THE SEA OF MONSTERS by Rick Riordan ONE MY BEST FRIEND SHOPS FOR A WEDDING DRESS My nightmare started like this. I was standing on a deserted street in some little beach town. It was the middle of the night. A storm was blowing. Wind and rain ripped at the palm trees along the sidewalk. Pink and yellow stucco buildings lined the street, their windows boarded up. A block away, past a line of hibiscus bushes, the ocean churned. Florida, I thought. Though I wasn't sure how I knew that. I'd never been to Florida. Then I heard hooves clattering against the pavement. I turned and saw my friend Grover running for his life. Yeah, I said hooves. Grover is a satyr. From the waist up, he looks like a typical gangly teenager with a peach-fuzz goatee and a bad case of acne. He walks with a strange limp, but unless you happen to catch him without his pants on (which I don't recommend), you'd never know there was anything unhuman about him. Baggy jeans and fake feet hide the fact that he's got furry hindquarters and hooves. Grover had been my best friend in sixth grade. He'd gone on this adventure with me and a girl named Annabeth to save the world, but I hadn't seen him since last July, when he set off alone on a dangerous quest—a quest no satyr had ever returned from. Anyway, in my dream, Grover was hauling goat tail, holding his human shoes in his hands the way he does when he needs to move fast. He clopped past the little tourist shops and surfboard rental places. The wind bent the palm trees almost to the ground. Grover was terrified of something behind him. He must've just come from the beach. Wet sand was caked in his fur. He'd escaped from somewhere. He was trying to get away from…something. A bone-rattling growl cut through the storm. Behind Grover, at the far end of the block, a shadowy figure loomed. It swatted aside a street lamp, which burst in a shower of sparks. Grover stumbled, whimpering in fear. He muttered to himself, Have to get away. Have to warn them! I couldn't see what was chasing him, but I could hear it muttering and cursing. The ground shook as it got closer. Grover dashed around a street corner and faltered. He'd run into a dead-end courtyard full of shops. No time to back up. The nearest door had been blown open by the storm. The sign above the darkened display window read: ST. AUGUSTINE BRIDAL BOUTIQUE. Grover dashed inside. He dove behind a rack of wedding dresses. The monster's shadow passed in front of the shop. I could smell the thing—a sickening combination of wet sheep wool and rotten meat and that weird sour body odor only monsters have, like a skunk that's been living off Mexican food. Grover trembled behind the wedding dresses. The monster's shadow passed on. Silence except for the rain. Grover took a deep breath. Maybe the thing was gone. Then lightning flashed. The entire front of the store exploded, and a monstrous voice bellowed: "MIIIIINE!" I sat bolt upright, shivering in my bed. There was no storm. No monster. Morning sunlight filtered through my bedroom window. I thought I saw a shadow flicker across the glass—a humanlike shape. But then there was a knock on my bedroom door—my mom called: "Percy, you're going to be late"—and the shadow at the window disappeared. It must've been my imagination. A fifth-story window with a rickety old fire escape…there couldn't have been anyone out there. "Come on, dear," my mother called again. "Last day of school. You should be excited! You've almost made it!" "Coming," I managed. I felt under my pillow. My fingers closed reassuringly around the ballpoint pen I always slept with. I brought it out, studied the Ancient Greek writing engraved on the side: Anaklusmos. Riptide. I thought about uncapping it, but something held me back. I hadn't used Riptide for so long.… Besides, my mom had made me promise not to use deadly weapons in the apartment after I'd swung a javelin the wrong way and taken out her china cabinet. I put Anaklusmos on my nightstand and dragged myself out of bed. I got dressed as quickly as I could. I tried not to think about my nightmare or monsters or the shadow at my window. Have to get away. Have to warn them! What had Grover meant? I made a three-fingered claw over my heart and pushed outward—an ancient gesture Grover had once taught me for warding off evil. The dream couldn't have been real. Last day of school. My mom was right, I should have been excited. For the first time in my life, I'd almost made it an entire year without getting expelled. No weird accidents. No fights in the classroom. No teachers turning into monsters and trying to kill me with poisoned cafeteria food or exploding homework. Tomorrow, I'd be on my way to my favorite place in the world—Camp Half-Blood. Only