

BATTLE BUGS

THE DRAGONFLY DEFENSE



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With special thanks to Adrian Bott

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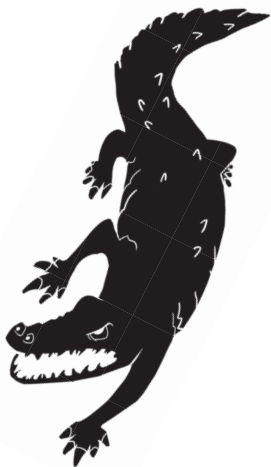
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DRAGONFLY'S WARNING

Max Darwin woke up with a jolt. A deep rattling, gurgling noise was coming from overhead.

The thought hit him: *I'm back on Bug Island! A giant lizard's about to swallow me whole!*

Max sat bolt upright and opened his eyes.

He looked around, saw the timber walls and the bunk beds in the dim morning light from the shuttered window, and remembered where he was.

This wasn't Bug Island at all. It was the boys' cabin at Camp Greenwood. The noise he could hear was Scott Downie in the bunk above, snoring. Although the sound was gross and very loud, somehow all the other boys were still fast asleep.

Max lay back down with a sigh. Camp had been awesome so far. There had been boating, archery, science projects with microscopes, and a whole LOT of bug hunting. As cool as camp was, it couldn't quite match the thrill of battling alongside the intelligent, talking bugs of Bug Island. After

two weeks of summer camp, he was starting to miss his home and his bug collection, too. His mom sent him daily texts telling him they were all fine, but he still wanted to see for himself.

That reminded him. There was something he had to do. Something he did every day, while the other kids were still asleep, or whenever he could grab a moment to himself.

“Time to check the encyclopedia,” he whispered to himself. “Just in case . . .”

He groped under his bed and found the thick, heavy *The Complete Encyclopedia of Arthropods*. The magical book was a priceless collection of bug knowledge, but also a magical gateway. Whenever it glowed

with a special light, Max knew he'd be able to travel through its pages to Bug Island.

When he saw there was no telltale glow coming from the pages, he was disappointed but not surprised. *I guess the bugs don't need me anymore*, he thought sadly.

Still, he flipped through the pages eagerly until he reached the double-page map of Bug Island. The book must have had *some* strange magic left in it, because the map had updated itself after his last visit. The lava bridge that had connected Reptile Island to Bug Island was gone now, and only a few rocky islets were left where it had once been.

Max remembered how the lava bridge had been the cause of a long, bitter war between the bugs and the reptiles, which

the bugs had eventually won. The bridge had been smashed away by a gigantic wave—a wave that had taken General Komodo with it. The bugs had defeated the reptiles once and for all, and Bug Island was safe. Forever.

I'm glad, Max thought. But I sure do miss the adventure.

Just then, Scott Downie let out an ear-splitting snore like a hippo gargling with mud. Across the room, Jamal Peters sat up and rubbed his eyes sleepily. “Scott, you’re going to wake the whole camp!”

Max quickly hid the encyclopedia under his covers before Jamal could see it.

There was a knock at the door. The friendly voice of Joe the camp counselor

rang out: “Rise and shine, folks! Last day today. That means you get to do whatever you want.”

All around, boys stirred and stretched. “River trip!” Mark Garcia yelled, bounding out of bed. “Last one to breakfast is a toad’s butt. Go!”

Max got dressed and washed as quickly as he could, then rushed to breakfast at the main lodge. He didn’t care about being a toad’s butt, but he did want to get down to the river.

Together with the other boys, he wolfed down cereal, eggs, toast, and orange juice before charging out into the late-summer warmth.

Mark Garcia was already there, grinning and waiting for them all. “Ready for this?”

“You know it!” Max laughed.

“Okay! Let’s hit that jetty. Last one in the water is a—hey, Max, I never said ‘go!’”

Max was already on his way to the water, his arms and legs pumping.

He sprinted down the dusty track that led the way through the woods. The other boys came storming up behind him, yelling. Up ahead, he could see the river glittering through the trees in the sunlight.

He was in the lead! He sped up his pace, edging out the other boys, keeping the wooden jetty fixed in his view. No stopping

now. He was going to run all the way to the end of the jetty—and right off it!

His feet pounded the path. The jetty loomed up ahead. The way was clear. Only a few yards more to go.

Then a bright yellow flash on the riverbank caught his eye.

Instantly, he knew what it was: a dragonfly, perched on a log. Nothing unusual about that . . .

But then, it shot into the air, flew up and down in an odd, jerky zigzag, then settled back down again.

Max stopped in his tracks. There was definitely something weird about *that*.

The other boys swerved past him, but he



just had to stop and stare at the dragonfly. *What's it doing?* he thought.

Again, the dragonfly flew up and did its strange flight routine. Up-down-up-down, left to right, then settle.

The boys splashed in the river, whooping and throwing water at one another. Mark Garcia whooshed past Max and leaped in. “Too slow!” he yelled as he cannonballed into the water.

Max ignored him. Something about the dragonfly's behavior was—well—*bugging* him.

It did the midair dance again, and suddenly Max knew what he was looking at.

“It's a letter M,” he said, amazed.

Jamal Peters swam up to the jetty and squinted at Max. “You coming?”

“Just got to get my magnifying glass,” Max replied. “I need a closer look at that bug!”

“You’re bug crazy!” Jamal laughed.

Max began to race back to the cabin, but a droning noise followed him as he went. He glanced behind and saw that the dragonfly was following him.

Wild excitement gripped him. He wasn’t imagining this.

The moment he burst through the cabin door, he saw light shining from under his bed. Only one thing gave off that unearthly, silvery glow: the encyclopedia!

Max quickly changed his clothes. He yanked the encyclopedia open, found the magnifying glass, and held it over the map. In an instant the dragonfly shot over his shoulder and dived into the book. Max watched it grow tiny until it vanished from sight.

Then a strong, familiar feeling tugged at him. A breeze ruffled his hair, growing stronger and stronger until it was a gale. A poster was ripped off the cabin wall.

Max laughed out loud as he was pulled off his feet into the open pages, into the whirling funnel of wind between the worlds.

Here I go! he thought. *Back to Bug Island!*