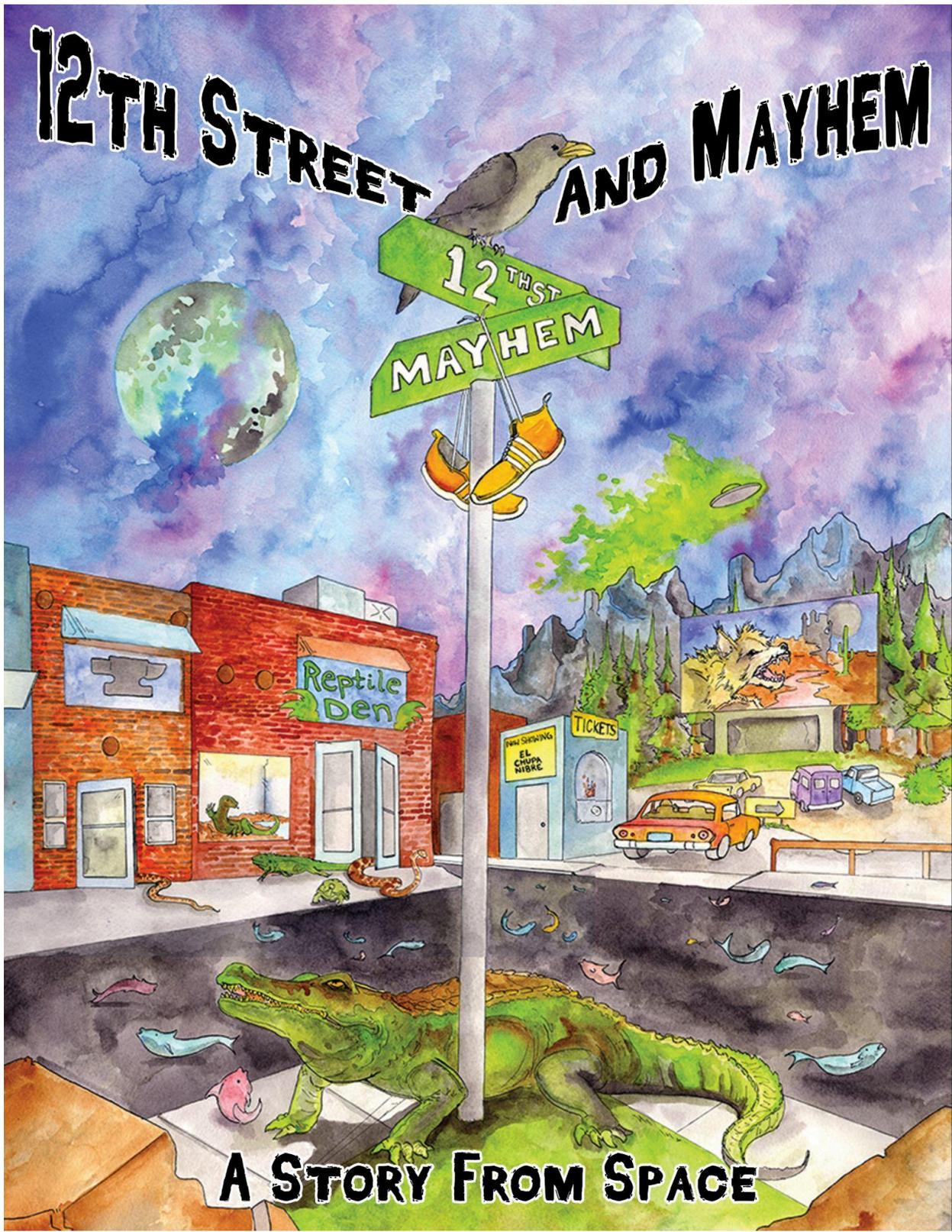


# 12TH STREET AND MAYHEM



**A STORY FROM SPACE**

12th Street & Mayhem

A Story From Space  
Written by Stephen Shubert  
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Dedicated to my mom, Linda

It was the first day of October, and October always felt like a new chapter of the year. Surviving the cold whip of winter, evading the unpredictability of spring, and recovering from summer sunburns all led to the best part of the year, it was finally fall. The wind swirled with a crisp breeze and a rainbow of colored leaves covered the neighborhood. Everyone is outside, enjoying the seasonal changes. A boy passes his neighbors while on a bike ride through town. Swerving down the park's paths he passes the local university soccer team practicing on the field, while others decorate light posts and park benches for the upcoming fall festival. Ducks gathered around the pond in search of the friendly man with the oversized bucket hat and mustache who gave them old sourdough from the local bakery each day. There was even a mime walking around, entertaining, or pestering some young families, depending on perspective. Simon thinks to himself as he remembers words his father tells him, "It's a matter of perspective, son!" He snaps out of it when he hears his name called.

"Good afternoon, Simon," a little old man with a cane gives him a wave.

"Hi, Mr. Silvo," the boy waves back with a smile, keeping his balance with one hand on the handle bars.

"Let's see how fast you can get that thing going," the old man shouts. Just the motivation he was looking for, Simon pushed his legs furiously, picking up the pace as he wound down the path and away from the park back home.

"Hi, Mom! Hi, Dad!" Simon greets his parents.

"Hi, son," his Dad responds in a much more somber mood than him.

"Wash up, dinner is ready," his mother adds.

"What's wrong?" he asked, noticing the concern in their voices.

"Oh, it's nothing for you to worry about, dear. This is our problem, not yours," his Mom places a dish onto the table.

"But we're family," he says. "'Our' problems' include me," Simon reminds them.

"Honey... it's only bills, and you'll have your own bills in no time with how fast you're growing! Everything is fine. C'mon, grab the mashed potatoes from the counter," his Mom says with an upbeat tone.

"It's okay, Mom. I get paid Thursday, I promise I can help," Simon insists. It's hard to see his family in such a tough spot.

With his family short on cash and him desperate for a bit of space, Simon had started working at the local herpetological society. Feeding the animals, cleaning the habitats, recording vitals, or anything else Dr. Uspring needed. It's the coolest job you could have for the biggest nerd around. Simon was happy to spend time at the society even when not on the clock. It hardly felt like a job to him and if it meant taking some burden off his parents it was more than worth it. While others were joining sports teams, working retail, lifeguarding, making more money or just being in closer social circles, that just was not where Simon's interests were. Studying the molting stage of a Gila Monster was the type of thing to keep him happy.

“That isn’t necessary, son. Now, let’s eat, dinner’s getting cold!” his Dad says, looking up from above the rim of his glasses.

Simon lets it go as the three sit down together. He knew better than to press it further, besides, his Dad started talking about crop circles and before you know it, all the plates were empty and headed into the dishwasher.

“I’m stuffed,” says his Dad, patting his belly.

“Thanks, Mom, that was delicious.” Simon pops up from the table, rinses his dish and loads it into the dishwasher. He chugs down the rest of his water and places it next to his plate. He grabs his backpack from the hook beside the door, stuffing in a few snacks from the pantry before turning back to his parents, “I’ll see you later!”

“Not too late tonight, honey, have fun, and be safe!” His Mom started to close the door behind him, “Wait. Where’s your helmet?” She asked, giving one last dose of motherly care and attention. Helmet now strapped, he rides under the cotton candy color skies as the sun begins to set.

On the other side of town, a girl is just getting off her bike. In too much of a hurry to lock it up, she lets it crash into some others on the rack knocking them down like dominoes and she rushes into the staff break room at the local drive-in theatre.

"You're late," the voice sounds like nails on a chalkboard. It comes from Jeff, the assistant manager of the drive-in.

"I am 3 minutes early, Jeff," Moe quickly quips back.

"Employees are expected to be here 15 minutes before shift starts," Jeff says, tapping his watch, not budging from his position.

"Put it on my personal record," she says as she grabs her vest and heads to the ticket booth. It had been about 3 months since she started working there. She loved her job as much as her love for movies themselves; besides, she was not *just* a ticket tearer. Moe was also a projectionist- someone who also readies the films. "A dignified position," she thought.

The drive-in was infamous in town. Mitch Mayhem opened the theater when he built it by hand in the 1930s. He was a founding member of the city but was abruptly sent overseas and during his time in the first world war he found himself drawn to European cinema. When he returned he found an empty plot of land and built the theatre there as its centerpiece. And he was right, it didn't take much time before the old town was buzzing with excitement. Folks from near and far would come to catch his "pictures in motion". It's been a town constant ever since, right off 12th street and Mayhem. Despite its age, the drive-in has managed to stay in top shape as each generation treasured the town staple. It was a place to make memories. Everyone enjoyed watching a great movie. Plus, not everyone in town had cable, or a tv, for that matter. Not to mention, only a few had the latest technology: VCRs. The theatre was the perfect place. Sadly, later in life, tragedy struck Old Man Mayhem, and he disappeared from town. While some thought he was just senile, there were always rumours of something more sinister at play. Still, for a sophomore who needed some cash to spend at the mall, it was the perfect gig for her.

Moe sees a familiar face and head of hair walk up to the ticket counter. "Hey! What are you doing here?!" she asked, excitedly.

"Thought I would catch a movie and help you close down the place," Simon replies.

"The mad scientist doesn't have you 'experimenting' tonight?" Moe says in a Dr. Frankenstein-esque voice.

"Why'd you put it in air quotes? No, no work today. Dr. Uspring is holding a lecture at the university tonight for adults who want to know more about reptiles," says Simon.

"We all know you just clean up feces," she states plainly.

"It's much more than that! Plus, you can learn a lot from the... um, anyway..." lowering his animated hands, Simon stops himself short, recognizing his overenthusiasm for the topic. "So, what's playing tonight?"

"'Fanastic Man' - we wanted something to really get the crowd excited. Starring that hunk, Dario Pitt." she says, grinning.

“Haven’t heard of him,” he says facetiously. Of course he’s aware of him, who hadn’t heard of the actors all the girls at school drool over.

“It’s supposed to be really good. Jeff won’t shut up about it. A comic he read as a kid or something. You know, nerd stuff. The real main event is at the end of the month with that new Spleenberg movie.” Moe hands him a movie poster. The title is splayed across the top in a dripping, red font, “Play Dead!” It featured a gory display of decapitated heads, tortured bodies and fleshing-eating zombies. All the good stuff.

“Is that a werewolf?” he asked, pointing at the poster.

“Oh yeah, yeah, it’s a werewolf. It’s supposed to be Spleenberg’s best movie yet!” Moe responds nonchalantly, snatching the poster out of his hand; she places a corner into her mouth, while using her hands to frame and angle its spot on the wall. “Han’ me tha’ tape.”

Handing it over Simon helps Moe get the marketing material secured to the wall. She looks up at her work. “Perfectly straight,” she says, staring at the very obviously crooked poster. The clock on the wall catches her attention. “Oh shoot, I’m late, I gotta go ready the film. Are you sticking around?” She asked, rushing to gather her things.

“Yeah, I brought a book in case it’s lame. This one is about the gestation period of the Gila Monster,” Simon shares excitedly.

“Ha! Dork!” Moe quips, already halfway out the door.

“Look who it is?!” A candy red convertible pulls up full of the local high school’s finest, “You’re here again?!” He nearly hits her as she crosses the path. Brenden Kart was a senior despite being in Moe’s sophomore math class. He was notorious at school for being a big airhead. No one is sure how he passed 5th grade, let alone his driver’s test, but a few folks in town think it had to do with his Police Chief father’s connections. And if that brain could pose danger in a simple math class, imagine the destruction he could do on the road.

“Yes, I work here,” she says enthusiastically.

“Huh, that’s so funny. It’s almost like we pay your salary or whatever,” chimes in a voice that sounds like the offspring of a bagpipe and dying dolphin.

“Something like that,” Moe says, responding only because she is required to by employee policy.

“Come on, babe, let’s go,” Brenden revs the engine an obnoxious amount before peeling away and laughing at her expense.

“God, it’s so embarrassing. Everyone is dating guys that drive but me,” Moe says under her breath.

“You’re 10 minutes behind!” She hears Jeff call out from the backroom.

“It’s more like 5 minutes, Jeff!” Picking up her speed, she attends to the job at hand.

Back in the projector room, she looks out and sees another crowded night. Even on a weeknight, the drive-in was the place to be. There was Mrs. Hunnybee and her five kids running around the grass patch, and sweet Mrs. Flower, who has come to the drive-in ever since it opened all those years ago, just a little girl then. And, of course, there were the usual suspects from her school goofing around and causing a ruckus. Moe scans the field and sees the popular senior girls in matching outfits cozying up to one another, checking their hair and make up in the mirrors. The skies darken and the movie begins. Simon settles in toward the backfield, opting for the roof of the snack bar to take in the film. A secret spot for those in the know. The movie ends just after 10:00pm and though he found the 175 minute runtime to be a bit long for the plotline, overall, he gave the movie a solid 7.8 that he jots down in his journal.

After the final car exited for the evening, the two of them started closing up the drive-in. Moe wipes down the snack bar and sweeps the floor. They finish cleaning up any trash and shut off the lights, the routine moves much faster with two people.

"Thanks! I'll actually get to bed at a decent hour now," Moe is grateful for the help.

"See you tomorrow at school!" Simon says, too eager for another day of tenth grade.

"Not if I see you first," she jokes.