one more day to go. Surely even I couldn't mess that up. As usual, I didn't have a clue how wrong I was. My mom made blue waffles and blue eggs for breakfast. She's funny that way, celebrating special occasions with blue food. I think it's her way of saying anything is possible. Percy can pass seventh grade. Waffles can be blue. Little miracles like that. I ate at the kitchen table while my mom washed dishes. She was dressed in her work uniform—a starry blue skirt and a red-and-white striped blouse she wore to sell candy at Sweet on America. Her long brown hair was pulled back in a ponytail. The waffles tasted great, but I guess I wasn't digging in like I usually did. My mom looked over and frowned. "Percy, are you all right?" "Yeah…fine." But she could always tell when something was bothering me. She dried her hands and sat down across from me. "School, or…" She didn't need to finish. I knew what she was asking. "I think Grover's in trouble," I said, and I told her about my dream. She pursed her lips. We didn't talk much about the other part of my life. We tried to live as normally as possible, but my mom knew all about Grover. "I wouldn't be too worried, dear," she said. "Grover is a big satyr now. If there were a problem, I'm sure we would've heard from…from camp.…" Her shoulders tensed as she said the word camp. "What is it?" I asked. "Nothing," she said. "I'll tell you what. This afternoon we'll celebrate the end of school. I'll take you and Tyson to Rockefeller Center—to that skateboard shop you like." Oh, man, that was tempting. We were always struggling with money. Between my mom's night classes and my private school tuition, we could never afford to do special stuff like shop for a skateboard. But something in her voice bothered me. "Wait a minute," I said. "I thought we were packing me up for camp tonight." She twisted her dishrag. "Ah, dear, about that…I got a message from Chiron last night." My heart sank. Chiron was the activities director at Camp Half-Blood. He wouldn't contact us unless something serious was going on. "What did he say?" "He thinks…it might not be safe for you to come to camp just yet. We might have to postpone." "Postpone? Mom, how could it not be safe? I'm a half-blood! It's like the only safe place on earth for me!" "Usually, dear. But with the problems they're having—" "What problems?" "Percy…I'm very, very sorry. I was hoping to talk to you about it this afternoon. I can't explain it all now. I'm not even sure Chiron can. Everything happened so suddenly." My mind was reeling. How could I not go to camp? I wanted to ask a million questions, but just then the kitchen clock chimed the half-hour. My mom looked almost relieved. "Seven-thirty, dear. You should go. Tyson will be waiting." "But—" "Percy, we'll talk this afternoon. Go on to school." That was the last thing I wanted to do, but my mom had this fragile look in her eyes—a kind of warning, like if I pushed her too hard she'd start to cry. Besides, she was right about my friend Tyson. I had to meet him at the subway station on time or he'd get upset. He was scared of traveling underground alone. I gathered up my stuff, but I stopped in the doorway. "Mom, this problem at camp. Does it…could it have anything to do with my dream about Grover?" She wouldn't meet my eyes. "We'll talk this afternoon, dear. I'll explain…as much as I can." Reluctantly, I told her good-bye. I jogged downstairs to catch the Number Two train. I didn't know it at the time, but my mom and I would never get to have our afternoon talk. In fact, I wouldn't be seeing home for a long, long time. As I stepped outside, I glanced at the brownstone building across the street. Just for a second I saw a dark shape in the morning sunlight—a human silhouette against the brick wall, a shadow that belonged to no one. Then it rippled and vanished. TWO I PLAY DODGEBALL WITH CANNIBALS My day started normal. Or as normal as it ever gets at Meriwether College Prep. See, it's this "progressive" school in downtown Manhattan, which means we sit on beanbag chairs instead of at desks, and we don't get grades, and the teachers wear jeans and rock concert T-shirts to work. That's also why I fit in pretty well. I mean, I'm ADHD and dyslexic, like most half-bloods, so I'd never done that great in regular schools even before they kicked me out. The only bad thing about Meriwether was that the teachers always looked on the bright side of things, and the kids weren't always…well, bright. Take my first class today: English. The whole middle school had read this book called Lord of the Flies, where all these kids get marooned on an island and go psycho. So for our final exam, our teachers sent us into the backyard to spend an hour