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 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 all cool with me. 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 break yard 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 people 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 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 he talked 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 softie, despite his massive strength and his scary looks, they made themselves 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 a million times that they weren't doing enough to help him. She'd called social services, but nothing ever seemed to happen. The social workers claimed Tyson didn't exist. They swore up and down that they'd visited the alley we described and couldn't find him, though how you miss a giant kid living in a refrigerator box, I don't know. Anyway, Matt Sloan snuck up behind him and tried to give him a wedgie, and Tyson packed. He swatted Sloan away a little too hard. Sloan flew fifteen feet and got tangled in the little kids' tire swing. "You freak!" Sloan yelled. "Why don't you go back to your cardboard box!" Tyson started sobbing. He sat down on the jungle gym so hard he bent the bar, and buried his head in his hands. "Take it back, Sloan!" I shouted. Sloan just sneered at me. "Why do you even bother, Jackson? You might have friends if you weren't always sticking up for that freak." I balled my fists. I hoped my face wasn't as red as it felt. "He's not a freak. He's just…" I tried to think of the right thing to say, but Sloan wasn't listening. He and his big ugly friends were too busy laughing. I wondered if it were my imagination, or if Sloan had more goons hanging around him than usual. I was used to seeing him with two or three, but today he had like, half a dozen more, and I was pretty sure I'd never seen them before. "Just wait till PE, Jackson," Sloan called. "You are so dead." When first period ended, our English teacher, Mr. de Milo, came outside to inspect the carnage. He pronounced that we'd understood Lord of the Flies perfectly. We all passed his course, and we should never, never grow up to be violent people. Matt Sloan nodded earnestly, then gave me a chip-toothed grin. I had to promise to buy Tyson an extra peanut butter sandwich at lunch to get him to stop sobbing. "I…I am a freak?" he asked me. "No," I promised, gritting my teeth. "Matt Sloan is the freak if…if I can't…" His voice trembled. I realized he didn't know if he'd be invited back next year for the community service project. I wondered if the headmaster had even bothered." Tyson sniffled. "You are a good friend. Miss you next year. "Everything's going to be fine." Tyson gave me such a grateful look I felt like a big liar. How could I promise a kid like him that anything would be fine? Our next exam was talking to him about it. "Don't worry, big guy," I managed. Tyson was my lab partner. His hands were way too big for the tiny vials we were supposed to use. He accidentally knocked a tray of chemicals off the counter as science. Mrs. Tesla told us that we had to mix chemicals until we succeeded in making something explode. After Mrs. Tesla evacuated the lab and called the hazardous waste removal squad, she praised Tyson and me for being natural chemists. We were the first and made an orange mushroom cloud in the trash can. The bell rang seconds. I was glad the morning went fast, because it kept me from thinking too much about my problems. I couldn't stand the idea that something might be wrong at camp. Even worse, I couldn't shake the memory of my bad dream. I had a terrible feeling that Grover was in danger. In social studies, while we were drawing latitude/longitude maps, I opened my notebook and stared at the photo inside—my friend Annabeth on vacation in Washington, D.C. She was wearing jeans and a denim jacket over her orange Camp Half-Blood T-shirt. H er blond hair was pulled back in a banana. She was standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial with her arms crossed, looking extremely pleased with herself, like she'd personally designed the place. See, Annabeth want s to be an architect when she grows up, so she's always visiting famous monuments and stuff. She's weird that way. She'd e-mailed me the picture I wished Annabeth were here. She'd knook at it just to remind myself she was real and Camp Half-Blood hadn't just been my imagination. My notebook when Matt Sloan reached her, but she was smarter than me, even if she was annoying sometimes. I was about to close my at? She is not your—" "Give it back!" I protested. Sloan checked out the picture and his eyes got wide. "No way, Jackson. Who is the ere they were wearing those stupid arted ripping it up to make spit wads. They were new kids who must've been visiting, because No human beings had names like they'd all filled in strange names like: MARR OW SUCKER, SKULL EATER, and JOE BOB. Sloan in the face. "You'd better tion, too, unlike your retard friend." "He's not retarded." I had to try really, really hard not to punch out on regular mortals, no matter nted to pulverize them, but