The next day he was back in school. Dropping off books into his locker, decorated with stickers and quotes from his favorite scientists and inventors. The first bell rings and he heads to class, he liked to be early. It may have only been a few weeks into the new school year but already he saw this would be just like last year... maybe worse. The jocks got stronger and smarter. The brainiacs got smarter and stronger. The troublemakers were more sinister than ever, and... you guessed it: stronger. They combined their ingenuity and brawn with mischief, creating pranks that would probably align with CIA torture techniques. Which meant those that were likely to fall through the cracks, were surely to slip even further. But what could a sophomore in high school expect? These halls were as close a replica to the serengeti as a suburban kid has. It was that perspective that kept his head up. Living life through the lens of a nature documentary is how all kids grow up, he figured. Everyone vying for the same thing: a little food, a little water, a little space to call your own, and popularity amongst the cuties. Still, he knew of plenty of species to survive amongst the apex predators of the world or of the school. And, like an oasis in the middle of a hot desert, fall break was approaching fast, only a couple more weeks away. He passes some students picturing them as animals drinking from a watering hole. He looks at a sign on the wall that reads: "Homecoming Dance 1 Month from Today". Not all that interested, it still draws his attention. As he takes a second glance, Simon begins to daydream.

He is at the Homecoming dance. Him and a few friends are dressed up in ill-fitting suits and poorly kept ties. Simon sees his school crush, the prettiest girl he knows. Her face still blurred in all the glitz and glam of the big event. Staring in a trance, he felt as if he was floating towards her. "Would...would you like to dance," he asked as the question dreamily echoed out. Only to be swiftly snapped back to reality.

"Two-way traffic coming, twerp," Brenden the bully gives him a shove into the lockers, "Out of my way."

Simon looks around to see if anyone else saw him lost in his haze, "I'm going to be late to math!" He says looking at his watch as the bell rings with uncanny timing.

Sitting in class, he stands out as being the only one still paying attention after seven hours. From the board to his notepad he furiously transcribes the day's lesson with enthusiasm. His hand shoots up to ask a clarifying question just as the final bell rings, disappointed, he was enjoying his lesson on logarithmic equations.

It was Tuesday which meant after school he rode straight to his shift at the herpetological society. On his way he recalled seeing his first articulated python and being memorized by the detailed patterns on its skin, and the sulcata tortoise, Berna. She was older than the city itself, legend says it was an old circus attraction, until the slowest escape in history occurred. Berna just walked off one day and no one in the circus saw her again. She was found burrowed on the same site they eventually made into the sanctuary. And there was the ferocious Louisiana snapping turtle, they had him shipped in from the south after he was injured in a boating accident. One misplaced move and he could take your hand off.

Arriving, Simon hops off his bike with a smile, he shakes his head trying to remove the helmet hair that never fails to set in. His Mom tells him that if "would just cut that mop on your head you could see".

"Hi, Dr. Uspring, I am here!" Simon says, entering the laboratory.

“Oh! Hello there,” the bearded scientist looks up from his glasses still holding his instruments in place, he turns to face him, the flashlight centered in the middle of his glasses blinds him for a moment. “How was your day?”

“Another day survived in the jungle, that is for sure,” Simon responds, using his hand to try and block the blinding light.

“I believe it. I remember when I was your age. When you get settled go into the gila monster tent and get their habitats all cleaned, after that we gotta scrub down Berna.”

“You got it! Anything else?” Simon asked, giving his hands a good wash before interacting with the animals.

“You know, you shouldn’t be so excited about cleaning scat and freshening bins,” Dr. Uspring says, still focused on the specimen in front of him.

“Are you kidding? It’s an honor,” he heads off to his duties.

“That kid needs to get a life,” Dr. Uspring says under his breath before flicking down his specs and getting back to work.

“Hey Berna!” Simon says to the oversized snapping turtle as he tosses in some fresh food.

At the herpetological society, they care for an incredible range of reptiles and amphibians. There were the non-venomous snakes, like the corn snakes and ball pythons— calm, curious, and great candidates for pets. They're perfect ambassadors for helping people get over their fear of snakes. Then, of course, we've got the heavyweights— over 150 alligators and crocodiles of all sizes and ages from all over the globe. The gators love nothing more than to be a bit lazy, basking in the sun most of the day, but don't let that fool you; when they move, they move fast. The crocodiles, with their narrow snouts and piercing eyes, roam the pools in crowded groups. Among the quieter residents are a variety of turtles and tortoises, from small red-eared sliders to our massive sulcata tortoise who wanders like a slow-moving boulder. Last month they reopened the amphibian wing which houses over 100 different species. Then of course over 70 venomous snakes, you could still hear the shake of their rattles behind the thick secured glass. A friendly warning that they are no joke. Every animal here plays a role in teaching visitors about conservation, respect for wildlife, and the incredible diversity of the reptile world. Whether you're fascinated or fearful, it was all a sight to behold.

Recently, Dr. Uspring put him in charge of updating the sanctuary's catalog. Dr. Uspring was still living in the stone ages doing everything by pen and paper. At school Simon had been learning about computing and figured he would take a whack at it. After all, who knew making spreadsheets could be so fun! Looking at the clock it was already 7:30 pm. So lost in his work Simon hadn't even realized the sanctuary closed 30 minutes ago. He shuts down the cumbersome computer, placing a dust cover over top. He grabs the broom and pan from the closet and sweeps up the floor. Looking back before he leaves happy and proud of his work. The lights shut out and the story of another day ends.

The following day Simon wakes to the ringing of his alarm. He rolls over, pushing the hair from out of his face, and glances at his watch stopping the tone. October 7th, 7:00 am. His radio is playing smooth jazz, and just so happens a song from his favorite quartet, Looking For Treble. Nothing like some brass horns and delicate piano melodies to start the day. Out of bed he stumbles into his clothes, the same shorts and shirt he wore the day before, it had become a quasi-uniform. He gives it a quick sniff-test. Pass. "Morning, Mom. Morning, Dad!" He says, barreling down the stairs.

"Morning, son!" They respond in unison.

"Quick, breakfast is ready," Mom says.

He sits down and grabs a muffin from the centerpiece. Mom is preparing in the kitchen while Dad is reading the newspaper and watching the news. She places a full plate of bacon, eggs, and pancakes at his seat at the table.

He pours himself some orange juice into a tall glass, "Looks delicious, Mom! Where did you get the-" he is interrupted by his Dad, who is focused on the TV, turning the volume way up.

"We bring you now a breaking story, a heartbreaking one at that, as reports are coming in that there has been a grizzly murder. Victims include: 45 year old Bernard Voyce, and his wife, Joyce Voyce, 43. More details to come from this harrowing story." The family paused as they watched in shock. A bite of muffin falls from Simon's mouth.

"Bernard..." Dad says.

"Joyce," Mom follows, a pancake flopping from the spatula to the floor. The report continues as his parents are totally encaptured now, Simon grabs a rag to clean the pancake off the floor.

The report continues, "Police were called around 1 am this morning when neighbors saw a suspicious figure lurking around the Voyce's residence. Another eyewitness reports they saw clergy members enter the home. Upon arrival, the police could only stand in horror of the scene before them. We will continue to provide more on this story as details are verified with local law enforcement. For now we have field reporter, Rachel Randkowski, with a local neighbor of the Voyce's.

"Hi, I'm Rachel Randkowski with Channel 8 News. I am with town local, Francesa Gaudzmony. What can you tell us, did you see anything last night?"

"First of all, I would like to thank my lord and savior, Jesus Christ, for protecting me and my own last night." A chyron pops up and reads "God-Fearing Neighbor" with the local woman's name attached below.

"Of course, we are glad you are okay and that there are reports of no further injury," Rachel responds, attempting to keep the woman on track. Frantically, the woman goes on, "But, last night, oh, no, I don't know what happened last night. But, what I do know is what I am saying everyday on the streets of this god-forsaken town. There is evil here! This town is cursed. Cursed, I tell you. Demons infiltrated the Voyce's and an evi-" The news hosts back at the station scramble, looking to one another as if to say "what the ef- " before abruptly cutting back to the studio.

“Thank you, Rachel, that was ... insightful. Like we said, details are still emerging and we will keep you informed with every confirmed update.” The news cuts to commercial. As he was listening Simon thought it sounded eerily similar to something but couldn't quite put his finger on it.

“Honey, please be safe today and come straight home after school!” Simon's Mom pleads.

“Okay, Mom, love you. Love you, Dad, see you later!” Simon reluctantly grabs his things.

“Love you, Simon,” they say in unison.

Riding his bike to school he can't help but think about the Voyces. They had been neighbors for as long as he could remember, Bernard had even helped him learn to ride. When they first moved into town they were so welcoming. Apple pie and all. Mom and Joyce became close friends and shared a fondness for creating a vibrant garden in the backyards. Bernard even helped Dad get into the engineers' union in town. He eventually got into inventing gizmos and gadgets. “Such nice people,” he thought to himself.

Arriving at school he sees a group of students hovered around his locker. Scrolling through for his lock combination he overhears the group of popular students' conversation.

“Those were some weird old people anyway,” a tall lanky girl twists her straight blonde hair with her fingers. “They were probably just on something,” she states, matter of factly. She admires herself in a handheld mirror.

“What would make you see demons, Lydia?” Heather responds harshly.

“My Dad says he's seen his demons before,” another boy chimes in, combing his hair trying to sneak a peek of Lydia's mirror.

“You're an idiot. Those sound like different demons to me,” Lydia snaps back.

“It's a curse,” another student confidently adds. “This place has been cursed forever. My uncle told me so. I can't say for sure if it's a Holy curse but all the signs are there. The Voyces must have hired someone to fix the curse. Simple as that,” the boy comments thinking he's got it all sorted.

“That's true,” a student agrees, “My Mom said this place is cursed because Moms like Heather's are filled with lust.”

“That's funny my Mom says your Mom is a sloth,” Heather barks back. The jokes turned to jabs with each retort.

“Wait, isn't that the plot of...” another student jumps in but is cut off before finishing his sentence.

“The plot. Listen to you! This isn't a movie, this is real life,” Lydia says finally content with her make up. She slams the pocket mirror shut. The sound nearly synchronized with the ringing of the bell and the kids quickly dispersed to their classroom.

It was still left to be determined how much teaching or learning actually would go on that day. Some teachers used the class time to grieve and talk about feelings. While others were hardened and

focused on getting through the curriculum. Most students were distracted, whispering between them the horrors that took place in town the night before. The rumors and gossip swirled quickly, bouncing around colliding and ricocheting like balloons in the hall. By the end of the day it went from quiet tragedy to the joke of the Moment. Exiting class, Simon sees another student with ketchup splattered across their face.

“Look, I’m Joyce Voyce,” the student mimics a demon walk fixed with a gurgling sound and her arms out in front of her. Another student fills a cup from the water fountain and tosses it on her shouting “begone spirit” to the amusement of others. Mr. Foster, the gym teacher, drags the students by the shirt collar into his office. Slamming the door shut behind him, it didn’t do much to suppress the sound of him screaming at them for mocking the tragedy. One of the more intimidating teachers to piss off Simon thought to himself.

Following his Mom’s wishes, Simon heads home after the final bell. Riding through town the usually friendly neighbors are a bit more distracted and in their own heads. He sees his Mom is waiting by the garage as he comes down the street.

“How was school?” she says with some extra cheer behind her voice.

“You know, another day survived in the wild,” Simon says.

“That’s what you always say,” she says with a laugh and a smile. “Dad is still working, I thought we would go get some burgers and shakes.” Mom was always extra nice when she worried. She ended up trying to do everyone’s favorite things. It was her way of coping. It was sweet of her, but it was an easy tell at this point. But at least she’s not cooking people’s favorite meals yet. That’s when you know to be alarmed. “The last time I had chicken parmesan was when the dog died. I miss our dog and chicken parmesan,” Simon thought to himself. “Sure Mom, I could go for some food,” Simon said aloud. If he could just take away some of that worry, he would be happy.

Simon felt for Mom losing such a close friend. She says it’s not easy making friends as an adult. I don’t know if she knows how hard it is making them as a teenager. But he was always up for a Mom date. Even under the circumstances they have a burger and fries and share some laughs. Afterwards, they stop at the store and pick up some ice cream for Dad. Mom’s favorite song plays on the radio, but she isn’t much in the mood for car karaoke like she usually is. Rolling into the driveway they arrive home the same time as Dad and great minds must think alike as he leaves the car holding a handful of ice cream. They chuckled together and went inside for an otherwise quieter, more somber night than most as they sat together around the table, but this would be something they got passed together, as a family, like they always did, Simon thought.

The next morning Simon comes down stairs rubbing the sleep from his eyes and it's like deja vu. Mom and Dad are sitting on the couch watching the news. Just like the day before, a grim report is on the television.

"Eye witnesses reported seeing a masked man lurking around the residence late last night. Just in - police have released a statement stating that phone records show the Houser's received a series of calls last evening from 9 to 10pm. Including Denis Houser calling 911 at 9:15pm reporting what he believed to be prank phone calls from local teens. In an effort to put an end to these horrible crimes, audio of the interaction has been released.

"Hello, Hello, 911? Hello?! Baby, Baby, pause the movie. Pause the movie!" Mr. Hauser is heard talking to someone else in the room.

"911, what is your emergency?" dispatch answers the phone.

"These damn teenagers won't stop calling my phone, and I am trying to watch a movie with my lovely wife," Mr. Hauser yells through the phone line.

