

ADRIAN FOGELIN

SUMMER

ON THE

MOON



ADVANCED READER EXCERPT ONLY





Socko pushed open the front door of their apartment building and instantly noticed—the Temporarily Out of Order sign on the elevator was gone!

“They fixed it!” Damien yelled, leading the charge across the lobby—sometimes Socko thought they shared a brain.

As he skidded to a stop, Damien slapped the Open Door button.

“Don’t trust it, boys,” called Mr. Marvin. The old guy always sat beside the bank of mailboxes in a plastic chair. “It’s a death trap!”

Socko and his friend knew all about the ancient elevator. Under normal operation it bucked and lurched. But they had figured out a few tricks to make things even more interesting.

Socko popped the button again. The door of their personal amusement park ride was taking its time opening. “Maybe somebody stole the sign.” He was ready to walk away when the

door slid back with a groan. “After you,” he said, then followed Damien into the musty wooden box they called “the Hurler.”

“Remember what happened to Rapp,” Mr. Marvin warned as the doors closed.

Damien gave Socko a nervous grin. “You hear about Rapp?”

“Yeah, I heard. You think we should forget it?”

Damien punched his arm. “Aw, just do it.”

Socko hit the 5 button. When the elevator began its wheezy climb to the top floor, he felt tremors through the thin soles of his sneakers. He stared up at the hatch in the elevator ceiling. “They said Rapp was stuck in here for, like, three hours.”

“Would’ve been forever, but he busted out.” Damien pointed at the tortured screws above them—evidence of the local gang leader’s escape.

“Too bad we don’t have a knife, just in case,” said Socko, like either one of them would have the guts to climb through the hatch and stand on the roof of the elevator in the pitch-black shaft.

Damien shrugged. “So what if we get stuck. We got all summer.” School had ended less than an hour ago. “Free at last!” Damien had yelled as they ran down the mildew-infested halls of Grover Cleveland Middle School.

The elevator heaved a sigh and stopped on the fifth floor. “Ya ready?” Socko’s thumb hovered over the launch button.

Damien tapped the *S* on his Superman ball cap. “Do it!”

Socko punched the button for the basement.

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A flicker of light jumped from one numbered button to the next as the elevator dropped. “Five...four...three...,” they chanted.

“Now!” Damien roared.

Socko smacked the Open Door button, triggering an instant malfunction. Like a yo-yo hitting the end of its string, the falling box stopped with a jolt. Socko got a sudden taste of pizza—his last free school lunch of sixth grade.

Damien slapped a hand on top of his cap. “Sweet!”

“*Definitely* sweet.”

“Again?” asked Damien.

“Yeah!” Socko hit the 5. Instead of starting the climb to the top the elevator cable let out a loud *twang*.

Damien scrambled to grab the bar that ran along the walls of the elevator. Socko’s breath caught. If the cable snapped, they’d hurtle for real—down the shaft to the basement where the rickety box would explode on impact. But when nothing worse followed the scary *twang* Damien reached across and popped the 5 button again. This time the box went down instead of up, dropping fast.

“What the heck!” Socko slapped a button. The cable twanged again, louder this time as the elevator lurched to a stop. The box shuddered, then stilled.

In the shivering silence, Socko could hear his own rapid breathing.

“Try it again,” said Damien.

“You sure? What if the cable breaks?”

“Wuss.”

Socko punched the 5, then slouched against the wall like he hadn't just been a wuss. High overhead, the motor let out a muffled *whirr*. A split second later, the gasp of a dying motor echoed down the shaft.

Socko popped the 5 button half a dozen times, secretly relieved when nothing happened.

"Allow me." Damien tapped the red *S* on his cap again, revving up his superpowers, then thumbed the button. When the magic of the *S* failed, Damien kicked the door.

"You think we broke it?" Socko thought of his mother, Delia, who would have to puff and blow her way up four flights of stairs after a day on her feet at Phat Burger.

"You kidding? It breaks all the time!" Damien tried the Open Door button. The door groaned open, revealing the side of the elevator shaft with a space about a foot wide at the top. "Oh, man. Stuck between floors." He grabbed the edge of the floor above him and pulled himself up. His chest resting on the floor above, he rolled through the opening.

For Socko, who was taller and heavier, getting through the gap was a squeeze. "Come on, Burger Boy." Damien latched onto his arms and yanked.