with no adult supervision to see what would happen. What happened was a massive wedgie contest between the seventh and eighth graders, two pebble fights, and a full-tackle basketball game. The school bully, Matt Sloan, led most of those activities. Sloan wasn't big or strong, but he acted like he was. He had eyes like a pit bull, and shaggy black hair, and he always dressed in expensive but sloppy clothes, like he wanted everybody to see how little he cared about his family's money. One of his front teeth was chipped from the time he'd taken his daddy's Porsche for a joyride and run into a PLEASE SLOW DOWN FOR CHILDREN sign. Anyway, Sloan was giving everybody wedgies until he made the mistake of trying it on my friend Tyson. Tyson was the only homeless kid at Meriwether College Prep. As near as my mom and I could figure, he'd been abandoned by his parents when he was very young, probably because he was so…different. He was six-foot-three and built like the Abominable Snowman, but he cried a lot and was scared of just about everything, including his own reflection. His face was as kind of misshapen and brutal-looking. I couldn't tell you what color his eyes were, because I could never make myself look higher than his crooked teeth. His voice was deep, but funny, like a much younger kid—I guess because he'd never gone to school before coming to Meriwether. He wore tattered jeans, grimy size-twenty sneakers, and a plaid flannel shirt with holes in it. He smelled like a New York City alleyway, because that's where he lived, in a cardboard refrigerator box off 72nd Street. Meriwether Prep had adopted him as a community service project so all the students could feel good about themselves. Unfortunately, most of them couldn't stand Tyson. Once they discovered he was a big scary lookers, they made them feel good by picking on him. I was pretty much his only friend, which meant he was my only friend. My mom had complained to the school nothing ever seemed to happen. The social worker claimed Tyson didn't exist. They swore up and down that they'd visited the apartment. Anyway, Matt Sloan snuck up behind him and tried to give him a wedgie, and Tyson panicked. He swatted Sloan away a little, but he accidentally knocked him down. Tyson was the only homeless kid living in a refrigerator box. Sloan fell hard on his head. He lay dazed for a few seconds, then he sat up and rubbed his head in his hands. "Take it back, Sloan!" I shouted. Sloan just sneered at me. "Why do you even bother, Jackson? You might as well go back to your cardboard box!" Tyson started sobbing. "I…I am a freak? I don't know why I'm so different. I don't know why I don't fit in. I don't know why I don't have friends if you weren't always sticking up for that freak." I balled my fists. I hoped my friends were too busy laughing. I wondered if it were my imagination. "Just wait till PE, Jackson," Sloan called. "You and your friends are so dead." When first period ended, our English teacher, Mr. Bailer, gave me a chip-to-the-shoulder lecture about how we should never, never grow up to be violent people. Matt Sloan nodded earnestly, then gave me a chip-to-the-shoulder lecture about how we should never, never grow up to be violent people. "No," I promised, gritting my teeth. "Matt Sloan is the freak." Tyson sniffled. "You are a good friend. Mister Sloan's project. I wondered if the headmaster had been bothered talking to him about it. "Don't worry, big guy, like him that anything would be fine? Our next exam was science. Mrs. Tesla told us that we had to mix chemicals in tiny vials we were supposed to use. 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He tried to touch it, but she smacked h sters in the gym. They're a race of giant cannibals who live in the far no can't even say that. What would you call them in English?" She thought abou after me." "That's the least of our problems," she said. "Have you been having er my dream. "Why? What were you dreaming about?" Her eyes lo y mom was saying the same thing! "Oh." "What do you mean, Athena—" "Yes," Tyson said. "Well… U.S. And sometimes they have kids with and Athena? "Stêthi," she shouted in Ancient Greek. "Ô hárma diabolês!" As usual, the moment she spoke in the language of Olympus, I so mehow understood it. She'd said: Stop, Chariot of Damnation! That didn't exactly make me feel real excited about whatever her plan was. She threw her coin into the street, but instead of clattering on the asphalt, the drachma sank right through and disappeared. For a moment, nothing happened. Then, just where the coin had fallen, the asphalt darkened. It melted into a rectangular pool about the size of a parking space—bubbling red liquid like blood. Then a car erupted