Who's Afraid? Disguises come in all shapes and sizes. Some are on

the outside, like the costumes kids would be wearing in a couple of weeks for the school Halloween parade. Others are on the inside, like the head of Ordinary Elementary, Principal Luna, who pretended to be an iron-fisted tyrant when she was really an experienced treasure hunter ea-Then there are the disguises so cleverly con ceived, so smashes some poor sap in the nose like a perfectly

gerly awaiting the next adventure, just like me. deviously deceptive, so carefully concealed that you don't even realize there is anything hidden behind them until it aimed dodgeball—turning their school days upside down and filling their nights with the twisted dreams of a tormented fifth grader.

I am Graysen Foxx, finder of secrets, solver of mysteries, explorer of the unknown—and also the sap in this story.

Graysen Foxx and the Curse of the Illuminerdy The kid who clued me in to the area under the stage was Jake Campbell,

although most kids just called him "Toes" on account his abnormally large feet

Along with his sizeable sneakers, Toes was known for being in nineteen plays, fourteen holiday pageants, eleven musical numbers, seven talent shows,

and the bathroom safety skit Mr. Flickersnicker, the janitor, made us watch af ter the McNaughton twins tried to see how many pencils they could flush down the toilet at once. According to Toes, the enormous cobweb-filled shadow world the drama

and how he tended to take off his shoes in class.

kids called Wardrobe contained every cos tume used in every play since Ordinary Elementary opened nearly a hundred years ago. That fact alone made my archae ologist senses tingle

like the time in science class we rubbed our hair with balloons to learn about static electricity. But the treasure I was searching for that morning wasn't a cos tume at all. Maya and Jack Delgado, my two best friends and third grade treasure hunters in training, wanted to win the pizza party promised to the classroom with the best Halloween decorations. According to Toes, under the stage was an old painting so spooky it would guarantee that the classroom hanging it on their wall would take first place. As a reward for helping me recover Principal Redbeard's Treasure a few weeks ago—and because they were such good friends—I'd agreed to help the twins find it.

Who's Afraid? So there we were, exploring our way through decades of dusty dance slippers and mountains of moldy masks. Maya poked through a rack of ball gowns to my left while Jack, her elusive twin, kept watch near the door. The area was off limits to kids who weren't in drama, and none of us were actors.

pushing aside a yellow satin gown with enough lace to provide the entire kindergarten with snowflake-making material for a month. "Maybe they just want to look nice?" I climbed a stool to peek over a stack of hatboxes. The only thing there was a sequined white glove circa the mid-1980s covered in spider webs. A long-legged spider glared at me with what looked like at least a dozen angry eyes, and I jerked backward, knocking over the stool and tumbling to the splintery wood floor with a thump. Maya looked over. "Nice fall." "It wasn't a fall," I said, getting up. "It was a strategic re treat from a vicious arachnid that could probably have killed me with one touch of its sharp fangs." She smirked and said under her breath, "Most spiders aren't venomous."

Trying to change the subject, I examined one of the gowns. "It's pretty." "But totally impractical." Maya shoved the dress back in place. "The first

Graysen Foxx and the Curse of the Illuminerdy

"I don't get why princesses always wear these floofy dresses," Maya said,

passage or fight an assassin, that material is going to catch on every sharp corner in the castle." "I don't remember princesses needing to fight assassins very often," I She snorted and squeezed around a set of armor made of soup cans and foil. "That's because no one tells the sto ries right. Aurora poked her finger on a spinning wheel, but she was actually looking for a battle axe to fight Malefi-

time a princess has to crawl through a secret

cent. Mulan wiped out an entire Hun army single-handedly. And Cinderella only pretended to mop the floors and clean out the fireplaces when she was really gathering info to take down her vicious stepmother and creepy stepsisters the first chance she got. Rags make fantastic espionage clothes." I had no idea. "Speaking of espionage," she whispered. "Are you sure no one followed

us here? Lizzy Stonebrook says her spies haven't spotted any suspicious activity, and ever since Cameron and the first graders embarrassed the Doodler,

tens. But Raven's been too quiet lately." Raven Ransom, aka Red Raven, had been my arch nemesis for as long as I could remember—figuring out what I was hunting for, then cutting in at the last minute to swoop my find away. During the search for the treasure of Principal Redbeard, she'd used every dirty trick in the book to reach it before me, including bribing the Second Grade Spy Network, distracting me with student emergencies, and convincing

he's been holed up in his office drawing pictures of angry kit

Who's Afraid? the Doodler—boss of the Venerable but Quick-Tempered Order of Sixth Graders—that I'd betrayed him. In the end we'd been forced to work together, com bining her intelligence and cunning with my investigation and puzzlesolving skills to thwart our real enemy and res cue Redbeard's stash of toys. "I really think she's turned her powers to good," I said. "Sometimes all it takes is—" "Shh," Maya said, pointing to where something was jangling the metal hangers like a librarian searching for her favorite cardigan. A shadowy figure pushed its way clumsily through the rows of costumes a few feet away. "I bet

I shook my head. "Raven would never be that obvious." And she definitely wouldn't have made the low half cry, half howl sound that came from the

it's Rotten Raven, back up to her old tricks."

direction of the movement.

