

Inner Terrestrials and The
Gireens

The Discovery

John Greene Jr.

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John M. Greene Jr.

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If you ever get down on yourself or are feeling bad, do yourself a favor. Look up at the stars and sky at night and ponder this. Yes, ponder. How many of those stars, planets, galaxies, or solar systems out there have life? Probably some but we don't know. What we know is our planet has life, lots of life and you are part of it. You are special and one of a kind on this beautiful planet full of life. There is no one exactly like you on the planet or in the universe. Feel special because you are. Think about it. Out of all that space out there, you are one of a kind. Amazing. Appreciate what you are, don't get caught up in small stuff or worry too much. Take a step back and love the wonder of this universe, of this planet. Appreciate your special life with all its goods and bads, and ups and downs. Enjoy all the life on this planet and universe.

Just don't get bitten by it...

INNER TERRESTRIALS AND THE GIREENS

THE DISCOVERY

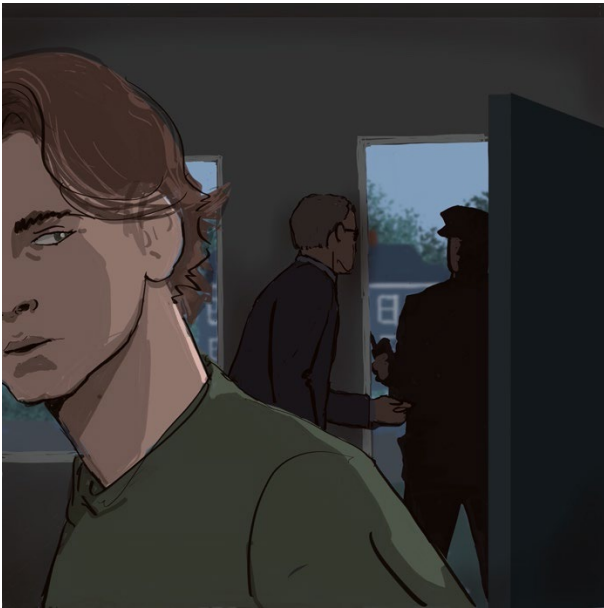
Aliens are here. Not ON Earth, but IN the Earth.
Their enemies are coming for them...and us.
Can 2 teens and a cyborg army save our planet?



BY JOHN GREENE JR.

1

Another Bad Day



2

Jack ran. There were exactly three things that led Jack to run for his life: a bad safari accident, a five-foot piece of beef jerky, and a boulder.

The safari accident happened three months ago, although it seemed like yesterday. It was a fine day in May. Uncle Bob was taking care of Jack while their parents were in Kenya on safari. Jack was watching a movie, the Green Berets, starring John Wayne. Uncle Bob was Jack's favorite, but he was due back to active duty as a Marine serving overseas. He was in Bravo 23 B-company, a platoon commander during the Iraq war, and stayed in the service when the war ended.

When the doorbell rang, Jack watched as his Uncle Bob opened the door.

As soon as Jack saw the police officer standing there, he knew something was wrong. The officer shuffled his feet back and forth on the welcome mat and gripped his police hat in his hand.

"What's up, officer?" said his uncle.

The officer looked down at Jack.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but your parents, David and Melissa O'Reilly, are missing."

There was more talking, but Jack wasn't listening. The officer left. Jack sat stunned.

"What are we going to do now?" Jack asked.

"Not sure, but there aren't many options. Can't have a 13-year-old living alone," Uncle Bob said.

"You will need to stay with your grandparents. I don't know for how long."

"No way! I am not leaving here. I am not leaving my girlfriend and friends to live in some crazy place across the country."

"Girlfriend? She's a girl and a friend. I will give you that."

Jack's uncle looked at him and sighed.

"Your parents are missing Jack. You know the drill, but this time it's a little different. I can't be here to wait for them." Uncle Bob said. He was usually tough on Jack, but not this time. He could tell this was different. Jack's parents really seemed missing this time.