Socko was being dragged out of the elevator when he saw Mr. Marvin's brown slippers and baggy socks. He was on the ground floor again.

"Need this?" Mr. Marvin was holding the Temporarily Out of Order sign.

Damien jammed the sign into the crack at the edge of the door that had just closed behind them.

"We didn't bust it," said Socko. "It just sort of happened."

"Everything's broke." Mr. Marvin tapped the headline on the newspaper in his lap.

"Unemployment Tops 9 Percent." The hardware store where the old guy had worked for twenty-

seven years had closed months ago. He crossed his legs. The slipper on his foot jiggled nervously up and down. “The world’s a mess, boys.”

Socko could tell he was just warming up. “See ya, Mr. Marvin.” He walked to the stairwell door fast, then glanced back. “Damien?”

Damien stood, fists stuffed in his back pockets. “Found another one.” He stared at the closed elevator door.

Gouged into the wood was a crude drawing of a spider. Just the day before they’d found a similar spider painted on the sidewalk in front of Donatelli’s, the convenience store across the street from the apartment building.

“Bunch of punks,” Mr. Marvin said. “Know why Rapp named his gang the Tarantulas? He had a pet spider when he was a kid.” He shook his head. “He’s making things up as he goes along. Heck, he’s seventeen. What does he know about running anything? Those boys are just playin’ at this gang business.”

Mr. Marvin picked a speck of lint off the knee of his pants. “Still...Rapp has a temper and don’t you ever forget it. My advice to you boys? Steer clear of the whole lot of them.”

“Sure thing,” said Socko. “Come on, Damien.” He pushed open the heavy door to the stairs and listened.

“Nobody,” said Damien, listening too. The elevator was dangerous, sure, but the dark stairwell wasn’t exactly safe either.

Socko trudged up the steps, breathing through his mouth. This place never smelled good. Today it smelled like a restroom—and not the air freshener part.

“What you wanna do tomorrow?” Damien asked.

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Even though it was the first day of summer vacation, Socko couldn't come up with much. "Hang out on the roof and work on our tans?" he joked.

"Genius idea! You turn red like a stoplight, then peel like a banana. And me?" Damien held out one skinny arm. "I'm naturally tan."

"True and true." Socko was what Damien called "beyond white," and although Damien's mom was white, he definitely took after the black dad he'd never met. "You got any genius ideas?"

"I'm working on it." Damien loped ahead, his footfalls echoing.

Socko was watching the toes of his sneakers on the gray steps when he bumped into Damien.

"Another one." Damien pointed to the wall.

The spray-painted spider was so new it was still shiny. Socko took a quick look and kept climbing.

"Seriously, man!" Damien caught up to Socko on the second-floor landing. "Mr. Marvin says steer clear. How're we supposed to do that?"

"I don't know. Die young?"

A while back Socko had been flagged to run an errand for Rapp. It was no biggie. He'd delivered a folded piece of paper to a guy on the corner of Baker and Elm. When he reported a successful handoff, Rapp had put a sweaty hand on the back of his neck. "Ya did good, Big Red."

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All winter Socko had worn a hoodie to keep his stupid red hair from attracting attention. What he needed was cryptic coloration so he could blend into his surroundings like the moths and lizards he'd seen on the Nature Channel.

Size was Socko's other attention-getting problem—he'd gladly give his short buddy Damien some of the extra inches he had picked up in the last few months. Showing no sign of quitting, his growth spurt was putting him in Rapp's face a little more each day.

"Seriously." Damien slapped Socko's arm. "Sooner or later we're gonna have to join. Probably sooner."

A tingle ran down Socko's spine. "They ask you?"

"Nah."

Socko started climbing again.

"Got any food at your place?" Damien asked.

"Probably." Socko's mom could bring home anything that had been under the heat lamp for more than two hours—one of the few advantages of working at a fast-food place that wasn't a chain.

"Burgers? Fries? How about a couple of those little pie thingies with the greasy crusts?" Damien cut in front of him, climbing the stairs backwards. "I could be a runner for the gang—you know I can really pump on my skateboard."

"You want to end up in jail?" Socko heard his mother's words come out of his mouth.

"So? I hear they eat regular in jail."

That morning Socko's mom had stood at their window, looking down on Rapp and his boys loitering on the sidewalk in front of Donatelli's. "Jobs," she'd said. "That's what those punks need."