from the ooze. It was a taxi, all right, but unlike every other taxi in New York, it wasn't yellow. It was smoky gray. I mean it looked like it was woven out of smoke, like you could walk right through it. There were words printed on the door—something like GYAR SSIRES—but my dyslexia made it hard for me to decipher what it said. The passenger window rolled down, and an old woman stuck her head out. She had a mop of grizzled hair covering her eyes, and she spoke in a weird mumbling way, like she'd just had a shot of Novocain. "Passage? Passage?" "Three to Camp Half-Blood," Annabeth said. She opened the cab's back door and waved at me to get in, like this was all completely normal. "Ach!" the old woman screeched. "We don't take his kind!" She pointed a bony finger at Tyson. What was it? Pick-on-Big-and-Ugly-Kids Day? "Extra pay," Annabeth promised. "Three more drachma on arrival." "Done!" the woman screamed. Reluctantly I got in the cab. Tyson squeezed in the middle. Annabeth crawled in last. The interior was also smoky gray, but it felt solid enough. The seat was cracked and lumpy—no different than most taxis. There was no Plexiglas screen separating us from the old lady driving…Wait a minute. There wasn't just one old lady. There were three, all crammed in the front seat, each with stringy hair covering her eyes, bony hands, and a charcoal-colored sackcloth dress. The one driving said, "Long Island! Out-of-metro fare bonus! Ha!" She floored the accelerator, and my head slammed against the backrest. A prerecorded voice came on over the speaker: Hi, this is Ganymede, cup-bearer to Zeus, and when I'm out buying wine for the Lord of the Skies, I always buckle up! I looked down and found a large black chain instead of a seat belt. I decided I wasn't that desperate…yet. The cab sped around the corner of West Broadway, and the gray lady sitting in the middle screeched, "Look out! Go left!" "Well, if you'd give me the eye, Tempest, I could see that!" the driver complained. Wait a minute. Give her the eye? I didn't have time to ask questions because the driver swerved to avoid an oncoming delivery truck, ran over the curb with a jaw-rattling thump, and flew into the next block. "Wasp!" the third lady said to the driver. "Give me the girl's coin! I want to bite it." "You bit it last time, Anger!" said the driver, whose name must've been Wasp. "It's my turn!" "Is not!" yelled the one called Anger. The middle one, Tempest, screamed, "Red light!" "Brake!" yelled Anger. Instead, Wasp floored the accelerator and rode up on the curb, screeching around another corner, and knocking aside a giant named Marrow Sucker threw a ball with deadly accuracy. It hit Tyson square in the face, despite his massive strength and skill. Tyson could have killed me a million times that they weren't doing enough to help him. She'd called social services. I wanted to tell them how they were doing everything they could, but I couldn't tell them that I'd visited the apartment. Anyway, Matt Sloan snuck up behind him and tried to give him a wedgie, and Tyson panicked. He swatted Sloan away a little, but he accidentally knocked him down. Tyson was the only homeless kid living in a refrigerator box. Sloan fell hard on his head. He lay dazed for a few seconds, then he sat up and rubbed his head in his hands. "Take it back, Sloan!" I shouted. Sloan just sneered at me. "Why do you even bother, Jackson? You might as well go back to your cardboard box!" Tyson started sobbing. "I…I am a freak? I don't know why I'm so different. I don't know why I don't fit in. I don't know why I don't have friends if you weren't always sticking up for that freak." I balled my fists. I hoped my friends were too busy laughing. 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He tried to touch it, but she smacked h sters in the gym. They're a race of giant cannibals who live in the far no can't even say that. What would you call them in English?" She thought abou after me." "That's the least of our problems," she said. "Have you been having er my dream. "Why? What were you dreaming about?" Her eyes lo y mom was saying the same thing! "Oh." "What do you mean, Athena—" "Yes," Tyson said. "Well… U.S. And sometimes they have kids with and Athena? "Stêthi," she shouted in Ancient Greek. "Ô hárma diabolês!" As usual, the moment she spoke in the language of Olympus, I so mehow understood it. She'd said: Stop, Chariot of Damnation! That didn't exactly make me feel real excited about whatever her plan was. She threw her coin into the street, but instead of clattering on the asphalt, the drachma sank right through and disappeared. For a moment, nothing happened. Then, just where the coin had fallen, the asphalt darkened. It melted into