Jack didn't care. This was the fourth time they went missing, which meant they got interested in some place or thing on their trip and extended it while telling nobody. They were probably partaking in the local festivities, customs, or rituals. Especially if it had some kind of local

beverage involved. They were a little too on the happy side to come home now. His parents would be back soon. He could wait it out.

It's not like it made a big difference to Jack. His parents were never around. They worked at a museum in Boston, called the Harvard Museum of Natural History, which meant it had a bunch of old crap in it. They were always getting more old crap. Some crap came from Africa, some crap from Columbia or Mexico or China. From all over the place. Every month on a Saturday, Jack would hang out in the museum. He loved going into the exhibits and hang out. For a museum with a bunch of old useless stuff, it had a modern Climate Change exhibit. Yes, modern, which was good but bad because it was true. The Earth was dying. Jack liked this Earth and was going to do his part in maintaining it. His parents, because of their job were always picking the crap up at the airport in Boston or going somewhere far away to see if the crap was real. This safari, as they called it, was one such trip. They were supposed to be gone a month. After 5 weeks Jack was getting a little worried, at 6 a little more and at 8 weeks he gave in to the realization that something was wrong. They were missing this time, but Jack figured they would be back, maybe. There was another problem and for Jack, it was much bigger. Uncle Bob was going back to active duty in the Middle East. Back to hunting terrorists and protecting villages in the mountains. He told Jack that these were good, hardworking kind people that had been put in the middle of a war. It was his job to help keep them safe. So Uncle Bob, Jack's teacher, his favorite, was going away for a long time and as his uncle always said, "Jack, it's a dangerous place and I might not make it back." His luck might run out. Jack would miss him but for now, he was mad.

Jack stormed out of the house and came back two hours later. Uncle Bob was still sitting in the same place.

"I talked to Grandma and Grandpa. You can stay with them for a while, with conditions." Uncle Bob said.

"What conditions?"

"They weren't very specific, but something about keeping hidden."

"I'm not going. One of my friends will let me stay with them. I will talk to them tomorrow."

And Jack did. He talked to the Rowes, the Franks, the Myer's, the Moseley's, the Stones, the Gurneys, and many more. The good news was they were all very sympathetic. The bad news was there was no room at

the Inn. Jack was on his own. He felt betrayed and very, very angry.

I have a going-away present for all of them.

For the Rowes—fleas.

Fleas are fun, and they seem to like any living creature. The Rowes had three dogs, a cat, one gerbil, and a Pot Belly pig named Pete. Best friends for their new fleas.

For the Franks, hey, let's be frank—termites.

Their house looks like they have already eaten it. The more the merrier.

For the Meyer's with the five kids—bed bugs.

They could share them with the Jones since they are very close and live next door. Those little bed bugs don't even have to take a bike to the neighbors.

For the Moseley's, something special—stink bugs.

These guys didn't know if you squish a stink bug they attract? More stink bugs! Oh, yeah, they love each other's stink, but the Moseley's won't.

For the Stones, Jack thought the most appropriate attack was La Cucaracha, the cockroach. They were neat freaks. This would drive them from their house. That would be nice.

For the Gurneys, a combination would do—brown recluse spiders and new shoes for all the family.

They needed shoes and brown recluse love new shoes.

"Jack!" Uncle Bob said, waking Jack from his revenge plans.

"Time to go."

So, in the end, Jack had to go live with his grandparents.

2

Jack's Escape

Jack stomped upstairs. He wasn't going out west. What were they thinking? 'Go west young man, find your fortune!'. Not for Jack, it was *Go west young man, leave your life and live with some old people you hardly know. Be miserable young man, but get the heck out of here.* Jack couldn't believe the rage brewing inside him. Not again, no way, just when things were getting normal. Jack sat on his bed, thinking. What to do, what to do?

