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 unle ss 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 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 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 talking to him about it. "Don't worry, big guy," I managed. "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 science. Mrs. Tesla told us that we had to mix chemicals until we succeeded in making something explode. 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 and made an orange mushroom cloud in the trash can. 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 ones who'd ever ace her exam in under thirty 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 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 wants 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 after spring break, and every once in a while I'd look at it just to remind myself she was real and Camp Half-Blood hadn't just been my imagination. I wished Annabeth were here. She'd know what to make of my dream. I'd never admit it to her, but she was smarter than me, even if she was annoying sometimes. I was about to close my notebook when Matt Sloan reached over and ripped the photo out of the rings. "Hey!" I protested. Sloan checked out the picture and his eyes got wide. "No way, Jackson. Who is that? She is not your—" "Give it back!" My ears felt hot. Sloan handed the photo to his ugly buddies, who snickered and started ripping it up to make spit wads. They were new kids who must've been visiting, because HI! MY NAME IS: tags from the admissions office. They must've had a weird sense of humor, too, OW SUCKER, SKULL EATER, and JOE BOB. "These guys are moving here next year," Sloan bragged, like that was supposed to scare me. "I bet they can't. No human beings had names like that." "Oh. Yeah." I tried not to pay the tuition, too, unlike your retard friend." "He's not such a loser, Jackson. Good thing I'm gonna put you out of your misery next period." His huge bu ddies chewed up my photo. I was retarded." I had to try really, really hard not to punch Sloan in the face. "You'd'r e ow obnoxious they were. I had to save my fighting for monsters. Still, part of me thought, if Sloan only knew who I really was… The bell rang orders from Chiron never to take my anger out on regular mortals, no matter how obnoxious they were. I had to save my fighting for monsters. Still, part of me thought, if Sloan only knew who I really was… The bell rang voice whispered, "Percy!" I looked around 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 I'd or not I'd be for the gym, carrying Tyson and me along 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 shorts and tie-dyed T-shirts. Fortunately, we did most of our athletic stuff inside, so we didn't have to jog through Tribeca loo okin g li ke 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 about to leave hanged yet. He was standing by the weight room door, 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. I stood guard outside the door while he changed. I fe It kind of awkward doing this, but he asked 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 way that sing out, he'd get upset and start ripping the 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 and no teeth and a greasy wave of gray hair. He reminded me of the Oracle at Camp Half-Blood, which was a shriveled-up mummy—except Coach Nunley moved a lot less and he never billowed green smoke. We'll, at least not that I'd observed. Matt Sloan said, "Coach Nunley looked up from his magazine. "Yeah," he mumbled. "Mmhmm." Sloan grinned and took charge of the picking. He made me the other team's captain, but it didn't matter who I picked, because all the jocks and the popular kids moved over to Sloan's side. So did the big group of visitors. On my side, Tyson, Corey Bailer the computer geek, Raj Mandali the calculus whiz, and a half dozen other kids who always got harassed by Sloan and his gang. Normally I would've been okay with just Tyson—he was worth half a team all by himself—but visitors on Sloan's team were a lot strong-looking as Tyson, and there were six of them. Matt Sloan spilled a cage full of balls in the middle of the gym. "Smell funny." I looked at him. "Why talking about himself. "Them." Tyson pointed at Sloan's new friends. "Smell funny." The visitors were cracking their time. I couldn't help wondering where they fed raw meat and beat them with sticks. Sloan blew the coach's whistle and the game began. Sloan's team ran for the center something Urdu, probably "I have to go to the exit. Corey Bailer tried to crawl behind the wall mat and hide. The rest of my team did their best to come in fear and not look like targets. "Tyson, my