"Let's get out of here."

and fiery orange eyes.

front of us, cutting off our escape.

line, and maybe the end of

Was this it? In this musical we call life, would

I finish my treasure hunting days buried beneath a stack of stinky wool coats last worn by awkward el ementary school dancers in Fiddler

Turning slowly around, I looked up into the eyes of the ferocious beast.

Yelping, the wolf backed away.

our lives.

on the Roof?

a frenzied howl.

"Jack?"

ing?"

shook his head.

"That sounds like a ghost," Maya whispered, ducking behind the armor. "You didn't say anything about this place being haunted." "I d-didn't know it was," I stuttered. But that wasn't entirely true. Stories of spirits haunting the theater had been around long before I started school. Kids who didn't get parts they wanted. Actors whose overly dramatic death scenes went on way too long. Angry parents who weren't allowed to take pictures or use their cell phones during the show. Even Toes had seen them—he claimed the ghost of Ordinary Elementary's first drama teacher, Agnes

Graysen Foxx and the Curse of the Illuminerdy Fishbottom, once threw a shoe at him for getting his lines wrong during a dress rehearsal of A Christmas Carol. Pointed ears and shaggy brown fur appeared above a rack of kindergarten-sized Oompa Loompa suits as the crea ture moved closer. "That's no spirit," Maya squeaked, her dark eyes grow ing round.

in the Forsaken Field, but this looked way bigger than either of those.

Grabbing Maya's hand, I yanked her back toward the stage entrance.

But what was it? I'd seen some enormous rats inside the Maze of Death below the school, and only the timely kazoo playing of the second-grade spies had kept me, Jack, and Maya from being captured by the mutant chamelepigs

At the sound of my voice, a giant wolf standing upright on its back legs lurched into the open—at least six feet tall with a pointed snout, sharp fangs,

I elbowed my way past a rack of zebra outfits as Maya and I raced down a row of Lion King costumes. But the monster hunting us was too fast. With a ferocious growl, it knocked over a stack of plastic flamingos and leaped in

"This way," Maya said, turning toward the back of the costume storage. The monster was incredibly fast for its size. Its paws thumped across the floor, its crying howl growing louder with every step. Who's Afraid? With the fanged horror only feet behind, Maya and I ran straight into a brick wall. It was the end of the

raising its paws to protect itself. Apparently some princess clothes did come in handy in a battle. Maya raised the mangled crown, and the wolf shook its massive head. "Stop it. That hurts." Looking closer, I could just make out a second pair Graysen Foxx and the Curse of the Illuminerdy

of eyes watching me—not from the wolf 's face but from behind the matted brown fur halfway down its body. As I leaned toward them, the eyes blinked.

Globes of white foam dripped from its hungry jaws onto the floor as it let out

mannequin head, wound up, and punched it into the beast's stomach.

In an act of pure desperation, Maya grabbed a jew eled tiara from a nearby

She smacked it again, bending the tiara nearly in half as the wolf cried out,

CHAPTER 2 An Unexpected Treasure Elementary school is like a 64 pack of Crayola Crayons. Sometimes you break your Forest Green in the middle of a picture only to discover that Shamrock is what you really needed all along. Maya peered at her twin. "What are you doing in there?" "I thought it would be awesome for Halloween," Jack said, his voice muted by the fur of the Big Bad Wolf cos tume. I touched a piece of the "foam" leaking from the wolf's mouth and discovered it was Styrofoam balls used to fill the snout. "Why were you howl-

From inside the costume that was a good three feet taller than him, Jack

was built, a wealthy donor contrib uted more than a million dol lars to its construction. As a reward for his generous gift, the school hung an oil paint ing of him just inside the front

But students and teachers soon began complaining that the portrait made them uneasy. One glance at the figure on the dusty canvas made it easy to

Standing in front of the doors to the newly built school, the old man glared angrily out

doors.

understand why.

who saw it nightmares. Graysen Foxx and the Curse of the Illuminerdy Maya reached for the painting, but I held out my hand. "This is a historical artifact. We have to make a record of everything we find." I took out my field journal, noting the relic's size, condition, and location. The frame was solid oak carved with a pattern of raised and lowered rectangles. Even though the canvas was old, the man's eyes seemed alive, watching every move I made. I tried stepping to one side, but the eyes followed me no matter where I went. Once I was done with my notes, I nodded for Maya to take the painting. "Heavy," she said, hoisting the portrait before handing it to Jack, who was

from the frame like someone had just eaten his last piece of Halloween candy. I hadn't seen a face that grim since the Turkleson sisters accidentally glued

their mouths shut while making papier-mâché globes.