Decision made. He got up and packed. Not for New Mexico or wherever they thought they would send him. No, he packed for a different trip. He had been thinking about it for a while and it made sense. He could do it. Live off the land. He was close enough to the Canadian border to sneak in and become a Canadian. Eh? That would be fun, plus they needed more people up there. A lot of trees, few people. He packed some survival clothes, but most of his survival gear and weapons were out at the fort. He signaled his friends on their private chat line he was calling an emergency meeting. It was go time. They would be ready and would help even if their useless parents

couldn't.

"You ready?" Uncle Bob asked, seeing Jack slinking down the stairs.

"Almost. Give me another half hour." Jack said and before his uncle could answer, Jack was up the stairs and into his room. He figured he had a half hour head start. His uncle would try to follow him, but this time, Jack was ready. He would put his informal training to use. His uncle would never catch him.

Jack escaped out his back window as he had done a thousand times before. Out the window, onto the porch roof, climb down the trellis and onto the back lawn. He ran, crouching, to the back shed where he kept his dirt bike. Jack always had the bike ready to go. He was always ready, like his uncle taught him, for any situation. He walked the bike down the back ramp of the shed. The bike was a Taotao 110cc DB14 Dirt Bike, a blue one. It had knobby tires and a powerful engine. They made electric dirt bikes, but Jack liked the sound his made as he gunned it down through the woods. He kept it pointed toward the forest and hidden from the house so he could make a quick getaway at any time. Jack knew he had little time, but if he made any noise, he was toast. His uncle had the hearing of a bat. A big mean bat. He would walk the bike until he got clear of the house.

When Jack was a few hundred yards from his house, he hopped on the dirt bike and coasted down the hill. He hit the clutch when he reached the bottom, and the dirt bike roared to life. Jack hit the throttle, changing gears, and raced off towards the logging road to get to the fort. It was about a 1/2 mile to where the logging road turned into a narrow path through the woods. Jack took a detour. He eyed the golf course off in the distance to the east of him and smiled. It looked nice and peaceful, all green and happy. Wimpy golfers playing badly but being polite to each other.

'Oh, nice shot Jim.'

'Thank you John, can I tend the pin for you?'

Tend this, Jack thought. Jack didn't play golf, but he loved the golf course. He turned toward the course and gunned it. *Just one brief trip through my favorite course before I go.*

Jack hit the entrance to the course, going around 35 mph and accelerating. He raced past gaping golfers as he took his dirt bike straight up the fourth fairway, cutting a divot three hundred yards long. He launched himself over the sand trap onto the green, a feat few

hackers can do, and took a right turn at the hole taking about 2 feet of turf with him.

Jack yelled, "Fore! Three! Sixteen! Twenty-two!" as he raced around the course. He gunned it, back wheels spinning, dirt flying, and onto the fifth tee. Luckily it had rained a little so he could try out his new knobby tires, supposedly good for any terrain and a putting green was any terrain. He couldn't resist a few donuts around the hole. He headed down the fifth tee and then fairway, deciding on the fly that he would be only playing 9 today.

From behind him, Jack could hear sirens, a lately occurrence for him, but he wasn't concerned. They were 5 miles off in the valley to the south. Jack was heading northeast, through the densest and darkest park of the White Mountain National Forest. He'd be gone in a second. Jack hit the ninth green, turning most of it into dirt and clumps of turf. He turned sharp right after the clubhouse, which was really just a broken-down trailer that housed a broken-down old golf pro that gave the local golfers a hard time for just existing. Jack turned onto an old logging road he's been on a thousand times and gunned it. He popped a wheely and narrowly missed a stray groundhog, fat, slow, and now perplexed that he, no she, didn't have knobby tire tracks in her fur.

"Hey land beaver." Jack said as he flew by.

Jack sped on, sirens now a distant noise. He heard the steady whine of the engine as he made his way through the woods back to his hideout.