Jobs. Like *that* was going to happen. Out Of Business signs were taped to windows all over the neighborhood, not just Mr. Marvin's hole-in-the-wall hardware store. The evening news his mom watched spewed reports about people losing jobs like water from a busted pipe.

"Third floor." Damien pushed open the stairwell door. "Gotta drop off my pack." He stuck his head around the door and listened. Apartment 3A was the first on the left. The fight going on inside was coming through loud and clear.

"Or not." Damien pulled his head back and eased the door shut.

"You think your mom's okay?" Socko asked.

"She's fine." Damien jogged up the next flight of stairs. "I'd help her if she was *really* in trouble, but she picks out these guys, not me. This one's really big. I'm not messing with him." He stepped into the fourth-floor hallway.

Socko's apartment was one floor above Damien's—they signaled each other with a broom handle banged against Socko's floor or Damien's ceiling. Socko lifted the key string from around his neck and unlocked the door.

He felt himself unclench as soon as they were locked inside. And double-locked. And chained.

Except for the steady drip in the kitchen sink that had left a rusty bull's-eye on the enamel, the apartment was quiet. Delia wouldn't get off her shift at Phat Burger for another hour.

Socko's backpack hit the floor, then Damien's. They pried off sneakers, peeled off socks. Damien wiggled his toes and sighed, but it was Socko's toes that were celebrating. Delia could get clothes to keep up with his growth spurt out of the Help Yourself closet at St. Ignatius, the Catholic church down the street—you didn't even have to be Catholic to help yourself—but shoes that fit cost money.

Damien padded across the gray linoleum and stuck his head in the fridge. "Pretty empty." He stood on his toes, reached into the cupboard over the sink, then stared at the box of microwave popcorn in his hand. "No butter? This is *so* bogus."

"Delia's trying to lose weight."

"Wish my mom was fat." Damien tore the clear wrapper off a packet of popcorn with his teeth. "Fat moms don't have boyfriends." He opened the microwave door and fell back a step. "Whoa! Mega roach!"

The cockroach faced them, antennae raised.

Socko eyed the can of Raid on the counter, but he didn't want to blast bug killer into the microwave. Plus, he wasn't crazy about killing things, even roaches.

Damien slammed the microwave door and hit the 1-minute button. "Death by laser!" Palms on the edge of the counter, he watched the roach stroll across the rotating tray.

"They're indestructible," said Socko, secretly pulling for the roach. "Been around since the Cretaceous."

The roach stopped in its tracks and began to spark.

Damien gasped. "I wasn't expecting that. Were you expecting that?"

Beep.

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Damien popped the microwave door. “Dead roach flying!” He flicked the crisp bug across the room.

Socko dodged it. The nuked roach landed legs up and skidded to a stop under a chair.

Damien put the bag in the microwave, selected Popcorn, and hit Start. “Our snack lives!” he said, rubbing his hands together as the popcorn bag began to jiggle.

So Delia wouldn’t freak when she saw it, Socko picked up the roach by one stiff leg and dropped it in the trash.

Beep.

They tossed the hot popcorn bag back and forth as they charged the sofa. Damien had possession when they vaulted the sofa back and whumped down on the gray-green cushions. While Damien was ripping the bag open, Socko snagged the remote and hit Power. Instantly a black-and-white face filled the screen.

“Not nature again!” Damien stuffed a humongoid handful of popcorn into his mouth. The panda on the screen did the same with a bunch of bamboo shoots. “I’m so tired of nature!” he whined, spraying bits of popcorn.

“How can you be? You never see any.”

“I see plenty of roaches.”

“Roaches don’t count.” Socko reached into the popcorn bag. He chewed. The panda chewed.

“Hey, Socko!” Damien pointed at the screen. “That’s you, man. You’re the panda.”

“What’re you talking about?”

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“The panda’s big, but harmless—like you. I mean, a panda’s a bear, but all it eats is leaves.”

“I don’t see you acting like a superpredator.”

“Look at me!” Damien spread his arms. They stuck out of his T-shirt sleeves, as skinny as pick-up sticks. “I weigh, like, eighty-seven pounds, so what am I supposed to predate on?”

“I don’t know.” Socko propped his feet on the coffee table. “Algae?”

“Algae, huh? Damien dug into the bag. “What does algae taste like?”