MIDDLE SCHOOL

FROM HERO TO ZERO

JAMES PATTERSON

AND CHRIS TEBBETTS

ILLUSTRATED BY LAURA PARK



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Young Arrow
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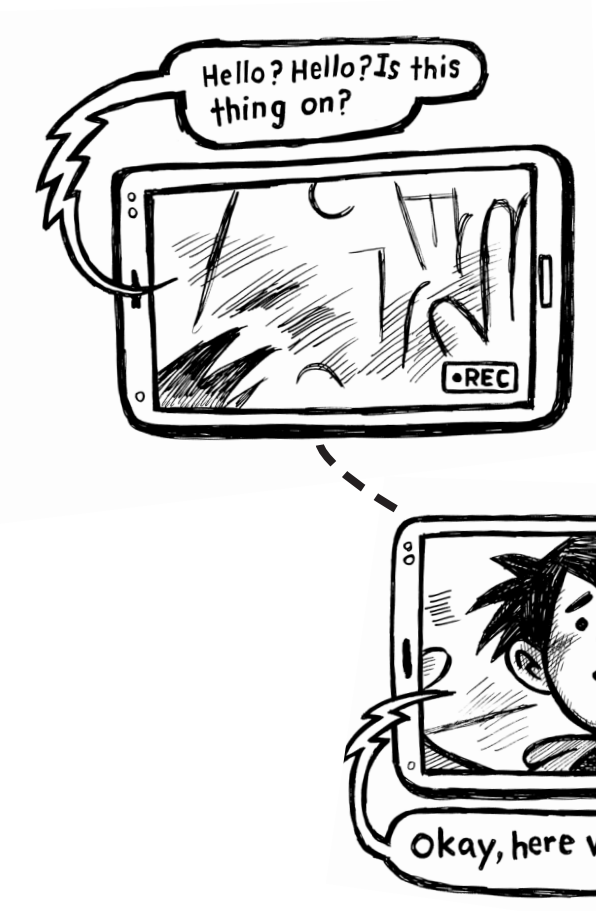
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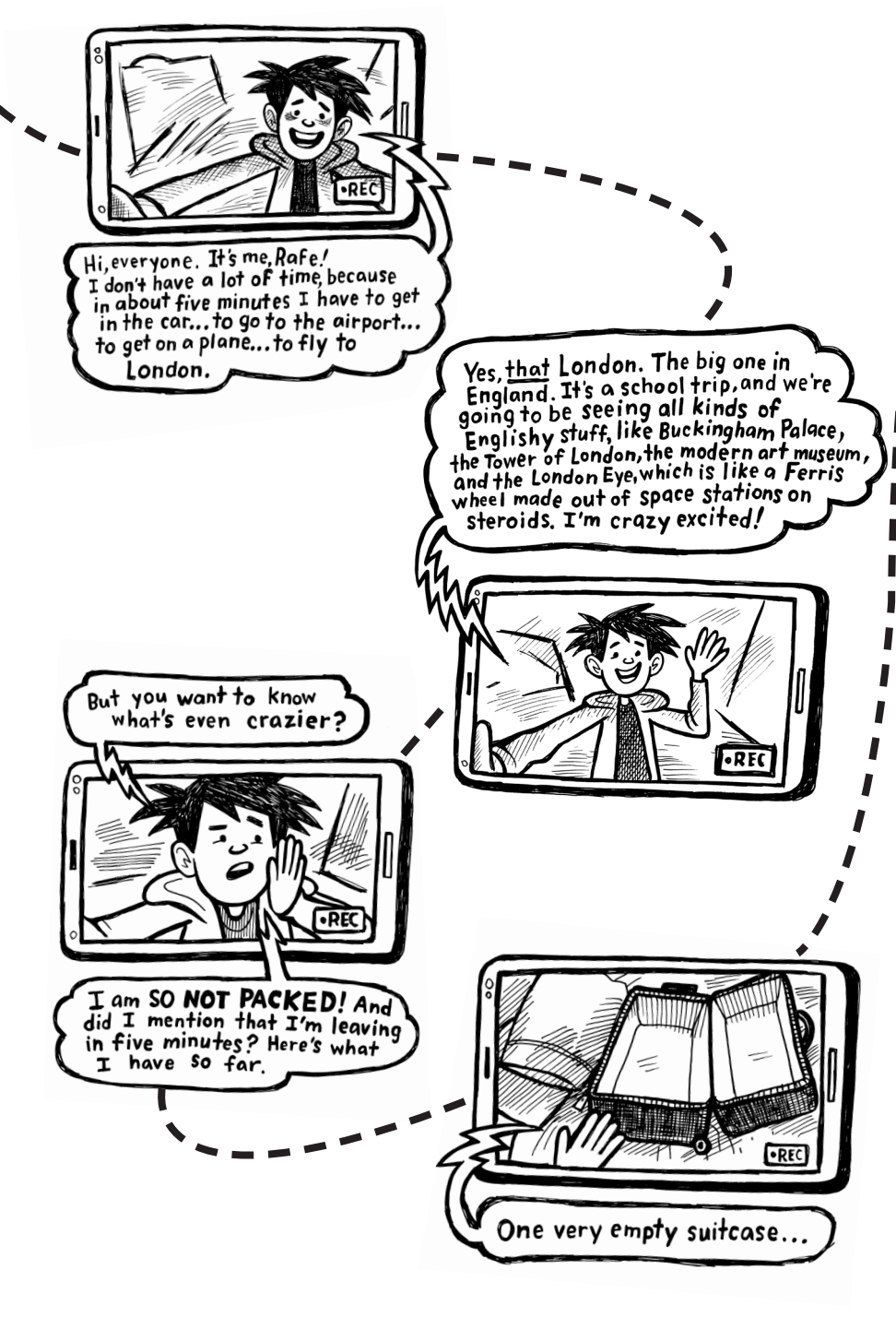


THIS ONE GOES OUT TO
THE LONDONDERRYS:
BARBARA, JAN, JOE,
RUTH, AND VICKI
—C.T.