As he approached, he whistled. The hidden door to his hideout swung open, and he raced inside, shutting the door behind him. He had rigged the door to open when he whistled by attaching a voice recognition device to the garage door opener they borrowed. Jack and his buddies had taken an old garage door, covered it with sticks and branches and leaves so it looked like part of the forest. They dug out a small, 8 foot by 10 foot garage in the hill to the right of the hideout. They used old mining timber for the supports, making it look, at night, just like the beginnings of a mine shaft. They had planned to dig a mine in the fall. There were plenty of rumors of gold running through the hills and mountains. Jack was more interested in the rumors of strange hairy creatures coming out of the earth and wandering around. He had never seen one, but the old-timers say they come from the near the flume gorge in Franconia notch, which was only a few miles away.

Jack entered Camp Black Flag, or as Craig called it, the Great Guano

Fortress. There were plenty of bats around at night. He had plenty of supplies there, including several guns, his Henry Silverboy 22LR and a Smith and Wesson 22 revolver. His father had called them pop guns, his Uncle Bob had called them useful. Bigger calibers would come later, he would say, but you could do anything with a 22.

"Jack. A 22-caliber pistol is the most deadly gun in the world. It is not a toy," his uncle told him.

Jack knew. He slipped the other day going down a rocky slope, and the pistol went off, taking a small chunk out of his left hiking boot. Metal toe boots to boot. Since then, he'd been careful; he liked his toes.

Jack and his friends built the fort over a couple of years, adding features as often as they could buy, borrow, or steal things. It had an accompanying village in the woods, off the grid, completely. The Great Guano Fortress flew a black flag. They called themselves the 'Hekawi's' after the Indian tribe in the F-Troop TV show of the 60s. The gang loved the old TV shows.

They setup a small farm of solar panels charging three banks of batteries, each bank six high. They could run everything they needed, provided they didn't run the A/C too long. They had two wood stoves they requisitioned from a local abandoned house to heat the place. It had battery powered lights, TV, CB radio, plinking range they built, and a long-range shooting area. Jack's friend Andy used to say that the CB radio was for contacting long, dead relatives. After all what else can you use a CB radio for these days? The back of the hut was a cave hollowed out and cleaned of bat guano. The village hugged the trees and sat in the last field before hundreds of miles of forest. You had Maine forest to the east, Canadian forest to the north, and Vermont forest to the southwest. A series of kid-made camouflage roofs, which they rolled up mechanically, covered the whole complex. They jury-rigged an old setup from a closed business in Berlin, NH just up the road. One of those businesses you only saw in really old movies. One that had the red and white awning that covered the sidewalk. They hooked it all up to their generator, which was hooked to the batteries, which was hooked to the solar panels which were hooked to the ground so someone couldn't steal them if they found them.

The fort had a dueling ring, like the slave camps in Rome, where they used to train the gladiators. Jack's gang would take turns battling each other. They made spears out of the local Sugar maple trees, although

birch was preferred if they could get it. The shields were metal trash can lids. They made bows and arrows from the same trees. The arrow point, if they could find them, were made of animal bones. The good news was they didn't have ****that**** many accidents. There was the lost finger time, the broken leg time, the stitches times, the put your eye out with that thing time and the worse, by far, was the running with scissors time. Forget about the zip line, that was a disaster. All in all, most of them survived.

Jack headed to the back of the fort to get the rest of the survival items for his bag. He had little time. His uncle was a marine and could track anything. He repacked his bug out bag. He checked the list, which he kept in the bag.