"Sir, is anyone in danger?" they ask intently.

"Someone will be if they don't stop calling my damn phone!" the man's temper grows.

"Sir, if no emergency has been-" the dispatch worker responds before being abruptly cut off.

"Hold on, this fool is calling me again!" Mr. Hauser says, livid.

"This is when the call to 911 abruptly ended. At this time, we believe Mr. Houser spoke to the very killer that would eventually take the lives of him, his wife of 15 years, and their two children. Their extended family has asked for privacy during this time. We encourage anyone with information to reach out to local police enforcement," the reporter ends her segment and they cut to a commercial.

Simon's family is stunned, almost frozen in the Moment. Another horror. Another neighbor gone in an instant. He finishes his cup of juice and grabs his bag. Walking out the door his parents see him off, giving him an extra tight hug. "Straight home after school, Simon!" his Mom pleads.

The heavy news carried throughout the halls of schools when he arrived. He saw some students donning scary masks running around terrorizing the underclassmen. The cliques clustered like wary tribes, everyone on edge, trading suspicious glances as they crossed paths in the hall. A small gathering of students who practice witchcraft were performing a ritual in the hopes of cleansing "the spirit" of town, while some others pulled tarot cards in the hopes of predicting what's to come. Simon sat back and observed it all as he ate his lunch. Alone, as usual. He thought to himself, "Do other animals do this?"

Simon drifted off, daydreaming of reptiles roaming the halls handing out wedgies and acting like scaly bullies, when he was suddenly shook from the thought. Screaming, he almost loses his dessert as another child uses a prank knife to stab him over and over to his friend's amusement. They quickly run off in laughter ready to terrorize the next unsuspecting victim. Savoring his last bite of dessert, he manages to get out of Dodge only to run into Moe.

"Hey nerd!" Moe says. "How's it going?"

"How's it going?! The school is going mad. There's a killer in town and my parents are totally freaking out. How's it going with you?" Simon asked, happy to see a friendly face.

"Elle and Bradley? Oh, they're doing just fine. I think last night they hosted poker or backgammon or charades. I can't keep up with them," Moe responded, chomping into a green apple.

"I think my Mom is closer to a nervous breakdown," Simon hands her a napkin as apple juice drips from her chin.

"That sounds like her, but, anyway, I'm sure it's just a coincidence. This will blow over and the bullies will have their next fixation by tomorrow," Moe answers with her typical nonchalant confidence.

The bell rings. Commotion in the halls grow as the silence ramps up to the low roar of the students' conversations.

"I hope so, what are you up to now?" Simon asked.

"No drive-in tonight, so I'll be headed to my second job," Moe tosses the core of the apple into the trash with a basketball hook shot.

"What's that?" he asked genuinely.

"Napping!" she says excitedly, meandering into her next class.

By the end of the day, it was hard to think about anything other than the Housers and Voyces. Not only had the town lost beloved neighbors, he couldn't help but wonder, what if it was him and his parents next. Unwavering and extremely curious, he hits the library after the last bell rings despite Mom's wishes for him to come straight home. He would be quick, he thought, plus the library is essentially an extension of school or at least that what he was going to bring to the judges (his parents).

Entering through the main entrance, he pushed open the thick wooden doors, the originals, from when the library was first built. It was a modest place. Quiet, dark. It's the same one he had been going to ever since he moved to town. It's where he got his first book on reptiles. And while the revolving door of people at the library changed often, the constant was the collection of books, video tapes, magazines, and encyclopedias. The collection had grown so much the books have overflowed onto the floor stacked 6 feet tall.

But... where to begin. He looks upon the great wall of knowledge in front of him. It was a bit daunting as he scanned the aisles.

"Can I help you with an inquiry?" a young librarian calls out from behind her desk. Her hair is wrapped tightly in a high bun supported with two pencils. Her black top buttoned to the top reminded him more of a correction officer than of the sweet old lady that used to help him when he was a kid.

With no time to mince words, Simon gets straight to the point, "Where can I find literature on unholy rituals or demon expulsion?"

"Excuse me?" the librarian asked, taken aback.

Not focused on small talk, but rather the task at hand, he responds, "I think I know where I am going." Simon carefully navigates the aisles of the library, which are still organized by the trusted dewey decimal system. Scanning the book spines of all different colors and sizes his eyes bounce to each like a bee to a flower. He tries to find some connections.

"Let's start here," he says to himself, heading down aisle 200 - Religion. He orients to the books' spines, scanning and searching for something that might explain what he saw, or what those folks were doing.

"The Bible in modern places - too broad. Eastern Religions in the new world- not quite. Theology for idiots - hmm, think I will hold on to this one," Simon murmurs under his breath looking for the perfect book to answer his questions, not quite there yet, he continues to scan. "Unexplained Events and Exorcisms. Bingo!" He exclaims, reading the spine of a wide book with a yellowish color. Opening to the table of contents its pages are fragile like a butterfly's wing. Scanning, then shutting the book quickly, he hoists it under his arm. From there he bounces over to the history aisle for some verification and resources. Simon finds a book on the local history of the town and pulls it off the shelf, accidentally taking another book with it, both tumbling to the ground. Glancing only briefly, it appears to be a film encyclopedia. He grabs both, adding them to the growing mountain in his arms.

"The library closes in five minutes," a voice booms from the intercom. Losing track of time, he remembers he told his Mom he would come home immediately after school.

"Shoot, I have got to get out of here. Nevermind some monster, my Mom is going to kill me!" Simon rushes to finish up making a few photo copies of newspaper archives before bringing a towering stack of books and videotapes to the library counter.

"Hi there!" he says, almost out of breath from the weight of the books.

"Hello! That's an awful lot of literature you're looking to be lent out here," the librarian, Lillian Mayhem, granddaughter of old man Mayhem, remarks. "These are some... interesting.. choices." Looking more closely at the materials, Lillian notices they weren't necessarily typical titles for a teenager.

"What are you doing with all these?" she asked.

"Research!" Simon says confidently with a smile.

She raises her brow above her glasses looking down on him, "And you are sure you'll be able to return these all in time?"

"I think you'll find by my \$0 late fee tab, I am more than capable of returning these on time," he responds proudly.

Lillian laughs sarcastically. "Oh, those are just symbolic anyways." She scans the final book.

"Really? I find them oppressive actually," Simon stuffs all the materials into his bag. Bursting at the seams, the zippers can't close all the way. He hurls it onto his back like the weight of the world's problems now rests there as he exits the library. Under his breath, he mutters, "Step 1 complete!" The doors swing behind him. Lillian Mayhem, not enjoying being the second smartest person in the room, quickly picks up the phone, "Hi! Yes, I would like to report some suspicious activity."

Simon gets home bursting through the door, he rushes upstairs.

"Honey! Simon! You were supposed to come straight home from school, I was worried!" his Mom asked from the bottom of the stairs.

"Sorry! Mom, emergency chess club meeting," he yells from behind his closed door.

"Ok, sure. We have some leftovers for you!" His Mom calls for him at the bottom of the stairs.

"No time, Mom! I will grab something later!" Simon calls back.

"But it's your favorite, chicken parmesan!" She pleads with him.

The crispy crunchy cutlets were always so thin, the sauce the perfect sweetness to match the salty, extra melty mozzarella cheese. He could taste them from imagination alone.

"She must be really worried," Simon thought, coincidentally holding his rumbling belly. Dropping his books, he heads downstairs and his research would have to wait a bit longer.

In no time, Simon was helping himself to a big plate of seconds as his parents tried convincing him that there was nothing to worry about. A big scary nothing, apparently.

"Sometimes bad things happen to good people," Dad says, bringing his plate to the sink. "How about some dessert?"

"Not tonight, Dad, I am stuffed." There was only so much eating away your worry that you can do in a day. Finishing up the dishes, Simon heads upstairs, but not before giving his parents a big hug.

"You're right Dad, it's just bad luck," Simon concedes.

He rushes into his room and closes the door. Unzipping his bag a wave of books poured from it. Simon grabs a book, flipping to the index. His finger traces down the page. "Page 68," he says, flipping through to find what he's looking for. Annotating while he reads, before long, book after book were covered in sticky notes. He looks back at a mess of piled notes, "I got nothing here."

Trying a new approach, Simon pops a VHS tape into his TV/player combo. The 12 inch colored screen powers on as he leans back in his chair watching the grainy movie about vampires or wine makers... or both. It's hard to tell which it is with heavy eyes and a distracted mind, but he cannot fight off sleep any longer.

By the next morning, there's another report... one stranger than all previous. The house was found soaked, and, somehow, covered with salt from the ocean. Despite the nearest ocean being hundreds of miles away. Reports of sharks and other marine life were spotted. Some thought it was a hoax, while others began to grow weary about their little town.

Storefronts shutter events. Weekly bingo for the seniors begins to cancel. And the next day was more of the same. The headline read "Killer Bees on the Swarm". As claimed, a swarm of killer bees killed two who were allergic, and another two just from sheer shock of witnessing the bizarre event according to the papers. The pattern of crimes continues until finally, the police chief holds a conference to take questions from reporters and citizens trying to get to the bottom of the bizarre week.

"Good afternoon, everybody," the police chief begins, standing tall behind the podium. The rumblings in the crowd eventually silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen, as you all know by now, over the course of this week the town and its people have been tortured and terrorized. Rest assured, the police department is working tirelessly to catch these perpetrators and make our streets safe again!" the police chief says with pride, expecting a round of applause.

"We want to know who did this!" A townsman shouts from the crowd.

"At this time, we do not have a person of interest to share with you and our investigation is still on-going," the chief says, taken aback by the response.

"That's all you got?!" Another unhappy citizen shouts as others cheer on in support.

"Now please, please understand this department is doing everything that it can to put an end to these heinous crimes. And, after speaking with the Mayor, at this time I urge you all to close your shops and businesses until this is resolved. In the name of safety, the mayor has declared a state of emergency."

The crowd erupts.

"Are you kidding me? Easy for you to say, we have mouths to feed. You're all eating donuts!!" The message resonates with everybody in the room as the cheers and jeers grow louder and louder.

The press conference quickly deteriorated into a shouting match that abruptly ended with the police chief scurrying off the stage. Tired of it himself, Simon turns off the chaos and heads up into his room for bed. Tossing and turning for hours his mind is moving too fast for him to sleep. He rolls over grabbing his walkie from the desk.

"Moe, do you copy?...Moe, do you copy?, over - Moe, Moe, are you there?" he waits for a response but only gets more silence, until a few Moments later.

"Ugghhh, why did I agree to this stupid thing? Yes, I am here. What are you doing," Moe responds.

"I couldn't sleep. Did you watch the press conference? I am really worried." he says.

"Worried about what?" Moe asked obliviously as usual.

"Oh Moe, nevermind." Frustrated or amazed at her focus or lack thereof. Everything is perspective, he tells himself taking a deep breath. "I will see you at school tomorrow and I will be on channel 8 if you need me."

“You’re staying up again?! You’re gonna be scarier to look at than any zombie. I am going to bed, night! She flings the walkie talkie from her bed, shutting off the light.

Lowering the volume on his walkie, he hops out of bed swapping his pajamas for a sleek black outfit, complete with some camouflage. It was an old Halloween costume. His Mom told him to throw it away years ago, but he always knew it would come handy sometime in the future. Who knew that moment would be when the neighborhood was under attack. Simon waits until he knows his folks are asleep for sure. Peeking out his bedroom door, he sees the stillness of the dark quiet night. He quietly closes the door and secures it with his desk chair, making sure no one can easily enter. His bag is packed with the essentials, a flashlight, pocket knife, field notes manual, pen and paper. “Let’s explore..” he says to himself.

Simon tiptoes to his bedroom window carefully, delicately dispersing his weight he climbs down and lands with a near perfect dismount. Walking the streets he kept to the shadows dodging the shine coming from the streetlights. He is on edge with the pocket knife closed but in hand ready to take on the unexpected. It seemed just like any other night, quiet and normal. So much so that after not too long he found himself on a park bench looking up at the clear sky, it was a great night for stargazing. Simon looked up at the constellations and tried to remember the names of the stars in each, thinking back to his science camp a few summers back. When suddenly the sound of a car engine revs, he looks back down the street, there’s a fancy old school car, the large hood ornaments reflecting the night’s moonlight. The doors open and a couple of large men in black coats and top hats exit first before a final shorter man in a deep purple suit stands outside the vehicle. A storm quickly arrives as thunder and lightning fill the sky. Thunder and lightning shake the neighborhood as the clouds cover the moonlight making it almost pitch black outside.

Despite being at a safe distance away he quickly takes cover behind a tree as to not be seen. Taking out his binoculars he can almost see into the neighbors front windows from the glow of lights. He adjusts the focus for a more clear look when suddenly he hears screams. Simon ducks behind the tree. He waits for the piercing of another scream, but instead there is just a haunting silence. Pausing for a minute he cautiously peeks his head around the tree. Simon sees the man dressed in the purple coat, he has shiny golden shoes and a cane in his hand walking briskly back to the car. “He didn’t seem to need that cane to walk” Simon thinks to himself. Quickly, the car peels out from the curb and dashes off into the night. And just like that they were gone. Simon dashes, his mind racing his feet, as he tries to leave the scene. Rubbing his eyes and checking over his shoulder he makes a beeline for his house.

“Freeze!” a voice shouts in the dark.

“Oh shi-” Simon is suddenly tackled to the ground.