She looked at me. "Did you help Jack?"

the painting?"

whispered.

now. But that's impossible."

before we noticed them.

"Raven!" she snarled.

in her success all day."

thing moved.

other bricks looked loose.

the school opened.

Jack shook his head, crossed his legs, and pantomimed running. He'd been too busy hurrying to the bathroom to look around. The clues to the mystery came together faster than a two-piece Lego set. "Someone must have followed us under the stage when Jack was trying on the wolf costume," I said. "They came up behind us while we were looking at the painting, loosened the zipper on Jack's costume, then ducked out of sight while he took it off. As soon as he was gone, they dressed up as the wolf, took the painting from you, then changed out of the costume and escaped before Jack returned." It was a plan as brilliantly daring as it was evil. Graysen Foxx and the Curse of the Illuminerdy "Look," Maya said, spotting a metallic gleam next to the wolf costume. She pushed aside the fur and picked up a multipurpose tool that could be used as a screwdriver, knife, saw, and several other tools-including pliers. Whoev-

"Ahh." She nodded covertly and dropped me a wink. "Another hunt," she said in a soft voice. "How did you know?" Maya asked. You Can't Book This "I'd recognize that look anywhere," Mrs. Hall said. "I imagine it's how Sherlock Holmes must have looked when Dr. Mortimer told him and Dr. Watson about the demonic hound haunting the mires of Dartmoor." I didn't know anything about demonic hounds, but they sounded interest-"What can I help you with?" the librarian continued. Jack opened one of

results students have to take every year. Others say it was sold—or burned." "Maybe someone brought it here to be used as a prop," Maya said as Jack—no longer wearing the wolf outfit—appeared to our right. "How did you get over there?" I asked. Jack whispered to his sister. "He says he just came back from going to the bath room." "But how did you get out of the costume?" I asked. Jack whispered again and Maya shook her head. "No I didn't. The zipper was stuck." 12 An Unexpected Treasure

"Of course not. I was busy examining the—" I looked around. "Where's

"Unless—" Tugging down my fedora, I peered into the passageway and spotted a hastily dropped wolf costume. "Did you see who unstuck the zip-

Maya turned to Jack. "Where did you put it?" Jack shrugged and

"Yes, you did," Maya said. "I handed it to you just a minute ago." Jack whispered so forcefully I could almost make out a couple of his words. They didn't sound happy. Maya ran her fingers through her dark hair. "He swears I unzipped his costume and he's been in the bathroom until just

Jack shuffled toward her and tilted his head. Maya snorted. "No, I don't think she'll share her pizza with you." So much for my archnemesis using her powers for good. Shrugging, Jack pointed back to the soup-can armor we'd passed earlier. "It is creepy," Maya admitted. "But not half as spooky as the painting. You should have seen the old man's eyes." I stared at the spot where the portrait had been only a few minutes earlier, feeling as bitter as the cafeteria's baked brussels sprout goulash. Maya had warned me about Raven, and I hadn't listened. I really thought she had changed. "Let's get out of here," I said. "School starts in half an hour, and no doubt Raven will rub our noses An Unexpected Treasure I kicked the wall, wishing I didn't have such a trusting nature, and some-Leaning down for a closer look, I noticed that one of the bricks had slid slightly out from the others. Was it just loose mortar—or something else? The building was old, but the wall didn't seem to be crumbling and none of the When I tugged the brick, it slid out, exposing a small compartment. I reached inside, my hand closing around a tarnished metal star. It looked like the kind of thing some one would get for winning a race. On the front of the

star was a picture of a bumblebee and the words "First Place, 1927"—the year

Something was written underneath, but I didn't recog nize the symbols.

"Not sure," I murmured. "But I think we might have just found some-

CHAPTER 3

You Can't Book This

There are three things you don't mess with in this world: another kid's cubby, a parent's pick-up rou-

As soon as the lunch bell rang, Maya, Jack, and I headed straight for the library—the home of knowledge, really funny books, and the fastest school librarian west of the Mississippi. We were here for the former—and the latter. The minute I stepped up to the library counter, Mrs. Hall slapped down a

double stack of Dog Mans—my latest read of choice—and a clean bookmark. The librarian was a peach, but I shook my head. "I'm not here for

tine, and a book from the library.

books today."

spelling bee."

ach virus going around."

in the middle and seven stars along the curve of the top.