That's when he realized the first problem, and it was a big one. His hatchet was back at the house. That was his survival lifeline, it was his protection. He had been throwing it at the neighbor's cat and left it stuck in the Apple tree when he heard his uncle come home. It was still there, sticking to the cat's picture. The hatchet, or survival ax as his uncle calls his, has a saw, ax blade, shovel, fire starter, and many small tools, including a rope cutter. It was light and carried on his belt, but not this time. This time, he would have to do without it. He grabbed his water sanitizing bottle. Although up here in god's country the water was pretty fresh and cold, his uncle had taught him to never rely on the obvious but plan for the worst. Especially when you're out in the wilderness by yourself and water was essential for life. He brought his water filtration system with water purification tablets. Boil the water, use the tablets and the water is safe most of the time. The other times, well, it could be death or worse. You'll get sick and it will come out of you so fast and often there aren't enough leaves in the forest to wipe yourself. He brought his headlamp, bear spray and his hunting knife. He'd take his Bowie knife, which was a foot long, instead of his forgotten hatchet. He had his sleeping bag, dried fruits and nuts, matches, lighters, matches and more lighters. Jack slung the pack over his back, grunting.

"Maybe I brought a little too much," he said to himself, turning to leave.

"Where are you going?" Voices said from behind him. It was part of the gang. There was Andy, Manuel, Pete, Moto, Michael and Mark. Andy was a girl and Mark used to be. Manuel was here from Puerto

Rico. His family moved to New Hampshire after a big storm wiped out power on most of the island. Pete was a native. He had lived in NH all his life. Michael was a transplant from New York City's finest - Harlem. As he said in his best Harlem accent - 'don't know why no poor black kid ended up in the woods of New Hampshire, it's scary.' He pronounced New Hampshire as Nu-Hamp-Shire. And they would all laugh. He was, out of all of them, the best survivalist.

"I'm leaving. No place left to stay." Jack turned and looked past them.

"Jack. We tried but our mothers said no way. They don't trust you. You're sneaky, they said. You never know where he is."

"We know it's true, but it was hard hearing it from my mom." Andy said, grinning.

"Look, I know you tried, but guess what? I don't have a place to live on this planet! No home. So I will make one myself, right up there. As close as the sky as I can get."

Jack moved through the six of them and out. He gave them a Great Guano salute as he left. That's holding each of your hands up and to the side with the fingers opened and wiggle. Looked like they were calling a Moose.

Jack had to leave the dirt bike behind. No sense taking it since he couldn't use it in the dense forest. Besides, his uncle could hear a motorbike running for miles in the woods. He might as well just tell him where he was and let him come and get him. No thanks, Jack ran. He headed northeast to catch the Canadian border and hang out in the abandoned cabins on some of the hiking trails Jack knew well. The forest was full of streams from the mountain runoff, but it was summer, and it would be easy to cross the monkey bridges at this time of year. Jack and his friends had put up several to get over the big streams. Springtime saw some heavy flowing streams, so they needed to use the bridge. The monkey bridge was only one long log to walk on and one narrower log to use as a handhold. Not for the faint of heart and good to stop people chasing you. They called them monkey bridges because you had to keep in a stooped position to cross safely.

Jack could run across them now, although at first they were frightening. At about 1/2 mile from the fort, Jack followed a stream up the mountain. He knew of a couple of huts the Appalachian Mountain Club had built up here years ago. It turned out it was too rugged and remote, so they had abandoned them. Each year, they were more and

more worn down, but Jack and his friends still stayed when they could. He stopped to take a rest on a log, but as soon as he sat down, he heard an ear-splitting rattle from behind him. A rattlesnake, about a 6 footer, lay coiled behind him, ready to strike. Its head swaying back and forth, spiked tongue darting in and out of its huge mouth.

Jack looked at the snake, only 4 feet away.

"Hey snakey. Don't bite me, please. I don't taste that good." The snake stared at Jack.

"I'm going to get up and walk away. You can just chill, stay right where you are." The snake shrank back a little and stopped rattling.

"Thanks, that rattling is pretty effective, snake. I'm leaving." And he did. Jack took three steps forward and bolted like the wind.