“Gotcha!” the voice rings out with phony authority. A second figure comes huffing and puffing from the dark. It’s the town police.

“You’re coming with us!” the second police officer says out of breath. Lifting Simon from the ground, they quickly get him in handcuffs.

“You got anything to say for yourself?” the first officer says, giving him a stern look, trying to intimidate him.

All sophomores in high school should know how to deal with such an encounter he thought to himself as he remained silent.

"Nothing to say, huh? We will see how this birdy sings in front of a judge. Guess what, buddy? You're going away for alooong time". The officer says with dramatic affect.

Simon is brought downtown to the police station. The officers are confident they have found their town terrorizer. "Case closed", they say with confidence. Within 45 minutes Simon's parents were out of their beds and at the local holding cell.

"I am so sorry, let's just say our new deputies were a bit jolted with all the crimes happening.... We... it was just that..." the sheriff stutters to Simon's parents.

"That you tackled a 15 year old boy running at night," his Mom says, unimpressed. "Goodnight, we are going home." Simon's Mom is in no mood after being woken up in the middle of the night with a scare like that. The sheriff turns red, ready to ream out the rotten police work by his deputies. Simon and his family head home to try and catch whatever remaining sleep they could.

"Buddy, you have to let the people who know what they're doing do their job," his Dad says, breaking the silence on the car ride home.

"But Dad, *do they know what they're doing?*" Simon asked, referring to the less than competent police crew.

It was hard for Simon's parents to argue his point. Still - they worried for him.

The next morning the shining sun on Simon's face wakes him up. Barely registering last night as real life he rushes to tell his parents what he had witnessed, thinking after a fresh night of sleep for everyone they may believe him. Coming down the stairs, his Mom and Dad are already tuned into the news, sitting on the couch they looked like they hardly slept themselves.

"Aliens INVADE quiet neighborhood", blares from the TV as the morning newscaster begins their opening monologue. Confused for a second, "last night was scary, but those looked more like gangsters than aliens to me," Simon thinks to himself. He pauses to reevaluate his plan "they'll think I am crazy...I can't risk it."

"Honey, I think we'll all stay in today. How about a board game?" Mom offers. "Who wants ham rolls?! And I've got brownies in the oven!"

"Mom never cooks this much, something is seriously wrong right now" Simon says to himself under his breath. "Sure, Mom, that sounds like fun!" Simon goes along with it for the sake of his Mom. By the end of a long day and a ransacked board game closet, his Mom and Dad are snoring on the couches catching up on some much needed rest themselves. Up in his room Simon is poring through books he borrowed from the library. He opens the movie encyclopedia. A headline catches his attention, "Unsolved Mysteries at Mayhem Theatre." He flips through more pages of the book. .

"Moe... Earth to Moe .. you there?" Simon lets go of the button on his walkie-talkie. "Hello!..." he waits.

"Hey, you there.. Where have you been?" Moe asked, sitting at her desk at home painting her nails.

"You'd be bored to know, Can you come over? I wanna show you something?" Simon pleads with her urgently.

"Oh why not, not like the town is cursed or anything" she says sarcastically, "I'll be right over."

The doorbell rings and Simon barrels down the stairs to open the door, letting Moe in. Headed up the staircase she looks over and notices his parents still passed out on the couch.

"Should I be concerned about that?" Moe asked.

"Not even a little", Simon says already halfway up the steps. Moe follows and they get to his room. Simon is excited to show her his work.

"Here I put together a little map." Simon shows her his set up that is less "a little map" and looks more like a full on CSI investigation. "Look ..7 incidents in 7 days, I marked them here on the map with an X". Simon points to the markings looking back at her eagerly.

"You ... .NEED... to get out more" Moe responds, stunned at the intricacy and complexity of the map he put together.. There are detailed outlined roads with flags indicating different areas in the city, the park, the lake, the mountain range, it even had a key, complete with pins and strings tying potential connections together.

"Is that the river?" she asked actually impressed

"Yeah, pretty cool right I used blue cellophane my Mom had from last Easter, and look there is Mount Peregrine," he says, nerding out for a minute.

"I might use this to make a topography rendering," he says.

"What's that?" Moe asked, curiously.

"It's a kind of map that shows elevations, like the shape of the land. I've actually got a book on it over on the shelf" Simon started to point, then caught himself and shook his head, snapping back to focus.

"I went out last night" Simon blurts out, pivoting back to the pressing matter of the Moment.

"Really?! Why? Did you do that? Moe asked.

"I had to see it for myself but, I don't know, you may not even believe me" Simon says, sheepishly.

"Tell me!" Moe urges.

"I think I saw it." he says intensely.

"Saw what?! What are you talking about", she asked, eager to know.

"Alright alright" he takes out a little pointer " First it was the Voyce' right .. People said they saw high members of a church, "Well I went to the library and did some research... and look at this...". He hands her a book littered with sticky notes and annotations. Before she could read the first sentence he grabs her attention again and look ...see this ... a movie from a few decades back...." he presses play on his VHS player. The scene shows two religious men hovering around a boy tied to a bed shouting what they presume to be Latin.

“What is this European or something?” Moe asked.

“Just wait.” He takes a piece of yarn from Joyce's place on the map and pins it to the Housers.

“Second, the housers, murdered by a masked man.” Simon waves the pointer from house to house. “Shout”, a movie from when our parents were our age about a masked serial killer. On the 911 call, Mr. Houser mentioned they were watching a movie. Third - Shark Teeth, the house was found flooded with water and sand, with floundering fish flopping. And...”

“Slow down.. Slow down What are you saying here? What does this have to do with last night?” Moe asked, trying to follow where Simon is going with this.

“Here is what we know... So far each victim was at home at the time of the incident... so far it seems that all were reportedly watching movies the night it occurred and all the crimes we spoke about so far... they're all movies too.” he says, showing her the highlighted pages of the movie encyclopedia he found at the library.

“The Shoeshiner! This is what I saw last night!” he shows her the small blurb and a picture of a mafia boss with a striking resemblance to who Simon saw the night prior on his escape.

“That's it?” she looks at him with a confused look, “That's not much” she says unimpressed.

“I am saying that the movies they watch are happening to them! Simon says coming off a bit deranged.

“What! That sounds crazy, and even that was the case, how could it be stopped” she says semi entertaining the idea.

“Well I have a plan...” Simon responds assuredly.

“I'm listening...” Moe says, unsure of what to expect next.

“Well I learned about logarithmic equations the other day and polynomials, actually it was a great day of school technically, there were a lot of great lessons that day when I think about it. Logarithms help us analyze patterns, reverse exponential trends, and better understand how mathematical processes unfold over time” he explains, going full nerd mode.

“What the heck is a long rhythm equation?” Moe says even more confused than before.

“Logarithmic equations. It's complicated, but I think we have to try and replicate the conditions. It's a stretch I know but- ” he says perhaps now just realizing how crazy he sounds.

“Are you suggesting we attempt to be murdered?!” Moe inquires.

“Precisely” he says trying to remain confident. She stares back at him blankly.

The next evening Simon is in his bedroom getting ready. “Hmm, what should i bring” grabbing a replica sword from an old movie off the wall , he waves it around imitating a battle scene, fighting off a

demon or serial killer or maybe even a priest, sound effects included. Placing it down ever so carefully, he grabs his backpack filling it with the movie encyclopedia, a notepad and a fist full of pens.

"Where are you going dear?" his Mom asked.

"Moe's!" he says in his typical rush.

"Oh, are you sure honey, with everything that's been going on," his Mom shows her concern.

"It's fine Mom, It's just Moe's," he says assuredly.

"Will you be home late?" she asked.

"No! Don't wait up, Mom, love you!!" Simon says, running out the door.

"That boy better be safe" she says, locking up behind him.

Simon's adrenaline is pumping while riding through the neighborhood. Thoughts and questions raced through his mind, his legs furiously pedaling, would his hypothesis be supported? Is the town cursed? Is he losing his marbles? He hops off his bike and up to the large red wooden door to Moe's house as the sun lowered beyond the ridgeline, the colors of the sky blended into a cotton candy swirl. The moon is big and bright in its first quarter phase. He locates the first planet to pop out in the night sky as he fixes his helmet hair before knocking on the door. After a Moment or two the door swings open

Moe's mother answers the door "Come on in! Oh, it's so good to see you, sweetie, how have you been?" She warmly welcomes him.

"I am good, Ms. Leafgreen," Simon responds.

"What a crazy week right! How's your family holding up?" she asked.

"Pretty good. Mom is making brownies mostly." Simon refrains from telling them anymore.

"Oh we love a good brownie, right babe! Randall and I got the only reservation in town! Everywhere else was booked or closed! We thought a date night would lift the spirits. I am so glad you're here to babysit, you know how she falls asleep early"

"Yeah, I have seen her fall asleep standing up frankly" Simon agrees.

"Okay well she is upstairs giving Luke a bath, we just ordered pizza so that will be here shortly. We will be home late so don't stay up, once he's asleep just check on him before you doze off" Ms Leafgreen says as readies her purse.

"Sorry Ms. Leafgreen, all I heard was pizza," Simon confessed.

She lets out a big laugh, "You crack me up, Simon!"

Hey! Gimme some, Darwin!" Mr. Leafgreen holds his hand out for a fist bump. He was always calling Simon by some scientist's name.

“Hey, Mr Leafgreen!” Simon says cheerfully.

“So, what are you two gonna get up to?” Mr. Leafgreen asked, gathering his keys and smoothly placing on his sport coat one arm after the other. Moe comes downstairs, you can hear her heavy steps coming all the way from the top floor.

“Earthquake!!!” Mr. Leafgreen says to Simon, giving him a friendly elbow bump, and extracting just enough laughter from him to know the Dad joke landed.

“Oh you know, solving crimes, tracking down murders, that kinda stuff,” Moe says proudly entering the foyer of her parents house. It lands as sarcasm to her parents who laugh together. Simon shoots her a particular stare as if to say “what the -”

“No seriously, we are probably just gonna watch, Shelf Life,” she quickly follows on beat.

“Shelf Life! We will find you, we will kill you,” her Dad mimics a line from the movie in a robotic voice. “That’s a classic!”

“Oh, what about Luke, won’t he be scared!” Ms Leafgreen asked.

“Don’t worry Mom, we will watch it after he falls asleep,” Moe reassures her.

“Thank you honey! Okay! We are off, you two have fun, don’t watch anything too scary! Bye!” they say, closing the door behind them as they head out for their date night.

Simon puts down his bag and sits down onto the couch in the living room, Moe’s younger brother Luke is playing with some toys in his playpen.

“You got the movie?” she asked him.

“Of course.” Simon pulls out the tattered cardboard covering housing the video cartridge.

“Cool! Well I guess we will just watch it when - Ah!” Nearly jumping into Simon’s arms, Moe responds to the sudden ringing of the door bell. “My dumb Dad probably forgot his keys,” Moe says, regaining her composure.

“He’s not dumb, I think he is Kind of Funn-” Simon comes to his defence.

“Ahhh!” Moe screams again. Opening the door, she was not expecting the pizza boy.

“Whoa, you guys are fast,” Simon says, pushing her out of the way, taking the pizza and giving the boy an extra few dollar tip.

“Thanks!” The delivery driver is appreciative walking back to his car.

Lifting the lid to the pizza, steam drifted upward, carrying the irresistible scent of savory sauce, bubbling cheese, and a crackling crust still hot from the oven.

"Mushrooms! My favorite," Simon says, pulling one from a slice and popping into his mouth.

"Ewww, no thank you!" Moe opts to peel them off and throws the Mushrooms onto Simon's plate.

"More for me!" he says with a big grin.

Before long the pizza was nothing more than scraps and they were all stuffed. Moe picks up Luke from the ground, removing a chunk of pizza crust from his hand, he looks exhausted, barely keeping his eyes open. Moe brings him to his room, flicking on the light the room is scattered with toys on the floor.

"And yet, I get yelled at for having my clothes on the floor" Moe says to her younger brother who only stares back at her, not yet developed enough to understand her gripe. She tucks him into his bed and hands him his favorite stuffed animal, a grey rabbit that looks like it survived a world war. Turning off the light, Luke was already snoring happily in his crib.

"Should we watch it now?" Moe asked as she got back to the living room. Looking out the window it was pitch black outside.

"No time like the present," Simon says. Plus I know you have a 9:30 bedtime so we better get started soon" he adds, sending a jab her way .

"Shut up!" Moe quips back.

Moe places the VHS into the player. Music blares as a preview trailer for the movie appears on the screen "When the toys come off the shelf... where will you run!" A woman's screams ring out in the background. The two teenagers laugh at its corniness.

"This is supposed to be scary?" Moe says feeling braver by the Moment. But not before long they were totally engrossed.

"This movie is kind of unhinged," he says, turning to her on the other end of the couch. Moe is already fast asleep, snoring away.

"Typical," he says to himself. Suddenly, a sound from behind startles him, pulling his attention away for just a second. He chuckles at how easily spooked he got, then grabs the remote and turns the volume up, refocusing.. "This is a classic!" Simon praises the film.

His watch reads 10:30pm as the film's ending credits begin to roll after the tight 80 minute runtime. Simon turns to Moe snoring under the blankets of the couch. He lowers the volume of the TV, the only light left in the room coming from the glow of the screen. Simon readies himself with a plastic wiffle ball bat for protection, scanning the darkness for danger.