gut. I sat down hard in the middle of 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 couldn't believe anybody Percy, duck!" I rolled as another dodgeball whistled past my ear at the speed of sound. Whooom! It hit the wall mat, and Corey Bailer yelped. "Hey!" I yelled at Sloan's team. "You could kill somebody!" The Illy. Somehow, he looked a lot bigger now…even taller than Tyson. His biceps bulged beneath his T-shirt. "I hope so, Perseus Jackson! I hope so!" The way he said my name sent a chill down my back. Noone knew my true identity. Friends…and enemies. What had Tyson said? They sm ell funny. Monsters. All around Matt Sloan, the visitors were growing in size. They were eight-foot-tall giants with wild eyes, pointy teeth, and hairy arms tattooed with snakes and hula women Valentine hearts. Matt Sloan dropped his ball. "Whoa! You're not from Detroit! Who…" The other kids on h is team started screaming and backing toward the exit, but the giant named Marrow Sucker threw a ball with deadly accuracy. It streaked past Raj Mandali just 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 desperately. "Let them go!" I yelled at the giants. The one called Joe Bob growled at me. He had a tattoo on his biceps that said: JB luvs Babycakes. "And lose our tasty morsels? No, Son of the Sea God. We Laistrygonians are nch!" He waved his hand and a new batch of dodgeball appeared on the center line—but these balls weren't made of red rubber. They were bronze, the size of cantaloupes, perforated like wiffle balls and 've been searing hot, but the giants picked them up with their bare hands. "Coach!" I yelled. Nunley looked up sleepily, but if he saw anything abnormal about the dodgeball game, he didn't let on. T force called the Mist obscures the true appearance of monsters and godsfrom their vision, so mortals tend to see only what they can understand. Maybe the coach saw a few eighth graders pound e other kids saw Matt Sloan's thugs getting ready to toss Molotov cocktails around. (It wouldn't have been the first time.) At any rate, I was pretty sure nobody elsealized we were dealing with giants. "Yeah. Mm-hmm," Coach muttered. "Play nice." And he went back to his magazine. The giant named Skull Eater threw his ball. I dove aside as the fiery bronze comet sailed past my shoulder. "Corey!" I hind the exercise mat just as the ball exploded against it, blasting the mat to smoking shreds. "Run!" I told my teammates. "The other exit!" They ran for the locker room, but with another wave of Joe Bo No one leaves unless you're out!" Joe Bob roared. "And you're not out until we eat you!" He launched his own fireball. My teammates scattered as it blasted a crater in the gym floor. I reached for Riptide, en I realized I was wearing gym shorts. I had no pockets. Riptide was tucked in my jeans inside my gym locker. And the locker room door was sealed. I was completely defenseless. Another fireball cam out of the way, but the explosion still blew me head over heels. I found myself sprawled on the gym floor, dazed from smoke, my tie-dyed T-shirt peppered with sizzling holes. Just across the center I n at me. "Flesh!" they bellowed. "Hero fish for lunch!" They both took aim. "Percy n e eds help!" Tyson yelled, and he jumped in front of me just as they threw their balls. "Tyson!" I screamed, but it w …but no…he'd caught them. Somehow Tyson, who was so clumsy he knocked over lab equipment and broke playground structures on a regular basis, had caught two fiery metal balls speeding towa them hurtling back toward their surprised owners, who screamed, "BAAAAAD!" as the bronze spheres exploded against their chests. The giants disintegrated in twin columns of flame—a sure sign the die. They just dissipate into smoke and disappear. Unfortunately, most of them leave a lot of trouble cleaning up after a fight. "My brothers!" Joe Bob the Cannibal wailed. He fell to his knees and his Babycake struction!" "Tyson!" I said. "Look out!" Another comet hurtled toward us. Tyson just had time to swat it aside. It flew straight over Coach Nunley's head and landed in the bleachers with a nd screaming, trying to avoid the sizzling craters in the floor. Other hers were banging on the door, calling for help. Sloan himself stood petrified in the middle of the court, watching in disbelief as nley still wasn't seeing anything. He tapped his hearing aid like the explosions were giving him interference, but he kept his eyes on his magazine. Sure enough, the whole school could hear the noise would come help us. "Victory will be our s!" roared Joe Bob the Cannibal. "We will feast on your bones!" I wanted to tell him he was taking the dodgeball game a way too seriously, but before I could, he s followed his