the European countries would let him pass through to the Atlantic coast. He was not intending to hurt anyone if they let his forces pass through. From there he would go to America, to New York City....

Jolick would send his forces tonight, the sooner the better. If his predictions were correct, they would be at the coast of France by early winter. From there he would go to New York. He was intending to catch the Americans where he would have the advantage of having his soldiers trained in cold weather. He also aimed for the element of surprise.

The Soviets encountered little resistance as they passed through Europe. Many countries warned the Americans of an attack. Some, though, did not, because of the threats imposed upon them by the Soviet government. The Russians had not expected to sneak past the Europeans with 2,000,000 troops. To counter the reports to America they had brought communication devices to jam these outgoing messages.

Two Months Later

“On to the boats,” a Soviet corporal called as the men boarded ships. The 2,000,000 soldiers would need 1,000 warships, 3,000 airplanes, and 200 paratrooper and Special Forces transports. It would take three days to cross the ocean.

Warmaster Jolick had accomplished one of the harder parts of the invasion. Now all he had to do would be to surprise the Americans. He knew his numbers could overpower the

Americans, but could they land in a city so densely populated? He would consult with the tsar.

Messages were streaming in from all over Europe. They read, "The Soviets are coming. The Russians!"

"*Full battle stations,*" a voice rang out on the loudspeaker as Joe's platoon boarded a grav transport. He knew now what he feared most: His regiment would receive the full force of the attack of an army with more numbers and airplanes than the Americans. Nevertheless, they would have to hold out, and just hope the navy could help them.

All of them came at once. The planes flew overhead, boats came full speed, and the landing craft could be seen cutting through the choppy waves. The American artillery pounded away at the craft as they came into range. One by one they were picked off. Planes drowned the mother ships behind the landing craft. There would be no turning back.

Joe had his sights trained on a red coat. On the captain's command, he used his rifle to plunge the soldier into the deep blue water.

Despite the American defenders, the Soviet army spread into New York City like a virus through a group of people. The Americans could only hold on to one building for so long before falling back. New York was being demolished. Reinforcements were being called for from the northern states.

As the Americans retreated to Washington, D.C., the Russians continued to advance through the Northern states across the nation (Pennsylvania, Michigan, Montana, and Washington State). As these states fell one by one, the president called for the aid of the British. The prime minister said that his forces could be there in four days. Could America hold till then?

Joe was lucky to be alive; many of the American troops had been trapped in New York City office buildings by the swiftness of the attackers. The final waves of the assault had finally passed. He was hiding in a small storage room of an office building. Outside he could hear an anti-gravity vehicle. How could the Soviets have gotten one? He would take a chance and see if it was a rescuer.

There in the hovercraft was the pilot he had seen in the hanger. How did he get into the city without being seen or being picked up on radar? This thought raced in his head until voices of a language he recognized from his 11th grade Russian class told him that guards were patrolling the building. Joe quickly signaled to the driver. Once Norman saw him, the hovercraft coasted up the side of the building until the exposed passenger seats were in line with the open window. Joe jumped in just as the guard's boots could be seen coming into the room. He was safe.

California finally fell as the valiant defenders struggled to hold the line. It was almost as if the Soviets could never have been stopped. The Red Army swept like a broom through the southern states until it came down to the last remaining city in America, Washington, D.C. Here the fate of the country would be decided, on the grass that our forefathers planted.

"This is all the British could marshal?" asked a major, "Only 2,000 men?"

"We'll make do with what we've got," answered a soldier.

"Hope we have enough," said the major.

"We're here, chaps," shouted Private Johnson as the British clambered off the boats and onto the smoking ruins of New York City.

"It's a bloody mess," shouted one of the soldiers.

"Where are the Americans?" asked another.

Most of the British army had landed in New York City; the others in Washington, D.C. As the British received a radio message, the fighting in Washington D.C. commenced.

Anti-gravity vehicles started up with a low humming sound, planes took off to aid the battle, and elite units brought up the rear, as most of them were snipers. The sea of red looked never-ending. The battle was fought with so much determination on both sides that it was as though angels were fighting demons. As bombs started to drop on the Soviet side of the battlefield, the earth shook. It was frigid weather to fight in and yet it was almost

as if it didn't matter to anyone. Tanks moved like hulking beasts at a lumbering pace. The eastern countries tensely waited for a final outcome of the war. The numbers on both sides dwindled as the battle turned in favor of the Russians.

Then, as the fog off the coast receded, a whole armada of ships was to be seen. The rest of the British army had finally come. The Americans would surely win now. The planes came like a swarm of bees as deadly missiles hit their targets. Tanks started pounding away at the already weakened Soviet army. Artillery pieces fired just after being assembled. There was new hope for the defenders.

The Americans started to flank the Soviets on two sides, causing the attackers to be surrounded. The Russians then suddenly broke through the front of the American line to the British. The British were too strong, though, as the red sea of coats turned into a lake of red. Then, in the final moments, the British armada was starting to disappear. Where were they going? The answer was unveiled as new ships took their place. The Americans were now the ones being surrounded. The British then started firing at the Russian squadron of ships. The Americans, on the other hand, were fighting their way out of the circle that had closed in around them. The tanks went first, followed by the troops.

When the Americans finally made it out, the battle had turned back to American hands. Most of the ships had been destroyed when the attackers fled. Troops sat on tanks going full speed over the river. The Red Army was in full retreat, as the grav-attack vehicles tailed them. The Americans then spread out, and with the aid of the British they fought the Soviets in all the states, reclaiming the 48 that were in Soviet control. The Americans had saved their country, but rebuilding? That's another story....

A Bus Ride to Remember

*A little girl's science project propels an older sister into a situation that no one could have imagined. Is history repeating itself, or are things about to change for the worse? This is the focus of **A BUS RIDE TO REMEMBER**, by **Paige E. Robnett**.*

"How could this have happened, Paige?" my little sister cried.

"I'm so sorry, Erin," I said while picking up the last remains of my sister's science project.

"Now I have to start all over again. It's due tomorrow, or I'll get a zero. Paige, will you hand me some of those Kleenex boxes and get me some glue? I guess I'll rebuild it."

"Sure, Erin. What was it anyway?"

"It was a time machine, Paige." Erin sighed again. "Now it's a pile of trash, thanks to you!"

I thought, *A time machine. That's odd. It would be funny if this contraption would actually work. But that's silly. I don't think anyone will ever come up with a formula for time travel.*

The next morning while leaving for the bus, I spilled some orange juice on her new project. "Oh, man!" I said. "Not again!" Suddenly I saw a spark from the project. Then I felt trembling in my feet. I could feel it coming upwards, all the way to my head. *This can't be happening*, I thought. Finally, I felt heavy and fell over.

Soon I heard a voice. "Excuse me. Excuse me," someone said, shaking me.

"What?" I asked. Then I yawned.

"May I sit next to you?" a lady asked.

"Oh, sure," I replied. "Hi, I'm Paige."

"Hello, I'm Rosa."

"Do you know why everyone is staring?" I asked Rosa.

“Oh, you know why,” Rosa said.

A man interrupted us. “Leave, lady,” he said rudely. He stared at Rosa and he sounded like he was threatening her.

“I’d rather not,” Rosa replied.

Suddenly I felt my throat close up. My eyes filled with tears. My face turned purple, darker than a grape, and I couldn’t even yell for help.

“We have to get you to a hospital!” said Rosa while leaving her seat and pulling me with her, leaving an empty space for that man.

I woke up later that day with a slight headache. “Where am I now?” I asked out loud.

“Just try to relax.” I looked up and saw a doctor with many instruments staring down at me. Rosa was nowhere to be seen.

Hey, maybe, I woke up from that weird dream, I thought. I looked around.

“You have a rare cell in your body,” the doctor explained. So that’s it! I was in a doctor’s office! I must have been in an accident. “I’ve never seen anything like it. It’s orange but sparkling.” His eyes turned toward the window and spied an African-American boy who stopped to get a drink from a fountain. “Hey, kid! That’s not a Negro drinking fountain! Get out of here!”

When he turned his attention back to me, I was gone. Not physically gone, but mentally. I felt confused and dumbfounded, but most of all scared! I was in an unfamiliar place and there was no one comforting me. What troubled me the most was how that man was so rude to that boy. He didn’t do anything wrong. It was like I was in 1955 with prejudices!

Then, out of all the lights and instruments, I finally noticed the nurse’s clothes. Everything was so old fashioned. Then I looked up and saw the calendar. It read... 1955! *Oh, no!* I thought, *I must be hallucinating.* But somehow I knew I wasn’t, and I ran out of the hospital at record speed before some other bad thing happened.

It couldn’t really be 1955. Time travel isn’t possible. As I walked down the unfamiliar streets, I tried to convince myself this

was a dream. But no matter how many times I pinched myself, I didn't wake up. I traveled through the town. I couldn't believe how low the prices were! But that wasn't the problem. I needed to find a way out of here soon. It was turning into night and I was so cold!

Everything was so different—so old fashioned, like in books I've read or seen in antique stores. The buildings were even more unfamiliar than the items. The weirdest things were the automobiles. I swear I've seen ones just like them at the Henry Ford Museum.

I couldn't comprehend what was going on. Where was my family, my friends, my city? I could tell it was 1955, but where was I? As I wandered off some more, I caught a bus for its warmth.

On the bus, I started to feel dizzy and heavy, so I closed my eyes.

The next thing I knew I was sitting on my own chair in my own kitchen. "What a dream!" I said, looking around at my kitchen. "Thank goodness it was just a dream."

That morning as I walked to school, all I could think about was that bus dream. *Why did I fall asleep in the kitchen and what made me dream about a bus and a woman named Rosa?* The answers to these questions were soon to be revealed.

"Hi there, Amber!" I shouted to my friend. "Do you think we made basketball try-outs? It's pretty close between us and Maggie."

"Are you talking to me?" Amber asked.

"Well, you are the only Amber here, and I'm looking at you."

"Listen, I could never try out for your basketball team," Amber explained. "The separation rule will never be changed. You're strange."

What was that? I wondered. Amber had been right next to me last Sunday at try-outs, shooting baskets with me. I walked to my locker. It seemed like all the African-American kids were off together whispering. It was like that all day, but in Social Studies when we were discussing the Civil Rights movement, an idea popped into my head. The bus, the name, the man, the

separation! The lady was Rosa Parks! That would explain everything! How could my little fourth grade sister have created a time machine? She can't even subtract correctly.

Could this be the end? Will people be separated forever? No, I can't have this happen. There has to be a way around this," I thought. I closed my eyes and thought of our kitchen. At last a thought came to my mind: home! It was worth a try. After all, the worst thing that could happen was that it had been thrown away.

After sixth period, I rushed out of school to go to my home where I thought Erin's project must be. "It's not here!" I flew into a rage of frustration! What was I going to do?

"Oh, no! It's not here!" I cried again. Then, staring at the trashcan, I half wished it was there and half wished it wasn't. As I scrambled through piles of disgusting garbage, I pushed away some applesauce and saw... some piles of worthless cardboard! Time to rebuild!

I started taking bits and pieces out of the trash and tried to build a contraption. I thought I needed more cardboard, but it turns out I put the Kleenex box in the wrong place. Once I was satisfied, I got a gallon of orange juice and used it all. I guess I was a bit excited as I tried to settle down.

Suddenly I felt dizzy again and then: bumps. Bump. Bump. I opened my eyes. I was on the bus again. Hurray! "I am a pure genius," I say. A lady interrupts my pleasant thoughts.

"Rosal!" I yelled.

"How do you know my name?" she asked.

"I, um, I was speaking to my friend, Rosa Mays. Yeah, that's it."

"I don't see anyone."

"She's gone now. Hey, would you like to sit down?" Rosa sat with a strange look on her face. "Listen, I don't have much time, but you have to listen to me. Don't give up your seat on this bus. You can change history. I know you can." I tried to rush through everything, trying to convince her to not give up her seat.

When the bus stopped, I decided to get off, and it turned out I was getting off the bus at school. I walked into school praying that there would be no separation. To my luck, the hallways were filled with a mixture of black and white.

Could it be that I was sent back to change history, or was I supposed to make a difference in the world like Rosa? Was it all just a dream? A figment of my imagination? No one will ever know. Of course, I hope to know someday. Suddenly, I felt a hand touch my shoulder.

“Hi! I’m new here at this school. I’m in sixth grade and my name is Rosa Parks.”

“What?”

The Weather/Mood Girl

*It isn't unusual for people to be affected by the weather. But what happens when the weather is affected by a person? You'll see in **THE WEATHER/MOOD GIRL**, by **Katie Rulkowski**.*

“Hey, guys. What’s up?” I said to my friends.

“Hey, the sun, that’s what’s up. But not yours or anything!” replied my friend Lila.

“Jenny, are you ready for the big science test on the weather system?” asked one of my other friends, Nina.

“Oh, no, I forgot to study!” I said.

“That’s okay; Jenny, you have your own weather system. You should know what’s on the test. But if you don’t, you can cheat off our test. You know, Jenny, if some stranger met you on the net, he would think you were blond,” replied my other friend, Mia.

Hi, I’m Jenny. I was born with a weather system. When I’m happy there is a sun above my head. When I’m sad there is a raining cloud. When I’m mad it thunders or lightnings above my head.

When we got to the school’s front door we all scattered like ants to our lockers. Everyone looked at me with strange eyes when I opened my locker, which made a huge squeak. When everyone started laughing or whispering to each other, I knew they weren’t laughing at my locker, but at me. Everyone saw the huge sun above my head.

As soon as I got my books for homeroom I hurried there. I arrived to homeroom early, so my prize was to get to talk to my friends. When I went over there to talk to them, they ignored me!

I didn't understand, so I said hi. Then Lila said, "Why are you trying to talk to us?"

I told them, "Because you're my friends."

She said, "As of a few minutes ago, you are too unpopular to be with us."

That's how I got here sitting in the rain from my own rain cloud. A few minutes later Renee walked under my rain cloud and sat down next to me. "Hi, Jenny" said Renee.

"Hi, *ump, ump*," I said.

"What's wrong, Jenny?" asked Renee.

"Nothing. You wouldn't understand," I replied.

"Come on, what?" Renee asked again.

"My friends dumped me because my cloud is the laughingstock," I said in despair.

"No, it isn't. People are just weird. No one knows what normal looks like. For all we know, you probably should be laughing at us. Anyway, those 'friends' you had were not true friends. Your friends judged you on whether they thought you were cool. What they should have judged you on was how nice you are. If I was judging, you would get an A," Renee said.

"Thank you," I said.

"Hey, Jenny, you want to study for the science test? I sort of heard you say you didn't study."

"Sure," I said.

That day I learned the most important lesson of my life: Don't judge people on how they look; judge them on how kind they are.

"Jenny, one more question."

"Yeah?" I replied.

"Do you ever get a sun tan from your sun?" asked Renee.

"Nothing is affected by my sun, but people are affected by my rain," I answered.

"I know that," said Renee, as she squeezed out the water from her shirt.

The Bands of Sheva

*Artifacts from the past hold a power that is accidentally unleashed by their new owner. This traps a boy in a different dimension and puts him in grave danger in **THE BANDS OF SHEVA**, by **Robert J. F. Salton**.*

Long ago, an evil wizard made a “gift” for the pharaoh, Sheva. The wizard wanted to take over the throne, so he made bands for Sheva that were enchanted, but Sheva did not know this. The bands were an evil trick played by the evil wizard. The bands were a magical gift that took Sheva to a parallel universe, but this parallel universe was a trap, and Sheva was never heard from again. He left the bands behind to be found today....

My dad is an archeologist. He searches for artifacts. I’m Steve and I’m fifteen. I have this annoying dad who believes I want to go on this stupid trip. I, instead, like action and not boring educational things, so that’s why I don’t want to go on this trip. At the airport I didn’t whine—much. I’m not one to complain, at least on the outside!

As soon as we got to the site, which was known to be the location of the ancient temple of Sheva, a man who was second in command of the dig greeted my dad and told him that the digging crew found something. When the man showed my dad what they had dug up, my dad said that they just looked like some child’s toy that had been discarded. The man agreed and said that a child’s toy was not at all what they had been looking for. The site was reported to be the location where Sheva had been lost in space, and they were looking for the very thing that had banished Sheva and caused him to be lost. His kingdom erected the ancient temple of Sheva in memory of the loss of its king.

The man catalogued his find as junk and gave the bands to me. I thought they looked like ancient wristbands or some sort of jewelry. Even though the grown-ups said they were just junk, I thought they were cool, and it looked like they might even be made of real gold. My dad just laughed. Later, I was to realize that we were all wrong.

A week later, at home, I put the bands on my wrists and said out loud to myself, "Bands of Sheva! That's a great name for these old pieces of junk!" Little did I know that these were the words that would lead to my nightmare. From out of the bands a brilliant flash of light blinded me. A whistling wind blew around me. All I could see was a burning green color. I closed my eyes to shield them. Then all went silent.

Suddenly, I felt woozy, and like I was falling. When I opened my eyes, I couldn't believe what I saw! Things from the past were flashing before me while I was falling through a warp vortex! I could see Sheva with the bands and then me with the bands. I saw the evil wizard laughing as Sheva was taken away to the other universe. Then I saw myself screaming as I was transported, too. I could see the wizard controlling the throne and I could see the kingdom of Sheva being led to destruction. I poked at the visions, but my hand went through them as if they were holograms. I sputtered out words and cried out to the visions, but nothing responded. Then it ended.

I landed in a forest during the night. I was so scared I was literally paralyzed! I couldn't move until I realized I wouldn't live a day if I didn't make camp. On my hands and knees, I began to crawl around in the dark. I came upon some logs that appeared to have been placed into something of a teepee shape. I quickly threw myself into the strange little house I had found for shelter. It struck me as if someone had been here before me on a journey of his or her own.

In the morning, I finally mustered up some strength and started to journey on. I ventured on through the forest. I saw things you could only dream of. There were bizarre animals with multiple body parts and heads. I saw trees that could never exist in reality because they had eyes and spoke to me in a language I

didn't understand. In the dark there were things, strange things, even some plants that seemed to move by themselves. If I told you everything I saw, you would be praying for your own safety.

I traveled for seven days and seven nights through forests of bizarre items and a valley of despair and torture. The forests contained huge, scary and dangerous beings such as people and animals, but still not really animals or really human. They seemed to be hiding in shadows. I feared for my safety and my life, so I hid as I traveled during the night. But the valley of despair and torture was the worst, since there lived creatures that threatened me. One night, as I snuck past, I witnessed something that scared me stiff. Even now, it gives me a chill. I saw a thing, a hideous monster, so horrible that I cannot even describe, feasting on the carcass of someone who had passed through before me.

I ran until the valley was far behind me. On the horizon before me, I saw towns full of people, and they were advanced in civilization! They had technology that we would only have discovered in thousands of years, such as holograms, flying cars, and robots! The towns seemed nice, at first, but when I came closer, I saw there were riots everywhere and horrible accidents involving deaths! I was afraid of death and afraid for my life, so I did not dare go into the town. I spent the night on the outskirts of the town.