I was under strict orders from Chiron never to take my anger out on the locker area, but nobody was paying me any attention. Like any girl at Meriwether would ever be caught dead calling my name. Before I had time to consider whether voice whispered, "Percy!" I looked around with them. It was time for PE. Our coach had promised us a free-for-all dodgeball game, and Matt Sloan had promised to kill me. The gym uniform at Meriwether is sky blue for the gym, carrying Tyson and me along to jog through Tribeca locking a bunch of boot-camp hippie children. I changed as quickly as I could in the locker room because I didn't want to deal with Sloan. I was a our athletic stuff inside, so we didn't have room doors, clutching his gym clothes. "Will you…uh…" "Oh. Yeah." I tried not to sound aggravated about it. "Yeah, sure, man." Tyson ducked inside the weight room hanged yet. He was standing by the weight me to most days. I think it's because he's completely hairy and he's got weird scars on his back that I've never had the courage to ask him about. Anyway, I'd learned the hard It kind of awkward doing this, but he asked he doors off lockers. When we got into the gym, Coach Nunley was sitting at his little desk reading Sports Illustrated. Nunley was about a million years old, with bifocals the size of potato chips—but they always looked like that. "Tyson," I shriveled up mum my—except Coach Nunley moved a lot less and he never billowed green smoke. We'll, at least not that I'd observed. Matt Sloan sing od—which was a seemed fascinated by Annabeth's blond hair. He tried to touch it, but He made me the other team's captain, but it didn't matter who I picked, because all the e mumbled. "Mm-hmm." Sloan grinned and took charge of the picking. o live in the far north. Odysseus ran into them once, but I've never seen Raj Mandali the calculus whiz, and a half dozen other kids who always got harassed by Sloan an y self—but the Tyson, Corey Bailer the computer geek, decided. "Now come on, we have to get out of here." "The police'll be strong-looking as Tyson, and there were six of them. Matt Sloan spilled a cage full of at s visitors on Sloan's team were almost as tall and t about Grover?" I told her my dream. "Why? What were you dreaming mells funny." The visitors were ey w ny?" Because I didn't figure he was talking about himself. "Them." Tyson pointed at Sloan's new friends. "Smell funny." The visitors were e thing! But what kind of trouble?" "I don't know exactly. Something's were from . Someplace where they fed raw meat and beat them with sticks. Sloan blew the coach's whistle and the gate began. Sloan's team otty !" and rand for the exit. Corey Bailer tried to crawl behind the wall mat and hide. The rest of my team did their best to cower in fear and not look like head. "None all year…until today." "None? But how…" Her eyes drifted to the gym floor. The other team exploded in laughter. My eyesight was fuzzy. I felt like I'd just gotten the Heimlich maneuver from a gorilla. I could Annabeth and I exchanged looks. I didn't know how I could explain, but I figured. Whooom! It hit the wall mat, and Corey Bailer yelped. "Hey!" I yelled at Sloan's team. "You could kill Ll whistled past my ear at the speed of sound. "Yes." I stared at him. He didn't seem surprised or confused by what I ed beneath his T-shirt. "I hope so, Perseus Jackson! I hope so!" The way he said my name sent a chill down …even taller than Tyson. His biceps bulged. "Yes," Tyson said. "Well…those gods are still alive. They kind of follow Wes ell funny. Monsters. All around Matt Sloan, the visitors were growing in size. They were eer no longer kids. They were eight-fo emies. What had Tyson said? They sm rs." Tyson said, like he was still waiting for me to get to the point. "Uh, well, Annabeth t Sloan dropped his ball. "Whoa! You're not from Detroit! Who…" The other kids on the team started screaming and backing hula wo men and " Tyson frowned. Now he looked confused. "But then…" A siren wailed. A st as he was about to leave and hit the door, slamming it shut like magic. Raj and some of the other kids banged on it desp racy. It strea ey—" "Trust me." I hesitated. "What about Tyson?" I imagined escorting too on his biceps that said: JB luvs Babycakes. "And lose our tasty morsels? No, Sorry, no longer. n oat grow ked past Raj Mandali ju hand, the cops would be looking for us. "We can't just leave him," I ter line—but these balls weren't made of red rubber. They were bronze, the size of cantaloupes. and s aren oe Bob led at me. He had a tat a big disease we needed to get to the hospital, but I followed her Coach!" I yelled. Nunley looked up sleepily, but if he saw anything abnormal about the nonplayers balls, perfo h of dod gebal Annabeth stopped us on the corner of Thomas and Trimble. m their vision, so mortals tend to see only what they can understand. Maybe the coach dodge ball game, he didn't let on. Th d them up wit 'd slept several nights in the open. The slashes on the he und. (It wouldn't have been the first time.) At any rate, I was pretty sure nobody else c h saw a few eighth graders pound ppearance of monsters king for juvenile