"What is that?" Maya asked.

thing way more valuable than free pizza."

I flipped it over. On the back, someone had scratched an image I'd never seen before. It looked like the plastic protractors we used in math with an eye

"No." She tapped her chin. "But same fire in her eyes that you have in yours. But I don't think the symbol she Graysen Foxx and the Curse of the Illuminerdy Near the door, a chair squeaked as it slid across the floor. We all turned to find an empty room—the only trace of whoever had been watching us was an abandoned book in the middle of a table. Whoever had been sitting there

I checked the clock. Only twenty minutes until the end of lunch. I patted

"I wasn't howling. I was yelling." He shifted from one foot to the other. "The zipper's stuck and I have to go to the bathroom." Around school, Jack was known as "The Ghost" because he was so fast and quiet he could slip in and out of any Graysen Foxx and the Curse of the Illuminerdy classroom without being noticed. Also like a ghost, he didn't like to talk when he was being watched and would only speak out loud when he was in the dark—or apparently in side a wolf. The rest of the time, he relied on whisperhis sister. The price of working in the shadows. "You were supposed to be keeping an eye on the door," I said as Maya turned Jack around and pulled at the zipper on the back of the costume. "Sorry." The wolf shrugged. "I got bored." "Stop moving," Maya said. She tugged on the zipper again, but it wouldn't budge. "I think it's caught on the fur." Jack crossed his legs. The key to any good treasure hunt is discipline, and the kid could have blown the whole operation by leaving his post. To be fair, the first rule of treasure hunting is that nothing goes exactly the way you planned. But the second rule is to always go to the bathroom before an expedition, which it looked like we needed to revisit. Still, we had bigger fish to fry. By the way he was shift ing from one foot to the other, it was clear that if we didn't get Jack out of that costume soon, I would have some major explaining to do to Toes—and the drama teacher. Looking for something to help unstick the wolf cos tume, I pushed aside a stack of boxes and gasped. Maya grinned. "More spiders?" "No, look," I whispered, pointing at the framed canvas leaning against the wall. "It's the painting." According to legend, the year Ordinary Elementary An Unexpected Treasure

Over pinched lips and a nose as thin and straight as the edge of a ruler, the portrait's cold gray eyes stared right through me. "He looks like he has a mouth full of sour gummy worms," Maya said. "Or grave dirt," I added with a shiver. This was going to win the bestdecorated-classroom contest for sure. I just hoped it wouldn't give the kids holding out his hairy paws. "How do you think it ended up here?" I shook my head. "I only know that after enough people complained about the painting, it was moved to the library. Then the art room. After that, the records are sketchy. Some people say it was stored with the piles of test

er stole the painting must have left the tool behind in their hurry to escape Maya turned the tool over, revealing a pair of engraved initials. R.R. Jack raced toward the door, but I called him back. "Don't bother," I said. By now she's probably hanging the painting on the wall of her classroom. "She'll win the contest for sure," Maya said.

She frowned. "You aren't feeling sick, are you? I hear there's a nasty stom-I looked over my shoulder to make sure no one was watching. "It's not the Dog Man books and immedi ately began chuckling as I slid the medal across the counter. 'Ever seen anything like this?" "Hmm, it's a little before my time," she said, putting on her reading glasses. "But I believe they used to give these out to the winners of the school Maya gave me a sideways glance. I knew what she was thinking. The Doodler—boss of the sixth-graders—blamed everything bad that had happened to

expected. Let's go to the computer lab and do some online sleuthing." Jack frowned, and his stomach growled so loud it sounded like he'd swallowed an electric train. him on the shoulder. "Okay. Food now, sleuthing after school."