On day eight, I finally came upon a hut. This hut had masks on it. It also had shrunken heads around its base. I went inside and saw a man with a gourd in his hand. I asked him what he was doing, and he said he was a witch doctor. He said he was practicing spells. He stopped and looked up and said, "I am not surprised to see someone like you. Many have come, but none have left." I asked him if he could send me back to my home in my time. He answered me with, "If you can take on the Labyrinth of Death, you may return to your place in time and space, but only if you accept the challenge." I said I would accept. I was desperate.

A large stone door in the back of the hut appeared out of nowhere and then opened before me. The doctor shoved me

through the door and suddenly the door vanished. On the other side was the beginning of the maze. I ventured inside.

About two minutes into the maze, a trapdoor opened. I fell through and reappeared at the start of the maze. I realized that if I made any mistakes, I would always have to start over and over, and that I would be stuck in this maze for the rest of my life and probably die there.

For days I traveled, memorizing traps so I wouldn't have to fall victim to them again. I spent many days running from the zombies of people that had taken this challenge before me and failed. I worked hard searching for and at last finding clues that turned out to be mere tricks!

At one point I knew that I only had the strength left for one more passage. I mustered all the strength and courage I had left in my poor, tired body. I struggled to remember all the lessons I had learned over the many days I had spent in the maze. Although tired, I was oddly aware of even the smallest difference from times before. I saw a path that appeared to be new, one I had never tried. Did I dare take it? I had no other choice, and when I took it, it was the path to victory! I had finally found the path to home! Another flash of green light and wind came forth and the portal reopened!

I entered and came back to my room. It was as if time had stopped for me since nothing had changed at all! I quickly went to my dad's tool shed, took out his electric saw, and destroyed the bands, not only to make things normal again, but to make sure no one ever ventured into that horrible world again.

The Mystery of BABA

*An inhabitant of a different planet finds that he has superpowers. Although he uses these powers for good, they bring terrible consequences in **THE MYSTERY OF BABA**, by **Noah Saperstein**.*

Here is a tale about a man named BABA. He never really knew what he could do, until now.

BABA is what you would think looks like a thumb, except with arms, legs, a head, and a body. That is what all Ramu-Hobs look like.

One day BABA was walking down the street, when he went into a store. There, right in front of him, was a robber. Without thinking, he tackled the man. Then the man shot BABA with a gun! The bullet hit BABA, then fell to the ground. BABA kicked the man, and the man froze. A layer of ice covered him.

BABA started to freak out, until the police assured him that the man was all right. The cops thanked BABA, even though they were afraid of BABA, and they gave him a reward.

They also did numerous tests on him. One of the tests was whipping him until he got angry, which is when he pushed the scientist and turned him into ice. Scientists found he had numerous superpowers. They also found that he was able to use them when he was feeling scared or hurt.

BABA's best friend, Dwarf, and he bought a mansion and loads of clothes. They had many chefs, butlers, and house cleaners. (BABA paid all of them extremely generously and gave them shelter and food). He lived in a ghetto just outside of the planet's biggest town called Eth`iop`IA.

A couple of days later, BABA and Dwarf went walking, and they found three men holding items that looked like bombs, and

about thirty more holding plasma rifles and plasma bazookas. The men were transporting plasma-biological weapons. (When they blow up, they shoot out plasma and biological waste, which kills everything in its blast radius.) They hid in the bushes and watched them until they drove away in a truck.

BABA and his friend started to run after the men. They followed the suspected terrorists into a dark and mysterious cave. Then they found Boo, the world's worst terrorist, there.

BABA and Dwarf commanded, "*Stop!*"

"What will you do...kill me?" Boo said.

"If we have to, yes," Dwarf said.

"You wouldn't put your own father in jail," Boo said.

"What? My father died," Dwarf said.

"No, that is just what they told you at the orphanage. They knew that you couldn't handle the truth," Boo said.

"What is the truth?" Dwarf said.

"That I am your father, who is the world's greatest terrorist," Boo said.

"*No!* It can't be true, since you claim you are my father who brought me to the orphanage," Dwarf cried out.

Then, quick as lightning, Boo shot Dwarf with a plasma rifle.

"*Noooooo,*" BABA said as he started to cry. His tears turned to lightning and a storm came. Then he jumped onto Boo. Boo fired at BABA, but he missed. BABA then tackled Boo. Then Boo fired his taser. BABA fell to the ground, and then Boo fell to the ground. BABA got up and looked at Boo. Boo had shot himself by accident. BABA fell backwards in shock. (He thought he was going to die.)

BABA recovered and called the cops. They told BABA that it was all true about Dwarf. Boo was his father. In addition, he got a \$100,000,000,000 reward.

Thereafter, BABA tried to live happily, but it was not the same.

The Magical Fox

*Many people have been helped out of a bad situation by a friendly stranger. Such a stranger is usually human, though. Can you guess where help comes from in **THE MAGICAL FOX**, by **Adam Serhane**?*

On Sunday, June 20 (Father's Day), Alex took his dad to the airstrip blindfolded. Alex took off the blindfold and said to his dad, "Surprise!"

His dad said, "Wow!"

Alex and his dad were signed up for a plane ride above and around the forest. They met a pilot named Bob and took off. They didn't know that the plane's nose was off-center by 50 inches.

All of a sudden the plane had nose failure and began to dive to the ground. BOOM! They crashed in the forest. Alex and his dad were really scared but glad to be alive. Bob had a broken leg and was in a lot of pain.

It was getting cold and dark, so Alex and his dad went to find firewood. Bob stayed behind. He had a pistol in case an intruder came by.

Two minutes had passed when Alex and his dad heard gunfire, so they ran to see what happened. Alex saw blood and Bob was gone! Alex saw bear tracks, and next to the tracks he saw Bob's bloody handprint. While Alex was examining the tracks, he felt warm breath on the back of his neck and heard a loud "ROAR"! The bear had come back for seconds because he was still hungry.

All of a sudden, a fox appeared and scared off the bear. The fox said, "Get on my back."

Alex was surprised and said, "You can talk!"

The fox said, “When I was younger, I was playing in the forest and found a dump site. I was exposed to toxic waste, and now I have magical powers and can do many things.”

All of a sudden the fox grew as big as the size of a car. Alex and his dad got on the fox’s back. Alex said, “My house is in the town called Beverly Hills.”

The fox said, “I know where that is.”

The fox took off at 100 miles per hour and flew over the forest. They landed in the driveway of Alex’s house. Alex and his dad said, “Goodbye.” The magical fox vanished into thin air.

A month later, Alex and his dad saw Bob walking down the street. He had no left arm. Bob told Alex what happened to him that horrible day when he and his dad left to find the firewood. “The bear dragged me into the forest by the arm. When the bear stopped, he bit off my arm. Then I played dead, and he left me alone. When the bear was gone, I ran for my life. Then I found my friend and he took me to the hospital.” Bob retired from being a pilot and became best friends with Alex.

Babies Threaten People

Something odd is going on, and babies are at the heart of it. Adults need to get these babies in line before someone gets hurt in **BABIES THREATEN PEOPLE**, *by* **Tommy A. Syrkett, Jr.**

Do you know how people threaten each other? Well, this time, babies threaten people.

It all started when the parents of the babies went to the baby store to get a machine to make babies talk. But they got the wrong one. They got a machine to make babies bad.

When they got back home, they tried to put the babies in the machine. (They didn't want to go in.) So the parents gave each of their babies milk to get the babies in the machine. They got in the machine, and then they turned it on. BOOOOOOOOOOM!

One of the parents said, "Did it work?"

One of the babies said, "We're going to kill you."

The parents got scared and hid in the closet.

The babies drove to the airport by driving a Corvette. Then they hijacked a plane and flew to Washington, D.C., where they threatened the president. Then they flew to Iraq and threatened Saddam Hussein. He got scared and hid in his hole.

Finally, all the people in the world said, "Why are we scared of babies?" All the people came out of their closets and all the babies got mad. But the parents had some type of formula that all babies like: milk. The babies were good—or so we thought.

The Rat That Almost Took Over the World

*No one wants an evil rat for a leader. Fortunately, the princess of Kingsville has a plan to foil the schemes of a power-hungry rodent in **THE RAT THAT ALMOST TOOK OVER THE WORLD**, by **Chloe Elyse Weisberg**.*

“He’s all right? Okay, great. We will be right over to pick him up. Oh, and thank you very much, Dr. Linston,” answered Mrs. Hornze, who was talking to her local veterinarian. Ralphie, Jamie’s pet rat, was hospitalized after being found frozen, mysteriously buried in the snow five miles from the Hornze house, which is a long way for a rat. The truth is, it wasn’t mysterious, and it wasn’t him.

Rathilda was a famous rat who had tried several times to take over the world. Since Rathilda is obviously not running the world, you know that all her attempts have failed miserably. Once, she ruled all of Africa and most of Asia and Europe, but a wise King offered her a giant slice of cheese if she would surrender. Being a rat, Rathilda took advantage of the free cheese, even though she owned a cheese factory in France.

This story is about a particularly strange attempt to take over the world. It was Friday the thirteenth, and Rathilda was putting her first step of the plan into action. Rathilda had decided to start by gaining control of one family that had power over the Kingdom of Kingsville.

Jamie, the daughter of Jonathon Hornze III, had a pet rat named Ralphie. Rathilda kidnapped Ralphie late that night. She

had managed to get him out to her car when the troubles started. It was thirty-five degrees out and snowing. Luckily, Ralphie was a very sound sleeper and never woke up at all during his journey in a burlap bag. Rathilda reached evil headquarters, or E.H. for short, two hours later. She put Ralphie in a jail cell and locked the door. The bars had very small openings, too small for Ralphie to escape.

Then Rathilda took a hot shower and scrubbed until her black fur shone. She put on her pink bathrobe and matching pink bunny slippers, and sat in her pink chair with a cup of hot chocolate.

Later that night, she returned to the Hornze house wearing her Ralphie disguise. When Jamie woke up to go to school, she didn't suspect anything. The moment Mrs. Hornze closed and locked the door behind her, Rathilda snuck off to plot out the rest of her plan at E.H.

Once at E.H., she checked on Ralphie and gave him a tiny bowl of water and one slice of cheese. Then she sent a note to Mr. Hornze, revealing herself. The note advised the King that if he ever wanted to see his daughter happy again, he should tell his citizens to obey Rathilda, and she would return Ralphie. But the king had to keep this a secret.

At three in the afternoon, Jamie arrived home and found that "Ralphie" was not there. Jamie searched the house and even the yard. She called her dad and heard the horrible news.

Meanwhile, Rathilda had lost track of time. She was driving back to the Hornze house when she realized it was four-thirty and Jamie had been home for over an hour. Surely Jamie had already discovered that Rathilda was missing, and had already probably called her dad and heard about the note Rathilda had sent the day before.

That's when Rathilda's car broke down in the snow. Rathilda felt like she was trapped in a frozen snow globe. She lay in the snow after trying to fix her car and failing. She had been driving down 52nd Street toward the Hornze house when her car started to sputter. It shuddered and gave one last sputter, and then it stopped. She was trying to fix it when she became an ice sculpture of herself. If you haven't already noticed, winters in Kingsville are not warm and sunny.

On this particular day, it was very cold—fifty degrees below zero farenheight—and snowing. Five people had already been found frozen in Kingsville. Jamie was very worried about what happened to Ralphie when Rathilda kidnapped him. The note didn't give all the details and Jamie didn't know that all this time the rat she thought was Ralphie was really Rathilda in a disguise. So, when Jamie got worried, she bundled up, left a note on the kitchen counter telling where she had gone, and went outside to look for Ralphie.

By the time Jamie reached 52nd Street, her hair was frozen, her teeth hurt from chattering, and she had frostbite on her nose. She spotted a small pink object sticking up from a mound of snow next to the local market. It resembled a rat's tail. Jamie forgot about the cold and sprinted ahead to dig Ralphie out of the ground. She frantically dug in the snow, spraying it everywhere. When she discovered what it was, she was very disappointed. It turned out that it was just a frozen pink string. With frozen tears in her eyes she went on. A few feet away she saw another pink object sticking out of the ground; once again it was a frozen pink string.

A few feet away there was another pink object sticking out of the snow. Not wanting to raise her hopes, she dug through the snow and discovered what once might have been a rat. Now, it was a very frozen rat or a brown ice sculpture, the same color as Ralphie. After rubbing it to melt the ice, Jamie realized it was a rat: a rat with hypothermia. Jamie took "Ralphie" home. That's how "Ralphie" ended up at the vets recovering and thawing.

That's just the beginning of the troubles. As soon as Rathilda was well again, she returned to taking over Kingsville. On Thursday, two days after she returned from the vet's, she left the Hornze's castle and moved into her newly-built rat sized castle. Rathilda had become ruler of Kingsville. The first thing she did when she became ruler was to change the city's name to Rathildaton. Then she sent some of her subjects to the moon because she thought there were way too many people on earth.

In a week she had ruined the lives of everyone except whoever lived in North America. Jamie was devastated when she found out about the real Ralphie and demanded that Rathilda immediately return him.

Rathilda ignored her and continued taking over the world. Soon she had even conquered North America. After gaining control of the entire planet Earth, Rathilda started to create ridiculous laws for fun. Jamie's father thought it was his fault, which it was, and he wanted to help save everyone, but he didn't know how. Jamie had an idea, though. She had researched Rathilda on a now illegal computer. She learned about the time when Rathilda was offered cheese if she would surrender. Jamie knew that Rathilda was a pretty smart rat and probably wouldn't fall for the same trick again, so she came up with a plan more clever than before.

Jamie gathered all the townspeople and told them her plan. Everyone quickly got to work to try to save the world. The town carpenter made a rat trap that looked like a giant slice of cheese. All the cheese factories in Kingsville sent Jamie all of their cheese. The invitation was sent out, the trap prepared, and the agreement was decided. Everyone was ready. The cheese trap was sitting in the town square draped with a big black cloth. The invitation that was sent to Rathilda was for a party to show her how much the people of Kingsville appreciated her.

The people were holding their breath, the clock ticked slowly, all was silent, and finally at three o'clock sharp, Rathilda arrived. Jamie greeted her as if she was a long lost pet, which she sort of was, and then the cheese was presented to Rathilda. Rathilda didn't even hesitate. She practically flew over to it, her feet just barely touching the floor. She didn't even wonder why there was a hole carved in it. She just jumped through the hole and ate. She kept eating even after the door closed. She didn't stop until the cheese was gone two hours later.

Jamie took advantage of this time and read the speech she had prepared; it told Rathilda how terribly she was treating her subjects. Then she handed Rathilda a piece of paper to sign, which was an agreement to surrender. Rathilda reluctantly signed it, on

the condition that she could have as much cheese as she wanted. The kingdom gladly agreed to the endless supply of cheese.

Later, the Hornzes and Rathilda were interviewed on television, and everyone was watching. At the end of the interview, Rathilda pressed a button and everyone fell asleep. When they woke up, no one remembered what had happened. Jamie saw Ralphie lying next to her and another rat who she decided to take home.

A few weeks later, a rescue mission was sent to the moon to rescue some people who were trapped there, but had no idea how they had gotten there.

Jamie, Rathilda, and Ralphie lived peacefully ever after, and so did everyone else, until Rathilda discovered a note she had written and put in a time capsule to remind her to attempt once again to take over the world. But that's a different story.

It's About Time

Going Home

*A shipwreck means more than survival for a British girl who lands on the coast of Africa. A difficult choice will lead her to understand that home truly is where the heart is in **GOING HOME**, by **Katherine Darr**.*

A flash of lightning. Drenched. Cold. Crying on the deck. A hand reaches out through the darkness. I take it. Screams. Moans. A wall of black approaches the ship. *Queen Margaret* is no match for this monster. It comes down, pounding, pulling. Can't scream. I grip the mast. The creature releases its grip. I look down. The hand is gone, eaten by the great monster that curls and pulls at the only solid thing, my ship.

The monster is back. It pries at my fingers. They slip. I fall, fall, fall. My mouth fills with the monster. It is ripping me apart from the inside out! My stomach burns, on fire.

I moaned, trying to shield my eyes from the burning African sun. The darkness of my dream was gone. Even in the sweltering heat, my heart was an unearthly cold. The fire in my stomach burned with the same heat.

In that moment, it all came back, leaving me as weak and feeble as a blade of grass faced with the wind. My life in England, my parents' death, the ship . . . the shipwreck.

I tried to stop the flow of painful memories with my hands, but the pictures seeped through with no sympathy.

Only a month before, at only twelve years old, I was in my best black dress, peering down at my parents' cold, tranquil faces. They lay in a joint coffin, just as they had wished it. My mother

was so beautiful, my father handsome. Their faces showed no sign of the pain and fever that had taken them only a week before.

As I stood there, it never occurred to me that I was all alone. In my mind I wanted to cry, but my heart was dry and tears didn't come. All I could think of was that I had to be dreaming. My arms were red from pinching, but no matter how hard I pinched, my parents were still dead.

The coffin closed after my final kiss. A woman drew me aside. She told me simply that I was an orphan, and if I wasn't cared for, I might have to live on the streets. I was old enough to work for my living, she informed me, and she knew just the place for me. I must leave Britain to go to America, and work for a family as an indentured servant.

What else could I do? I packed my few belongings and sold the rest for food. In only a few weeks I was standing on the deck with a half-thousand orphans, about to board the barely seaworthy *Queen Margaret*.

My memories faded as my mind wandered back to my stomach. My clothes were ruined, and I was bruised from the rocky shore. That didn't matter, though. All I wanted was food.

Looking around, all there was was a beach and a distant jungle. My best hope was the palm trees. Even I, Beth Blakely, with my meager, middle-class education, knew that palm trees meant coconuts.

The few yards felt like many miles. Each step took years. Finally, the palm tree loomed over me. Only one coconut remained on its lush, spread branches. In a short while, I sat happily drinking the warm, rich coconut milk. To my starving self, it tasted like heaven. The blazing heat started to feel cozy and my stomach was pleasantly full. Soon my sight went fuzzy and I drifted away from the harsh, cruel world.

“Mommy, look what I found!”

I'm so happy, with a big smile and a big daffodil, my very favorite flower. My mommy holds out her hands, love for her pretty three-year-old making her face glow.

“Come here, my Beth, my daffodil,” her rose-petal voice rings. “Come here.”

Skipping down the lane, I leap into her hug. She strokes my long, golden hair. She loves my hair. She loves daffodils. She loves me.

All of a sudden she is still, then disappears. I cry and cry for her, but she doesn't come back.

Still crying for my mother, I woke to find the sun sinking. Then I remembered that my mother was never, ever coming back, and my bottled up tears came out as a waterfall.