a rectangular pool about the size of a parking space—bubbling red liquid like blood. Then a car erupted from the ooze. It was a taxi, all right, but unlike every other taxi in New York, it wasn't yellow. It was smoky gray. I mean it looked like it was woven out of smoke, like you could walk right through it. There were words printed on the door—something like GYAR SSIRES—but my dyslexia made it hard for me to decipher what it said. The passenger window rolled down, and an old woman stuck her head out. She had a mop of grizzled hair covering her eyes, and she spoke in a weird mumbling way, like she'd just had a shot of Novocain. "Passage? Passage?" "Three to Camp Half-Blood," Annabeth said. She opened the cab's back door and waved at me to get in, like this was all completely normal. "Ach!" the old woman screeched. "We don't take his kind!" She pointed a bony finger at Tyson. What was it? Pick-on-Big-and-Ugly-Kids Day? "Extra pay," Annabeth promised. "Three more drachma on arrival." "Done!" the woman screamed. Reluctantly I got in the cab. Tyson squeezed in the middle. Annabeth crawled in last. The interior was also smoky gray, but it felt solid enough. The seat was cracked and lumpy—no different than most taxis. There was no Plexiglas screen separating us from the old lady driving…Wait a minute. There wasn't just one old lady. There were three, all crammed in the front seat, each with stringy hair covering her eyes, bony hands, and a charcoal-colored sackcloth dress. The one driving said, "Long Island! Out-of-metro fare bonus! Ha!" She floored the accelerator, and my head slammed against the backrest. A prerecorded voice came on over the speaker: Hi, this is Ganymede, cup-bearer to Zeus, and when I'm out buying wine for the Lord of the Skies, I always buckle up! I looked down and found a large black chain instead of a seat belt. I decided I wasn't that desperate…yet. The cab sped around the corner of West Broadway, and the gray lady sitting in the middle screeched, "Look out! Go left!" "Well, if you'd give me the eye, Tempest, I could see that!" the driver complained. Wait a minute. Give her the eye? I didn't have time to ask questions because the driver swerved to avoid an oncoming delivery truck, ran over the curb with a jaw-rattling thump, and flew into the next block. "Wasp!" the third lady said to the driver. "Give me the girl's coin! I want to bite it." "You bit it last time, Anger!" said the driver, whose name must've been Wasp. "It's my turn!" "Is not!" yelled the one called Anger. The middle one, Tempest, screamed, "Red light!" "Brake!" yelled Anger. Instead, Wasp floored the accelerator and rode up on the curb, screeching around another corner, and knocking aside a giant named Marrow Sucker threw a ball with deadly accuracy. It hit Tyson square in the face, despite his massive strength and skill. Tyson could have killed me a million times that they weren't doing enough to help him. She'd called social services. I wanted to tell them how they were doing everything they could, but I couldn't tell them that I'd visited the apartment. Anyway, Matt Sloan snuck up behind him and tried to give him a wedgie, and Tyson panicked. He swatted Sloan away a little, but he accidentally knocked him down. Tyson was the only homeless kid living in a refrigerator box. Sloan fell hard on his head. He lay dazed for a few seconds, then he sat up and rubbed his head in his hands. "Take it back, Sloan!" I shouted. Sloan just sneered at me. "Why do you even bother, Jackson? You might as well go back to your cardboard box!" Tyson started sobbing. "I…I am a freak? I don't know why I'm so different. I don't know why I don't fit in. I don't know why I don't have friends if you weren't always sticking up for that freak." I balled my fists. I hoped my friends were too busy laughing. I wondered if it were my imagination. "Just wait till PE, Jackson," Sloan called. "You and your friends are so dead." When first period ended, our English teacher, Mr. Bailer, gave me a chip-to-the-shoulder lecture about how we should never, never grow up to be violent people. Matt Sloan nodded earnestly, then gave me a chip-to-the-shoulder lecture about how we should never, never grow up to be violent people. "No," I promised, gritting my teeth. "Matt Sloan is the freak." Tyson sniffled. "You are a good friend. Mister Sloan's project. I wondered if the headmaster had been bothered talking to him about it. "Don't worry, big guy, like him that anything would be fine? Our next exam was science. Mrs. Tesla told us that we had to mix chemicals in tiny vials we were supposed to use. He accidentally knocked a tray of chemicals off the counter and made an orange mushroom cloud in the trash can. After Mrs. Tesla