delinquent gym-bombers. No doubt Ma . The giant named Skull Eater threw his ball. I dove aside as the fiery bronze comet re realized were dealing with ge ng ready to toss Molotov cocktails th pulled out a gold coin that I recognized as a drach ng shreds. "Run!" I told my teammates. "The other exit!" They ran for the locker t sail ed past my shoulder. "Corey!" I nice." And he went back to his magazine n't take that." "Stêthi," she shouted in Ancient Greek you!" He launched his own fireball. My teammates scattered as it blasted a crater room, but with another wave of Joe Bo loded against it, blasting the door ctly make me feel real excited about whatever her pl eans inside my gym locker. And the locker room door was sealed. I was com er in the gym floor. I reached for Riptide, b roared. "And you're not out until we eat led on the gym floor, dazed from smoke, my tie-dyed T-shirt peppered with pletely de fenseless. Another fireball came had no pockets. Riptide was stuck in my j eds help!" Tyson yelled, and he jumped in front of me just as they threw sizzling holes. Just across the center I w me head over lends. I found myself spraw b equipment and broke playground structures on a regular basis, had their balls. " Tyson!" I screamed, but it was sh for lunch!" They both took aim. "Percy n e ronze spheres exploded against their chests. The giants disintegrated twin columns of flame— caught two fiery metal balls speeding toward yson, who was so clumsy he knocked over la ning up after a fight. "My brothers!" Joe Bob the Cannibal wailed. a sure sign the owners, who screamed, "BAAAAAD!" as the b st had time to swat it aside. It flew straight over Coach Nunley's head and landed in the Babycake ust, which saves heroes a lot of trouble clean the door, calling for help. Sloan himself stood petrified in the middle of the nother comet hurtled toward us. Tyson ju ving him interference, but he kept his eyes on his magazine. Sure ly the whole school could hear the noise craters in the floor. Others were banging o our bones!" I wanted to tell him he was taking the dodgeball game way too seriously, but before I could, he ed his hearing aid like the explosions were gi had to be seriously burned from blocking the first volley. Without my sword… I had a crazy idea. I ran to s!" roared Joe Bob the Cannibal. "We will feast on your owners and blasted them to ashes. Two left turn! That was your turn!" Wasp swerved Tyson couldn't deflect all those balls at once. His hands at most boys' locker rooms was enough to cause grated that the built-up gas in ions behind me. Tyson had batted two of the balls back toward the e court, watching in disbelief as the Babycakes swerved around the corner aside as the fiery sphere demolished the locker room door. Now, I fi n most personal belongings rained all over the gym. I WHOOOOOOOM! The wall blew apart. Lockers, socks, athletic supporters, and other various nasty personal belongings rained all over the gym. I . But the last giant, Joe Bob, had wisely held on to his own ball, waiting for an opportunity. He threw just as Tyson was turning to face him. "No!" I yelled. The ball caught back wall, which cracked and partially crumbled on top of him, making a hole right onto Church Street. I didn't see how Tyson could still be alive, but he fell back, stunned, into a pile of cinder blocks. "Head hurts. r blocks. "Well!" Joe Bob gloated. "I'm the last one standing! I'll have enough meat to bring Babycakes a doggie bag!" He picked up another ball and aimed it at Tyson. "Stop!" I yelled. "It's me you want!" "Hey, curse you!" I dropped her in a heap next to the pine tree and turned to face the bulls. We were on the inside slope of the hill now, the valley of Camp Half-Blood directly below us—the cabins, the training facilities, the Big House—all of it at risk if these bulls got past us. Annabeth shouted orders to the other heroes, telling them to spread out and keep the bulls distracted. Bull Number One ran a wide arc, making its way back toward me. As it passed the middle of the hill, where the invisible boundary line should've kept it out, it slowed down a little, as if it were struggling against a strong wind; but then it broke through and kept coming. Bull Number Two turned to face me, fire sputtering from the gash I'd cut in its side. I couldn't tell if it felt any pain, but its ruby eyes seemed to glare at me like I'd just made things personal. I couldn't fight both bulls at the same time. I'd have to take down Bull Number Two first, cut its head off before Bull Number One charged back into range. My arms already felt tired. I realized how long it had been since I'd worked out with Riptide, how out of practice I was. I lunged but Bull Number Two blew flames at me. I rolled aside as the air turned to pure heat. All the oxygen was sucked out of my lungs. My foot caught on something—a tree root, maybe—and pain shot up my ankle. Still, I managed to slash with my sword and lop off part of the monster's snout. It galloped away, wild and disoriented. But before I could feel too good about that, I tried to stand, and my left

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