Walking through the stacks, I tried not to get distracted You Can't Book This well. I flipped through the book, growing more confused by the second. Every page was as empty as a package of cookies in a class room full of sixth graders. Every page except for the last, where a handwritten You didn't think it would be that easy, did you? I held the book to my nose and sniffed the spine. Binding glue. I tried the next book, and it was the same. There were only a few books about ancient "But why go to the trouble of changing the pages when Graysen Foxx and the Curse of the Illuminerdy

dangerous thing going around." I narrowed my eyes, as anxious as a turkey the day be fore Thanksgiving. "Have you heard something?" "Nothing specific," she whispered. "It's just a feeling, but my librarian radar is almost never wrong. Be careful." "Come on," I said to the twins, tucking the medal into my pocket as I headed toward the back of the library. The twins paused. "You two aren't afraid of the Oracle, are you?" I asked. Jack whispered to his sister. "She is powerful," Maya agreed. "I heard she once made a kid's head explode just by telling him the true meaning of the lyrics to 'The Wheels on the Bus.'" I scratched my ear. "I thought that song was just about a bus." Jack whispered and Maya shook her head. "Maybe. But we're not going to ask." "Fine, stay here and keep watch." I looked straight at Jack. "I don't want anyone sneaking up behind me." The Oracle was a mysterious figure who answered ques tions and foretold futures in a shadowy nook at the back of the reference library. Kids sought her advice when there was no one else to turn But like most solutions, hers came with a price. She could demand anything from a piece of tape from the Graysen Foxx and the Curse of the Illuminerdy dispenser on a cranky history teacher's desk to a pair of chocolate Cadbury eggs with the creamy centers, or even a simple thank you. She never explained how she set her price, and you never knew what it would be until you got there. In order to reach her lair, you had to avoid dangerous traps and solve clever puzzles. The last time I visited her, I was nearly buried by an avalanche of globes and had to create a bridge of wooden blocks with states on them by putting them in order of their population. But this time, even though I kept a careful watch, I didn't spot a single trap. I didn't understand why until I reached the Oracle's desk and found a sheet of flowered sta tionery taped to the front. Out Sick. I couldn't believe my bad luck. Who was I supposed to ask now? Leaning closer, I spotted a second message written in small print at the bottom of the note. Until I return, try asking Google, a Magic 8 Ball, or, you know, a book. "Fine," I muttered, trudging back to the reference shelves. I was still going to get my answer, but this time the price I'd pay was the old-fashioned kind: looking it up myself.

I gasped. She smiled. "Only kidding. Just read something fun and suggest it to a "Sure thing." I tipped my hat, trying to hide my relief. "And you keep You Can't Book This

by Famous Quotes by Seventeenth-Century Writers or How to Survive a Canadian Winter with only a Pocketknife and a Stick of Chewing Gum. When I finally reached the section on the history of language, I froze. Carved into the edge of the wooden shelf was a curved protractor. I reached into my pocket and took out the medal to compare the two images. The one on the shelf didn't have the stars, eye, or symbols, but other than that, it was a per fect match. The cut looked old— had it been made by the girl who'd come to Mrs. Hall a few years ago? Quickly, I grabbed a book about ancient alphabets. I opened the cover and

writing in the school library, but all of them were as blank as the first. Someone had removed the pages from all the books that could help me translate the symbols on the back of the star and had replaced them with blanks. they could have just taken the books?" I wondered. "And why leave a note?" Something buzzed softly behind me. I turned to find a small camera attached to the wall a few inches below the ceiling. "This setup couldn't be any more obvious if they put a nametag on it and sent it to parent-teacher conference," I muttered. "The question is, was it meant specifically for me, or did I just stumble onto something much big-I shoved the books back onto the shelf and hurried to the front of the library as fast as I could without running, which would earn a stern warning from Mrs. Hall the first time and a quick trip out the door if it happened again.

him on losing the school spelling bee. Could this be his work? "This is interesting," Mrs. Hall said, turning the star over and studying the image on the back. "Do you know what it is?" I asked. it looks familiar. I could swear that a girl visiting from another school asked me about something like this a few years ago. A smart little thing with the showed me was on a medal." had disappeared into the flow of students in the hall. "Spy," Maya mouthed. alphabet," the librarian said. She arched one eyebrow—something I'd section?" Mrs. Hall handed the award back to me. sources." slinging stories."

I nodded and turned back to Mrs. Hall. "Do you have any idea what the symbols beneath the protractor mean?" "They look like letters from an ancient been trying to do for years with no success. "Have you checked the reference I caught her meaning right away. The reference section of the library was where they kept books that dealt with facts and figures people needed for research. But it was also the home of one of the most mysterious and able people in Ordinary Elementary—the Oracle. If anyone would know what the image meant, it was her. "What do I owe you for your help?" I asked as "Two five-page reports on historical figures who helped introduce the Industrial Revolution," she said. "Complete with bibliographies of all referenced "Wouldn't dream of doing anything else." She reached for her mouse and paused. "Keep a close eye out, Gray. The stomach virus might not be the only

frowned. The first page was blank. I turned it and the next page was blank as

The twins huddled with me behind a rack of paper backs. "What happened?" Maya asked. "Did you learn any thing?" "Maybe," I said, looking carefully around. "But defi nitely not anything I