In a short while my waterfall ebbed to a trickle, then stopped altogether. I recalled for an instant my mother's face, but quickly erased the image and stood up. I knew that this place offered no shelter from the darkness that was crawling calmly towards the beach where I stood.

Walking along the shore, I searched frantically for a haven to shelter me. Soon, it would be too dark to look, and I would be vulnerable.

Finally, I came upon a dip in the sand that was ringed with boulders. It was slightly damp, as though it had been previously full of water.

I climbed eagerly in, too grateful to find anything negative about it. The wet sand was cool, and, exhausted by my depressed feelings, I fell asleep.

I woke cold and wet, sputtering as my mouth filled with seawater. I was kicking and struggling. Finding my footing, I coughed, gasped for air, and threw up the salty water and nourishing coconut milk.

My bed had filled with water and shellfish! I understood immediately that I had fallen asleep in a man-made trap for food. How could I have done such a thing?

Thinking back, I remembered that on the day of the shipwreck, I had been dared to place a crab on Molly Carfield's dress. She was such a goody-goody-two-shoes that I laughed out loud when she screamed. Unfortunately, not only was she a

goody-goody-two-shoes, but she was a tattletale, too. Miss Marglin sent me to bed without lunch or dinner.

Not eating anything but coconut (which I'd thrown up) and barrels of salt water had a horrific effect on my growing body. My mind went black and I fainted.

I am skipping down a road of clouds. Far ahead is a light. I am glad to go towards it, going farther away from my troubles. In the light, I know, are my parents, and all the orphans on the *Queen Margaret*. My parents welcome me, call to me. I begin to run...

"She's almost dead. Leave her be, Nummy."

"No! She needs our help and you know it. Just because you're in a hurry doesn't mean we shouldn't help her, Arro."

"Look at her face. It has the spirit light. Let her be!"

"Kola, give me that lantern! Look at her face, Arro. Maybe she knows my father. Her skin is as light. Kola, go get Mom!"

"Numbee, I'm scarwed. Please come wid me!"

"See, Arro. I told you she was too young for this chore. Go with her."

The boy who the girl called Arro tried to protest, but walked off with the little one named Kola. Still in a daze, I lay there and listened.

In a while I heard voices: a new, deep voice, accompanied by Arro's. I began to feel woozy again, and slipped quietly into unconsciousness.

When I woke again I was warm and dry, lying on a soft bed. I pried my stiff eyes open and cried meekly for food. A large woman with very dark, silky skin and a colorful turban bundled on her head came over. She fed me cold pudding that tasted strongly of coconut, filling my cavernous stomach slowly with each spoonful. In a warm bed, with a full belly, I drifted far away.

When I woke again I was no longer drowsy at all. I wanted to jump up and run free like the wild horses in fairy tales.

As my eyes popped open they were filled with my surroundings.

I was lying in a bed of straw and soft jaguar skins, in the corner of what appeared to be a small mud hut. Some straw ticks and blankets were piled neatly in the other corner. I peered around this crude but homey abode. Finally, my eyes fell upon a small child, not much more than a baby, sleeping on a blanket in the light of the one window.

This little one was like none that I had ever seen. Her skin was dark, nearly black, with little baby curls of blue-black on her little delicate head. She wore hardly anything but a small cloth diaper, tied with reeds. Her miniature thumb was thrust between her pink lips, and the peaceful look of slumber rested on her face. All was quiet and peaceful.

The chatter of young voices and the patter of small feet abruptly ended the silence as three children burst into the hut.

Two girls and a boy belonged to the noise capable of a herd of elephants. Their complexions and facial features matched that of the baby, so I assumed they were related.

The oldest one was a girl about my age. Her hair was long and dark, her eyes large and brown. You might have called her beautiful, as a lion is beautiful. Capable-of-killing-you-beautiful. Her face was coated with mischief and her eyes were wild and free. A colorful blanket was draped carefully about her in the way of a dress. Her eyes lit up when she beheld me.

The boy beside her was a head shorter. His scalp was shaved clean. As I looked upon this boy, I saw determination. He carried himself like a child trying too hard to be a man. He stood tall and proud, but his eyes showed he was none but a frightened boy.

I smiled to see the little, curious face that peered cautiously from behind the older girl's skirt. Her hair curled sweetly and her round, rosy face showed contented innocence. A smile sent the round toddler ducking from view.

"Good day! Finally you have awakened after many days of sleep!" said the older girl in perfect English. "Let me introduce myself. My name is Numbee, but please call me Nummy, since all my friends do. Soon, hopefully, you will be one of them. This is my old little brother, Arro. He is often more serious than he is

old.” Her pleasant laughter, which rang like bells, brought a small smile to Arro’s face.

“Who is that darling lady who hides behind you?” I inquired in the most charming voice I could muster. A knowing wink came from Nummy as she pried the clever child out of her hiding place. The little toddler stole a quick glance, and then decisively buried her face in Nummy’s skirt.

“This is Kola. She hasn’t . . . quite gotten over her shyness of strangers. Kola, don’t be rude! Say hello to . . . I’m sorry, what is your name?”

Blushing, I answered, “Beth Blakely.”

“Oh!” She smiled. “Kola, say hello to Beth!”

“Hewo,” a muffled voice obediently answered.

Nummy shook her head. “Toddlers! Oh, over there is little Baby Kiki. She’s beautiful, isn’t she?”

I nodded politely, intrigued by these people.

After our conversation, Nummy ushered everyone out, helped me bathe, and assisted my pinning on of a blanket dress like hers.

Many weeks went by, and each day I learned more about the life of my caregivers. Gratefully, I accepted the food and bed given to me. In return, with the help of Nummy, I learned new tasks to do to make their lives easier. I happily forgot all the terrible memories of before, and sank into a normal routine. I slept, ate, did small tasks, and played, a child again.

I tried not to think that such an advanced girl like myself, from the modern city of London, was reduced to the base living of these people. It was 1736 and these people lived like cavemen! I told myself that if not for them I would be dead.

The village near our house was full of welcoming people, who asked nothing and were told nothing. Nummy, Arro, Kola, and Kiki became my brother and sisters. “Aunt” Ananala, their mother, took me in as her daughter. I had a family again.

Ananala, a many time widower, took care of her family, and was a doctor for the village. Her first husband, Nummy’s father, was a sailor, who taught her English, stayed for three years, and left on the next boat. Her next husband, Bontu, was a ne’er-do-well, who gave her three children, spent most of their married life

drunk, and was killed by a jaguar. She never needed her husbands, so she just worked harder when they left her life. She was warm and companionable, a perfect friend.

Everything was going so well. I was so happy, cared for, loved, and needed. But bad luck was not done with me yet!

It started on a warm day in August. The wind was blowing, and the gulls on the beach were sending up wails that curled through the air before coming to your ears on the clean, salty breeze. Nummy and I were walking on the beach when we saw it. The blasting wind whipped our hair, and as we fought for clear vision, Nummy yelled that she saw something.

“A ship! A ship! My father could be on it! O God of the Sea, please let him be on it!”

“Your father?” I wondered. “He’s gone, isn’t he?”

“Yes...but he said he would come back. He promised. He loved me! He’ll be back. Maybe that’s him!”

I knew her father probably wasn’t on that ship, but if my father were alive I’d most likely think the same.

An evil thought crept sneakily into my mind. Maybe this ship could take me back to England! I tried not to think about it, but soon it filled my brain, conquering all other thoughts, sending me jumping up and down with Nummy. Home! England!

Shots, screams! A pirate man, evil in his head and heart, grabs my family, friends, even enemies. They are locked up, thrown in a black dungeon, tight, cruel, dark as a night in the jungle. Silence. I walk through my home. No one. There is absolutely NO ONE. I am alone. Terribly alone. I scream and shout to fill the silence, but it never goes away. Never.

I woke up with a jolt, stuffing a fist in my mouth to keep from screaming. The hut was full of softly breathing people. I was not alone. Yet. My dream was clear. I knew what it meant. Somehow, the dungeon was the ship I had seen that day. The evil man was on that ship. He was going to do something awful, horrid, to my family, but not me. He would leave me alone. But something troubled me. When I saw my family, why had I seen Nummy,

Ananala, and the little ones? Why had I seen the deserted village instead of my home in England?

The dreaded ship anchored offshore that morning. Everyone in the village was delighted. Everyone but me, that is. The villagers were chattering about trade, new clothing, pots and pans. All I wanted to talk about was running far away from that ship. I ran to the front of the group heading towards the deceitful vessel.

“Stop! Everyone!” I yelled. “The men in that ship are NOT friendly traders. That’s what they want you to think. Those men will catch you and lock you up. They’re...they’re slavers!”

Some children stared. Most people laughed. Some merely shook their heads at the poor, crazy English girl. They continued walking.

I begged them to stop, emphasizing the horrible things the men would do to them. The people kept going. As they neared the beach, I despaired of hope. Downcast, I thumped down onto a rock, visualizing life alone.

The first villagers cleared the cover of the palm trees. Ear-splitting blasts shook the earth. The trading ship was firing at them! Boats full of hunting men rowed, straining against the waves, inching towards the peaceful shore. As the people of my village turned, I saw their wide-eyed faces filled with astonishment. I had been right!

“Help us, please,” cried a woman woefully.

Yelling above the cracks of thunder power, I said, “To the jungle! Hide. If the white men find you they will take you! Go now!”

The cruel whip of fear drove the villagers, sending them scattering into the shadowy jungle. No one was left behind, young or old. Soon, there was no trace of the people of the village.

One of the last to disappear was my family. Ananala led the way, her bulk clearing the trail, Kiki hugged tightly to her. Nummy followed, struggling to keep up with her mother and carry Kola at the same time. Bringing up the rear, Arro clutched a spear, prepared to defend his family if need be.

Grimly, I turned my face towards the pursuing men, exploring my options. I could give myself up, hoping they wouldn’t harm

me, and take me to England. Or, I could go down fighting for a village that was perfectly capable of protecting itself. Or . . . or . . .

I could run into the jungle. But that would mean I was giving up on my returning to my home. I might never see England again.

England or the village? Old or new? What did I have to go back to? My parents were dead. My future was a bleak orphanage, all alone. The village? Here there were people who cared for me, friends . . . even family.

Then, I made the hardest decision of my life, which split me in two. I turned my back on England and everyone on its misty shores. I turned my back on that ship of hope and terror, and faced the jungle, my family, and my new life.

Finally, I was going home.

What's the Word, Thunderbird?

*A veteran of WWII keeps a special place in his heart for the common crow—although for him, it isn't so common after all in **WHAT'S THE WORD, THUNDERBIRD?**, by **Adam Fisher**.*

“What’s the word, thunderbird?” is what my Grandpa always asked me. Grandpa always told stories of his days in the Navy, and the black crow that he called a thunderbird that Grandpa claimed saved his life. Grandpa said that it was a tribal belief that a thunderbird was the bird that created thunder and lightning. I did not believe that, but Grandpa obviously did.

Back on January 3, 1943, Private Percy Williams (my grandpa) was in Manchester Harbor with his brigade on the *S.S. Jefferson* with her brilliant nautical beauty. Williams was so excited because finally he was on a real mission. As the ship approached Manchester, there was a radio pickup that Nazi U-boats from their navy and B-29’s from the German Luftwaffe were bombing parts of Manchester and Northern Ireland. The whole brigade listened in awe. Some privates yelled, “We’re finally on a mission!” while other fearful ones sat down to pray for life.

Before this radio pick-up was heard, the brigade figured that patrolling the coastline of Manchester was going to be quite simple. Now the whole *S.S. Jefferson* was on its toes, as silent as a mouse.

Then, the brigade actually sighted a German U-boat, slowly examined it, and cautiously moved towards it. The Admiral, Jimmy Rae, sent a distress call to nearby boats in range and to the British Navy telling everyone to look out for a Nazi attack. Rae

then ordered his crew to head swiftly towards the U-boat. The U-boat also steered slowly and quietly in the direction of the *S.S. Jefferson*. Rae quickly sent a call to the nearby boats to get out of Manchester Harbor immediately for their own good, and the crew saw hundreds of boats receding into the distance within minutes.

Suddenly, the German U-boat shot a torpedo, blasting right into the *S.S. Jefferson's* bow, and the whole starboard side of the boat burst into flames. Rae said, "Get into the lifeboats. Mayday!" The unorganized crew sprinted towards the lifeboats in chaos, with each private trying to get onto one. Fifty men including Grandpa and Rae all crowded into one lifeboat, and sent it into the harbor. Each private took a slow sigh of relief, and thought that G-d had spared their lives. The German U-boat wasn't finished yet, though. A second torpedo was aimed straight towards the lifeboat, and the torpedo erupted, sending 50 people into the smoky air full of ash.

Forty-five people were killed instantly. Four had been stunned and there was little hope for their survival. The last man, Grandpa, was struggling with a newly burnt leg to the shore, since now he just could barely swim. Grandpa found on shore that his leg was black with ash from his thigh down.

The Nazi U-boat admiral fled his submarine and swam to the shore, just in case there was a survivor trying to bomb his U-boat. Grandpa did not know at first that one of the enemy that sank the *S.S. Jefferson* was right on the shore, but when Grandpa sighted the German, he limped in his direction as fast as he could go, and chased after him, yelling, "Nazi!"

The Nazi ran away into the hidden parts of Manchester. He went into the alleyways between the historic brick buildings, and assumed that the young private would not be able to find him. Grandpa ran to every alleyway checking for the Nazi fighter, and found him soon afterward.

They came face to face, like one of the old western movie stand-offs. They both drew weapons and stared at each other eye to eye. They both were tough looking on the outside, and determined to capture the other, but in both of their hearts they were sick with fear. Grandpa, with his courageous instinct, aimed

his .22 rifle at the Nazi, but then let it down knowing that he could never kill a man, innocent or not. Neither of them blinked until the Nazi shot Grandpa in the thigh and again in the upper arm. Grandpa immediately fell to the ground. His clothes were tattered to pieces, his skin was the palest of pale, and his blood was gushing out of his body.

Then there came a flock of beautiful black crows, circling above. The lead crow swooped down onto the German enemy, like an archer's arrow dropping to a target, and the rest of the flock became other arrows swooping right to the Nazi. The thunderbirds attacked the German deliberately, like thunder and lightning attacks a metal pole.

Grandpa, with every ounce of strength left in his body, stood up as the lead thunderbird perched on his shoulder. The Nazi, regaining strength slowly, opened his eyes, recovering from the attack. When Grandpa saw him, he immediately turned the Nazi over to the British naval officers coming to Grandpa's aid.

Now, Grandpa calls those beautiful black crows "thunderbirds" because of the lightning-fast swiftness they show while attacking, and the fear they put in their prey's heart when they shriek as loud as thunder. Grandpa earned many medals, honors, and even a purple heart for his achievements in Manchester, but he claimed he did not deserve them; the thunderbird did.

Grandpa changed little since the old Navy days until he became ill from cancer. I visited him just last Monday at Long Beach Hospital in Newark during his final day. We shared a few last words. He took a long deep breath, closed his eyes, and softly whispered to me, "What's the word, thunderbird?"

He finally went to sleep at that moment, as a thunderbird streaked through the dark window, not like an archer's arrow aiming for a target, but slowly and gracefully like a glider. The thunderbird perched on Grandpa's shoulder one last time, as all of us, shocked, finally believed in Grandpa's tales.

Grandpa may be dead now, but his spirit will always be with me, and I will never forget his magnificent courage.

An American Nightmare

*For a young sailor, the attack on Pearl Harbor is just the beginning of a personal journey filled with life-changing moments in **AN AMERICAN NIGHTMARE**, by **Xander K. Raff**.*

I would like to welcome everyone to my version of the horrible nightmare that was World War II. My name is Corporal John Patterson. If I hadn't joined the military, I would've been in Boston, Massachusetts picking apples with my family in our yard. Unfortunately, I have had to spend the last five years all around the Pacific. My favorite post was Hawaii because of the sun and tropical weather all year round. My favorite post was Hawaii until the events of December 7, 1941....

It was the morning of December 7, and the entire crew of my ship, the *U.S.S. Arizona*, was asleep. The only one who still seemed to be awake was me, and just before my heavy eyes (tired from paper work) hit the soft comfortable pillow, a series of explosions erupted across the harbor full of ships.

Everyone scrambled out of bed to get topside. I luckily found my brother, Michael (the best friend I ever had), amidst the human stampede. He and I followed our commanding officer, Lt. Gene Walker, through the devastatingly ravaged ship, going from corridor to corridor as the continuous explosions spewed flames from all directions.

When we got topside, Gene handed my brother and me two heavy machine guns and told us to fire. When I asked what to fire at, my question was answered with a hail of gunfire from two dive-bombing planes. Michael ducked under a staircase as I jumped back into a corridor.

While I dragged myself up, I saw what everyone who was able to was shooting at: a swarm of Japanese Zero fighters. I joined in, firing bullet after bullet at the Zeros that flew above me like starving vultures ready to eat. As I cautiously crept out of the corridor toward the center of the deck, all the planes began to flee triumphantly from the battle. Michael, Gene, and I jumped into a gunboat while shooting at the few remaining stragglers.

We saw first-hand that this had been a massacre. We viewed each ship, seeing dead men on the ruined decks of the battered ships. We returned to the site of the *Arizona*, seeing only metal scraps in the water as we approached. The ship had been hit and sunk by the Zero planes. The great *Arizona* was gone, along with all of its crew. When our gunboat crept closer to where the *Arizona* should have been, we gaped in horror, realizing that what had originally looked like metal scraps turned out to really be human remains. Knowing that nothing could be done for the dead, floating, lifeless bodies, we returned to the dock. Looking over the harbor, Michael and I saw total, apocalyptic destruction.

Seconds later, Michael and I were approached by Gene. He told us to remember this day and to honor those who lived and died during this horrendous fight.

Through the following months Michael and I were sent to many vicious battles, including Saipan, Luzon, and Iwo Jima. Unfortunately, one skirmish will be etched into my mind for all eternity.

After Michael and I had I been transferred all over the Pacific, we finally got an easy job: security. Michael and I were supposed to protect the citizens of a small city called Singapore. We were outside patrolling as we heard four loud moans.

Michael ran ahead to see what it was and I followed. There was a resident bleeding from the stomach down. Michael picked him up and started to carry him when bullets began to soar over our heads. We straightened our bearings and learned that they were firing from our rear.

The gunshots were heard and we received nearby reinforcements. Bullets flew from both ends until it suddenly stopped. It was as if god himself had put a hush over the smoking

guns that had cut both enemy and ally down to size, but it was short-lived. Just then six Japanese soldiers, bayonets ready, charged at us. We killed all of them just before their bayonets reached our chests.

I began to relax until I looked over Michael's shoulder. A Japanese officer unsheathed his shiny metal sword. In one, swift motion he thrust his blade into Michael's stomach. All the men quickly grabbed their guns and pumped bullet after bullet into the enemy's chest. The hail of bullets easily pierced his flesh. The officer fell to the ground with my brother.