"Holy mother of snakes! That was close." Jack said to the woods as he climbed up the incline, getting as far away from that rattler as he could. Well, at least it wasn't a bear. Bears were the worst up here, especially black bears. Last year a hiker was attacked by a black bear and killed. The bear had eaten his leg right down to the bone. It left the rest of him but picked his thigh clean right down to the shiny white bone. They found the hiker, dead, just sitting up against a tree like he was resting. Well, it was going to be a long rest for him. Jack brought his bear spray, which was just a giant can of pepper spray, and he had his gun, but shooting a bear with a 22 would just piss him or her off. The gun was for food and to protect against the Earth's most harmful creature, humans. Although Jack would never shoot anyone with his 22, he did shoot a kid with his BB gun once. He was out fishing with Manuel in a kettle pond near their camp. They were in a small rubber raft when 3 local older kids who were fishing from the shore ran out of bait and yelled to Jack and Manuel to bring them some.

"Hey, kids, we need bait. Bring us some bait. Now."

"We don't have any." Jack yelled, paddling away from the shore. They were not fast enough. The first rock came in as a high lob. Sort of like a mortar, the rest came in like bullets. The three teenagers just kept firing rocks at them, Jack and Manuel paddling their lives away. Splashing and almost capsizing the tiny rubber raft as rocks bounced off the raft. They paddled to the shore, dragged the raft through the path in the woods, went back to Manuel's house and got his BB gun - a Crossman 10 pump. They cut back to the pond using a different path and when the kid across the pond bent over to get some bait. Jack put

two BBs in the chamber, pumped it 10 times, like the directions told him for shooting people in the butt. The kid bent over and Jack shot. Hit him right in the butt. The kid howled and jumped about 5 feet in the air. When he came down, he slipped on the rocks and fell another 6 feet into the pond, face first. He got up covered in algae and lily pads. He looked like the Creature from the Black Lagoon from the movie their parents told them about.

Jack and Manuel left the scene quickly, laughing and jumping, all the way back.

Jack smiled at the thought.

Snap!

Jack's head turned at the noise. He had been daydreaming. A dangerous practice being in the deep dark woods by yourself with nothing but a big knife and a 22. He waited. All was quiet.

Nothing, he thought.

He got moving again, this time, looking behind him every 30 seconds, which is not a good idea walking through deep woods. It was more like, walk a step, trip, smack your head on a branch, walk a step, stumble, swear, get stuck in the side by a stick, repeat the process. By the time he made it 10 yards, he was battered and bruised.

'OK, this isn't working. There is nothing following me. It's just my imagination.'

Just then, his imagination went 'snap', 'crack' and 'crunch' right behind him. Jack, panicking now, ran through a jumble of brambles and branches, crashing his way through. The crunching noise was following him, now not trying to keep quiet. He was being chased by something huge. A moose or a bear, most likely. Off to the right, he could see the start of a path and a small opening in the forest. He veered off towards the path, tripping and stumbling through the last of the thick forest before it thinned out for a brief stretch. He reached the start of the clearing and stepped in.

Wham! Twang!

Jack had time to think 'what was that' before he was looking through a rope net hanging 8 ft off the ground. With Jack in it. He had been snared and was spinning like a top, just dangling. He was getting dizzy with all the spinning. He could just make out - think of being on a fast merry-go-round and trying to see if your girlfriend was watching - a glimpse of a big black hairy thing. It was standing outside of the

clearing. It had to be a bear but didn't look like one as far as Jack could see in his spinning state. He was getting really dizzy now, and he felt like he was going to pass out. The black bear stood there for a minute.

He heard his uncle Bob yell in the distance. The bear, hearing his uncle, bolted into the woods, leaving Jack in the net, still spinning although the net was slowing down. Jack gave up and yelled.

"Over here," he yelled. Five minutes went by and he heard some rustling nearby. The net was gently swaying now. Rocking back and forth. Jack looked down to see his uncle, in full camo gear, staring up at him. He wasn't smiling and didn't say a word. He took out his machete.

"Watch your butt." Uncle Bob swung the machete, hitting the bottom of the net, two inches away from Jack's butt.