"I'm gonna stay up all night and defend this post," he says to himself under his breath with determination but with heavy eyes, he yawns. The determination is too soon defeated by exhaustion as he loses the battle to stay awake, his eyes shutting, his head nodding, the slightest snore rumbling from his nose. When suddenly, he pops out of his deep sleep, he peeks at his watch, it reads seventeen minutes past midnight. "I have to pee like a racehorse", he jumps up from the couch shaking off his slumber. Still half asleep he makes his way down the hall to the bathroom. Arriving, a pair of bright red dots appear from down the hall, he can see something on the ground moving on the rug.

"What is that?" he walks over rubbing his eyes. A mechanical robot toy made of spare parts and bolts begins to roll towards him.

"Halt I am the leader of this revolution, and I demand you free-" a voice emits from the ground below. Still half asleep he kicks the toy out of his path heading down the hall.

"Ow!" Simon shouts. Suddenly, a noise from the other room jolts him fully awake. "Luke!" he calls out worryingly. He sprints down the hall and barges through the closed door. "Luke, Luke are you okay!"

He flips on the light and sees Luke in his crib playing with several toys, flying them through the air sending them crashing into one another, sound effects and giggles included. The toys are mumbling statements that can barely be heard over the child's laughter. "Put me down you, bandit," a cowboy shouts from the grasps of the ironclad fists of the two year old. "You're gonna pay for that, you drool-drenched demon!"

Simon is relieved to see him safe. "Come here bud, it's late, let's play with these in the morning." Simon gathers the toys and puts them back into the toy chest. Murmurs from the toys trail behind as he heads back to the bed to tuck Luke in and turn off the light.

After a much needed pit stop to the bathroom, he stumbles into the family guest bedroom, plopping onto the bed, out like a light as soon as his head hits the pillow. He's snoring again in no time. The next day Simon wakes up feeling quite well rested but confused about his location. As he sees unfamiliar photos of family members hanging on the wall. "Who the heck is that? Ohhh.. right", he thinks to himself trying to piece the evening together. "That was one weird dream".

Looking over the edge of the bed he sees some action figures on the ground, a dinosaur, wrestler and cowboy action figures. "What are those doing there?". Suddenly Moe rushes into the room.

"Did it work?!?! Are we dead?" she asked way too eagerly, especially so early in the morning.

"No.. no.. I.. I... don't know. No, we aren't dead." Simon responds astutely.

"It was proolly just that boring kids movie, Shelf Life," she says waving her fists in the air.

"How would you know, you fell asleep during the opening scene!" Simon is quick to remind her.

"Did not!" Moe says.

"Practically!" he insists.

"Ughhhh, now what do we do!?" Moe asked.

"We regroup," he said, his mind already mapping out the next move. Simon packed up his things and headed home, his mind volleying back and forth between relief at being alive and disappointment at not having learned more. "Back to the drawing board," he says, waving goodbye.

Getting home, his Dad is in the garage tinkering with his woodworking project. The radios' on but instead of the usual upbeat classic oldies they typically played, they were reporting on local places that would be shutting down in the midst of all the crimes.

"Some have decided, at least for the time being, it is better to close and stay safe than risk any further dangers. The list is as follows.. The Book Ballroom, shuttered. Until further notice Glanger's Hardware, closed. People's Pet Emporium, suspended until further notice. Blossom Ferns Florist, boarded up after the incident last night." What was going to be a delightful festival season has quickly turned into a living nightmare for the folks in town that are just hoping to make a small living. "And remember if you have any information remember to call the hotline number at 7-1-1. The Mayor has asked that we all band together in this trying moment, and if we do, 12th St will thrive once again!" The radio cuts to commercial.

"That's like everywhere in town, except the drive in," Simon says to his father. Even the local schools heeded the warning and closed for the week.

"And the old haunted house, of course!" Dad chimes in, "How was the evening... No sneaking about in the middle of the night right?" Giving him a friendly elbow bump referencing his little outing earlier in the week.

"No, not last night Dad," Simon says with a small laugh.

"Go say hello to your Mom, I don't know if she slept a wink last night with you out of the house"

"Will do, Dad." Simon heads inside.

Later on in the day Simon is sitting in his room which now looks more like the 18th precinct downtown. A map of the town was pinned on to the wall with yarns strung about, sticky notes covered it from east to west and north to south and evening extended into the room like fresh snow on the ground of a winter morning. His books took over his chairs and the bed and the bureaus. Simon sat on the floor with a book in his hand when he got a knock on his door. It's Moe.

"Missed me already?" he says without lifting his eyes from the page.

"You wish! There is nothing else to do in this town, everything is closed, everything except a creepy haunted house for 10 year olds to scream and the drive-in that I work at and I do not want to be at work". She looks around his room. "So are you a crazy person now?" scanning the amount of clippings and research strewn about. "You're lucky I know you better otherwise something would think *you* were up to all of this," referencing the madness she is witnessing.

"Simon!" his mother yells from the other side, pounding on the door. The knob begins to turn as he rushes across the room, slamming his weight against it to block her entry. "Oh, honey, what is going on in there?" his Mom asked worriedly.

"Nothing Mom, we are studying!" Simon blurts out.

"Studying? Only you could study while there's a crime spree terrorizing the city AND there is no school. Is everything alright?" his Mom continues.

"Can't fall behind, Mom!" Simon shouts through the door. "You know how Moe is!" She gives him a death stare he can feel.

"Well, if you have bored Moe to death in there, tell her there's ice cream and brownies ready downstairs," his Mom says, playing to her audience.

"Ice cream!" Moe repeats back to Simon. "See you later, dork". She pushes past him opening the door and follows his Mom down stairs.

In the quiet room, staring at his investigation board, a chaotic patchwork of string, pins, and clippings. His eyes narrow as he slices a fresh article from the morning newspaper, "Town in Shambles as Crime Wave Claims 6 More." Before he knows it Moe is back with a bowl of ice cream, brownies and bag of pretzels.

"Want some?" she asked, "the pretzel place closed today lucky your Mom had a bag". Moe pushes some books off Simon's bed to make herself comfortable with her dessert. Simon is still focused, without a word, he pins the clipping beside the others. The headlines blur together like a chorus of despair. Simon steps back, scanning the patterns, desperate for a thread that ties it all together. His lips move without sound as he reads each one again, eyes flicking from pin to pin.

"Priests seen vanishing in the night."

"Killer Still At Large after slaying 4."

"Sharks in town Lake?!?!."

"Deadly Swarm Strikes Citizens."

"Unexplained Lights Before Disappearance."

"Family Claims House is Haunted ... Again."

"Murdering Monster leaves nothing but Feathers Behind"

"Why is this happening?" he mutters. "What did the Petersons, the Housers, or the Junipers or anyone in town here do to deserve such a tragic end?" Simon pleads his hands pulling at his hair.

Behind him, the sound of Moe's spoon scrapes the bowl as she downs another mouthful of ice cream. Moe somehow remained calm amongst all this chaos. Simon turns, agitated. "Why?" he demands, voice rising. "Why all of this? Why them? Why now?"

She doesn't even glance up. Instead, she shrugs, grabbing a fist full of pretzels, "Why isn't it as important as *how* to stop it," Moe says nonchalantly.

He freezes. The silence stretches between them. He doesn't love the answer. There has to be a reason Surely there was a formula or an equation they've missed. "You're right," he finally says. "Parsimony," Simon continues quieter this time.

"Sure... that is exactly what I meant. "So what is the plan?" Moe says, trying to keep up with his strange vocabulary as usual.

"The only thing we still have ... all these crimes have been plots in different movies made throughout the last 4 decades. Maybe if we survive once we could break the curse or at least learn more. If we don't stop it - it's only a matter of time before it's us. Death. Gone. Perished. No more."

"Thanks for reminding me," she says, rolling her eyes. "Okay.... And 'Shelf Life' didn't work?" she asked.

"Maybe it did. Maybe it is, it just wasn't... wasn't..." Simon spins in his room looking at the sky looking for the words.

"Wasn't 'scary' enough?" she tries to finish his thought.

"I.. I.. guess not - I don't know! Yeah maybe it wasn't enough risk like you said. Need to raise the stakes" he can't believe what he is suggesting.

"Okay.. so we need something ...scarier..." Moe skims the movie encyclopedia. Thunder and lightning rumbles behind them sending the lights flickering through a power surge.

"Was it storming before?" she asked, startled by the intensity of the crackling lightning.

"Uhhhh, no," Simon says, looking out the window. "Okay. I'll have my Dad drive you home." He closes the curtain.

“Thanks,” Moe says, happy to avoid the untimely downpour.

The following night was warm and quiet, the clouds blocked out the usually starry sky but a nice breeze whistled through the town. The rains from last night have dried and the flowers and plants are standing strong from the drink. Most people in the neighborhood have shuttered in their homes. Some have actually boarded up windows and spurred up points of entry. The typically bustling 12th street was deadly silent as he rode his bike. Getting to the herpetological society, Moe is already waiting by the locked gate. It starts to rain.

"Hurry up! What took you so long?" she says standing under the dim light of the lamppost trying to stay dry with her umbrella.

"Sorry, my Mom and Dad were up late watching the news again," he shakes the rain off his helmet. Getting more wet by the minute as the rainfall gets heavier, "Ugh. Why did we have to pick tonight, it's pouring!" Moe is less than thrilled.

"It's hardly raining. Plus who knows how much time we have, or when it's gonna be us, or our parents." Simon looks up at the night sky filled with dark clouds. They get to the entrance as he finds the right key and turns to unlock the secured door. "Find the light," he tells her as he heads into the dark room. Suddenly, Moe screams. "What the fudge did I just touch," she says in hysterics.

Retracing his steps he feels for the wall eventually finding the switch. He sees Moe's hand on a taxidermied cobra. "I am gonna throw up!" she says disgusted, wiping her hand on her shirt feverishly. Simon throws her a towel to dry off. "Give me a minute to get set up," he says drying his hair.

"Sure, I need a snack. All this commotion is making me hungry." She pulls out some gummy worms from the Sugar Shack, the local candy store. Thunder rumbles and lightning flickers outside as the storm picks up quickly, startling her. Simon rolls the old projector from the storage closet out into the education room.

"So what movie are we watching anyway?" Moe asked, stuffing a fist full of gummy worms into her mouth.

"The Gator of Crater Lake," Simon says, anticipating a big reaction from her.

"Never heard of it, sounds lame," Moe says unbothered, plopping herself onto the couch with her snacks as he finishes getting set up.

"Yeah. Well, we will see about that when you're hiding behind me," he says as the projector turns on. Looking at the clocks it reads 10:15pm. "We need to hurry."

"I'm ready," she says, feeding herself a grape as though she was royalty.

"Ready." Simon sits down and gets settled next to Moe.

The film begins. A flurry of names drifts across the screen, mostly old-timey actors they'd never heard of. The slow, dull roll of credits lulls their senses until ... BAM! A sudden jump scares tears through the quiet showing a viscous gator jumping towards the audience, sending them both flying from the couch. Popcorn and grapes soared through the sky like fireworks. They laugh at each other for getting so spooked before getting settled back in. Only for the power to suddenly go out. She screams. They sit in the darkness for a Moment

“We should just try this tomorrow!” Moe pleads.

“No! We can’t risk it! We are already here,” he says. “Wait, are you scared?”

“Scared? No, I am not scared. Maybe a little creeped out! I have already touched a dead snake. What’s there to be scared of,” Moe responds, emotions rise as her eyes dart around the dark room.

“Okay, then just take a breather. There’s a backup generator. Let me go check it out,” Simon throws on a poncho opening the door; the wind nearly pulls it from the hinges. “Wait here,” he says. The door whips closed behind him. The tool shed is about a stone’s throw from him but the wind makes it feel like climbing a mountain. He gets there drenched.

Inside the tool shed he shakes his poncho off as much as he can. There are some boxes in front of the projector marked “heavy.”

“Of course,” he says as he gets to hauling them out of the way, making sure to lift with his legs as he strains to move them. Finally, he locates the generator. “Hmmm okay, this should take just a second” Simon pulls the ripcord. The motor sputters but doesn’t turn over.

Simon pulls it another two times, mindful not to flood the throttle. “What is wrong with this thing?” he says as his frustration quickly grows. When suddenly, for some reason he can sense someone behind him. Simon keeps cool for a moment. Something touches his shoulder and he screams only to turn and see Moe. He was startled but relieved.

“What are you doing?! I told you to wait, ” he says exasperated.

“You were taking too long - it’s creepy in there and it smells.” Moe says. A snake slithers behind her but it goes unnoticed. “What’s taking so long anyway?” she snaps, antsy.

Trying to hide his frustration Simon takes a deep breath, readying the cord, he gives it one more pull with all his strength. It’s enough - finally, as the motor turns over and the generator starts. Shortly after, the power turns back on illuminating the shed. Making their way back to the education room, the slithering snake sneaks in with them as they drop the ponchos to the floor. The movie picks up where it left off.

It was an old campy movie, made a few decades ago. A flop in the theatre but it had become somewhat of a cult classic for movie buffs over time. Someone donated it to the herpetological society years ago and it’s been sitting in the small educational library ever since. They watch as a group of a few fresh twenty somethings drive up to a secluded lake for a weekend of summer fun. They pull up in a cherry red convertible.