Both fought and died valiantly. I only felt sorry for one, my brother.

Shortly after Singapore, I was discharged and sent home. I got married and had a child. He acts so much like Michael that I know we named him correctly: Michael. Now I feel as if Michael is still alive through my son.

We Were the Soldiers

*The horrors of the war in Vietnam have a strong pull on a U. S. soldier. In **WE WERE THE SOLDIERS** by **Harvey Semaan**, a veteran of the Vietnam War struggles to find his place in the world.*

I am in the war, and I am out of bullets, so I kneel down to put bullets in my gun. As I hear bullets fly right over my head, I see a man get shot in the kneecap. When I am walking, I see this man pull this wire out of this thing, and he throws it over here. I am wondering what it is; then I realize that it is a grenade. As I jump for cover I yell, "Grenade!"

Months and years pass by in this terrible war. I can't take this anymore. I am going to wait for the next chopper to come, and I am going on the next chopper so it can take me to the buses that will drop me home.

I return home after a long and boring bus ride. When I arrive at my apartment, I figure out that my wife, Jessica, has left me. I don't understand. First my parents die, and now this. I start cursing and breaking things.

All of a sudden I have this vision of myself lying on the cold ground, with a bullet through my head. I am so scared; my whole body is shaking. Just as suddenly, things go back to normal. I can't believe what just happened. I am sick of life! I decide to go back to war.

I am in the chopper, and it drops me into the battlefield of Vietnam. I crouch in front of a tree that has fallen over. I hear the leaves crunch, so I get up to shoot. Then, as my troops and I climb a hill, one of my buddies gets sniped.

I spot the sniper on top of an abandoned building. As tears run down my cheek, I yell, “sniper on the roof!” War is just like hell, after all the deaths I’ve seen.

As soon as I get up from my crouching position, I find myself surrounded by three Vietnamese soldiers. As they cock their guns, they wave goodbye, laugh, and shoot. I fall face down on the cold ground.

All I can say is, “We were the soldiers.”

Petals of Time

In PETALS OF TIME by Anna Urso, a country girl's diary bears witness to her move from rural living to city life. In which environment does the girl's happiness lie?

Dec. 17, 1899

I ran to the forest. Snow and tears stung my face as I approached the cool, white woods. I came upon the frozen stream I had known my whole life and found the hollow log that held my diary and began my writing.

The birds are chirping and singing joyfully, but this does not make me happy as it had before. I can see their bright colors against the white forest, and bears playing in the distance. But this still does not cheer me up. Dad has found better work in the city, far from Violet Farm, where we live now. I know that at the city I will never hear or see these things again.

I must run back to our house. The strange noise coming from that direction can only mean one thing.

I'm back. I was right. It was what I had feared. The sound was the new horseless buggy of the man who wants to buy our farm. He was already inside, so I went to the stable, since there was nothing I could do. Inside was Rosetta, the one-year-old horse that Dad gave me. I spent the past hour with her, brushing her, giving her sugar

cubes, and talking to her. She will be sold with the farm. We can't have horses at the city.

Oh. The dinner bell is ringing. Got to go.

Jan. 2, 1900

I am writing this in our carriage. It is so bumpy that I can't write very well, but I'm going to try anyway. We are moving today. I said my last goodbyes to everyone, including Rosetta, whom I stayed with until our carriage started pulling away from the farm. We've been going for miles and miles. The trip seems like it's taking forever. It's as boring as years and years of washing dishes. I already miss Rosetta. As we're moving along, I'm thinking about how excited I was the day Rosetta was born, and about Baron and Misty, her parents. I'm thinking about how I'm going to miss my grandma and her delicious cherry pies, and my grandpa sitting next to the fireplace, ready to tell another story. . . .

Whoa. We just hit a big bump! I'm looking up to catch my balance, and I can see the city, a few acres away. The sight horrifies me. People are everywhere I look. As we are getting closer, the noise is getting louder and is aggravating me. I want to run back to the farm into my own quiet house, where the only noise I would hear is the soft sound of the crickets outside.

I have to stop now and put my diary in my trunk. We are at the apartment and I have to help move our things in.

Jan. 3, 1900

We're still settling in, unpacking boxes and moving furniture. I'm looking out the window at our new city. Everything looks so compact and

close together compared to the fields of corn and horse pastures at our farm. There are all these tall buildings that are blocking my view, and I can barely see the sky. I can't see how people can breathe around here. Even our apartment is so small that there's no separation between rooms. I feel like I'm trapped in a cage with no way out.

□ □ □

June 6, 1921

So many things have happened since I last wrote in this diary. I've gotten married and had two children. My life has changed in the city and also gotten busier. I was left with no time to write. Now that my children go to school, I have more time and I want to continue writing.

My husband, Bill, is at work. The kids have already walked to school and now it's time for my daily errands. I'll write tonight.

When Lindsay and Jimmy got home, they did their homework while I made dinner. Bill got home and we all ate together. The kids did their chores and went to bed.

Every night before they go to sleep, I tell them something about the farm. Tonight, I told them about Rosetta's birth. This is what I said: "One night there were noises coming from the stable. Grandma, Grandpa and I went out to check on Misty. She was grunting and twisting, and Baron had his head over the stall separation, watching. We were just in time! Hooves started to emerge. Misty pushed and slowly it happened. She had her baby. We named her Rosetta, after the beautiful white rose shape on the foal's forehead. Grandpa said she would be my horse. All mine!"

My son, Jimmy, said I should be a writer, because I'm such a good storyteller and I hold his attention. It's time for *me* to go to bed now.

June 7, 1921

Today at dinner, Bill said he had something important to say. He told us that he bought a farm. We were shocked. He said he's been listening to all my farm stories for years, and that he got a deal on a farm. It comes with three horses. It's only a mile from Violet Farm!

I'm too excited to write any more.

July 14, 1921

The day is here! We're moving. Once again I am writing as I am moving, but this time I am in a horseless buggy! No one is sad. The kids are anxious to experience the farm, and not just hear about it anymore. And I want to go home! I'll write more when I get there.

The ride there wasn't nearly as long as it had seemed many years before. When we got there, I ran straight to the stables to see the three horses. I stopped dead in my tracks, like someone had pinned me to the floor. Standing right before me was Rosetta! Bill came walking up behind me. He had a big grin on his face and told me to look in the next stall.

There was another horse, and she was pregnant. Her name was Jasmine, and Bill told me that she was Rosetta's daughter! She, too, had a white flower mark on her forehead, and I wasn't surprised. Her mate, King, was in the third stall. I walked up to Rosetta and stroked her face. She recognized me immediately, and neighed with delight. I am so happy!

July 17, 1921

I woke up to familiar sounds coming from the barn. I knew exactly what it was. We all ran to the barn and once again, it happened! Only this time, something wasn't right. The foal was small and looked too weak. I ran into the house and called the vet and she came quickly. She said it didn't look good. The foal came out too early.

I went into the stall and stayed with the baby. Rosetta lay down next to the baby and Jasmine. She licked her over and over, but the baby still didn't stand. Seeing that Rosetta wasn't going to give up, I nudged the lips of the baby to her mother for a drink. A few minutes later, the baby tried to stand, but she fell again. Rosetta and I both gained confidence and nudged the baby up. She stood with our support, but fell when we let go. Jasmine was trying to help, too, but was very tired. I took a wet, warm cloth and rubbed the baby down as Rosetta licked and warmed her. I got the stable blankets down and slept with the horses.

July 18, 1921

I am so tired. It was a long night. We're going to try again. I'll write soon.

After the third try, the foal stood. King neighed with delight. We won the fight! We named the foal Daisy, after the tiny white marking on her forehead. Something tells me she's going to be just like her grandmother, Rosetta, as I watched her snuggle next to her mother.

□ □ □

Nov. 29, 1971

We are still on the farm fifty years later. I found this diary in an old trunk in the attic. It was a thrill to read these old entries and I decided to add one more.

Daisy grew up, and had children of her own, all with similar white markings on their foreheads. During that time, I used to love running with all the horses through the flower-covered valley. I had learned from the horses never to give up, no matter what happens. It all works out in the end.

Look Who's
Talking

The Kold Caper

*The fate of Antarctica is in the hands of two of its bravest residents. In **THE KOLD CAPER** by **Kerry Concannon**, Cola and Berg must outwit a nasty villain in order to save the day.*

“Come on! Hurry up!” Cola the polar bear shouted to her companion, Berg the penguin.

“I can only waddle so fast!” answered the penguin.

They were off on a quest. Their beloved Antarctica was melting, and they intended to save it. The wise village chief, Blubbkins, told them to try searching Kingdom Kold (a cleverly disguised palace) where the dreaded King Kold lived. He was their number one suspect, but for what crime, you may ask? A terrible one. You see, Antarctica runs on the rare, powerful ice orb. It must never, ever be removed from its spot atop the biggest, tallest, most *humongous* iceberg in the land. If it is, the cold will be sucked from Antarctica, and it will melt. Yet its new wielder will harness all of Antarctica’s power—and will never part with it until the orb is replaced on its iceberg home.

Cola and Berg must get past the terrible snow beasts enslaved to the king. The terrible beasts live in a hidden lair in King Kold’s awful disguised castle. They snarl, roar, and breathe blasts of ice. Even one single, half-hearted, gentle bite could kill. They are also so freezing cold, a touch with a ten-foot pole could send a spine-tingling, heart-stopping, bone-rattling chill up and down your body, until you are robbed of life. If Cola and Berg die from these beasts, Antarctica will go down, too, because it will be too risky for another. But if Berg and Cola can save Antarctica by replacing the orb in its home, Antarctica will not melt and its inhabitants

will survive. Berg and Cola feel up to the challenge, and in return they get an adventure they will never forget.

“Climb on my back, Berg! It’ll make us go faster!”

Berg, wanting to hurry and not disappoint Cola, hopped on her back, though not as graceful as a butterfly, and Cola took off as fast as a turkey does two days from Thanksgiving. A short time later they smelled a horrible smell, like rotten milk, spoiled cheese, or even expired fish!

“*Yuck!* What is that awful smell?” exclaimed Berg. “Ewww, it’s the smell of power, and big business,” replied Cola.

“We must be getting close,” said Berg.

After struggling for many days against brutal winds and freezing temperatures (even for Antarctica inhabitants), and without food or baths, they were weak. They neared a mass of ice, at first thought to be an iceberg by Cola. If the half-delirious friends had been able to get a better look at it through their weary eyes, they would have seen that it was actually Kingdom Kold! The kingdom blended in perfectly with the scenery of Antarctica, being entirely made of ice. But there was something wrong about it. Perhaps it was the evil that clung to the walls, or the eerie glow that loomed around the place, or maybe it was its keeper, King Kold, or his terrible snow beasts! Whatever it was, it was making the friends uneasy—very uneasy indeed!

The penguin and the polar bear screeched to a halt as they came dangerously close to the castle—so close that Berg was pecking everywhere on it, trying to find its invisible door. Suddenly sirens came on—“INTRUDER! INTRUDER!” Red lights went off everywhere, the castle had a lockdown, and meanwhile, Cola was baring her teeth and Berg was clinging to her leg, cowering. Then it all just stopped. There was a silence so thick, the extremely hungry polar bear and penguin could have eaten it. Then, a person with icy skin, silver hair, and clad in a robe with blue swirls and silver snowflakes stepped out of the ice dwelling. It was none other than KING KOLD!

“Well, well, well, look what the snowman dragged in! Who do we have here?” he sneered.

“B-B-Berg, and I’m C-C-Cola!” Cola replied, a little nervously. After all, she was talking to everyone’s number one suspect!

“We need the ice orb you stole. You did steal it, right?” said Berg, with a confidence she had only found since her friend had spoken to the king. Berg desperately wanted to be like Cola: brave and strong, instead of scared and weak.

“Why would I tell YOU?” the King jeered. “Hahahahaha! Just go AWAY!” he snickered.

“But Antarctica is melting, and...,” Berg started a little more nervously.

“I don’t care!” said King Kold.

“But everyone will melt or die—including you!” Cola observed.

The King started to ponder this, then shot up into the air with silver wings and yelled, “But I can FLY! And I’ll fly away to the North Pole and stay with family,” he added as he landed. “And I’ll take the orb! That’s for sure!” he added icily. Then he locked them up.

Many days later, the friends found themselves in the same circumstance as they had before they found the kingdom: cold, hungry, dirty, and weak. They knew they MUST think of a plan to escape. But how? They soon put their heads together, and, later, two sly grins broke out on the faces of a polar bear and a penguin.

Cola used her massive paw to break the lock that held them in their iron prison, while Berg chipped away at the wall and got a chunk of ice. Berg pecked at it faster than ants come to a picnic, and made a fake ice orb out of, well, ice! Their plan had worked so far, and was their only chance of survival. That and not wanting to let each other down were the only factors pushing them.

Next, they needed to find the awful King Kold’s room. After not much effort, they did, thanks to the “friendly” signs. But the signs actually misled them to the snow beasts’ lair! The close companions didn’t know what on Earth to do!

They thought this would be the end. They hugged each other tightly, as the snow beasts cornered them, their teeth bared with jaws open, ready to snap! The friends closed their eyes, waiting for the end to come, but it didn’t. They each opened one eye slowly,

then the other, and after that were immediately greeted by a blinding blue light. And with a popping sound the terrifying beasts were gone with only silver, glittering dust in their places. “But how?” they two friends asked each other. Then a beautiful woman in an all-white sparkly gown and with a crown sitting on her blue hair came with a bright silver light, smiled, and left as fast as she came. She was very graceful, and the friends knew who she was right away.

“*The Snow Queen!*” they eagerly exclaimed, remembering the childhood stories they knew of a queen who looked after and protected all, until one day, she became very old and only helped those in grave danger. But sometimes she knew there was a lesson to be learned, and let the inhabitants try and resolve matters themselves.

“She must have saved us!” said Cola, adding, “She sees all!”

“I wasn’t scared,” Berg said, placing a flipper across her chest.

Cola laughed. “Now let’s go get that orb!”

Hours later, they finally found Kind Kold’s room, after wandering and searching and being met every which way with doors, doors, doors, and more doors! They also found there was not a single soul in the castle besides themselves and King Kold, if he even has a soul! King Kold’s bedroom had the biggest door, and so they figured it was his. They had not a moment to spare, but there was one problem: He was cuddling the ice orb like a teddy bear! He was also sucking his thumb. (Berg muttered, “That explains the crooked teeth!”)

The friends had absolutely no idea how to get the orb! They tried just yanking it away, but he moved and talked in his sleep, which the friends mistook for a spell. Finally, half an hour later, he slept-walked to “go and get some water” (actually, grabbing a telescope and pouring water on the floor next to it) and put down the orb. The friends saw their chance, and sprang to make the switch. The transaction was fast and successful! Cola and Berg wasted no time in getting out of the palace. They had to return the orb, and then return to their village.

A new thought came to their heads about King Kold. He was a baby! They walked off into the sunset side by side, and saying, “Think we will ever do this again?”

“Maybe, but I think that all that is left in that castle is a big baby, with absolutely no power at all.”

The Day the Tooth Fairy Went on Strike!

*The United States of America refuses to give the Tooth Fairy a raise! It's left to some highly motivated kids to get the Tooth Fairy back on the job in **THE DAY THE TOOTH FAIRY WENT ON STRIKE!**, by Dayna Elconin.*

I was there when it all happened. I was eleven years old at the time, and no longer believed in the Tooth Fairy. I was proven wrong the day the Tooth Fairy went on strike.

Her strike got so out of hand, the federal government had to come to straighten things out. I became extremely emotional, seeing all the people not wanting to have their taxes raised for a good cause.

"I need a raise!" exclaimed the Tooth Fairy. "I'm up all night, and you people pay me with an endless supply of teeth! You expect me to give your children money, and I get nothing in return?" You should have seen the irritated look on the Tooth Fairy's face.

"I'm sorry, Miss Tooth Fairy. We just can't afford to have our taxes raised," my father, Joel Elconin, said calmly.

"Yeah, we're sorry!" the other adults said together.

"I'm sorry, Miss Fairy, but as of right now, we don't have enough income to give you a raise. The majority of the people also seem to not want their taxes raised." The President had a faint smile run across her face.

"Wait until your children find out the Tooth Fairy is not real! I quit until you give me a raise!" said the Tooth Fairy disgustedly.

"Daddy, the Tooth Fairy's gone!" Emily realized.

I couldn't believe that I was actually at this important date in time! If I had the money, I would definitely fund the Tooth Fairy's raise.

"Daddy, Daddy, I lost a tooth!" screamed my little sister, Emily.

"Uh, oh!" my father whispered under his breath.

"If I put it under my pillow, will I get big bucks?"

"Uh, sure."

I can't believe my father still told Emily to put her tooth under her pillow. He knew what was going to happen!

You probably know what goes next, don't you?

Dear Tooth Fairy,

*This is the first time I
lost a tooth! So I need
big bucks! Thanks a lot!*

Love,

Emily Elconin

As you know, the Tooth Fairy did not come. Emily was devastated.

"Why didn't the Tooth Fairy come, Mommy?" Emily yelled, practically sobbing.

"Honey, the Tooth Fairy is on strike, and it's all over the news," her mother, Lisa, said calmly.

"I want my money, Mommy!" she stated quietly, barely talking.

"Here's a buck, sweetie," Mother said to keep Emily from *really* starting to cry.

"I've got a great idea," Emily mumbled to herself. "How about I put on my own strike, so people will pay the Tooth Fairy? I can only lose so many teeth!" she said a little bit louder.

The next day, a Saturday, she went to the town's crowded mall. Emily wandered into the mall and shouted to no one in particular, "Hey, you!"

"What?" a little child replied.

"You want money for your teeth, don't you?" Emily inquired.

"Of course I do! I lost ten teeth, and you know how much money I got? *Nothing!* Since the United States won't pay the Tooth Fairy, I just sob and sob." The little girl started bawling non-stop.

Everyone looked at her awkwardly, with puzzled looks on their faces. They knew that they just didn't have the money the Tooth Fairy needed.

"What? Don't you want money for your teeth?" Emily inquired to everyone else.

"I'm with you, kid!" said an older man.

"We're sorry, guys. We just don't have the money the Tooth Fairy wants," a gentle and kind man said.

"We're sorry," a couple of other people chimed in.

Emily just tries so hard. She should have gone to see the President right away.

My sister decided she had to have a little talk with the President of the United States. I'm sure you're wondering, "How did she manage that?" Well, it just so happens that my grandmother is the President of the United States of America.

"Grandma, Grandma!" Emily said as she entered the White House.

"I'm over here, Sweetie," Grandma said calmly.

"Are you busy with any important elections right now?" Emily asked hopefully.

"Nope. It's been pretty quiet around the White House."