"Hey!" Jack yelled, "Watch out." His uncle said nothing and swung a second time, cutting through the rest of the bottom of the net, spilling Jack onto the forest floor. His uncle sliced Jack's pants open and somehow missed his skin.

"Get up. Let's get out of here. You have a plane to catch." And that was it, it was that simple. He had been caught before he really even escaped.

Jack got up and dusted himself off.

"Thanks for scaring off that bear." He said.

"What bear?" Uncle Bob said.

"The bear that made this net," Jack said, but realized that bears don't make nets, at least most bears don't. Yogi might have been able to, but that's it.

"A trapper made the net. Looks like it's been here for a while. Surprised it held you, especially through all that kicking."

Jack grimaced. "I saw a bear or something that looked like a bear staring at me when I was spinning around. It was huge."

"Maybe it was Bigfoot," Uncle Bob said sarcastically, "it's your overactive imagination. Let's go. Now."

And Jack did. The two followed the same path back to civilization, past Fort Black Flag with his friends standing at attention outside just watching them go past. He didn't even wave. Jack didn't have the strength. He was done. He had to leave his home, alone, and live thousands of miles away. Life was over, Jack thought, before it has even begun.

3

The Wild Wild West



So instead of being in New Hampshire with his friends and girlfriend, Jack was in New Mexico, in the middle of a summer heatwave.

Jack wasn't happy. In fact, he was as angry as he has ever been.

His grandparents didn't even have the decency to live in a cute white picket fence house, like other old people. No, they lived in a 'retirement lifestyle' trailer park called Pinetree Acres. Their trailer was small. He lived in a room the size of a closet, which he shared with the dog. It was an old gray smelly dog. His name was Dudley. Jack called him Dude, old Dude. The dog didn't seem to mind, although Jack was pretty sure Dude was deaf and blind. Maybe dead too. He didn't move that much. Their mattresses were two inches apart.

The trailer park had a mile-long list of rules, the first of which was: "No Kids." To Jack, most of the residents of Pinetree Acres seemed about 150 years old. Their kids had kids that had kids. No noise after 6 P.M., no running. Jack thought, that one doesn't make sense, he didn't see anyone that could run. No farting in the pool—well, that makes

sense. No shuffle boards on the shuffleboard courts. No this, and no that. It was a long list, taking up two boards outside the administration building.

He had to sneak in and out, so for Jack, that was the fun part. He had a lot of practice back home in NH; it seemed like every night he was sneaking out.

"You can't go outside too much," Grandma had told him. "We don't know what will happen if Aunt Aggie finds out you're living here."

Aunt Aggie was Agnes Barnwell, the woman in charge of the trailer park. She was the resident manager, local bulldog, and unofficial judge and jury. If you didn't cut your lawn to the perfect height or your deposit was late, you'd hear from Aunt Aggie, and so would everyone else. The woman liked to scream at the top of her lungs and seemed to be furious and yelling all the time.

Tonight, at dinner, Grandma and Grandpa told Jack stories of the trailer park, and that meant stories of Aunt Aggie.

Rumor had it that they buried no less than 12 former residents in the administration's basement building, guilty of questioning Pinetree Acres policies and procedures. Jack saw Aunt Aggie once, running into a nearby building, her gray hair blowing in the breeze and her lips painted a bright red under her big, pointy nose. She was short, only ninety pounds, and looked like a five-foot piece of beef jerky. Her skin was wrinkly as a prune and hardened to a deep brown leather under the New Mexico sun.

The next day was Saturday, and by 3:00 P.M., Jack had enough of the trailer. Dude was, in fact, alive, and he was farting up a storm. There was a gray haze floating in Jack's room. It stunk. Jack needed to get out and figure out how to get back home and he would not do it staying in the trailer sleeping. After poking his head out to determine the coast was clear, he made a clean break, heading for the cover of the trees, picking his way through the narrow-treed portion of the park until he found a place in the fence where it had rusted away, leaving a four-foot hole to crawl his way through.