lead. I knew we were dead. Tyson couldn't deflect all those balls at once. His hands had to be seriously burned from blocking the first volley. Without my sword… I had a crazy idea. I ran to eammates. "Away from the door." Explosions behind me. Tyson had batted two of the balls back toward their owners and blasted them to ashes. That left two giants still standing. A third ball hurtled st Mississippi, two Mississippi—then dove aside as the fiery sphere demolished the locker room door. Now, I figured that the built-up gas in most boys' locker rooms was enough to cau en the flaming dodgeball ignited a huge WHOOOOOOOM! The wall blew apart. Lockers, socks, athletic supplies, and other personal belongings rained all over the gym. I kull Eater in the face. The giant crumpled. 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 caug ength of the court and slammed into the 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. "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 wa rst, young hero?" I had to do something. Riptide had to be around here somewhere. Then I spotted my jeans in a smoking heap of clothes right by the giant's feet. If I could only get there…I knew it was hopeless, but I charged. The giant lau his arm to throw. I braced myself to die. Suddenly the giant's body went rigid. His expression changed from gloating to surprise. Right where his belly button should've been, his T-shirt ripped open and he grew something like a horn—no, e ball dropped out of his hand. The monster stared down at the knife that had just run him through from behind. He muttered, "Ow," and burst into a cloud of green flame, which I figured was going to make Babycakes pretty upset. Standing in the e was grimy and scratched. She had a ragged backpack slung over her shoulder, her baseball cap tucked in her pocket, a bronze knife in her hand, and a wild look in her storm-gray eyes, like she'd just been chased a thousand miles by ghosts. Matt Slo an, who'd been standing there dumbfounded the whole time, finally came to his senses. He blinked at Annabeth, as if he dimly recognized her from my notebook picture. "That's the girl…That's the girl—" Annabeth punched him in the nose and knocked him fl

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iend." The gym was in flames. Kids were still running around screaming. I heard sirens wailing and a garbled voice over the intercom. Through the glass windows of the exit doors, I could see the headmaster, Mr. Bonsai, wres ing up behind him. "Annabeth…" I stammered. "How did you…how long have you…" "Pretty much all morning." She sheathed her bronze knife. "I've been trying to find a good time to talk to you, but you were never alone." "The shadow felt hot. "Oh my gods, you were looking in my bedroom window?" "There's no time to explain!" she snapped, though she looked a little red-faced herself. "I just didn't want to—" "There!" a woman screamed. The doors burst open and t side," Annabeth told me. "And him." She pointed to Tyson, who was still sitting dazed against the wall. Annabeth gave him a look of distaste that I didn't quite understand. "You'd better bring him." "What?" "No time!" she said. "Hur , which was a magic gift from her mom, and instantly vanished. That left me standing alone in the middle of the burning gymnasium when the headmaster came charging in with half the faculty and a couple of police officers. "Per ow…" Over by the broken wall, Tyson groaned and stood up from the pile of cinder blocks. "Head hurts." Matt Sloan was coming around, too. He focused on me with a look of terror. "Per cy did it, Mr. Bonsai! He set the whole bu He saw it all!" Coach Nunley had been dutifully reading his magazine, but just my luck—he chose the moment to look up when Sloan said his name. "Eh? Yeah. Mm-hmm." The other adults turned toward me. I knew they would the truth. I grabbed Riptide out of my ruined jeans, told Tyson, "Come on!" and jumped through the gaping hole in the side of the building. THREE WE HAIL THE TAXI OF ETERNAL TORMENT Annabeth was waiting for us in a yson and me off the sidewalk just as a fire truck screamed past, heading for Meriwether Prep. "Where'd you find him?" she demanded, pointing at Tyson. Now, under different circumstances, I would've been really happy to s r, despite the fact that her mom was Athena and didn't get along with my dad. I'd missed Annabeth probably more than I wanted to admit. But I'd just been attacked by cannibal giants, Tyson had saved my life three or fou are at him like he was the problem. "He's my friend," I told her. "Is he homeless?" "What does that have to do with anything? He can hear you, you know. Why don't you ask him ?" She looked surprised. "He can talk?" "Ah! Gross!" Annabeth