"Then I've got something for you to do. Could you pretty please start a campaign to see if there are enough people to give the Tooth Fairy a raise?"

"Actually, that sounds like something worthwhile to do in my spare time."

“Oh, thank you, Grandma!” Emily stormed proudly out of the White House.

Soon my sister made it on national television (with a little help from the president)!

“Hello, I’m Oprah Winfrey. Today I am here with Emily Elconin. Most of you viewers know her as ‘The Only One for the Tooth Fairy,’ ” Oprah said. “So, tell us Emily, why did you go on strike for the Tooth Fairy?”

“Well, I was extremely upset when she quit. Then I lost a tooth. My mother gave me a dollar, but she can’t do that every time I lose a tooth. That was my first tooth, so in time my mom will be broke,” Emily answered. “It’s just not fair. It’s a remarkable tradition to get money for your teeth.”

“Yes, I understand. I, too, got money every time I lost a tooth,” Oprah added.

“If you adults don’t want to pay the Tooth Fairy, don’t think about yourselves; think about your children,” Emily said with a tear in her eye.

“Thank you, Emily. We’ll be back after a message from our sponsor.”

At least Emily had a chance to state her thoughts on national television.

The President of the United States of America, Vicky Buckfire, decided that the country should have a vote. “If 51 percent of the citizens want to give the Tooth Fairy a raise, then so be it!” my grandma announced.

“You go, girl!” shouted my grandfather, Dave Buckfire, the First Man.

“Hey, Mom!” Dayna shouted.

“What?” Mother inquired.

“What did you vote for? Do you and Daddy want to give the Tooth Fairy a raise?” Dayna asked.

“Of course we want to give the Tooth Fairy a raise. I can’t stand to see your sister in her condition,” Mom said.

“Trust me, Mom. I can’t stand her so irritable all the time either.”

Emily got extremely involved in this vote. On the playground at West Maple Elementary, she had a meeting. Children from kindergarten to fifth grade were all huddled around the sandbox.

“Have any of you tried to convince your parents to give the Tooth Fairy a raise?” Emily inquired loudly.

“I tried but my dad said that he wasn’t sure yet,” Jamie said.

“Well, everyone needs to try *harder!* How can we live if we don’t get money for our teeth?” Emily shouted.

“Well—” Conor started.

“Excuse me, but that question does not require an answer. We can *not* live without getting money for our teeth!”

Emily is definitely strongly opinionated.

A couple of days later, everyone had voted. Everyone in Washington, D.C. came to see what would happen. My grandmother prepared to announce the outcome as she opened the envelope. The crowd went dead silent. “I am proud to announce the winner of the vote for giving the Tooth Fairy a raise. Citizens that do NOT want to give the Tooth Fairy: 51 percent. Citizens that do want to give the Tooth Fairy a raise: 49 percent.” My grandma wasn’t as proud as she thought she’d be after she opened the envelope.

As you probably figured out, my sister was bawling all over again.

Later that night, I accidentally overheard my parents’ conversation.

“Joel, what are we going to do?” inquired my timid mother.

“This time I really don’t know,” said my father.

When Emily was thinking about what to do in bed later that night, she came up with a marvelous idea. “*If the adults won’t give the tooth fairy a raise, children will!*” screamed Emily, unaware she was talking aloud. “I can’t wait until morning to put this into action; I have to do it tonight!” Emily officially decided.

Emily raced down the stairs. “Uh, Mom, Jess just called. I’m sleeping over. Bye!” she exclaimed before mother could say anything.

Emily went to every house in her neighborhood in West Bloomfield, Michigan. She knocked on all of their doors.

“Bring your piggy banks, everyone! We’re going to the bank!” she told all the children.

They headed towards Charter One Bank, the closest bank to their neighborhood. After everyone cashed in their coins, they hopped on a bus to Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

“Do you have any flights to Fairy Land’s Delight?”

“Dude, we have an empty plane leaving in five minutes. How many tickets do you need?” asked the flight manager.

“We need about seventy tickets!” all the neighborhood kids yelled together.

“That will be \$7,000. Do you have any money on you?” inquired the employee.

“Can we pay you back later?”

“Sure, dudes. Good luck in whatever you’re trying to accomplish.”

“Welcome aboard, mates. I’m Captain Martin, and I’ll be taking you to Fairy Land’s Delight today,” Captain Martin said as he started his introduction.

“Come on, prepare for take off,” Emily whispered almost soundlessly to herself.

“The flight for Fairy Land’s Delight is estimated to be ten hours. You can use your bottom cushion for flotation if you need to. Flight attendants, prepare for take off,” Captain Martin concluded his speech.

“Finally!” Emily said, a little louder this time.

I had decided to come to Fairy Land’s Delight also. I came just for the adventure, but it turned out Emily and her friends really needed me.

* * *

As most people do, Emily fell asleep on the airplane. I did some studying. I brought a book with me called *All You Need to Know About Fairies*. I was sure this knowledge would come in handy.

Ten groggy hours later, the children reached Fairy Land's Delight.

"Does anyone know where the Tooth Fairy lives?" Emily asked.

"Emily, I read about her all the time. She lives on 5329 The Tooth Fairy Lives Here Lane," I said.

"Well, what are we waiting for? Off we go!" Emily said.

I knew that I would need *All You Need to Know About Fairies*.

All the children went up to ring the doorbell. A microscopic lady answered.

"What brings you darling children here?" the Tooth Fairy asked.

"We brought as much money as we could!" said Jonah.

"Yeah, we want to give you a raise!" exclaimed Emma.

"We've been so upset when we don't have money for our teeth!" cried Halle.

The children handed her the giant amount of money.

"Oh, children! Thank you so much! I didn't even expect this much of a raise!" said the Tooth Fairy.

"Does that mean you'll come back?" inquired Gavin.

"No, I can't come back! I know you children want me back, but I've decided to retire. I'm way too old to still be working my wings."

There was a ton of mixed-up whispers among the children.

"Well, we need a tooth fairy!" Jacob exclaimed.

"I know, children. Settle down," the ex-Tooth Fairy said.

"I came all the way here for nothing," Emily said to herself in a dismal way.

“Is anyone willing to take the job? It’s a tremendous responsibility, you know!” the ex-Tooth Fairy went on.

I raised my hand diligently.

“Hey, you! Are you up for the job?” the ex-Tooth Fairy inquired curiously.

“Yeah, I’m sure I can do this!” I said with total confidence. “I used to not believe in the Tooth Fairy, but I was definitely proven wrong! It’s time for me to do the dirty work!”

“All right, children. Say hello to your new Tooth Fairy!”

Wait! Are you ready to stop reading? Hey, it’s definitely not over yet!

Every year after that, I left a little extra money for the children from the neighborhood in West Bloomfield, Michigan—of course, only when they lost a tooth. “So what happened to you?” you say. Well, I had been proven wrong not only about the Tooth Fairy, but all fairy-like creatures. I got to explore the world of the fairy-like creatures, and still live at home at the same time. It feels like college to me.

I’ve also decided to take on Santa’s technique. You can only get money for your precious teeth if you’ve been a good little boy or girl this year. Have you been good this year?

I can read your mind, okay? You’re going to say, “I’ve already lost all of my teeth!” Hey, you never know. I may drop by some time.

The Bagel Man

*Do you know the Muffin Man? The Bagel Man thinks he does. Find out just how much he really knows in **THE BAGEL MAN**, by **Amelia Johnson**.*

“All my life, I have lived in the shadow of the Muffin Man. Who am I, you ask? Well, my name is Inky—Inky Kankinpaw. (Only my mother calls me that.) Most people call me...the Bagel Man!

“The Muffin Man has gotten all the perks and publicity, all because of that poem he stars in. He is happily married, not to mention rich. And I, the Bagel Man, have been cast aside and ignored, while he signs autographs and rides in his limousine. It’s just not fair. So I, the Bagel Man, have come up with a plan to put myself in the spotlight, robbing the Muffin Man of all his glory!

“See, my plan is to lure the Muffin Man to my shop and push him into my Magic Bagel Machine, turning him into a giant blueberry bagel! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha—ahem, sorry; swallowed my mint. But how to lure him here? Money? No. Muffins? No, I’m such a doughhead; he *is* the Muffin Man!

“I’ve got it: Mrs. Muffin Man! I’ll send her a telegram inviting her to the Drury Lane Spa. Right before she has her chocolate facial, my henchmen bagel boys will take her hostage. Then I’ll send a ransom note to Mr. Muffin Man saying that he has to come to me. Brilliant, right? Bagel boys, don’t lie to me. I know you’re behind that door listening to my conversation with the reader.”

“Not us!” say the voices outside the door.

“Okay. Well, if you are behind there, you heard what you need to do. Go send Mrs. Muffin Man’s telegram and return with her by sundown tomorrow.

Sundown, The Next Day

“Master, we brought the muffin woman.”

“Good, good, bagel boys. Take her to the dungeon. By the way, help yourselves to my finest cream cheese.”

“Thank you, thank you, master.”

“You’ll never get away with this,” said the thing in the bag that the bagel boys were carrying.

“Take her away, I need to write a ransom note here!”

Dear Mr. Muffin Man,

How are things? I have your wife, and if you want her back, you’ll have to fill your shoes with custard, walk to IHOP (International House of Pastries), and be there at 3:00. See you there.

Evil Person

“There. What a beautiful ransom note. Bagel boys, please send this ransom note and remember—same day delivery.”

The Next Day in front of IHOP: 3:00

“Inky, do you have my wife?”

“Do you have custard in your shoes? And don’t call me Inky.”

“Whatever. Where’s my wife?”

“Come to my shop down the street.”

“Wow. You’ve painted since the last time I was here! But Inky, why?”

“Well, I was getting tired of the other color.”

“No, why did you capture my wife?”

“Ohhhh, because I hate you.”

“Hate? You know, Inky, hate is a very strong word.”

“Well, how come you get a poem and a wife and a summer cottage in Florida? And stop calling me Inky!”

“Well, Inky, I have an agent.”

“An agent?”

“Yes, an agent. Do you actually think I got that stuff by myself? You can’t get anywhere without an agent in this town.”

“Do you know any good agents around here?”

“Sure! How about we discuss it over some coffee this Sunday?”

“Great! I’ll meet you over at the coffeehouse at noon.”

“Inky?”

“What?”

“Did I forget something?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Okay. See you at noon on Sunday.”

In the Bagel Man’s Dungeon...

“Hello? Hellooo! Where is everybody? I’m Mrs. Muffin Man and I demand to be answered when I ask a question. Come on, hello! I’m hungry! *Dough*, I give up.”

Undercover Santa

*This isn't your typical holiday story. First, Santa joins the CIA on Christmas Eve. But that is just the beginning of his battle against bad guys. He also has to save the North Pole. It's all here in **UNDERCOVER SANTA**, by **William Kern**.*

One Christmas Eve, Santa was waddling over to his workshop to pay his employees (this was back before elves) and pack up the sleigh, when someone stopped him in his tracks. It was a man in a suspicious-looking black coat.

"*Halt!*" he shouted. "We want you to join the CIA."

"Unsec yimretinadounut," Santa replied.

"What?"

"Isuaid onsec yimetinadonut!"

"*What?*"

"Ahem—*cough, cough*—I said, 'One sec, I'm eating a donut!'"

"Oh! Well, I—anyway, before the donut, I said I wanted to tell you that we want you to join the CIA!"

Santa gasped. "*Why?*"

"Because you know where everyone is and what they're doing, even if they're naughty or nice! And would you please stop shouting?"

"But I do my work for the happiness of the children."

"I implore you to reconsider."

"Okay!"

And the man in the black coat walked away.

Later, after work, Santa went to the CIA building in Washington and told them who he was. Almost immediately, they opened the door and let Santa in. He got some high-tech gadgets and stuff (an electric cooler, a portable mist fan, and some other

things that are pretty useless at the North Pole) and was off to deliver the gifts.

Once he was at his first house, he broke through the window (it's cooler than jumping down the chimney, and when you're in the CIA, you have to be cool!). He delivered the presents (a new window for the dad, a coffee maker for mom, and a gun for little Billy), and was just about to leave when an evil employee came and attacked! Santa quickly used his jolly fat stomach to bounce the evil employee all the way to Antarctica.

When Santa got to Antarctica, he broke through a brick of ice (no windows) and delivered his coal. (The Antarctic wasn't bad, but Santa thought he might need it to burn.) He was just about to leave when the evil employee crashed through the top brick of ice! Santa pulled out his coal gun (hmmm... now what could a →coal← gun shoot?*) and started to shoot at the employee.

"Not *more coal!*" shrieked the frightened employee, and he died of shock.

Later, Santa went back to the North Pole after a long day at work and was stunned at what he saw. All the people on the naughty list were burning all the buildings with the coal they had gotten for the last few years! All the good employees were running from the naughty list people like mad! Santa had to think quickly. He remembered back to his Santa booklet (that he made, because he is the only Santa) that said when you kill an evil employee in Antarctica by shooting him with your coal gun, all the naughty-list people would use the coal from the last few years to burn down Santa's buildings.

"That was oddly specific," Santa thought. Then, he took action. He heard that if you are nice to naughty people summoned by an evil employee, they would melt. So quickly he ran around to all the naughty-list people, saying things like, "Hello," or "Good day," maybe even an occasional, "I'm being nice...*so melt.*" But they didn't melt. So he took out a megaphone—I mean, a CIA cool high-tech expensive super-megaphone (much cooler than a *normal* megaphone)—and shouted into the CIA cool high-tech whatever it was, "*I said 'Good day!'*"

But still, it didn't work. Then he thought he might be nice some other way, so he started to hand out toys from the leftovers in his sleigh to the evil people. The odd thing that we may never understand is that all the evil people grew long ears and started to happily work for Santa (punishment, I guess).

So Santa got helpers that he *didn't* need to pay (elves), and there weren't as many nasty people around.

The End (almost)

The only person that probably didn't get what he or she wanted might have been you, because you may have wanted them to melt... but too bad! Plus, I wrote the story, so I can choose the ending. But just to satisfy you, here is another ending...

He heard that if you were nice to naughty people summoned by an evil employee they would melt. So quickly he ran around to all the naughty list people, saying things like, "Hello," or "Good day," maybe even an occasional, "I'm being nice...*so melt.*" But it didn't work. So he went for a better approach. He dressed up as an evil person and started to hand out explosive coal (not too high-tech, but good enough). Everyone was running out of coal, so business went well (at \$2.00 a pound). Just as they started to light the explosive coal, he flew away in his invisible helicopter.

After the coal exploded, Santa came back to the North Pole and realized that he had just blown up the whole village. After a while of finding scattered employees (you know, the ones running like mad), building new houses (more like mansions with the money he made from selling coal), quitting his tiring job in the CIA, and trying to find his invisible helicopter (which took a while), Santa made the village a bigger, better, and more fun place for everyone.

The End (finally)

* Just in case you didn't know, a coal gun shoots coal.

Jake and Julie's Summer Adventure

In JAKE AND JULIE'S SUMMER ADVENTURE by Erin Mason, Jake is forced to leave his home. Perhaps Julie can help make this change bearable....

Jake, a shaggy golden retriever, casually stumbled out of a truck and said good-bye to New York City. Jake had once roamed the streets of the city until the day the mayor passed a law that no stray dogs could stay in New York. Being a stubborn dog, Jake refused to leave his home. The mayor was a busy woman and had no time to deal with stubborn, stray dogs. Unexpectedly, Jake was thrown into a *big* truck full of other stubborn, stray dogs by the New York City dogcatchers.

He was dropped off a day later in strange new surroundings. He said good-bye to the crowded streets he used to roam, to the polluted car exhaust and the towering buildings. All he could see of New York were the tiptop of the tallest buildings over the woody forest. He trotted west into the forest to seek a better life.

As he went west, he heard the ear-splitting noise of a gunshot fired behind him. He jumped into a jog. To his delight, his sensitive nose picked up the mouth-watering scent of an animal. A little farther up was a rabbit, already killed and ready to be eaten. Naturally, Jake picked up the delicious rabbit and started on his way. A man in a camouflage suit with a gun strapped over his shoulder ran toward him, shouting, trying to scare Jake into dropping his rabbit. Jake, who usually didn't interact with humans, bolted. Soon Jake lost the man in the camouflage. He

ran a bit farther and when it was safe, he laid down to devour his fast-food meal.

When he was done eating, it became dark, and he noticed a flickering light in the distance. “I’ll see what it is tomorrow,” he thought to himself as he drifted off in to a deep sleep.

Jake woke up to a raven in the trees chattering above him. The smell of bacon reminded him of the flickering light he saw the night before. Jake walked to where he saw the light and, fortunately for him, he found a fire with sizzling bacon cooking above it. He sat about ten feet away and a girl, Julie, walked out of a tent to the fire. She started to eat. As soon as she noticed Jake, she threw him a couple of strips of bacon. Jake munched on them happily. When he was done, he went to go find adventure in his new, unfamiliar surroundings.

Jake was sniffing down the track of an animal when, to his surprise, he ran into a bear about ten feet away from him. He watched as her muscles rolled when she lumbered towards him. This was not the kind of adventure Jake was particularly looking for. Fortunately for Jake, the bear ignored him. Jake sat down and cautiously watched her as she slowly strolled away. He almost didn’t notice the rather large cub trailing along next to her. Since Jake was a stray from the time when he was born, he never had a closeness like these two bears had; he never knew what it meant to be wanted.

It became around dinnertime and Jake was hungry. He walked back to where he had gotten the bacon that morning. Julie noticed him at once, as if she were expecting him. Jake, again, got a freebie meal. When he was done, he walked a little ways and fell into a deep sleep because of his long day of adventures.

The next day, Jake decided to go to the stream. While he was there, he ran into two familiar faces. The first one was in the morning when he was finding his breakfast. It was the bear that had the same idea as Jake: fish for breakfast – yum. The next one was in the afternoon when Jake was going to the river to quench his thirst. It was Julie, who also had the same idea as Jake: cool, fresh water.

Over the next few days, Jake ate breakfast and dinner with Julie, and in between he ran into her in the woods. One warm summer morning when Jake was going through his regular routine, Julie's tent was gone and so were most of her other supplies.

Jake stood there in astonishment, wondering where he would get his meals from then on. Right then, Julie came out from behind her truck and started packing the few things that were left at her campsite into the back of her truck. When she saw Jake standing there, she motioned him into her truck. He hesitated at first, but after he overcame his fears, he gladly jumped into the back of her truck.

They drove down the dirt road, away from Jake's old home and closer to his new one. About twenty minutes after starting off to his new home, he was there. They stopped in a driveway in front of a small white country house surrounded with a whitewashed picket fence that had hand-painted flower designs on it. Jake jumped cheerfully out of the truck and started leaping happily around the house. Jake, once trying to avoid humans, was now a house pet. But that didn't mean he didn't have to work. He would serve as a guard dog while Julie was away at work, keeping watch over their house. And for once, on this warm summer day, Jake felt wanted.