He had escaped. As they say, 'one small step for Jack, one giant leap for no-one.' He was free, for now. Even though it was 'fry an egg on the sidewalk hot,' it felt good to get out in the air. Jack was in his element now, alone, out in the open, exploring.

Jack headed northeast, toward the distant mountain range. He needed to think. Getting back to New Hampshire would not be easy. The first rule of finding an escape, according to Uncle Bob, was understanding your environment and current situation. The environment around here included the tallest of the mountain called Old Baldy, or Santa Fe Baldy Mountain. Old Baldy made sense to Jack. It had a thick group of trees at the base. The top of the mountain was all dirt and dust. It reminded Jack of Bald Mountain in the Franconia Notch State Park in New Hampshire.

Before the trees was a patch of desert space covered with boulders and rocks. It was outside of town, and Jack loved to explore there. He thought if Aunt Aggie ever found about him living where he shouldn't be, he could live off the land up here. Maybe even on Old Baldy. Jack had studied survival techniques. Jack was confident he could make it in the wilderness. Jack and his friends used to camp out all the time.

"Don't worry Mom, just going over to sleep in the Myer's shed," which really meant they would meet outside the Myer's, down North Street and head out from there. Out meant a bunch of different places. One of their favorites was the Air Base, where the F-18s flew out of. They cut a hole in the fence and crawled about 300 yards to the runway. It was a small base, so the runways were narrow. A one plane at a time runway. The puddle jumper runways, only the military version. One time, while they were screwing around on the runway, the lights came on and an F-18 landed, coming right over their head. It hit Andy right in the head, killing him instantly. They thought that anyway until he got up and dusted himself off. The plane missed Andy by ten feet, but it looked closer. It knocked Jack and the rest of the gang onto their butts. Andy saved himself by jumping off the edge of the runway into a culvert or ditch. They were all caught by the MPs and got to spend the night in the brig, all except Jack. He had escaped and made his way back and stayed in the Myer's backyard until dawn. That was a tough night. He was cold, wet, hungry, sore, and bitten. A mess. They did it again two nights later, after they let the gang out of jail.

Jack continued hiking east. The strip of desert outside of town was usually empty. Today, he heard voices and dove behind two boulders, hitting his head hard on one, drawing a little blood.

There were two of them. At first, Jack thought they were football players from the local high school. One was over six feet and wearing a letterman jacket. The second was shorter and much stockier.

Then Jack saw the weirdest thing. A head popped out of the sand and a third guy stepped out of the ground. He dusted himself off as he stood up. The sun glinted off a bracelet he was wearing; a thick band with a large, red, sparkling jewel. A crystal, or maybe a ruby. Jack felt his heartbeat speed up.

The three guys were now busy kicking dirt over the spot where they had been standing, covering up the hole but not filling it in. Jack thought, *that's not a hole, it's a door*. All three of them stopped, turning at the same time to look in the direction where Jack was hiding.

The red bracelet guy yelled, "Hey, you. What are you doing there?" Then, looking at his two friends, shouted, "Get him!"

The two took off running at full tilt toward Jack, the third close behind them.

The three guys were heading his way, and they were scowling, their ham-size fists curled up and their faces red. Jack did the only thing he could. He ran.

He put his head down and used the muscles he's gained over the past few months of hiking to burst forward.

"Hey," the guy yelled, sounding closer now. "Come back here!"

"Yeah, right, I am not an idiot," Jack said to himself. "Nobody listens to orders from the guy chasing them."

While Jack was in shape, he was still only thirteen and about five foot three. Within a few minutes of running, Jack was slowing down and could hear their footfalls getting louder.

They will catch me, Jack thought, his chest growing tight. *They will catch me and kill me. There is a place in the desert where they can hide the body.*

There wasn't much hope, but Jack veered off into town. His legs were throbbing and burning now, and he knew he was about to collapse into a sweaty heap. He hoped when they killed him, they'd be quick about it.