stepped away from him. I couldn't believe she was being so rude. I examined Tyson's hands, which I was sure must've been badly scorched by the flaming dodge balls, but they looked fin ils the size of potato chips—but they always looked like that. "Tyson," I said. "What are you talking about? Laistry-what? " "Laistrygonians. The monsters in the surprised the Laistrygonians had the gut seemed fascinated by Annabeth's blond hair. He tried to touch it, but een them as far south as New York before." "Laistry—I can't even say that. What would you call them in English?" She thought o live in the far north. Odysseus ran into them once, but I've never seen them after Polyphemus." "The dreams…about Grover? e dreams?" "The dreams…about Grover? decided. "Now come on, we have to get out of here." "The police'll be after me." "That's the least of our problems," she said. "Have you been having the our. "Camp," she said at last. "Big trouble t about Grover?" I told her my dream. "Why? What were you dreaming about?" Her eyes looked stormy, like her mind was racing a million miles an hour. e way from Virginia, trying to stop me. Ha e thing! But what kind of trouble?" "I don't know exactly. Something's wrong. We have to get there right away. Monsters have been chasing me all th ll in class. "Canadians in the gym called head. "None all year…until today." "None? But how…" Her eyes drifted to son. "Oh." "What do you mean, 'oh'?" Tyson raised his hand like he was sti ever hear those old stories about the Gre Annabeth and I exchanged looks. I didn't know how I could explain, but I figured Tyson deserved the truth after almost getting killed. "Big guy," I said, "you And sometimes they have kids with mort "Yes," Tyson said. "Well…those gods are still alive. They kind of follow Western civilization around, living in the strongest countries, so like now they're in the U.S. ick up our scent, they attack us. That's w n said, like he was still waiting for me to get to the point. "Uh, well, Annabeth and I are half-bloods," I said. "We're like…heroes-in-training. And whenever monsters p ed. "But you are…Son of the Sea God?" rs." "Yes." I stared at him. He didn't seem surprised or confused by what I was tellin g him, which surprised and confused me. "So…you believe me?" Tyson nodd ll talk in the taxi." "A taxi all the way to c " Tyson frowned. Now he looked confused. "But then…" A siren wailed. A p oli ce car raced past our alley. "We don't have time for this," Annabeth said. "We' th regular bullies, how would he act at a t ey—" "Trust me." I hesitated. "What about Tyson?" I imagined escorting my giant friend into Camp Half-Blood. If he freaked out on a regular playground wi ed to take him. Now come on." I didn't lik hand, the cops would be looking for us. "We can't just leave him," I ed. "He'll be in trouble, too." "Yeah." Annabeth looked grim. "We definitely ne a big disease we needed to get to the hospital, but I followed her gether the three of us sneaked through the side streets of downtown while a huge column of smoke billowed up behin Annabeth stopped us on the corner of Thomas and Trimble. r backpack. "I hope I have one left." She looked even worse than I'd realiz ed at first. Her chin was cut. Twigs and gr 'd slept several nights in the open. The slashes on the he piciously like claw marks. "What are you looking for?" I asked. All arou nd us, sirens wailed. I figured it wouldn't king for juvenile delinquent gym-bombers. No doubt Ma statement by now. He'd probably twisted the story around so that T yson and I were the bloodthirsty cannibal th pulled out a gold coin that I recognized as a drach nt Olympus. It had Zeus's likeness stamped on one side and the Empire State Building on the other. "An n't take that." "Stêthi," she shouted in Ancient Greek usual, the moment she spoke in the language of Olympus, I somehow understood it. She'd said: St ctly make me feel real excited about whatever her pl n into the street, but instead of clattering on the asphalt, the drachma sank right through and dis ed. Then, just where the coin had fallen, the asphalt ectangular pool about the size of a parking space—bu bbling red liquid like blood. Then a car er t, but unlike every other taxi in New York, it wasn't y mean it looked like it was woven out of smoke, like you could walk right through it. There wer like GYAR SSIRES—but my dyslexia made it hard for id. The passenger window rolled down, and an old woman stuck her head out. She had a mo she spoke in a weird mumbling way, like she'd just had ?" "Three to Camp Half-Blood," Annabeth said. She opened the cab's back door and waved a normal. "Ach!" the old woman screeched. "We don't take on. What was it? Pick-on-Big-and-Ugly-Kids Day? "Extra