The Christmas Wish

*A spoiled little girl goes to extremes to get what she thinks she deserves from Santa Claus. Maybe he can talk some sense into her in **THE CHRISTMAS WISH**, by **Leah Nagel**.*

There once was a spoiled little girl named Sophie. Her parents were never around, especially on Christmas. They had to go out of state for some business to a special Christmas meeting every year. While her parents were gone, Sophie had to stay with her grandparents. Her grandparents would always spoil her, but Sophie could never seem to get her parents' attention. She thought that if she acted mean and screamed for everything that she wanted, her parents would notice her. It turns out that it only made Sophie more mad and more mean!

It was only a week 'til Christmas, and Sophie had already finished her Christmas list over the summer. She decided to write a letter to Santa Claus telling him what she wanted for Christmas. Every year, Sophie would wish that she and her parents would be one big, happy family. Since Sophie is on the "naughty list," her wish was never granted.

About a day or two later, Santa received the letter and read it. As he was reading it, he just nodded his head and thought, "How many times do I have to tell her not to send me a three-page Christmas List? I am not going to get her every single thing that she wants for Christmas! She thinks that Christmas is only about presents! I am going to have to finally tell her that she is on the naughty list."

The next day, Sophie woke up and ran to get the mail. She was skipping around and jumping for joy! She had gotten a letter from Santa Claus! She ripped open the envelope, pulled out the

letter, and her mouth dropped open. “I’m on the—the *naughty list?*” She was shocked. “I will immediately go and talk to Santa about this!”

By the next morning, Sophie was packed and on her way to the North Pole to see Santa Claus. She got there a few hours later, only to find out the Santa was not available until the day after Christmas. Now Sophie was *really* mad!

Finally it was Christmas morning! After Sophie woke up, she ran down the hall, down the stairs, and into the living room. She grabbed the first present with her name on it and tore it open. She couldn’t believe her eyes! “It’s a—a—a lump of *coal!*” she screamed. “That’s it! It’s time for revenge!” She went again to the North Pole and demanded to see Santa. As a result, she took over the North Pole with mutant elves!

Just as she was about to blow up the toy factory and set Santa’s secretary’s hair on fire, Santa stopped her. Santa explained to Sophie the real, true meaning of Christmas. He told her what it was all about. It wasn’t about presents or gifts.

Sophie apologized and Santa promised her that next year, she would be on the “nice list.” Oops! I almost forgot. Sophie finally got the gift that she truly wished for. And Sophie’s parents and she lived happily ever after! And happily every Christmas!

Something's
Different

The New Home

*It's Moving Day for Jack. In **THE NEW HOME** by **Matt Bajorek**, Jack can't wait to hang out with his new friend who lives two doors down. He is less anxious to meet the aliens from another planet who live next door....*

“Finally, we are here!” Jack said. Today was the first day in his new home. Jack had been waiting for this moment for months. He couldn't wait to leave his old home in Toosdale.

Jack is 11 years old and in the sixth grade at Toosdale Middle School. Six months before, Jack's dad informed the family that they would be moving from Toosdale, Michigan to Tinsdale, Florida because his work was transferring him. Most children get upset when they find out that they have to move, but Jack was happy to learn this because he always wanted to live in Florida. Jack has a special collection of frogs, and Michigan winters are too cold for his frogs. Besides, all the other kids seemed to have dogs and cats as pets and he used to get teased about his pet frogs. Also, when his parents were in Florida buying their new house, they met their new neighbors who also happened to have a son with pet frogs. Ever since then, Jack had been in contact with their son, Mike.

Jack had been emailing his new friend, Mike, who was also 11 years old and in the sixth grade. Mike lived in the house two doors from his new home. In between Mike and Jack live the strange neighbors, the Dinkelbells. According to Mike's parents, the Dinkebells are very nice and sharing neighbors, but Mike and Jack had other ideas about them. Mike told Jack that they didn't leave their house very much and that they kept strange pets. They seemed rather mysterious and that gave two imaginative sixth-graders a lot of stories to tell about them.

As soon as Jack's crowded minivan reached their new house, Jack raced inside. When he looked inside it was completely white and empty. It gave him an eerie feeling. He walked up the stairs with his mom. She pointed out his room as they walked through the house. There was one room that was located in the back corner of the house that caught Jack's attention. When he walked inside it, he was drawn to the window in the corner. That window faced right into the Dinkelbell's house. Jack couldn't help looking into the Dinkelbell's home, where he spotted a glowing fly buzzing around in a glass jar.

"That's strange," he thought. "Why would they have a glowing fly?" Just then, Jack's mom called him and asked him to help unpack. Jack left to help his mom and forgot about the Dinkelbells.

The first thing that Jack unpacked was his frog collection. He had a cage with ten different species of frogs. Jack left them by the door to enjoy the nice Florida sunshine.

In the meantime, Jack's new friend, Mike, came by. Mike asked Jack to come outside with him so he could show him around the neighborhood. Jack's mom said it was all right, so the two boys took off exploring. Mike showed Jack where their school was, the park down the block, and some of his favorite places to go.

All that exploring made them very hot, so they stopped by Mike's house for some lemonade. Jack asked Mike about their neighbors, the Dinkelbells. Mike's mom suggested that they should go over there and introduce Jack. At first they didn't want to go, but decided that they might as well get it over with.

Jack and Mike walked past Jack's new house over to the Dinkelbell's front door. They rang the doorbell and an old woman came out. She was very gracious and invited them inside. Mike and Jack walked inside and took their shoes off, when all of a sudden, a three-eyed dog jumped out and started barking.

"Oh, don't mind him, he is just my dog, Jaylo," said Mrs. Dinkelbell. Then she showed them the upstairs where they met Mr. Dinkelbell. He had long gray hair hanging from the sides, but was bald on top. He happened to be watching the news. As the

boys walked over, they heard the reporter say, "In recent news, two older people snuck into the country a few months ago. We are not sure where they came from, but local investigators suspect they may be from Italy. They possessed a box of stolen glass jars. We will have more coming up on the ten o'clock news." Mr. Dinkelbell suddenly turned off the TV and Mr. and Mrs. Dinkelbell both headed downstairs. At that moment Jack and Mike walked over to another room. Jack asked, "What's in that room?"

"Don't ask. The Dinkelbells get pretty touchy when you even go near it," replied Mike.

Jack excused himself to use the bathroom, but he really was very curious and had to look inside the secret room. In this room, he saw that strange glowing fly that he had seen from across his window earlier. When he came closer to the jar, he saw not one, but thirty glowing flies. He quietly shut the door and went downstairs.

Jack proceeded to look for Mike. He called for him, but there was no answer. As he walked over to the kitchen, he heard Mike call for help from the basement. Just then, Mr. Dinkelbell grabbed Jack. "I'm glad you boys stopped by today," he said. "It looks like they're getting closer to discovering us, so now is the time to finish our mission."

Mr. Dinkelbell proceeded to force Jack downstairs where he witnessed an unbelievable, horrible sight. Mrs. Dinkelbell was about to feed Mike to a giant fly!

"What are you doing to my friend?" Jack shrieked.

"I am going to use him as my sacrifice for the queen fly," Mrs. Dinkelbell replied very casually.

Just then, Mrs. Dinkelbell took off her face, which was a mask, and revealed that she was an alien.

"Ah-ha, I knew it!" replied Jack. "You two were the ones on the news. You snuck into our country with those glass jars!"

"That's right. And we're going to set these flies free and create an army to take over the world!"

At that moment, Jack had an idea. He grabbed a shovel that was leaning against the wall next to him and hit Mr. Dinkelbell

over the head. Before Mrs. Dinkelbell realized what had happened, Jack ran home and grabbed his frog collection. When he got back, Mr. Dinkelbell was still unconscious, and Mrs. Dinkelbell was about to release the flies. At the same moment, Jack opened the cage to his frogs. In minutes, the frogs devoured every last fly. When the last fly was eaten, the giant queen fly miraculously dissolved from the frog's slime.

While all of this was happening, Mr. Dinkelbell began to arouse. Then Jack noticed that something strange was happening to the Dinkelbells, too. They started to become weak and powerless from the death of the flies. This gave Jack the opportunity to release Mike. Then the two ran upstairs and called the police.

While the boys were waiting for the police to arrive, the Dinkelbells mysteriously disappeared. When the police finally arrived, there was no evidence except for the glass jars and several of Jack's frogs scattered about the house. The police took the boys' stories, but did not seem to believe them.

After the police left, Mike and Jack collected all of Jack's frogs and walked to the door to head back home. At that moment Jack turned to Mike and said, "Who says cats and dogs are the best pets? My frogs just saved the world!" Jack proudly smiled and walked toward his new home.

The Attack of the Toxic Rooster

*In a quiet farming community, one rooster looks like another—unless, of course, that rooster grows fifty times its normal size. In **THE ATTACK OF THE TOXIC ROOSTER** by **Justin B. Brode**, farmers and townspeople alike suddenly have a big problem on their hands.*

It was usually a quiet and tranquil place. But today this town in northern Michigan was the scene of a brutal rooster attack. The entire town was in chaos. Buildings and houses were destroyed. People were running wildly in the streets. What could have gone so wrong?

The day started off as it usually did on that warm, sunny day on the big northern Michigan farm. The only difference was that a little baby rooster was just born early that morning. The farmers decided to name him Bob. He was small and cuddly and had red feathers. All of a sudden, he started running away. “Oh no! Come back, Bob!” screamed the farmers. But Bob never looked back. He just kept running away.

He then went into the landfill next door. He started to eat toxic waste. He rapidly grew larger and larger. He could now breathe fire and talk. Bob ran into town and started burning down houses with his fiery breath, and pecking at buildings. He became a big problem.

“How do we stop him and how can this rooster be talking? What was in that toxic waste that caused such a thing?” asked the angry and confused villagers. They found a big machine that catches things. It was about thirty feet tall and on one end was a huge net made from thick rope that could scoop up anything. It

made an awful mechanical noise as it moved on its huge black tires. After chasing the giant rooster for hours, they finally caught him. But as it turned out, all that work was for nothing. Bob blew through the net with his fiery breath and was once again on the loose.

“What else can we do to try and stop him?” asked the villagers once again.

“Well, what are birds scared of? Cats!” others replied.

“How are we going to find a cat big enough to take on and beat the giant rooster?” someone wanted to know.

“HMMMMMM,” thought the angry potato farmer named Cooper. “I’ve got it. Since the rooster got like that from eating toxic waste from the landfill, toxic waste will do the same thing to a cat. Yeah, that’s right.”

The people in the town took a stray neighborhood cat to the landfill and he started eating toxic waste. “Meow! What’s happening to me?” asked the cat. As the villagers watched in awe, the cat’s small, furry white body grew larger and larger in only minutes. He could now breathe fire.

“Cat, can you help us stop a giant rooster from destroying our town?” asked the villagers.

“Yes!” answered the cat. “He’s ruining our peaceful home and I want to help you if I can.” They all went to town where Bob was terrorizing.

Now it was a fair fight. Bob pecked the cat, but the cat whacked Bob with his long, sharp claws and knocked him out. The cat quickly won the battle and stopped big, bad Bob. While Bob was still unconscious, the villagers built a fireproof chicken coop. All together they dragged him in and locked it up before he woke up.

“Thank you, cat, for saving us,” said the short, balding mayor as he walked up to the cat.

“No problem. I was happy to help. I think I’d really like to fight crime and spend my time helping others,” replied the cat.

“To thank you for saving our town, I will now award you with a National Sheriff’s Badge. You can now fight crime wherever

and whenever you want,” said the mayor as he stood watching Bob starting to awaken in his chicken coop.

“Thanks, I will,” said the cat as he walked away with all of his nine lives still intact. The cat went on his way searching for someone else to save.

The relieved villagers now felt safe, but had a lot of cleaning up and rebuilding to do. They are all very grateful to the cat, but the town will never be the same again after Bob’s fiery rampage. The toxic landfill has since been destroyed. The villagers never want to live through another experience like that again.

The Living Brain

*Imagine a brain that wouldn't die, because it could move from one person's head to another. You don't have to imagine it, because **A. Brown** already has, and has written about it in **THE LIVING BRAIN**.*

Once there was a boy with a brain dysfunction that had a nervous breakdown. It wasn't any ordinary breakdown. It happened because the brain was trying to kill him.

The way the brain got around was by jumping very slyly near people. It would jump and dig itself into people's heads. It killed approximately 18 people a day.

There was a boy who came home from school one day. He saw blood marks all over the carpet when he got home. He was very scared and ran. He came upon an ambulance. The attendants took the brain and put it in a jar full of chemicals.

That is the story of he living brain.

The First Episode of CIAOAIPA

*In the future, who will keep us safe from enemy extraterrestrials? In the vision of **Cody Coulter**, it will be agents of the Central Intelligence Agency who will be trained for off-world combat. He writes about it in **THE FIRST EPISODE OF CIAOAIPA**.*

The pressure from the spaceship as it landed blew dust up from the planet. The CIA agents got out of the spaceship, and they found what they were looking for. It was an AI (Artificial Intelligence) space station. They were speechless from what they saw.

WARNING:

BEFORE WE GO ANY FURTHER, YOU MUST KNOW THAT PEOPLE UNDER THE AGE OF TWELVE MUST STOP READING THIS STORY. IT IS RATED "T" FOR TEEN BECAUSE OF THE VIOLENT WEAPONS.

Now back to our story.

“Oh, no, we have been spotted!” Two alien security guards had seen them. The agents tried their communications, but it was too late: Their transmissions had been jammed.

They rushed back to the spaceship and took off. Just when the CIA ship was halfway to Earth, the AI force blew up the CIA ship!

Now the first wave of the invasion got closer to Earth. At CIA Headquarters, the world council was worried because it had lost contact with the CIA spaceship.

“What! The ship has been destroyed!” exclaimed the director.

Then an alien transmission was intercepted.”◆◊◻♣■♠♣◻
■◻◆ ◻◻ ✗☞♣♣ ◆☞◻!”

“Double security now! And I want to get that translated on the double,” ordered the director. “Prepare for invasion by land, air, sea, and space. Get as many soldiers as you can.”

“Sir, we have a translation: ‘Surrender now or face war!’ ”

“No, we will not surrender! Men, get your weapons and prepare for a war. The alien empire will pay for disobeying the treaty that it signed fifteen years ago.”

**Now if you’re reading this, you must think of some battle music for the battle.
Now back to our story.**

“Launch the gigonots now,” came the order. Gigonots are the most impressive missile known to the universe. They dissolve almost anything.

“Launching in 5...4...3...2...1...blasting off. There goes 1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10. All launched, Sir.”

As the gigonots began to dissolve the space, air, land, and water aliens and their equipment, the director said, “Good. Now all we can do is wait, pray for the best, and hope that God will be with us.”

In the thick of battle, the fighting was fierce. “Time to pulverize you, you alien scum.”

BOOM! BAM! CLASH!

“Take this, and a-that. And a-this one, too.”

All of a sudden—BOOM—there were four huge explosions of nucleus titanium alloy acid. When they ended, there were only 2,569 solders left out of 50,000,000. But the battle was ended and Earth was victorious. Many lives were lost in the battle, but all who fought this gallant war died with honor and dignity!

Just wait until we get Number 2 out!

Slaves

*An alien farmer is forced into slavery on a lonely plantation. He does his best not only to survive, but to prosper, in **SLAVES**, by **Jay Johnson**.*

I watched the cylinder-like ships descend toward my planet. I knew this was another raid to obtain slaves for the human race. A large civil war and countless riots and strikes had shredded the race's crumbling economy.

Now, only the strongest held power. The warlords and faction leaders maintained power with personal militia and armies, while the barons and plantation owners held sway with tremendous amounts of money and slaves. This region was likely to fall under the human's wrath, just the same as many other countries and planets had fallen. Even without a government, humans had managed to become a formidable force. My small settlement would soon be crushed, but still I had to defend it. As the sounds of battle filled the air, I hurried toward the fray.

Before I had reached the battle, most of the resistance had been snuffed out. I knew it was not worth fighting to the death for this already-captured settlement, unlike the others around me. I dropped my weapon and surrendered. One of the humans took me and the other seven slaves to a shuttle, our hands bound. These humans were nothing but low-profit slave raiders, and because of that the ride to the merchant ship was extremely bumpy.

As soon as we arrived, I noted the only thing for sale: slaves of all different species, but mostly humanoids or races that could speak. The trading ship was huge, with a docking bay, a main room for trading, and a luxurious hotel-like section that housed long-staying sellers. Almost immediately after we touched down,

the human was flooded with interested customers. “These slaves are reserved!” shrieked the human at the anxious buyers. “All the slaves we could scrounge from this rock of a planet are for Minister Lot!”

“That rich idiot,” murmured one of the slavers. “He already has plenty of workers on that plantation.”

As we made our way slowly through the crowd, I saw how frustratingly confusing it was in the ship. People jostling others, arguments over prices: all took place in different languages. We neared a large radiant door that led to the luxurious part of the ship. The guards, seeing the procession of slaves, informed us that the human must enter alone, or hand over his slaves for safekeeping. Not wanting to lose his precious wares to the sly guard, he chose to leave us outside, chained to a pillar. “You try to run away and you will end up with a new master. One that uses slaves to feed his pets.” And with that he stormed away. For one brief moment as he opened the door we could hear peals of laughter and joy echoing out of the room, but as the door closed we felt as though we would be locked away from happiness forever. We finally recognized the fact that we were slaves and always would be.

When we were alone, one of the other slaves spoke. “What should we do? If we try to run away, the human will catch us.”

“We should just accept the facts.”

Another said, “Besides, there is no way we can escape.”

“No!” shouted a third slave. “I will not be doomed to a life of work!”

“But it is hopeless to resist.”

“I think we should kill this new master later and claim our freedom.” This new proposal was hard for most of us to accept, but three of the slaves quickly began plotting our new master’s death.

Then the human returned with our new master. This new human was short and stocky. Dressed in rich and colorful clothes, he made a powerful impression. “So these are my slaves!” he bellowed. His small stature did not affect his voice. “How much?” he asked.

“They are very fine specimens,” replied the merchant.

“I’ll give you 28,000 Human currency for them.”

The slave trader, clearly delighted at the price, shoved us at our master and snatched the money out of his hand. “A pleasure to trade with you!” he cackled. “A pleasure indeed!”

“Well, now,” Master spoke to us. “If you would accompany me to my shuttle, we will leave this blasted planet.” Unused to this kind treatment, the other slaves and I hesitated at first. “Well, come along.” Having no choice, we accepted the offer and made our way toward the shuttle.

It was a first-class ship. Its hull sloped smoothly and the gentle hum of the grav engine was like music to my ears. “Hop in, my little slaves,” urged Master. As soon as we were safely inside, the automatic doors shut and the booster engines blasted into space. Unlike the earlier shuttle, this one drifted soundlessly through space. “The Brayshaw Nebula is our destination,” Master told us. “My plantations are located on the 17th planet from the red dwarf. You will all work on the plantations and perform fixing and mending when needed.”