“Look familiar?” Simon says sending a jab her way. Moe just rolls her eyes. The scene continues. All hopping out over the seats, marveling at the cabin and the gleaming lake. “This is going to be the best summer ever!” one happily shouts as they get acclimated to the grounds. Before long they are having fun and swimming in the lake. As a couple toss a football back and forth, others go lay down for a rest. Later on the crew wakes up to the smell of a tasty meal as another has already made a head start on grilling out under the rising moonlight. A piece of meat falls to the floor. Picking it up, the brawny teen

throws it into the lake “A little something for the fishes” he quips. The rest run inside to set the table, hungry, they are all ready to eat. Suddenly, the chef is dragging into the lake.

The second act picks up with the friends confused and concerned for their now missing friend. After some investigating they find some strange tracks at the lake’s edge and giant claw marks on a canoe. “What could that be?” one asked inquisitively. All the while the friends keep dropping off one by one until the group splits: one team tries to search the woods for their friend; the others attempt to entice and trap the danger.

By now, Simon and Moe were watching so intently it was as if they’d been hypnotized, bracing for a big third act and oblivious to the treacherous storm brewing just outside.

The movie continues as those that were trying to search for the missing members of the group become lost in the dark thick woods. Meanwhile, the plan to trap the danger goes awry when they discover the threat is much larger than they thought. A massive 20 plus foot gator emerges from the water dragging an unsuspecting teen into the water, bubbles popping at the surface that slowly come to a stop. The others scream.

Final survivors use fireworks from the camp's stash to try to lure it into the old cabin, with the plan to blow the whole thing up. After all the dust settles, Sunrise comes. The last two survivors limp to the road just as help arrives. As the credits start to roll, bubbles rise from the lake... and a second pair of reptilian eyes opens above the surface.

“Wow that was great I wish we could watch the sequel” Simon says happily entertained by the b-rate film.

“This isn't a movie marathon, remember,” Moe reminds him. “Now what?” she says scared and sleepily.

“I guess we have to wait.” he says, unsure himself. Moe grabs a paperweight off the side table. It's dark and quiet inside as the winds continue to howl outside. Moe lets out a big yawn.

“Don’t fall asleep now. It couldn’t happen at any moment,” Simon urges ,pointing to his watch as the clock nearly strikes midnight. A faint pitter patter crawls along the floor. “Did you hear that?” he asked on high alert.

“Knock it off, not cool!” Moe says ,grasping the paperweight tightly.

“I’m serious. I thought I heard something.” They try to be completely still. Using all their senses to avoid being caught off guard. Time passes by and and the weight of sleep crawled toward them, barely able to keep their eyes open until the balanced breaths in and out in and out turned to light snores. They are both out cold. Leaning in his sleep, his weight gradually shifts until he falls onto Moe’s shoulder. Disturbed from her sleep she jolts up in panic yelling at him.

“What! I didn’t do anything,” he says, shaken from his sleep. Suddenly, a rattling sound fills the room. “Moe,” he says soft and cautiously.

“Yeah?” she says.

“Slowly hand me the lantern,” he says calmly. Confused, she obliges, feeling for the lantern on the couch before carefully handing it to him. Simon turns it on illuminating the room only to discover they’re surrounded by dozens of zombie snakes, primed for a vicious attack. Stunned, she goes to make a run for it but Simon quickly stops her. The sound of rattling intensifies.

“It’s happening,” he says.

“What are you talking about? Did you leave a cage open or something?” Moe says confused.

“No, of course not!” He would never be so careless. Quickly, the slithering snakes close in on the two unsuspected teens, prepared to strike. Trying by any means necessary to escape, Moe tosses some gummy worms onto the ground, distracting the fanged foe as they attack the gelatinous treat.

“That’s gonna be tough to digest,” Simon says as they use the diversion to head out of there. They leap from the couch to the table like a game of ‘the floor is lava’, tiptoeing and balancing their weight, cautious not to make any extra sounds, until finally they make their way to the exit. Managing to leave the room, they stop for a quick breath hoping for some reprieve but are surprised to find six large condors ahead of them. Their eyes glow a yellowish green staring right at Simon and Moe. The sight startles him, taking a step back he loses his balance tripping over a broomstick on the ground, falling into Berna’s pool. Stirred, the opportunistic turtle rushes right towards him, opening its deadly jaws ready to chomp. Simon closes his eyes bracing for the strike, when suddenly Moe grabs him just in time, pulling him from the water as he narrowly escapes the Louisiana’s snapping turtle.

“Her eyes, her eyes were red!” he says, completely spooked at this point.

“What the hell is going on! I didn’t know you guys had birds?!” she spits out dumbfounded by what she’s seeing.

“We don’t!” Simon says, grabbing her hand and making a dash for it but are cornered as they head toward the amphibian wing. A king cobra slithers up to them before levitating into the sky, its head spins and tongue slips around in a dance sending Moe to the dusty floor. Simon promptly lifts her up by her shirt collar. Looking around for a way out, they are trapped. Just then, the noise of a barreling gator catches their ear as the whipping of its tail crashes into fencing. Around the corner appeared the worn, blistered snout, resembling volcanic rock. The rows of teeth looked like a damaged chainsaw, sharp enough to cut diamonds. Each powerful step the massive gator dragged itself towards them blocking the way out. Simon grabs a nearby broomstick, “It’s me it’s me, Simon!” he says, waving the end of the broomstick in front of him, hoping to be recognized as someone other than the reptile’s next meal. Then, in an instant the gator strikes, chomping the broom stick in half, it’s pulled from Simon’s hands as he swiftly loses the game of tug of war. Moe seizes the opportunity to sneak around as the gator begins to roll unaware the more tender meats are about to get away. She runs for it and Simon follows. Before getting too far, up already they see the exit is blocked by dozens of gators, making a quick turn, they are chased down by the deadly foe. They reach the back wall of the herpetological society. They jump on to the chain link fence as it rattles, with their hands and feet they ascend the fence like free climbers, Moe is up and over the wall fast with ease, landing on two feet she calls out to the other side “Hurry! Hurry!”

Scrambling, Simon loses his footing on the fence, barely holding on, clutching so desperately his hand begins to bleed. He catches a glimpse behind him and he can smell the breath of the demon reptiles closing in. Secured again to the fence, Simon finds his footing and uses his leg strength to push him

higher. He is almost at the top. He reaches high with his hand as a gator leaps into the air to snatch him missing him by the thickness of a finger nail. Simon makes it over the fence tumbling to the ground. Moe runs to him to see if he is injured.

"I'm okay, I'm okay," he assures her. They breathe a sigh of relief, but it's one that comes too soon. The mountain of gators topples the fence running it over like a mower over grass. Simon and Moe stand shocked for a second, when without warning snakes fall from the trees above landing onto Moe's hair and shoulders.

She screams trying to free herself of the scaly serpents, flinging them in all directions, some of the gators seize the Moment and snatch a quick snack. "Here, follow me!" Simon grabs her arm and they make a run for it through the backwoods as the gators snakes and who knows what else relentlessly chase behind.

"I can't run anymore!" Moe says nearly out of breath. "We have to!" he pushes, not giving up on her. Moe's legs feel like concrete pillars running up sand, her pace slowing.

"Keep going! Faster!" he yells ahead of her. Finally, somehow they manage to make it to the top of Mount Peregrine. Nearing the edge Moe looks behind to see a pebble fall for what feels like minutes. There is nowhere else to go. Moe braces Simon, ready to meet their demise as the gators slowly stalk their trapped prey. The snap of their jaws ring out in the night sky. It was over. "It was nice knowing you!" she says, closing her eyes and squeezing him tight. He stares in horror at the dozens of gators chomping at their feet. When unexpectedly, the light of dawn hits, as rays of light shimmer across the plain below reaching the mountain top like a wave. Instantaneously, the possessed gators and snakes vanished into dust. All they can do is look at each other, "it worked?" she asked hesitantly. But Simon has no answer for her in that moment. Confused, cautiously Simon and Moe make their way back to the herpetological society. They get back to the sanctuary and to his surprise the fence is right where it should be, hardly looking touched. Simon is shocked but just too tired to think too hard about it, he finishes cleaning up and retrieves the rest of their belongings before Dr. Uspring would arrive for opening. The sun is up, their arms and faces are covered in grime and dirt (and cuts and bruises). Moe swipes at her pants trying to remove some dust.

"Hey, I'm sorry about last night. I shouldn't have risked your life like that. Especially not on a silly hypothesis or experiment," Simon says to Moe, while placing the last of the cleaning supplies back in the closet.

"Oh you know. it was an...uhh.... an adventure you know. Something for my memoir later in life," Moe says, choosing to see the glass half full.

"What're you going to tell your parents?" Simon asked.

"I told them I was staying at yours," she replies.

"I said the same thing," he says exhaustedly.

"Great, I'm sure that won't come back to bite us in the back end." Moe says sarcastically as she leaves to head home.

Relieved to have dodged both death *and* being grounded, Simon collapsed into bed as soon as he got home. He was out cold in seconds, sinking deep into sleep as the sunlight slowly shifted across the room from East to West, the dim amber rays of late afternoon sun shimmered off his window. At one point, around dinner time his parents knocked gently and peeked in. Seeing Simon still asleep, they left him alone, figuring rest was the best thing for an over-worried teenager, both completely unaware of how close he'd come to dying the night before.

When Simon finally stirred, the room was pitch dark. The sun had long since set. Disoriented and groggy, he rubbed his eyes, unsure if it was early morning or deep into the night.

"I have an idea!" he says to himself almost as if inspired in his sleep. He grabs his walkie taking a look at the clock to see it was almost midnight, he slept the whole day. "Moe! You there?" he waits. "Moe- this is important!" Simon yells into his walkie-talkie.

"Yes! Yes! I am here you dork, trying to get some sleep, I was almost snake food last night, remember? Why, what are you doing up this late? Don't tell me you have another idea." she says through a yawn.

"I have another idea" he says, wide awake now.

"Another one? Does this one involve us almost dying at the jaws of a 500 pound alligator? Moe asked, alarmed.

"Potentially. Don't watch anything scary tonight. We will talk in the morning," Simon warns her.

"Oh, I won't! Goodnight! " Moe says, her walkie tumbles off the bed as she turns over getting back to her slumber.

"Night." Simon turns up the volume on his walkie, just in case.

That night at his desk Simon composes a letter to the Mayor. He figures what better approach than a sensible argument supported by logic and experimental evidence that was presented in a manner that could be easily understood by anyone. Simon discusses his research, he provides the resources and even details his own close run-ins with death. He develops a reasonable plea. If the mayor was open minded he could save the city. Simon spent most of the night crafting it on an old typewriter his grandfather gave him. He won it in a sweepstakes. His Grandpa always was winning a sweepstake or something. But - Not only was this document his first official document to Congress. It was one that would save the city. Perhaps.

Simon walks to city hall the next day. It was a beautiful building only a few blocks from 12th street. Letter in hand he is rehearsing under his breath what he plans to say. Simon gets to the building, looking up at the tower of steps before him. He takes a deep breath to refocus. Using the directory in the building he locates and makes his way for the Mayor's office.

"Can I help you?" a woman asked in a not-so-helpful tone, sitting behind her massive wooden desk. She is dressed in a long skirt and collared shirt, buttoned all the way to the top. She wore a red sweater draped over her shoulders, her hair pinned up and tied back. Simon wondered if that was what was making her so uptight.

“Yes! I hope so! I was hoping to speak with the Mayor. It’s extremely urgent and could help save countless lives.” The urgency on Simon’s side could not be more clear and opposite from the one he is receiving on the other end.

“The Mayor is busy today. You’ll have to make an appointment, right now he’s about 4 months booked in advance.” She opens up a note book and flips pages and pages ahead, clipping her pen ready to write.

“4 months! That’s crazy, I need to talk to him today!” Simon pleads

“He has meetings all day, that simply cannot be moved,” she insists

“That’s okay, I can wait for him. It will only take a second!” he continues.

Her face turns a cherry red as she begins losing her patience with him “The mayor is not in office today, if you’d like to leave a message-” she barks back

“Wait, is he busy in meetings or not in office today-” Simon catches her twisting the story.

Flustered, she responds. “I said the Mayor is not-”. Ignoring her demands to halt, Simon puts his ear on the door, hearing muffled voices on the other side of the thick walnut door.

“Security!” the secretary calls out. “Security! Get this boy right this instance!” drawing attention from others in the building.

Shuffling in they go to apprehend the boy. When suddenly the door swings open. The mayor is wrapping up some ... business as a young woman scurries out of the office. Looking up and seeing all eyes on them, the Mayor maneuvers smoothly. “Hey there sport, how can I help you?.. Go easy there gentlemen. I love when I get to talk directly with my constituents.” The mayor wraps his arm around Simon’s shoulder.

“I’m not here to cause trouble,” Simon begins to explain.

The Mayor interrupts him “Ha! Of course you aren’t. You’re too smart for that,” he says with the wry smile of a ventriloquist “Well not with Big Rick and Al here anyway. “ implying it would in fact take two police officers to apprehend the peaceful teenager.

Starting over Simon tries again. “I’m not here to cause trouble...” all the words he planned went out the window. Stuttering now, “.Ju. Just... just please read this” Simon hands over the letter to the Mayor.

“Why certainly, son, messages to the Mayor are always read and always appreciated. Unhand him gentlemen, he looks perfectly okay conducting himself in a professional manner.” the Mayor says in his most hospitable tone.