pay," Annabeth promised. "Three mor n screamed. Reluctantly I got in the cab. Tyson squeezed in or was also smoky gray, but it felt solid enough. The seat was cracked and lumpy—no different t creen separating us from the old lady driving…Wait a minut , all crammed in the front seat, each with stringy hair covering her eyes, bony hands, and a charco ng said, "Long Island! Out-of-metro fare bonus! Ha!" She flo the backrest. A prerecorded voice came on over the speaker: Hi, this is Ganymede, cup-bearer to Zeus Lord of the Skies, I always buckle up! I looked down and fo ed I wasn't that desperate…yet. The cab sped around the corner of West Broadway, and the gray lady t! Go left!" "Well, if you'd give me the eye, Tempest, I could ve her the eye? I didn't have time to ask questions because the driver swerved to avoid an oncoming d -rattling thump, and flew into the next block. "Wasp!" th n! I want to bite it." "You bit it last time, Anger!" said the driver, whose name must've been Wasp. "It's nger. The middle one, Tempest, screamed, "Red light celerator and rode up on the curb, screeching around another corner, and knocking over a newspaper b on Broome Street. "Excuse me," I said. "But…ca l. "No!" screamed Tempest from the middle. "Of course!" screamed Anger by the shotgun window. I lo completely," Annabeth said. "They have an ey to me, Tyson groaned and grabbed the seat. "Not feeling so good." "Oh, man," I said, because I'd se and it was not something you wanted to a garbage bag or something?" The three gray ladies were too busy squabbling to pay me any atte s hanging on for dear life, and I gave Sisters Taxi is the fastest way to camp." "Then why didn't you take it from Virginia?" "That's o hat should be obvious. "They only We've had famous people in this cab!" Anger exclaimed. "Jason! You remember him?" "Don't 't have a cab back then, you tooth!" Anger tried to grab at Wasp's mouth, but Wasp swatted her hand away. "Only if Th t screeched. "You had it coming!" Wasp cuses! Turn! That was your turn!" Wasp swerved hard onto Delancey Street, squishin unched the gas and w e at seventy miles an hour. The three sister ers were fighting for real now, slapping e s face and Wasp tri g and their mouths open, screaming at each other, I realized that none of the sister, who had one bloodshot green eye tha had one mossy sed, sunken eyelids, except for Anger's ldn't get enough e of sight, managed to yank the tooth out of her sister Wasp's mouth. This m

ade Wasp so mad she swerved toward the edge of the Williamsburg Bridge, yelling, "'Ivit back! 'Ivit back!" Tyson groaned and clutched his stomach. "Uh, if anybody's interested," I said, "Th e's going to die!" "Don't worry," Annabeth told me, sounding pretty worried. "The Gray Sisters know what they're doing. They're really very wise." "Ex thena, but I wasn't exactly reassured. We were skimming along the edge of a bridge a hundred and thirty feet above the East River. "Yes, wise." This coming from the daughter of A showing off her newly acquired tooth. "W e know things's! "Every street in Manhattan!" Wasp bragged, still hitting her sister. "The capital of Ne!" Anger grinned in the rearview mirror, epal!" "The location you seek!" Tempest added. Immediately her sisters pummeled her from either side, screaming, "Be quiet! Be quiet! He didn't even ask yet!" "What?" I said. "What ing!" Tempest said. "You're right, boy. It' s nothing!" "Tell me." "No!" they all screamed. "The last time we told, it was horrible!" Tempest said. "At ars to find it again!" Wasp moaned. "And speaking of the at—give it back!" "No!" yelled Anger. "Eye!" Wasp yelled. "Gimme!" She whacked her sister Anger on d something flew out of Anger's face. Anger, trying to catch it, but she only managed to bat it with the back of her hand. The seat above the East River. "Yes, wise." nto the backseat, and straight into my lap my head from either side. "Give me the eye!" Wasp wailed. "Ill hitting her sister. "The capital of New Give her the eye!" Annabeth screamed. "No, I don't have it!" I said. "Don't even ask yet!" "What?" I said. "What?" "Don't" nd skidded along with a horrible grinding noise. The whole car shuddered. "Gimme!" She whacked her sister Anger on the eyeball rolled away. "I can't see!" all three sisters yelled. on warned. "Annabeth," I yelled, "let Tyson go!" "Are you on use your backpack!" "Are you managed to bat it with the back of her hand. The stoma. "Don't step on it! Get it!" "I'm not picking that up!" down the bridge toward Brooklyn, going faster than any human taxi. The Gray e eyeball rolled away. "I can't see!" all three sisters yelled, billowing gray smoke as if it were about to dissolve. "Don't step on it! Get it!" "I'm not picking that up!" es. I