The Brayshaw Nebula is remarkably beautiful with its swirling clouds and spectacular storms. When we landed on one of Master’s many spaceports we saw the planet was also good-looking and the bountiful wildlife and plants that inhabited it were, too. We got on a transportation vehicle that rumbled across the rough terrain. Master’s plantation was very large and supported a vast array of plants with water through irrigation ditches. Behind the plantation were the slaves’ quarters, which were our destination. The minute I got there, I dropped on a filthy mattress and fell asleep.

After waking the next morning, I had a quick breakfast of some strange nut cake. Then the call came to work. Being thankful the slaves’ quarters were close to the plantation, I walked until I had reached my assigned spot. Since it was late in the year, the work to do was harvesting. The plants around me were all purple. Their long stalks had large seedpods inside them. I got to work plucking and tearing the seeds off and putting them into bags. At the end of the day I had quite a crop. “Excellent!” Master

congratulated me. "You are the best worker I have had. If you continue to keep up this excellent work, there will most certainly be a promotion in it for you." And there was.

As the year dragged on I worked very hard, always picking the ripest fruit during harvesting season, plowing the most fertile land during preparation season, and sowing the seeds in the most irrigated areas during planting season. All the hard work and effort paid off when I received promotion after promotion for my productivity. My master and I grew to be close friends and I also gained popularity with the other slaves as well, except for one shady group of slaves, the same slaves that had plotted to kill Master so long ago. They were outcasts for frequent arguments and disagreements with the others. They practically burned me with their eyes as I passed. The group members were also constantly muttering to themselves, averting their eyes and talking in low tones. Their words were usually indistinct, but one day as I was returning from the fields I heard them speak. "Tonight will be the end of our master!" one said. "Long have we waited, brothers, but tonight he will pay the price for enslaving us!"

Suddenly he saw me standing there. "Not a word of this to anyone or you will be dead next!" the slave spat at me. But I couldn't just stand there while my companion was murdered. He was the first to befriend me and help me through a slave's life. He was not my master anymore, but my friend. Somehow I had to save him, even if it meant risking my life.

Since I was a valued slave, I had been issued a vehicle for travel across the plantation. I drove as fast as I could toward the master's mansion. But at his house I learned he was gone. The guard informed me that he had gone to inspect the slaves' quarters. I rushed back to the plantation and the slaves' quarters. There was Master, talking with some slaves. "Master!" I shouted. He turned to me. "The slaves are plotting to kill you!"

Before he could react, the outcasts rushed into the room. They drew their harvesting knives. "This is for enslaving us!" one shouted. But I had to stop him. I blocked his arm and wrestled the knife away from him. The others backed away, seeing their leader had been dispatched.

“Thank you for saving me,” said Master, still gasping from the sudden intrusion. “You have helped me to admit something I have known for a long time.

“It is wrong to take away a person’s freedom. For your act of kindness you are now pronounced a free man. You are *all* free; I even forgive those who were plotting against me. Unless some of you would like to work for me, I will help you return to your planet,” said Master.

I couldn’t believe it. I was free. My species seemed always meant to be slaves, but now we were free! I could leave. I could do what I wanted! Not only me, but also my entire race could go home. We were finally free.

Spy Slam

*In **SPY SLAM** by Devin Lazor, an average NBA player learns of a plot that will sabotage his stellar team. Now it's up to him to save not only his team, but the entire National Basketball Association.*

Nineteen-year old Gram Cackler was practicing three-pointers with his fellow Denver Nuggets in L.A. “Okay, team, hit the showers!” yelled Coach Dave Baxter. Tomorrow was the night Denver played the back-to-back champ L.A. Lakers. Gram took a shower and went back to his hotel room. Gram then took a quick nap.

When he woke up, he brushed his curly blond hair out of his eyes and almost fainted at what he saw! Two figures were leaning over him, dressed in black suits! “*Who are you people?*” Gram yelled. “You look like you came out of the Matrix or James Bond,” Gram remarked.

The man on Gram’s left spoke. “Actually, that’s a good guess. I’m Fro Man. This is my partner Braade Krazie. We’re from SWAT.”

“Go on,” said Gram.

Braade spoke. “We’d like you to go undercover.”

Gram said, “I’m going to do what?”

“Go undercover. A person on the Lakers is planning to destroy the Nuggets because your team is the only thing in their way to winning another NBA title. You need to find out who and how they’re going to do this. If they succeed, who knows what they’ll do next?”

Gram thought about it for a few minutes and finally said, “I’m a basketball player, not a person with the fate of a basketball team

on his shoulders! Even then, what am I supposed to do and what will I do it with?"

"You will enter the Laker locker room and look for any leads, using spy sunglasses. You will search for shoes, balls, jerseys, anything that make your glasses beep when you look at the object," said Fro.

"What am I supposed to do next?" said Gram.

"That's on your head," said Braade, flipping her long, blonde hair off her face. "On to the gadgets," she said.

Fro pulled out a flashy red vest and a pair of Adidas McGrady basketball shoes. "That's it?" Gram said.

"Yep," said Fro. "Look inside your pocket," he said. "Press that round thing." Gram did so and he felt pockets bursting out from under the fabric on his chest, hips, shoulders, back, and neck, brimming with tools.

"Put on the shoes and click your heels," said Braade. Gram did as he was told and blue flames broke out from his shoe sole as he glided into the air. "Touch the knob inside the tongue of the shoe!" yelled Braade, shielding her face from the flames. Gram tapped it and the flames disappeared, but Gram was still suspended in mid-air.

"Can I use these in games?" asked Gram.

"It's not illegal unless you get caught," smiled Fro.

"Okay, I guess I accept. This better not cut into practice time!"

An hour and a half of instructions later, Gram was geared up and at Staples Center. He entered the opposing team's locker room and used his new, normal-looking sunglasses to look for any leads on who was planning this act. His glasses began to beep and they led him to a note inside Shaquille O'Neil's locker.

*Meet me in room 204
at 7:00 tonight.
Don't be late!*

Just then, the door opened! Gram tried to hide in the laundry basket, but too late! The assistant coach had already spotted him. The man yelled, "Hey, you! What are you doing in the wrong locker room?" Gram, trying to make a quick excuse, stammered, "Uh, whoops, I made a mistake with the locker rooms. See ya!" He ran out of the building. "Close call!" Gram thought as he got into his new, highly-waxed, red and gold striped Porsche 911.

That night, Gram went to room 204 at the Lakers' hotel. Gram leaped over the ten-foot-wide hot tub with a mighty spring, and walked across the new glass backboard basketball court. "This must seem like nothing to them, compared to the cheapest one of Kobe's five houses," Gram thought silently. He went to the huge room, 204, and stopped there. The door was thin so Gram was able to listen to the conversation inside.

"Shaq, you're late!"

"So what, Kobe! I've got the game ball."

"Good. Here's the plan. We'll activate the ball before the game. When the game starts, the bomb timer starts. At the final buzzer, the ball will turn into several missiles and go after the Nuggets. When the ball hits a player, he will evaporate," said Kobe.

"What will we do next?" inquired Shaquille.

"Kill off every team that becomes a threat to us," said Kobe. Gram heard a satisfied grunt, then heavy footsteps coming toward the door. Again, he moved too late (as you know, Gram has slow reaction times in just about everything that has nothing to do with a basketball)! The door flew open and hit Gram square in the face.

"I'm gonna be sore tomorrow," thought Gram as Shaq left the hotel room, caring just enough to look behind the door to see what was caught behind it. Gram then used some weird gloves to climb up the wall and on to the ceiling, and quickly dropped from the ceiling silently. Just as Shaq tuned around, Gram flew down the nearest flight of stairs.

The next day, Gram and Shaq stood in the center circle for the tip. Gram jumped as high as he could, but six-ten Gram was no match for seven-one Shaquille O'Neal. The game raged on as Gram and Kobe scored point after point. In the fourth quarter,

the Nuggets were down by two, 89-91, with five seconds to go when Gram called time. He slipped his laser shield into his inside pocket and went back to the court. One of Gram's teammates chucked the ball down court. With three seconds left, Gram let a three-pointer fly off his fingertips. The ball ripped the nylon cords, just as the buzzer sounded.

The ball separated into about thirty missiles and went after all the Denver players. Gram whipped out the laser shield and began slashing the weapon at the missiles and succeeded in directing twenty-nine missiles into the court. The last missile went directly for Gram. The missile ricocheted off the shield and hit Shaq and Kobe. Then, the two players disappeared. The screaming fans turned silent.

The Denver players mobbed Gram and fans flooded the court, questioning Gram. Gram ignored the confused fans' reactions and questions. Instead, Gram sprinted into the tunnel leading to the Visitors' locker room, in order to keep his whereabouts confidential. He slipped the laser back into his tank-top.

"I never knew basketball and saving the world could be so closely related," thought Gram.

Martian Chase

*On a planet not too far away, a Martian P.I. works to crack a counterfeit case. It's eight-eyed action in **MARTIAN CHASE**, by **Brian Panas**.*

I got a call on my atomographic communicator a couple of weeks ago, for a case that will knock your socks off. It turned into a “round the world chase” sorta thing, and when you are talking about the planet Mars, that is a pretty big world.

The name's Shoo Tagui, but everybody calls me Shoot. I'm a private eye, if there ever was one. That's right, I said eye. I got eight good eyes, and an extra one, just in case. But anyway, it was a dull day over in the Cognacious region, so I decided to stay indoors. That's when I got a call from the chief of police, and he was baffled. He didn't know what to do. “I'm baffled,” he said. “I don't know what to do.”

Well, I was bored, so I decided to hear him out. “What are you talking about?” I asked.

The chief replied, “The Zorkon, you know, that expensive statue thing? It was reported missing. So I put up a search for it. A couple days later, six different guys say they each found it, but I don't know which one is for real.”

“Did you check each guy's statue out?” I said.

“Yeah, but they all look the same to me, Shoot,” he said. Well, I knew I had something to help him out, but it wasn't going to be easy.

We went to the museum where the Zorkon used to be displayed. The chief ate a donut. “No fingerprints, tracks, or any other missing artifacts. This guy knew what he was doing. All we found was this note,” Officer McMaggy reported. The note read:

If you want to see the original Zorkon, you must follow this clue:

*As daylight fades and darkness dawns,
Look out to the street through your shades Undrawn.
Hold up two strings, one white and one black,
And they will show you what you lack.
One week from today, on April thirteen,
You will understand just what the heck I mean.*

The same riddle was copied five more times on the page.

“Chief, order a good pack of donuts and a gallon of coffee. We got a faker to find,” I said.

Six donuts and three quarts of coffee later, we struck on a great idea. “Maybe he wants us to practice Carboblasting, you know, the holiday where you don’t eat from sunrise to sunset. Then you hold up a black thread and a white thread. When they seem to be the same color, because you can’t see straight, then you get to eat again,” I said.

“Well,” said the chief, “is that what you practice? That’s a different celebration than we’re used to here in Cognacia.”

We were both too full from the donuts and coffee to consider fasting any longer, so we considered my next idea. “Maybe just as the sky turns dark, we look out the police station window to find another clue. That way, we could be one step closer to the end of this case. Even if it isn’t the Carboblasting time of year.”

The chief replied, “Maybe so, but we should get to bed. It’s three in the morning.” We each had our last donut, and I drove the chief home.

At ten o’clock A.M. on April thirteenth, I was groaning. I had only gotten seven hours sleep that night, figuring with the chief for the seventh straight day.

After the last of the coffee, I dressed and walked outside to meet a better day than the last. Under sunny skies, and with no dreariness to be found, I took a walk to the chief’s place. We had lunch and an afternoon together, but it was still on our minds: the sunset. At seven o’clock, we had six inches of black and white

thread, and held them up high. As the light faded, the threads seemed to be the same color.

“Now!” I exclaimed. We each poked three eyes out on the intersection of Froddle and Goad to see a map. The map had red lines on it, tracing a path all around Mars. “Well, at least now we have a hunch of where he and the statue might have gone.”

We circled the planet, following the trail of the artifact counterfeiter. Soon finding ourselves thirty miles from where we started, the chief and I went into an abandoned warehouse, siphon blasters at the ready.

“Hm hmm hmm ha ha HAHAHAAHaa! I’ve done it! I’ve duped the whole planet!”

In the dusty rafters, the chief sneezed. “ACHOOO!”

“Who’s there?” the voice asked.

Shoot, I thought to myself. *Well, here we go.*

“YAAAA!” Diving from the rafters, shooting like mad, I realized our man was a woman! Falling into a tuck and roll, the chief was taken away by ugly ogre henchmen. *That explains how the culprit moved the Zorkon*, I thought. Meanwhile, I stared down the crazed counterfeiter, keeping eight eyes on her face and one on her plasma ray.

“Funny,” I said. “I thought our man would be a man, but I guess I was wrong. We’ve been following you for quite a while, and I guess I thought a woman could not do this.”

She looked at me with cold eyes. “You want to know who I am? Fine, I’ll tell you. The name’s Beatty McGraw, ace thief and counterfeiter extraordinaire. What’s *your* handle?”

“Shoot,” I said, “and I’m taking you out.” With a lunge, I dove at the counterfeiter. She was a quick one, though, and she pulled out her plasma ray so fast it could make your head spin. McGraw was sly, but she couldn’t outslly me. She bobbed and weaved, dodging in between all the molders. Suddenly, she flew towards me like a buzzard on prey. I shot a siphon at her, but I missed, and hit a molder full of hot, bubbling metal.

That started a chain reaction through the whole place, and the warehouse was going to blow! “The warehouse is going to blow!” I said. “Run!” With his guards knocked out by flying metal, the

chief ran along with me. It was too late. The explosion catapulted us out the door. The only thing remaining in the smoldering wreckage was the untarnished, golden Zorkon.

Rolling over, the chief remarked, “Did I mention the Zorkon is indestructible?”

Later, the police arrived and took Beatty McGraw and the Zorkon away. “Job well done, Chief.”

The chief replied through a mouthful of donut, “Yoo too, Thoot. Leth go home. I need a thower.”

Well, that’s my story. McGraw never saw another free day, the Zorkon was returned, and I never drank another ounce of coffee. Donuts, though, are here to stay.

The First Encounter

*When a teenager is attacked by a strange creature, then saved by equally strange men, that should be enough excitement for one day. But in **THE FIRST ENCOUNTER** by **Chris Probert**, there is more to come as our hero gets dragged into the battle to save the world!*

RING! RING! RING! The bell had rung and school had ended. I got my stuff from my locker and started walking down the sidewalk to home.

I took a turn and came face to face with a seven-foot-tall creature! It had a snake-like bottom, two arms with claws instead of hands, a normal jaw and then a second jaw that didn't connect, but in the middle it had two large carnivorous teeth! It prepared to stab me! It had me cornered!

An ear-splitting sound of machine-gun fire rang through my ears. The creature lay dead before me! I was now face to face with men in suits that looked like spacesuits, but more heavily armored and missing lots of things that a spacesuit has. They had guns that I had never seen before! One of them said, "Come with us." I hesitated, but then looked back at the dead creature and followed them.

"This place isn't safe anymore," one said.

"Yeah," the other said. "It hasn't been safe since the Zerg landed."

"Hey, do you know if the Protoss have landed on Char yet?" one asked the other.

"Not yet, but they are setting up the air defense in space and are preparing to land. They are having trouble getting through."

I asked, "Who are you guys and who are the Zerg and Protoss?"

“We are humans just like you, except from the future. The Zerg are a race that is 100 percent natural and are aliens we are at war with. The Protoss are genetically smarter and more advanced than us and we’re trying to exterminate the Zerg together, having a temporary truce,” one said.

We took a turn, and right in front of me was a gigantic spaceship! It wasn’t one of the spaceships of today. It was bigger, armored, and had cannons! I followed them in.

“This test will tell us if you are ready.”

“Ready for what?” I asked. He didn’t answer and walked off.

A man came in. He was wearing a white armored suit unlike the other guys’ suits, because it wasn’t as heavily armored. He stopped. It felt like he was searching through my mind for something. But what? He walked off after a little while.

Later, a crew member in black came in with a bundle of clothes and a gun! He said, “Change into this.” I put on the clothes and I looked just like the guy in white. My gun was like an advanced shotgun. I was told that the battle for the world had begun.

As I walked out of the ship, I saw all kinds of Zerg: ones like the one that attacked me, plus little ones, flying ones, and even giant ones that were three stories high! Cannons and turrets and men came out—some even had flamethrowers! Men came out in small robots and tanks. There were even men on motorcycle-like bikes!

As they two sides were facing, I thought to myself, *This is what I need to do to save Earth.*

The battle for Earth had begun! Both sides charged! Zerg and the Terran (as they call themselves) were dying and killing! I started shooting.

The battle was filled with the sound of screaming, roaring and blood-curdling screams that I heard all around me! I found myself surrounded by six of the little Zerg that looked like mutated dogs. They were circling me like a pack of wolves. They leapt at me, stabbing me with their claws. I kept shooting until they were dead.

As I got up, I saw that those zerglings (as I found out they were called) were the last of the Zerg!

The battle had finally ended. The Terran had taken heavy losses, and all the Zerg were dead. The battle for Earth had been won and the world saved.

The same guy in the white coat walked up to me and said, “We might need you in the future, but for now...”

He walked into the ship as I yelled back, “But for now, what?” The ship flew away and turned on its boosters and jetted out of the atmosphere.

The Uncharted

*Two friends become trapped in an underwater cave that is unlike anything they have ever heard of. The boys face what others would consider a catastrophe, and turn the experience into an adventure filled with bravery and resourcefulness in **THE UNCHARTED**, by **Daniel Sherwood**.*

“I’m going to get you!”

“Man, you got me right in the eye. It stings.”

It was maybe just one of the hottest days ever in North Carolina. Alec and Joe were splashing in the warm and welcoming ocean water. They’ve been friends since they were old enough to remember. They were both orphans that no one cared about, and they had no friends at the orphanage. On top of that, the mistress was beating them for every breath they took.

After the splash frenzy ceased, Alec suggested a diving contest. Both of the boys were born swimmers and could dive incredibly deep. They climbed out of the salty water and onto a cliff overhanging the water below.

Alec yelled out, “You can’t dive for beans!”

Joe replied with, “You look like an emu when you dive.”

Both the boys were readying themselves for the deepest dive in their lives.

“Go!” they both shouted, and launched off of the cliff, taking the perfect formation in the air, cutting through the water like a knife through butter. Deeper and deeper the boys descended, and something caught Alec’s eye. In the depths, a kelp-covered cave seemed to appear.

Alec and Joe soon came up for some air. They popped out of the water, breathing heavily.

Joe was spurting out excitedly, “I went so deep, man; beat that. That had to be a world record or something!”