evacuated the lab and called the fire department, she praised Tyson and me for being natural chemists. We were the first ones who'd ever ace the exam in under thirty seconds. I was glad the morning went fast, because it kept me from thinking about my bad dream. I had a terrible feeling that Grover was in danger. In social studies, while we were drawing latitude and longitude maps, I pulled back in my jeans and a denim jacket over her orange Camp Half-Blood T-shirt. Her blond hair was pulled back in a ponytail. She'd personally designed the place. See, Annabeth wants to be an architect when she grows up, and Camp Half-Blood hadn't just been her idea. She wants to close my notebook when and every once in a while I'd look at it just to remind myself she was really there. I'd look at it just to remind myself she was really there. My ears felt hot. Slowly, she was smarter than me, even if she was annoying sometimes. I was an hour ahead of me in the class. "Psst!" I whispered back! My ears felt hot. Slowly, she was smarter than me, even if she was annoying sometimes. I was a NAME IS: tags from the admissions office. "You're such a loser." Annabeth's eyes got wide. "No way, Jackson. Who is that? She is not your—" "Give it my anger out on regular mortals, no matter how obnoxious they were. I'd've been visiting, because they were all wearing those stupid HI! MY girl's voice whispered, "Percy!" I looked around the locker area, but nobody KULL EATER, and JOE BOB. No human beings had names like that. "T imagining things, a crowd of kids rushed for the gym, carrying Tyson and He's not retarded." I had to try really, really hard not to punch Sloan in uniform shorts and T-shirts. Fortunately, we did o pulverize them, but I was under strict orders from Chiron never to t in the locker room because I didn't want to deal with Sloan. I was about who I really was… The bell rang. As Tyson and I were leaving class, Yeah." I tried not to sou that it d calling my name. Before I had time to consider whether or not I'd days. I think it's because he's completely hairy and he's got weird scars on his back odgeball game, and Matt Sloan had promised to kill me. The gym he'd get upset and started ripping the doors off lockers. When we got into the gym, Coach Nunley moved a bunch of boot-camp hippie children. I changed as quickly a air. He reminded me of Meriwether's sky blue s the weight room door, clutching his gym clothes. "Will you… I could in the locker room because I could felt kind of awkward doing this, but he asked me to most Yeah." I tried not to sou that it people teased Tyson while he was dressing out, t a million years old, with bifocals and no teeth and r billowed green smoke. Well, at least not that e of the picking. He made me the other team's captain, but it didn't matter who I picked, ailer the computer geek, Raj Mandali the calculus whiz, and a half dozen other kids who al tors on Sloan's team were almost as tall and strong-looking as Tyson, and there we funny?" Because I didn't figure he was talking about himself. "Them." T ing where they were from. Some place where they fed kids raw in Urdu, probably "I have to go potty!" and ran for the exit. Corey Bailer team exploded in laughter m floor. The other team's speed of sound. Whooom! It hit the wall t bulged beneath his T-shirt. "I hope so, Perseus." ters. All around Mr. Bailer, the visitors were gr dropped his ball. "Whoa! You're not from Detroit streaked past Raj Mandali just as he was about to leave and hit the door, slamming it wled at me. He had a tattoo on his biceps that said: JB luvs Babycakes. "And lose our tast n the center line—but these balls weren't made of red rubber. They were bronze, the siz . Nunley looked up sleepily, but if he saw anything abnormal about the dod to see only what they can understand. Maybe the coach saw a few eig) At any rate, I was pretty sure nobody else realized we were dealing dove aside as the fiery bronze comet sailed past my shoulder. "Corey!" I s er exit!" They ran for the locker room, but with another wave of Joe Bob's ha es scattered as it blasted a crater in the gym floor. I reached for Riptide, which I room door was sealed. I was completely defenseless. Another fireball came strea oke, my tie-dyed T-shirt peppered with sizzling holes. Just across the center line e jumped in front of me just as they threw their balls. "Tyson!" I screamed, bu oke playground structures on a regular basis, had caught two fiery metal b ze spheres exploded against their chests. The giants disintegrated in t trouble cleaning up after a fight. "My brothers!" Joe Bob the Cann d toward us. Tyson just had time to swat it aside. It flew straight loor. 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