Sheepishly, Simon exits city hall. What he thought would be a heroic scene quickly turned into one of disappointment and dread.

“Should we trespass him?” the unruly secretary suggests. “Or press charges? That boy is a menace. First Lillian Mayhem called about him snooping at the library. Then he was picked up creeping in the night just a few days ago by local officers . Now he comes here to terrorize and make demands.” she is fired up.

“Now now.. Let’s see what he has got to say first”. He knows better than to act rash. Better to be diplomatic. Think about reelection. Hold my next meeting,” the Mayor says, closing the door behind him. He sits down at his desk and he opens the envelope.

“Dear Mayor,

I know this is going to sound crazy, but I don’t think it’s evil spirits or a religious plague or anything people are saying right now. I have been doing some research and experiments and I don’t why but, I should just spit it out. Movies are coming to life and killing our neighbors. I know how this sounds so I have attached a reference page.” The mayor flips to the end to see a bibliography in perfectly correct format.

“Who the hell is this kid?” The Mayor says continuing to read.

“I can’t tell you why or how this is because I don’t know myself. But with your help, if you could tell the townspeople to stop watching movies, then maybe they’ll survive whatever it is that is going on...” The Mayor reads the message and takes a Moment to process the information in front of him. “Secretary!” he calls out, “I have an idea... Tell the press that there will be a conference today at noon. Make sure all the outlets are there. “This is my time to shine. Reelection here we come,” he says, almost giddy with excitement.

Before long the message was out and around half past noon journalists and reporters gathered outside town hall in anticipation of the Mayor’s “major announcement.” Simon is at home eagerly waiting as well. He sits on the couch and turns the channel to the local news. “Mom, Dad, come quick, it’s starting!” Grabbing the remote Simon turns up the volume as his parents come and sit on either side of him.

“We’re here! We’re here! What is all this commotion!” his Mom asked.

And it wasn’t just them, with school closed along with most shops, everyone was glued into the press conference. Simon thought to himself, “maybe I’ll get a medal. A service award for upstanding citizen. Maybe even a scientific discovery! Who knows ‘Teen in Town Save Too Many To Count!’” Simon pictures the headlines as that rude secretary hands him the key to the city, shaking the Mayor’s hand.

“Hello Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for joining us here today and for tuning in to what is to be a most important message. We should get straight to it. I know we had made suggestions prior to shutter our shops and close the schools due to the foul crimes our town has witnessed. Let’s take a moment to remember who we have lost recently, invaluable members of our community.

But, now I will be the first one to admit it. Those calling for the closing of town may be just as bad as the criminals and vandals terrorizing our streets! In fact - if they want us to be silent, we will be louder and more present than ever. That is why tomorrow night we will host a community movie night at the Mayhem Drive-In Theatre. This is a community event sponsored by City Hall, it will be free for all and we encourage everyone in town to join as we get treated to an early preview of “Play Dead” the new Spleenberg Movie!

After this joyous event, the schools will reopen and we implore our local shopkeepers and business people and townworkers to get back to business as usual.” The Mayor pauses waiting for the showers of applause but he is instead met with flashing camera lights and microphones from reporters. One so close his lips touch as he responds. “Sorry, Sorry, no time for questions! Urgent matters to attend to!” the Mayor says, scurrying off stage and ushered into his security vehicle by four brutish men in tight fitted suits.

Miles apart, they don’t know it, but Moe and Simon reactions are exactly the same; Jaw Dropped to the floor. Despite Simon’s very clear plea for sensibility to the mayor it was completely lost on him. Or worse, he thought. Simon heads straight for his room. His parents, confused by his reaction, can only watch as he stomps up the stairs.

“Do you think he is okay?” his Mom turns to his Dad.

“Eh he’s a teenager” his Dad responds nonchalantly, turning up the radio as the local university soccer team match was ready to kick off. The whistle sounded signaling the start of a comfortable ninety minutes for his Dad.

“I cannot believe it!” Simon says upstairs in his room with his walkie in hand.

“We should have known we were expecting too much from the airhead in charge. All I know is tomorrow is my night off and I ain’t working!” Moe says aloof and focused on some premium relaxation.

“What are we going to do?” he asked.

“I have no idea, maybe go mini golf?” she answers.

“I am not asking about your day off!! We have to think. There must be something we can do. Everyone in town is in danger!” Simon continues as panic sets in.

“One second my Mom is calling me, says the phone for me” Moe says. After a few minutes she returns, “You’ll never guess who just got called into work tomorrow for a fun mandatory shift. I am toast. I am prime rib. I might as well be listed on tomorrow’s menu as the appetizer!” Moe says in dread.

The morning sunrise comes too fast for Simon. While most folks in town were up early excited for the day's big event, he was up most of the night dreading it.. Between watching over his own shoulder, looking out for Mom and Dad, and racking his brain for plans to stop the potential madness, he barely slept a wink. Everyone else was thrilled, ignoring all warning signs of what had been going on the past few weeks, including his Mom and Dad. Rolling downstairs Simon is somehow even more disheveled than usual.

"Hi dear! We thought you were going to sleep all the way through breakfast. Here come sit, there is still plenty," his Mom says cheerfully.

"Hey there kiddo, looking tired, you sleep alright?" his Dad chimes in. It's the complete opposite from the last couple weeks of concern and worry, like a switch flipped. .

"Yeah I am all good Dad. How about you?" Simon asked, trying to move the spotlight off of him and onto someone or something else.

"I slept like a sloth! Had to get a good night's rest, we will be out partying tonight!" his Dad replies eagerly.

"Are you sure it's a good idea? There have been a lot of dangerous crimes lately." Simon cautions them.

"Oh honey, it does sound nice doesn't. I'm sure Moe's parents will be there. It has been too long since we got out of the house ourselves and, well, with everyone there looking out for one another. I think it'll be alright, no?" His Mom is hopeful of a calm and safe evening.

"I don't know Mom, I ... I am just worried, I guess" Simon says, taking a bite from an apple. From there, Dad changes the subject, talking about his plans for a halloween costume this year, but Simon can only think about one thing.

"I am going to take a nap before the big event," he says.

"That's the spirit, Simon! A little fun isn't going to kill us," his Dad says, patting him on the back.

Upstairs in his room, too worried to sleep, Simon looks over his investigation board one more time. He sits down and jots down some ideas and a list of items on his notepad Before he knows it, it's almost 6pm. The family is getting ready to head to the drive-in.

"Hey! Are you ready?I got all the snacks packed." his Dads says with his hands full.

Simon rolls up on his bike from the garage, "Dr. Uspring, needs me to check on something at the sanctuary, can I meet you all there?" Simon says, wearing his work shirt.

"Really?! Are you sure? We could give you the ride?" his Mom offers.

"NO NO! Make sure to get a good spot, towards the back, not too close you know, especially in case it's a crap movie we can get out early," Simon yells already halfway down the driveway now.

"Honey, it's Spleenberg. It's going to be a masterpiece!" his Mom, a big fan, assures him.. They pack up the car and he rides off.

Meanwhile, Moe is at work arriving for her shift. Annoyed to death and not expecting any overtime pay for her efforts she is not thrilled to be there for so many reasons. Murmuring curses under her breath as she restocks the cups at the snack bar she sees her manager, Jeff. At first she walks right by him, happy to avoid eye contact all together, when she remembers, she needs Jeff. Stopping in her tracks she reverses and gets into his path.

“Heyyyy, Jeff!” Moe puts on her friendliest voice. “How about a comedy to start the night, you know a little palette cleanser before the main event!”

“A comedy? What about the Spleenberg double feature I had planned and advertised”, he fires back, referencing a quickly hand drawn sign he photocopied and hung in exactly two spots.

“Yeah - I just... I don’t know. Double Spleenberg, it might just take away from your big premier.” Moe attempts to sway her rigid boss.

“Hmmm,” Jeff is suspicious but he is hearing her out. “And what do you suggest, especially on such short notice?” he asked.

“What about a classic? I know you can whip something up Jeff, heck what would this place be without you,” Moe leans into, anything to help her save the world she thinks to herself.

“Fine, we will play ‘Step-Sisters’. We will bring them in with laughter and send them home screaming!” Jeff says with a diabolical look on his face.

“Let’s hope not,” she says under her breath.

“What was that? “ he asked.

Moe forgets that he can hear like a bat. “Nothing!” she says feigning innocence.

“Then why are you here and not at the ticket booth!” Jeff uses his time spent walking out to the storage room for one more critique. In a hurry she drops off the cups to the snack bar and she grabs her walkie from behind the slushie machine,

”Alert. Alert to, nerd.” Moe tries to get a hold of Simon.

“How many times do I have to tell you these communication lines are serious and sophisticated!” Simon radios back.

Moe rolls her eyes. “At least a thousand more times than you’ve said already. Anyway, Phase 1 of the plan is complete,” she says excitedly, proud to have pulled it off. “Jeff went for it — we are playing ‘Step-Sisters.’”.

“Awesome, hopefully it buys me some time for the back up plan. I am in the middle of that now. I will see you in an hour,” he says as his plans gain Momentum.

“Fingers crossed for phase 2” Moe says.

"Fingers crossed. Over and out." Simon puts his walkie into his backpack and continues his mission.

Moe heads to the ticket booth. People are excited driving up in packed cars with friends and family, the line is all the way down the street.

"4 tickets please," a man asked from the window of his car.

"Are you sure? You might be killed tonight," Moe says plain faced.

"Sarcasm right? Hilarious!" the car erupts into laughter "So spooky" someone calls from the back as they roll in happily. She can only roll her eyes. "Next!" she yells as the next car rolls up. To Moe's annoyance, it just so happens to be the school bully, Brenden Kartt and his girlfriend, Heather, roll up in the candy red convertible, "Two tickets please!"

"Come right in!" Moe says, cashing them out quickly, providing some of her swiftest service of the night. "Find yourselves a nice comfortable spot up front" she says connivingly. Driving off, she looks at the long line of cars still waiting to get in. It looks like the whole town is there. After everyone is settled with their spots and snacks, the lights flash signaling the start of the first movie. The expecting crowd is waiting for an old Spielberg classic only to be surprised entirely when the intro for Step-Sisters begins.

"I love this movie," a bozo shouts from the crowd drawing laughter as everyone settles in to enjoy the twist. Most are just happy to be out and about again.

After sunset, Simon rolls up to the ticket booth but it's empty. The place is packed. He looks up at the movie playing and laughs at a scene. He had seen the movie only about a couple dozen times. Practically could recite it line for line. He looked at his watch and figured there was about twenty minutes left or so. For a moment he remembers this is exactly what Autumn should have been about. Kids running on the lawn. Date night for Moms and Dads. Students on first dates. Or second if they were fortunate enough. At least tonight, they had that in some way. He took it all in from afar. He saw his parents' car, wanting to go to them, but he knew he had to stay and stand guard.

While Simon watches over from the back of the drive-in, Moe sneaks back into the employee closet, and finds the reel for the new Spleenberg movie. She takes the reel from the projection room. Looking left and right in a panic she heaves the reel, sending it rolling down the hill out of sight into the woods behind the parking lot. She quickly heads to the snack bar trying to go unnoticed. The first film ends and people are up and about for snacks and the restroom. Moe is filling up popcorn when suddenly she hears Jeff screaming her name.

"Uhh-ohhh," she says to herself trying to look busy.

"Where is it?!? Where is the Spleenberg reel?" Jeff is fuming so much his glasses are fogging up. He wipes them on his shirt and places them back on his head in haste.

"No clue Jeff, honest!" Moe says with a poker face of a professional.

"It was right where I left it!" Jeff gestures "I had it all set, and now it's gone!" His pale tone has shifted to red, reminiscent of the chromatophores of an octopus.

"Well there's always the Step-Sister 2!!" Moe says briskly.

"Ha! Jokes, you're filled with jokes, you're a little joke machine aren't you. From jokeland! Joking around!" she thinks she finally loosened the last screw, Jeff's gone crazy.

"Jeff, It's okay, the people will understand," Moe says, consoling him as he rummages through his bag. "Whoa Jeff, it's not that serious, don't kill your-." But what he pulls from the bag is way scarier than a gun.

"Here we are!" Jeff kisses a movie reel. Labeled with the new Spleenberg title, "Play Dead". Her heart sickens in confusion and despair.

"I knew getting a back up was a good idea," he says, kissing the reel again, as if it was his first ever kiss - which - Moe thinks it might be.

'I wouldn't miss the biggest film event of the year," Jeff yells with a maniacal laughter.

Moe starts to freak out. Running to grab her walkie she sees Simon in the distance and makes a hard pivot straight to him. He's at the entrance on his bike with night vision goggles scoping the parameters.

"Hey, secret agent dweeb," she greets him like usual.

"Hi," he says focused

"Where did you even get all this stuff and those!" referring to the goggles on his face. Along with that he is stacked to the tee with supplies. Flares and fireworks, a bat, some flashlights, and more.

"I went to Mr. Franks Hardware store and made a few other stops on 12th street," he says, digging through the bag.

"Aren't those stores all closed?" Moe asked.

"Yeah... And.. I had to borrow some stuff," Simon says matter of factly.

Moe doesn't say it but she's impressed with his guts. Not every nerd would "borrow" supplies from the general store while everybody was distracted.

"Bad News," she says sheepishly.

"Yeah?" he says calmly, unwavering.