Alec would ordinarily be denying this, but he was silently treading water when he asked Joe, “Dude, did you see that cave?”

“What cave?” responded Joe.

“I don’t know, but I’m pretty sure I saw an opening or something.”

“Let’s check it out!”

They each took in a great breath and dove again. Alec excitedly pointed out what he had seen earlier. Both boys, bewildered, swam slowly towards this discovered object. They could plainly see that it was a cave. The boys floated to the top as quickly as they could. Alec and Joe asked each other if they should venture on.

Alec started with, “You think we should or not?”

“I don’t see why not. I mean, we can each hold our breath for a long time.”

“True.”

“And if we can’t see an ending then we’ll turn around.”

“All right.”

The boys took in huge breaths and dove to their destination. Quickly pulling away the kelp, they swam through a long underwater tunnel. Losing breath, Alec’s and Joe’s speed hastened. Finally, they noted an air pocket, and surfaced to take their much-needed breath.

When they were breathing steadily, they observed their surroundings. It was much more than an air pocket; it was another shoreline, but not a shoreline of North Carolina, for there was no sky. What they thought to be the ground of North Carolina was at the top of this new and mysterious place. Joe was the first to speak.

“Man, you see the passageway?” Joe was right; there was a small crawl space at the end of the shoreline.

Out of nowhere, they heard a rumbling sound almost like a cave in. Alec started swimming back to the entrance of this queer place to investigate.

“Where are you going?” Joe said.

“Where does it look like?”

“Back?”

“Yup.”

And with that, Alec started swimming away. Joe had no idea what to do because, being the adventurous type, he wanted to go on. But shortly after his departure, Alec returned to Joe, this time with a terrible expression on his face.

Joe asked worriedly, “What’s going on?”

“The entrance collapsed! We can’t get out,” Alec squealed.

Although Joe started to panic, he had found at the orphanage that being unhappy got him nowhere.

Joe remarked, “At least we won’t have to listen to the griping mistress all the time. We won’t have to eat that terrible almost-too-stale-to-eat bread anymore. Dude, this is actually pretty cool,” said Joe with a grin on his face.

This comment seemed to settle Alec down a little.

Joe took advantage of this moment and said bravely, “Let’s see what’s on the other side of the tunnel.”

“Yeah!” seconded Alec enthusiastically.

They crawled out of the water and set out on their new adventure. Quickly they saw light up ahead. Joe and Alec exchanged glances, thinking the whole thing would lead them to where they started. The long crawl space widened out to a vast space, but again there was no sky.

Joe whispered in shock, “Where’s all the light coming from?”

“There, I guess,” answered Alec. All of the light was coming from a concentrated area. They walked forward to find a pond with many fish.

They were all brown with four fins on their backs, heart-shaped tail fins, and brown- and black-spotted scales. But the most peculiar thing was that there were something like car headlights circling their eyes, but they did not stick out. These spots around their eyes produced lots of light.

Once they were done gawking at these new and interesting fish, they became aware of a large roaring sound of water and a small deep stream leading to the pond. They turned to examine the noise, and a waterfall was what they saw. The waterfall was

enormous, with billows of water mist and only a few rocks at the bottom. The tremendous amount of water spilling over the falls created a very deep and fast-moving stream that fed the pond. At first, Joe thought that he could hear a roaring sound over the ruckus from the waterfall. When it sounded like an animal's roar, he figured that he was just imagining it.

Soon the boys' eyes traveled to many other amazing things. There were green vines twisted with a purple color and leaves striped yellow, and enormous bushes with leaves almost like lettuce, with roots reaching out of the ground. There was a flower with huge petals and sacs filled with a liquid.

Joe then made a most radical observation. "All the leaves of these plants are facing to that pond of fish."

Sure enough, all the leaves were facing toward the direction of the pond. Joe and Alec figured, later, that the light that these fish were giving off gave light to the plants, like photosynthesis. Alec and Joe walked around in awe, looking at these exotic plants in this enormous land. It made them feel so relaxed. Then sitting down, in this mouth-dropping area, Alec and Joe had a conversation.

"So?" Joe simply questioned.

"I really like it here," responded Alec.

"Me, too," said Joe. "I've never liked it at the orphanage."

Alec interrupted, "Well, duh, who did?"

"Anyway, the mistress hates us, all the beds are as hard as a stone, too. Plus, the food stinks. And all of the kids there are so weird, not counting you."

"Thanks."

"You know," continued Joe, "we could make our own civilization, not that we have much of a choice."

"That's a great idea, Joe, because we either starve miserably down here or be happy and resourceful."

The boys were really happy they could get away from people, but they needed food, drink, clothes, and shelter. They noticed one of the sacs of the flowers had broken and a reddish orange juice was slowly dripping from the flower.

"Let's try it," suggested Alec.

The boys drank a little juice from the flower nearby and they both said the same: “Mmmmm.”

This juice was the most lovely thing that would ever touch their tongues. It blasted citrus throughout their mouths, and had an aftertaste of the ripest nectarines and oranges; the last they could taste was the flavor of sweet Hawaiian pineapple, making it the perfect juice.

After Alec and Joe got over raving about this lovely liquid, Joe could tell Alec was still not that comfortable, so Joe said kiddingly, “We could always drink the water from the pond.”

Alec chuckled at this comment, and it seemed he was happier. With this exciting discovery of juice, Alec and Joe felt they needed to claim their new civilization, and they thought of names.

“We need a name for the juice,” the boys both said.

“How about JA?” suggested Alec.

“No, ‘mmmmm juice,’” Joe said.

“Yeah, I like it!” Alec said.

“What about a name for our new land?” questioned Joe.

“What about...?” “The Uncharted?” Alec suggested excitedly.

“Awesome idea!”

“The Uncharted,” they both repeated with satisfaction.

“We need a name for the waterfall,” continued Joe, enjoying himself.

“The Never-Known Falls!” said Alec dramatically.

“Perfect,” agreed Joe.

Later on, they found that the root of the enormous bushes (later named “big bush”) was pretty good raw. It sort of tasted like corn, and the leaves tasted like iceberg lettuce.

But Joe was unsatisfied with this menu. He wanted a hot meal. He looked around and saw plenty of rocks. He picked up a couple of sharp rocks and struck them together. As Joe had hoped, two sparks flew from the rocks.

Joe strode happily over to Alec to tell him of what he had just discovered. He said, “Remember those survivor shows we watched when those people got stuck in the wilderness?”

“Yeah, big whoop.”

“Well, they always showed the guys on the show striking two rocks together to make sparks.”

“Oh, so you want to burn the whole place down,” Alec said, smirking

“Alec, you’re in a sarcastic mood, aren’t you? Well, I figured we could make a fire and cook the food.”

“Nice idea!” exclaimed Alec.

So the boys learned to cook the roots of the big bush, and they tasted exactly like Lays Potato Chips. Then they also cooked the car fish, which had an amazing resemblance to salmon. And to wash all the great food down, they had the succulent mmmmm juice.

They found that car fish skin made excellent material for pants with vines as belts to hold them up. For shirts, they used the enormous flower leaves to wrap around themselves almost like a cloak.

But Alec and Joe were not completely settled in The Uncharted. After four days of adjusting to their new surroundings, the boys still needed to find a darker place to sleep. The car fish made too strong of a nightlight to have a comfortable rest. Alec recalled the spaces he had seen behind the waterfall. He ordered Joe to look at it.

“Yahoo! What about it?”

“Doesn’t it look like there’s a space behind there?”

“Hey, you’re right, man!”

“I’m going to go check it out,” exclaimed Alec.

Joe half-opened his mouth to tell Alec of the noise he had heard when they arrived at The Uncharted, but didn’t because he thought it would sound stupid. Alec strode to the edge of the Never-Known Falls. He hesitated, then jumped through the falling water.

Joe flinched, expecting to hear a thud hitting a wall, but did not. He did not hear a anything like “Sweet!” either. What he did hear was absolutely nothing, but that can only last so long. Eventually there came an echoing roar, a terrified scream, and a quick shuffle of feet. Then the most terrible thing that Joe had

experienced in *The Uncharted*: another scream, but this time out of pain.

Joe grabbed a strong vine and charged in search of the thing that was attacking Alec. Joe reached the cave behind the waterfall. The cave itself had a green glowing fungus, snails and glassy diamonds everywhere, making the cave just bright enough to see into the shadows. Joe glanced down a dark hallway leading off the main cave, when he saw the bones of an animal of some sort. He spied movement and charged in fury.

He whipped the thing with his vine, hard, and many two legged creatures jumped on Joe, pushing him away from the animal. Joe stopped his violent whipping to see that he was beating a small animal that looked just like the rest, with two brown legs, reptile skin, large lips, and a small pointy tongue. The one he was beating seemed to have a mane circling his neck. The creature looked at Joe with charming, sympathetic eyes as if to forgive him for his mistake before he scampered off into the darkness. Joe had a feeling that this was the type of creature whose bones were scattered everywhere.

Joe ran on and saw a figure lying on the floor, bleeding. He knelt down to see Alec's pale face. On Alec's right arm there was an enormous claw-shaped gouge, and there was a single cut going from his chin to his waist. Joe dragged Alec out of the dark, long hallway, back into the diamond gallery.

As Joe paused, panting heavily, at the mouth of the cave, the boys heard an enormous roar explode from the hallway. They first saw two huge brown furry legs protrude from the place where Joe attacked the small creature. Then they saw two huge, straight white horns, a large, wet nose, and something like the tail of a bear. The animal's body was one of a bear also and the beast was extremely fat. Its breath was bad enough to make the boys fall over.

It grunted at Alec and Joe like a bull and stood on his hind legs, then started galloping straight at the boys.

Alec scrambled away, but Joe stood there frozen. He was hit hard by the beast and could feel himself knocked senseless. The

beast hit Joe so hard he flew out of the cave to land on top of a panting Alec.

“Let’s hide,” said Alec.

Alec saw the head of the pursuer poking through the waterfall, and yelled in Joe’s ear, “Now!”

Alec had to drag Joe because temporarily he could not move. Alec rushed across The Uncharted aching, his chest heaving. He had a bloody lip, and was limping from Joe’s landing on him. He looked back and noticed that the beast had retreated back into the cave. He huddled in a slight indent in the wall and waited by his friend’s side for many painful hours.

Alec tried to revive Joe in every way he could imagine. Finally, after concocting a remedy from mmmmm juice, ground-up flower petals, and roots from the big bush, Joe gradually came back to life. The two friends talked about how their safe world had just changed so dramatically. Because they did not know how to deal with this beast, they decided to try to ignore it.

Alec never recovered from his wounds, and a week later, he woke with a great cough, and a headache that felt as if a semi truck was running over him, then came back again in reverse. Alec had caught pneumonia and Joe tried to fix it as well as he could, but he was not a doctor.

Two days later Alec was on the verge of dying. He had no color to his face, and could not lift his finger. Joe was sobbing at the side of the Never-Known Falls when the poor animal that Joe had been beating and many others ran straight at Alec. Joe got up with a start and ran towards the animals that seemed to be biting Alec, and Joe could hear a sucking sound. Joe tried to beat them away, but they kept coming until Alec said, “It’s fine; they’re helping.”

Joe was astonished because this was the first time he had heard Alec speak for two days. Joe collapsed at his friend’s side, dumbfounded, with tears of joy in his eyes.

After the animals completed their task, Alec was suddenly well again, and Alec and Joe were both crying with joy. Through teary eyes, they realized that they could see every bone in their saviors’ bodies, so the boys presently gave them every edible food they

knew of. After the feast, they were about to return to the cave when Joe remembered all of the bones scattered everywhere. He felt he needed to do something because they had saved Alec's life, and most likely also his. Alec and he agreed that they would kill the beast, so the boys then begged the kind animals to stay until it was safe to return to the cave.

They readied themselves. They sharpened roots and bound them together to make X's to place at the front of the hallway so that they could lure the beast into them. They made sharp daggers, pointy swords, whips from the vines, clubs by stripping the leaves from the big bush, and long spears with the stems of the flowers. Then they coated the floor of the cave before the X's with mmmmm juice, hoping the beast would slip into the X's.

The two companions were ready, except for finding a lure to bring the beast to a place where it would be easier for them to fight. Unfortunately, one of the creatures had died, and having no other ideas or options, they used this creature as bait. The boys hoped their two legged-friends would stay out of the way of the fight.

Alec and Joe bravely walked into the cave, each armed doubly with all of the weapons that they created. They placed the dead animal in front of the X's and waited.

Eventually they heard the slow, lazy sliding sound of the beast's paw, then the lazy pace quickened to a run. They heard the beast panting, then the slight rustle of fur, until it was too close to bear. The boys tightened up and looked around the corner to see the beast sliding into an X. He belched out an enormous roar of confusion and anger. He charged at Alec, who smartly slashed out with his sword. Joe quickly threw a spear at the beast.

Now the beast had a cut, a spear, and a piece of the X stuck in him, and he was infuriated. The beast struck at Alec with his claws, knocking Alec down. Then he leapt at Joe. Alec threw a dagger at the beast to defend Joe. Then Joe courageously jumped upon the beast, thrusting his sword into the beast's back. It flipped Joe off and turned on him. Joe was on the ground, helpless. Alec was desperately throwing daggers, but the animal would pay no heed.

Joe glanced away for one second to sight an escape, and the beast pounced on him, its mouth open wide and aiming straight for his neck. Joe looked up to see the gaping mouth of the beast. He quickly swung his spear upright and the beast fell helplessly upon it. Its limp body fell heavily to the floor. Despite their feelings of triumph, the boys were too fatigued to say a word. They both just slept.

The boys woke up and stashed the huge body of the beast away in the long deep hallways, and they invited their animal friends back into their old home. The animals offered the mouth of the cave as a home for Joe and Alec. From the bounty the boys produced from *The Uncharted*, they were able to feed the hungry animals.

Joe made all of the furniture for their new dwelling. He made beds with fish skin and roots, and stuffed them with folded leaf petals. The couches, tables and chairs were made with vines woven together. They made cups using the bark off of the Big Bush, strapping it together with vines. Plates were simply flower petals. They didn't mind not having any napkins, and using their hands to eat.

One morning, Alec woke first. He started up breakfast. He poured mmmmm juice for each of them and fried some fish. Joe arrived, sat down with Alec, and began eating. He reached over to his cup and chugged the liquid. He suddenly spit the juice and it went flying everywhere.

Alec questioned, "What's up with you?"

"Ukkkkk! That tasted terrible!"

Alec then took a sip of his juice and he had the same reaction, "Blahhhhh! What's going on?"

"Maybe it was just that flower."

"Yeah. Let's try another one."

The boys hurriedly ran over to the nearest flower and cracked it open. It tasted just as bad.

Alec said worriedly, "Maybe our food is getting bad."

Alec and Joe then recognized that it was darker at this area and that they had eaten all of the food closer to the pond. They tried all of the vegetation around the darker area and, to their

dismay, it was all terrible. They went into the cave and plopped down on their beds to think about it.

Joe wondered out loud, “What are we going to do?”

“I have absolutely no ideas.”

Joe sighed, “We had better just start a farm.”

“Man, that’s perfect. Remember back at the orphanage we had that garden, and we grew all of those green beans?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Well, we could make our own garden. We wouldn’t even need to water anything!”

“I’m a genius.”

“Yeah, sure; whatever you say, Albert Einstein,” Alec said with a beaming smile.

The boys took the hard roots and tied them together with the dead vines they found to make rakes. They quickly found that the soil was very loose, making it easy to turn. With their hands they dug many small holes in which to place the seeds. They found that the flower that produces mmmmm juice had seeds in the inside of the petals. They covered up the holes and tended to the garden daily.

Alec stepped back proudly with his hands on his hips. He said, “I’m pretty proud of what we’ve done.”

“Yup, that’s for sure,” said Joe. “I can’t wait to eat it.”

They decided to have a meal right then and there. With their lunch, they sat back and relaxed right next to The Never-Known Falls. With the cool mist hitting their faces, the greatest food in the world, and the beautiful and exotic plants and animals surrounding them, they started to think about when they first got there, and what they had been through. When they compared it to the way they used to live, they knew this was the right spot for them.

Time Warp: Cross-Dimensional Danger

*Two scientists from the last city of Earth become lost in another dimension, and in the middle of a war. They must rely on each other if they are to return home in **TIME WARP: CROSS-DIMENSIONAL DANGER**, by Sarah Smaga.*

Far, far into the future, there were two scientists, Atom and Molly, living in Metropolis. Metropolis was the only big city left, after the war in the other dimension broke the dimensional barrier. Metropolis survived only because it was in the calm center of the blast. If there were any other cities, they were either small or too far away for the shocked people in Metropolis to visit.

One day, the scientists found an archway while looking for the source of the blast. They found it had extremely high radiation levels. The archway was made of a very foreign metal. The archway had noble dragon-like creatures carved on it. While trying to collect samples, Atom stumbled and fell through the archway: a portal to another dimension.

At the same time, in a different dimension, a planet called Atomar was at war with its twin planet, Obrinsk. Fighter ships filled the sky, dropping nuclear bombs everywhere.

As the scientist fell through the archway, he had his hands covering his face, as he was expecting to hit a pile of plutonium rods. When he opened his arms, he saw a totally different world. He thought he was looking at a futuristic WWII scene.

Naturally concerned, Molly ran through to find her partner. She emerged in the same place as Atom, another dimension that

had an indescribable color and looked a lot like, well, nothing from earth.

The scientists tried to go into the portal again, but found that it had disappeared. The creatures that are known as Rugae were present on the planet. “Who, what, where, when, why, how?” Molly said, alarmed. After a while, they went up to one of these beings, acting cautiously and trying to feel relaxed.

“Are there more of you?” Atom asked.

“Let me show you the king,” said the Rugae named Uipo. They stayed back a little to collect samples as Uipo went ahead.

When they went to catch up with the Rugae, they saw the King Rugae, and he was wearing a ring with the same engravings as the Portal. The king said, “Hello, beings of Earth. I know what is on your mind: You want to go and search for a portal that I have in my possession.” He pulled down a curtain, and there the portal was, clean and more mysterious-looking than before. “You obviously can see you are in the middle of a war that has gone on for centuries. The people of your planet know nothing of this. That portal you went through is a time machine that caused the downfall of our race. That is how the evil people from our twin planet, Obninsk, started the war, by bombing us through this portal.” They eventually got the king to allow them to return to Earth.

Just as they were analyzing their samples, Atom and Molly heard a blast, but could not find anything that could have triggered it. “I hope that was Obninsk that took that blow, for Uipo’s sake,” Atom said.

The blast triggered an avalanche, the sun immediately exploded, and the human race was no more, except for two humans and a bearded dragon called Uipo, after the first alien the human race saw. Atom, Uipo, and Molly found another portal to go to the Andromeda galaxy just before the blast, and are living on a planet they called Metropolis, after the last city of Earth.

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