



# **THE FORBIDDEN POWER**

**BY MAX BRALLIER**

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**SCHOLASTIC INC.**

*For my parents. You built me a very radical, very unclean  
LEGO creation room in our damp basement when I was seven  
years old—and I played for hours upon hours. Thanks for  
encouraging creativity and valuing play.*

Thank you to everyone at the LEGO Group, specifically Paul Hansford, Mikkel Lee, Helle Reimers Holm-Jørgensen, and Peter Moorby; thanks for allowing me to play and create in such a wonderful world. This is a childhood dream come true. Thanks to Debra Dorfman, Samantha Schutz, Michael Petranek, Rick DeMonico, Elizabeth Schaefer, and everyone at Scholastic—thank you for inviting me in and welcoming me and being a delight to work with. As always, Dan Lazar for putting this together and Torie Doherty-Munro for being generally awesome. Above all, thank you to my wife, Alyse, for being the best, always.  
—Max Brallier

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# CHAPTER ONE

**F**letcher Bowman was nervous.

No, not just nervous. Poison ivy made Fletcher nervous. The dentist made Fletcher nervous.

Right now, Fletcher was more than nervous. Fletcher was anxious, agitated, apprehensive, and straight-up *scared*.

He was sitting on a cold, cracked seat on the holo-rail. The blue-and-gold train car was zipping toward the great city of Knightonia, speeding down the shimmering blue ribbon-rails. Fletcher had been riding the train for three straight days: His bottom was sore, and his neck was stiff. He didn't have the money for one of

the train's fancy sleeping cars, so he'd been in the same not-so-comfy seat for seventy-two straight hours.

He was finally nearing his destination, though that wasn't bringing him much relief . . .

There was a crackling sound. Then a voice came over the speaker: "*Next stop: Knights' Academy.*"

Fletcher pressed his face to the window. Nearly everything was a blur as the train sped into Knightonia, whirring past glowing beam bridges and the state-of-the-art Joustdome. Huge, high-tech brick buildings dotted the horizon. The city seemed endlessly huge.

Fletcher clutched his traveling bag as the holo-rail shuddered, hissed, and slowed. The conductor marched down the aisle. "Knights' Academy! Now arriving!"

Fletcher stood up. Brushing his shaggy brown hair out from over his eyes, he noticed that he was the *only* person to stand up. Apparently, very few students took public transportation to the academy.

The train came to a smooth stop, and the doors slid open. As Fletcher approached the exit, a voice barked, "Hey! Kid!"

Fletcher turned to see the conductor holding his travel bag. "This yours?"

Fletcher was so anxious, agitated, apprehensive, and

straight-up *scared* that he had nearly left his bag—*every last thing he possessed*—on the holo-rail.

“Oh yes! Thank you!” Fletcher said. “I’m sorry, it’s my first time in the city, and I’m just a little—”

Fletcher was interrupted by the conductor heaving the heavy traveling bag. Fletcher’s eyes burst wide open, and—

*OOF!*

The bag punched Fletcher in the chest. He managed to catch it—*sort of*. Imagine trying to snag a hefty grunting hog, midflight. That’s how Fletcher caught his bag. It *plowed* into him, and it knocked him right off the train car. He hit the ground, tumbled over backward twice, and finally came to a stop, one leg in the air, sprawled out, on the grass.

Fletcher managed to squeak out a pained “Thanks . . .”

The holo-rail squealed and glided on down the tracks. Watching it go, Fletcher’s stomach felt hollow—like it had been way too long since he’d eaten. It was his nerves. He wanted to jump back on the train. He wanted to slide into his seat, lower his head, and ride the train all the way home.

He was homesick, and he’d only been in Knightonia for, like, 3.8 seconds.

He was homesick—and he didn't even particularly *like* home!

"Off to a great start . . ." Fletcher mumbled as he picked up his bag and got to his feet.

The first thing Fletcher *really* noticed was this: The city stunk. He didn't mean it figuratively, like "Oh, Knightonia is the *worst*."

*No. It literally stinks, Fletcher thought. Like, it smells. It smells like swarms of people and jam-packed streets and grease and crowded malls and hustle and bustle.*

Fletcher had never traveled more than a few miles from his home, the orphanage outside the fishing village of Salty Town. Now he was *thousands* of miles from home, in the biggest city in the realm.

A rising tide of chatter and conversation caused Fletcher to turn. He saw it for the first time: the Knights' Academy.

*The Knights' Academy.*

It was huge and towering. A brick pathway led to a large gate, with a glowing blue shield in the center. Light from massive pixel torches sparkled and danced.

Fletcher couldn't believe how many students there were: hundreds scattered across the bright green lawn that surrounded the academy walls. Some got hugs and kisses from parents. Others greeted friends.

But not Fletcher Bowman.

Fletcher was alone, on the outside, watching. There was no one to hug him good-bye or give him a pat on the back and say, “Good luck.”

Fletcher had lived at the orphanage since he was a baby. It was the only life he knew. The orphanage was on the seaside in the Rocklands, where the land was dry but the smell of the sea hung in the air, always. He was one of twenty-seven orphans there, and he worked at the orphanage every day. Every weekend, he made the forty-five-minute trek into Salty Town and did *more* work, helping out at the salt farmers’ market. The town was nothing special, but Fletcher liked it. It was busy—at least, Fletcher had *thought* it was busy. It was nothing like this . . .

There was one old Holovision screen at the orphanage, so Fletcher had learned a little bit about the NEXO KNIGHTS heroes, and he of course knew about Knightonia. But the big city had always felt so far away. Now it was right here, in front of him . . .

He sighed. “Here goes nothing.”

But as Fletcher took his first step toward the academy, there was a sudden—

*BURRUP-BURRUP-BRA-BROOOOOO!*

It was the single loudest sound Fletcher had ever heard. So loud, in fact, it startled him.