The credits begin to roll. Which pretty much explains it for her. Phase 2 of the plan was not a success. Despite their best efforts to dispose of the film. It was now beginning.

"Here take this", he throws her a pocket knife, a flare, a tube of pepper spray and some candy, after all, it was almost Halloween, he thought it might lift the mood.

“Tell your family and mine to get home. And anyone else that will listen to you” Simon says as they are left with the back up plan at this point.

“And if they don’t?” Moe asked, doubting that she would change their mind.

“Then they don’t,” he says with assertion.

Walking away back toward the lot of parked cars she opens a package of assorted flavor SugarSuckers immediately, her favorite, “I need this right now”. she says, savoring the taste of the first bite. Her walk urgently turns into a run as she looks for her parents.

Simon glances at his watch. It’s almost ten o clock. The movie starts. A quick jump scare has everyone hollering, laughing and having fun. The laugh retreats to silence as everyone gets drawn into the opening scenes. It is intensely scary right from the start. Couples squeeze tighter together with their arms around one another and even the school bullies are attending to the task at hand for a change, sitting on the back of their pick up trucks towards the front. Scanning the field, Simon sees his neighbor, an older woman, Ms. Pam Brezly, she used to love to go to the movies with her husband, that was until he passed. Simon doesn’t recall seeing her outside the house since. Observing her, he watches as something catches her eye. Following her gaze he can see something moving in the trees beyond her car. Already on his bike, he sets his directions her way peddling furiously. Meanwhile, at full pace now, Moe finds her family’s car almost sprinting right by it at first. “Mom! Dad! You have to get out of here. Something terrible is about to happen!” She says through gasps of breath.

“The movie just started, fruit loop” her Dad says.

“Sweetie, what are you talking about?” her Mom adds.

Still trying to catch her breath, “there’s a curse or something. Something is happening. Trust me you’re in danger! Everyone is! There is no time to explain please!Please!” Moe pleads to the blank, confused stares from her parents. “Ugh! I gotta go!” She reluctantly sticks to the plan remembering what he said. Moe runs, dipping her head in and out of cars. “Go go! Go! Run, get out of here!” She draws some attention but no one is moved to listen. Her parents exit their car, worried, they watch as she continues to run. She gets to the boy's family. “Please, you have to go. Now!” she yells.

“Moe, dear, what is it!” Simon's Mom sees the concern on her face.

“You have to get home now! Something dangerous is about to happen, please! Please listen!” Moe begs them.

“Where’s Simon? He was supposed to meet us here hours ago, is he alright?” his Mom's worry quickly grows.

“He’s fine. At least for now. Simon asked me, no, he begged me to have you listen!” Moe continues to urge his parents.

“Okay, okay we will go,” Simon's Dad chimes in trying to settle the rising tidal wave of emotion “Honey, let’s pack up quickly!” his Mom adds.

Up in the front, the school bully is out in front of his car checking to make sure it's still polished and is suddenly taken down by a strange shadow. Folks in the crowd laugh as they suspect it to be some teenage tomfoolery, just another prank. But his unsuspecting partner in crime goes to check on the commotion. He watched as Brenden returned to his feet in a daze. Before he can gather his thoughts he is speared by a speedy black figure. They tumble to the ground together as his friend stares in horror. The bully is lifted from the ground above the black figure's head. The moonlight reflects off bright sharp teeth as he tears the teen in two.

"WEREWOLF!" the traumatized teen screams as he watches his friend since diapers get torn to shreds limb by limb. Suddenly creatures pour from the forest edge. Birds, rabbits, frogs, groundhogs, deers, and raccoons came from the trees all toward the townspeople. The screams draw attention, including Simon who is all the way on the far side of the lot. He is helping the old lady to get in her car and go.

"I think I saw my little noodle." she says, referring to the puppy she got after her husband passed.

"I'm sure noodles are at home Ms. Brezly" Simon says, trying to comfort her. "You need to get home and see her right away okay?" He says closing her door for her. She starts the car and zips off towards the exit. He strikes some flares, waving them in the air trying to get the attention from others.

"This way this way!" he yells as loud as he can. Either ignored or unseen, it's not enough. Riding his bike toward the danger he swings the baseball bat at the zombified rabbits hopping toward him but he's tackled and pinned to the ground by a dog-like zombie. Thinking quickly, he pulls his lighter from his pocket and burns the demon dog, freeing himself from its razor sharp claws.

"What the hell?! She was right?!" Simon says to himself, freaked out to see a snarling face that looked just like Ms. Brezly's dog, Noodle, except... undead. Moe sees him waving the flares, but no one is responding to him. Those aware are running like chickens with no heads, while some don't seem to know what has begun at all. In the midst of the chaos there are still a few dead set on the night's planned events.

"What about the movie?!" a man yells, standing out in the open only to be trampled by a passing zombie deer, impaled by its antlers. The man splits in two barely breaking the beast's stride. Walking, Moe sees an abandoned car. She lights her flare and uses it to start a fire, tossing it into the abandoned passenger seat, before looking for more people to help or alert. In seconds, the car is engulfed in flames.

"Fire!" someone shouts..

"My theatre!" Jeff sees the blaze from a distance and runs with a bucket of water. Needing much, much more. The fire draws everyone's attention who begin funneling out in all directions, causing a stampede of zombies and cars. Riding his bike, Simon attempts to corral everyone to the exit safely. He maneuvers between the cars dodging left and right trying to make his way to the front of the line as the jammed cars fight to get to safety. The threat grows as countless undead animals overrun the drive in, overwhelming the townspeople. Her family and his are finally in the line to get out, stuck behind the line of others, looking like sitting ducks. Simon leads an escort out of cars out of the grounds and through town.

"Follow me!" he shouts. Sirens fill the sky as firefighters and police trucks fly on the road in the direction of the theater, zipping past the convoy getting out. "I hope Moe is alright" Simon worries as he

continues down the path. He looks behind him to see a line of cars maneuvering down the trail to the theatre exit. He pedals furiously on his bike making to the exit as cars speed up past him and head to their homes. Simon rides down 12th street passing the local shops with a flare in his hand trying to draw the attention of the rapidly approaching foe.

People reach the neighborhood and dash from their cars to their homes rushing to lock the doors behind them, drawing curtains and turning off lights, as they arrive safely. Outside, undead cats and dogs scratch the walls trying to get inside for a midnight snack but it's to no avail. The herd focuses more and more on Simon. It begins to storm heavily making the streets slick and visibility low. Simon focuses on the road ahead. He is almost at the edge of town, Simon thinks maybe if he can bring them beyond the city limits maybe they would disappear. Through the fog, an undead dog attacks, causing him to veer off into woods and crash into the veranda. Getting up swiftly from the ground, panicking, he looks around, but the dog is nowhere to be found. Simon does a quick examination and is lucky enough to escape the attack mostly unscathed. His bike included. Exhausted but not giving up, he gets his bike off the ground when out of nowhere he is swarmed by bats from the trees above. He drops the bike and makes a run for it. Noticing where he is, Simon makes a dash uphill. Close behind he is chased by bats and rabbits, frogs and critters making his way to the top of Mount Peregrine. "Plan C" he thinks in his head. At full sprint through the woods he sees the clearing and dashes to the top of the hill, hoping for some day break. But unfortunately, it's still dark. With his pack on his back and baseball bat in hand he swings for the fences at the zombie onslaught. He stands battles and fights off the demons wave after wave until finally it stops. He bashes the last zombie rabbit off the hillside. It's quiet for a moment. He did it. He takes a deep breath, when through the thickened wood, the black figure from the drive in appeared, the werewolves' skull jutted forward beneath coarse, blood-matted fur, ears twitching at the faintest sound. Amber eyes glowed from deep sockets, burning with hunger. Saliva dripped from its jagged fangs, each breath carrying the stench of rot and raw meat. The beast's chest heaved with ragged snarls, shoulders rolling with corded muscle. Long arms swung low, ending in hooked claws that scraped the dirt. Its legs bent at unnatural angles, driving heavy paws into the earth, leaving deep prints.. Seeing the terror, Simon almost loses hope. He hides behind a tall oak tree amongst the thickly wooded area.

"I hope there are still a few intact organs to donate after all this" he says, coming to grips with his last Moments.. The sounds of thunder and rain are drowned out as Simon closes his eyes bracing for the pain.

"Are you there?! Are you okay?" Simon hears from his backpack. Moe is just getting home as she rushes upstairs on her walkie. "Simon, where are you!" she pleads.

It's just the lift he needs. Reaching into his bag, he grabs his walkie, "I'm okay. And I have a plan" he says, as the idea comes together. It's a plan. He's not sure it will work, but it's a plan. On the Edge of Mount Peregrine, he is surrounded now as the werewolf and friends close in on him. From his bag he pulls up two fire workers and a lighter. Lightning the fuse they fire off into the night sky, drawing the attention of the undead demons, buying him some time. Sneakily, he manages to get around them circling back to his bike. But the big Werewolf sniffs it out and begins the chase again. Pedaling back rapidly, Simon heads toward the herpetological society. *His* turf. Quickly unlocking the doors, he enters, through the poisonous snake hall, he unlatches a few of the tanks. Closing the door behind him and through to the next room he pops open the frog tanks as some of the most venomous use the opportunity to hop out of their habitats. Running to the kitchen he takes food from the freezers. The gators wake up ready for a late night snack or early breakfast depending on the specific sleep schedule. Simon readies into position as the zombie werewolf bursts through the door. Through the maze of the society grounds, he leaps over the gator pit and into the guarded maintenance pen, sending a few raw chickens in behind him. The

unknowing werewolf dashes into the pit after Simon only to be swarmed by the ravenous gators and crocs. The werewolf cries out into the night sky as the unsuspected rabbits and critters follow behind, providing a hearty feast for the tenants of the pit. Simon watches from the safety of the pen. The noise frightens him as he takes cover until eventually it fades away. There was silence again. Simon sits for a while just to be sure.

Eventually, cautious, Simon peers out from the small square window of the door, the evil appears gone as the first light of day hits. He quietly sneaks past the full and sleeping gators. Going back to the venom hall he sees it's all clear. One snake is already in its cage. He closes it up. The other is the gaboon viper he's familiar with. "Come here buddy, it's bedtime." Simon reaches but The snake strikes, freezing him stunned in fear. It happened so quickly. Opening his eyes fearing the worst, he sees the snake with its fangs deep into a zombie rat. Saving him from the last of the night's terror. The snake takes his meal back into his cage on the lower shelf. Taking a deep breath, he finds a broom and gets to cleaning up the trashed rooms. Simon makes sure the herpetological society looks perfectly untouched.

Moe arrives as he is finishing the final touches "You're alive !" she says, practically tackling him, they embrace in a hug. "You made it! You were right! We were right! That's Science!" she says happily giving herself a good pat on the back as well.

"I ... don't think ..." Simon questions how scientific it all really was but is just happy to be alive right now. His parents come rushing in. "Mom Dad!" He runs to them as they share a family hug.

"Moe said you'd be here," his Mom gestures to her as she joins the family hug.

"Aww you're gonna make me emotional!" Moe adds.

They head home for some much needed rest as they and the town had been severely damaged by the demon zombies, with shops signs and awnings torn to the ground, lamp posts and signs tossed like paper. Cleaning up what they could over the next few days, the people in town kept an eye on the sun and were inside well before the sunset. Everyone was quiet and eager to see how the night would go. The town was quieter than ever as all anyone did was peer and peek out in the window in nervous nosiness. Some may have caught on, others may just not have been able to stomach another scary movie yet. But that night Simon explained the whole thing to his family. Later, the family gathers for a movie, "should we?" his Mom poses.

"There is only one way to know if it worked right?" his Dad says supporting the hypothesis. Feeling brave they start the movie, only to quickly fall asleep, still exhasuted from the night before. Simon included, the popcorn bucket still in hand as he snored on the recliner.

Morning arrives, he wakes up from the warmth of the sun shining through the window. Jolting to a stance, Simon sees his parents still sleeping on the couch. He puts on the news. It's news as usual, boring, talking about taxes or stocks or some retirement something or other, but no crimes committed. No evil toys, or natural disasters, no mafia bosses, or high priests, no aliens, or sharks, and most gratefully, no werewolves. He goes to the kitchen and turns on the radio, Music is playing again rather than the grim reports of fallen neighbors. Simon dances on the pattern tiled floor.

The days went by and slowly everyone was out and about again, helping one another clean up and get back to tip top shape. It felt like the town was back to itself again, like home. And just in time for the biggest night of the year.

"You ready to trick'r' treat or what?" Moe asked.

"You bet!" Simon replies.

Simon hears some kids playing in the park as he rides his bike through town, Moe not too far behind him. They're dressed up in costumes. Somehow, somehow, they managed to save the day, the season, and most importantly, Halloween! Simon is just happy to be out enjoying the nice weather. Things were back to how it was supposed to be. Moe and Simon roll up to some friends who already have a big bag of candy, it looks store bought. "I figured this saves us some time," the friend says, smiling ear to ear..

"Isn't collecting the candy like half the fun?" Moe asked, unsure how to feel about this.

"Yeah but - did you see that new nature documentary, it's about coral reefs, we could watch in my basement," Simon's friend suggests.

"Are all of you dorks?" Moe follows up, grabbing a handful of candy from the stack. When suddenly, a piercing scream rings out in the night. Simon and Moe look at one another.

End.