ripped off a chunk of my tie-dyed T-shirt, which was already falling apart from a id. "Don't step on it! Get it!" "I'm not picking that up!" crazy? Get the eye!" Wasp yanked the wheel, and the taxi slammed against the guardrail a somehow knew I had her missing peeper . "Give it back!" "Not until you explain," I told Sisters screeched and pummeled each other and cried. "Oh, man," said Anger, as if he were about to dissolve from the strain. "Going to be sick!" Tyson ting!" I looked out the window. Sure enough, gh, trees and cars and whole neighborhoods w ll the burn marks, and used it to pick the eyeball off the taxi swerved away from the rail. We hurtled iddle of Long Island. "Percy," Annabeth warned, "they can't find our destination without her. "What were you talking about, the location? Seriously, I'd rather be out of sight, out of their way." "Wait!" the Gray Sisters screamed. "30, 31, 7 have to tell me," I said. "Or I'll open the w indow and throw the eye into oncoming traffic. ere now zipping by in a gray blur. We were already passing through the countryside of northern Long Island. I could see Half-Blood Hill 5, 12!" Anger wailed. "That's all we can te 1, 75, 12!" They belted it out like a quarterback the eye. We'll just keep accelerating until we ained the life force of a fallen hero. "Percy!" Annabeth said more urgently. "Give t ll you. Now give us the eye! Almost to camp! " "No!" the Gray Sisters wailed. "Too dangerous!" "I'm rolling down the window." d it into her eye socket like somebody pu hem the eye now!" I decided not to argue calling a play. "What do you mean?" I said. "That makes no sense!" "30, 31, 7 s lap. The old lady snatched it up, pushed in a cloud of smoke and squealed to a ha tting in a contact lens, and blinked. "W " We were off the highway now, zipping through the countryside of northern e brakes. The taxi spun four or five times now." "All right," I told the Gray Sisters. "It in the middle of the farm road at the rest—Thalia's tree, which contained the life force of a fallen hero. "Perc ill. Tyson let loose a huge belch. "Better out now." I was about to ask why, when I Now tell me what those numbers . I threw the eye into Wasp' s lap. The old lady snatched it up, pushed abeth opened her door. "We have to get And they were under attack. FOUR TYSO looked up at Half-Blood Hill an hoa!" She slammed on the brakes. The taxi spun four or five times crest of the hill was a group of campers. of old ladies, it's bulls. Last summer, I fou N PLAYS WITH FIRE Mythol he base of Half-Blood Hill. "If there's anything I hate worse than trio rse: two bulls. And not just regular bulls— ght the Minotaur on top o mean." "No time!" Annabeth's time what I saw up there was even worse hey had to breathe fire, too. As soon as we bronze ones the size o d understood. At the even that wasn't bad enough. Naturally the life was safer. They didn't even wait for th exited the taxi, the ogically speaking, i eeled out, heading back to New York, where ll. What worried me most weren't the bulls the eir extra three-drachma payment. They just left us on the side of the road, Annabeth with nothing but her backpack and knife, Tyson and me still in our burned-up tie-dyed gym clothes. "Oh, man," said Annabeth, looking at the battle raging on the hill. f Half-Blood Hill. Tyson who were getting their bronze-plated booties whomselves. Or the ten heroes in full battle armor ranging all over the hill, even around the back side of f elephants. And ooped. What worried me was that the bulls were Gray Sisters p the pine tree. That shouldn't have been possible. The camp's magic boundaries didn't allow monsters to cross past Thalia's tree. But the metal bulls were doing it anyway. One of the heroes shouted, "Border patrol, to me!" A girl's voice—gruff and familiar. Border patrol? I thought. The camp didn't have a border patrol. "It's Clarisse," Annabeth said. "Come on, we have to help her." Normally, rushing to Clarisse's aid would not have been high on my "to do" list. She was one of the biggest bullies at camp. The first time we'd met she tried to introduce my head to a toilet. She was also a daughter of Ares, and I'd had a very serious disagreement with her father last summer, so now the god of war and all his children basically hated my guts. Still, she was in trouble. Her fellow warriors were scattering, running in panic as the bulls charged. The grass was burning in huge swathes around the pine tree. One hero screamed and waved his arms as he ran in circles, the horsehair plume on his helmet blazing like a fiery Mohawk. Clarisse's own armor was charred. She was fighting with a broken spear shaft, the other end embedded uselessly in the metal joint of one bull's shoulder.