CHAPTER 1

PACKING UP




•REC
Hi, everyone. It's me, Rafe! I don't have a lot of time, because in about five minutes I have to get in the car... to go to the airport... to get on a plane... to fly to London.
Yes, that London. The big one in England. It's a school trip, and we're going to be seeing all kinds of Englishy stuff, like Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, the modern art museum, and the London Eye, which is like a Ferris wheel made out of space stations on steroids. I'm crazy excited!
•REC
But you want to know what's even crazier?
•REC
I am SO NOT PACKED! And did I mention that I'm leaving in five minutes? Here's what I have so far.
•REC
One very empty suitcase...



And way over here: one pile of clothes, shoes, and bathroom stuff. I don't care what I wear in London, as long as I can change my underwear every day. And I need comfortable shoes, too. My art teacher, MS. Donatello, said we're going to be walking our butts off over there. (Well, she didn't really say "butts off.")

My mom gave me fifty pounds of spending money. But that's just what they call money over there, it's not like fifty actual pounds of money. It's more like fifty dollars – but I'll take it! Thanks, Mom!

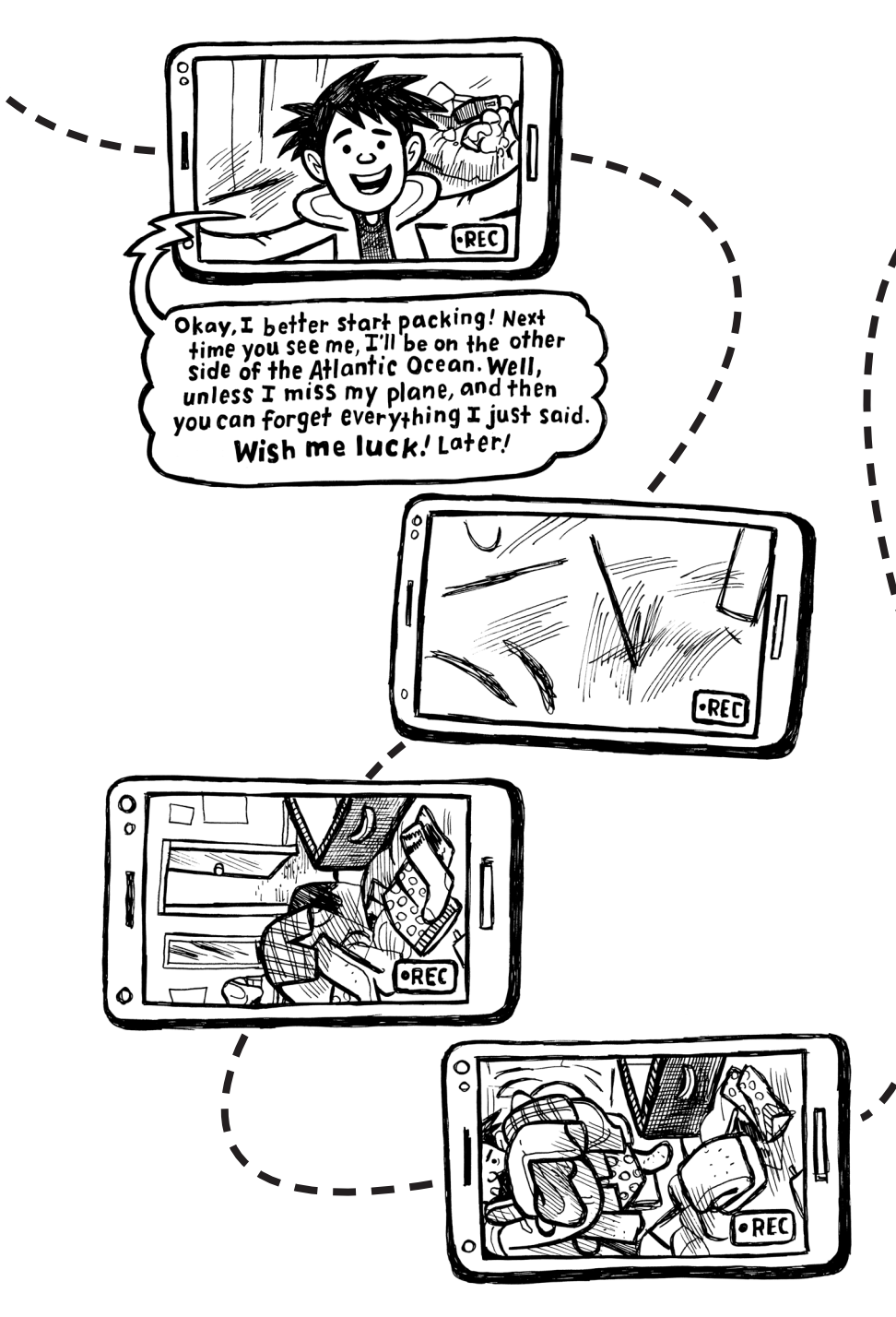


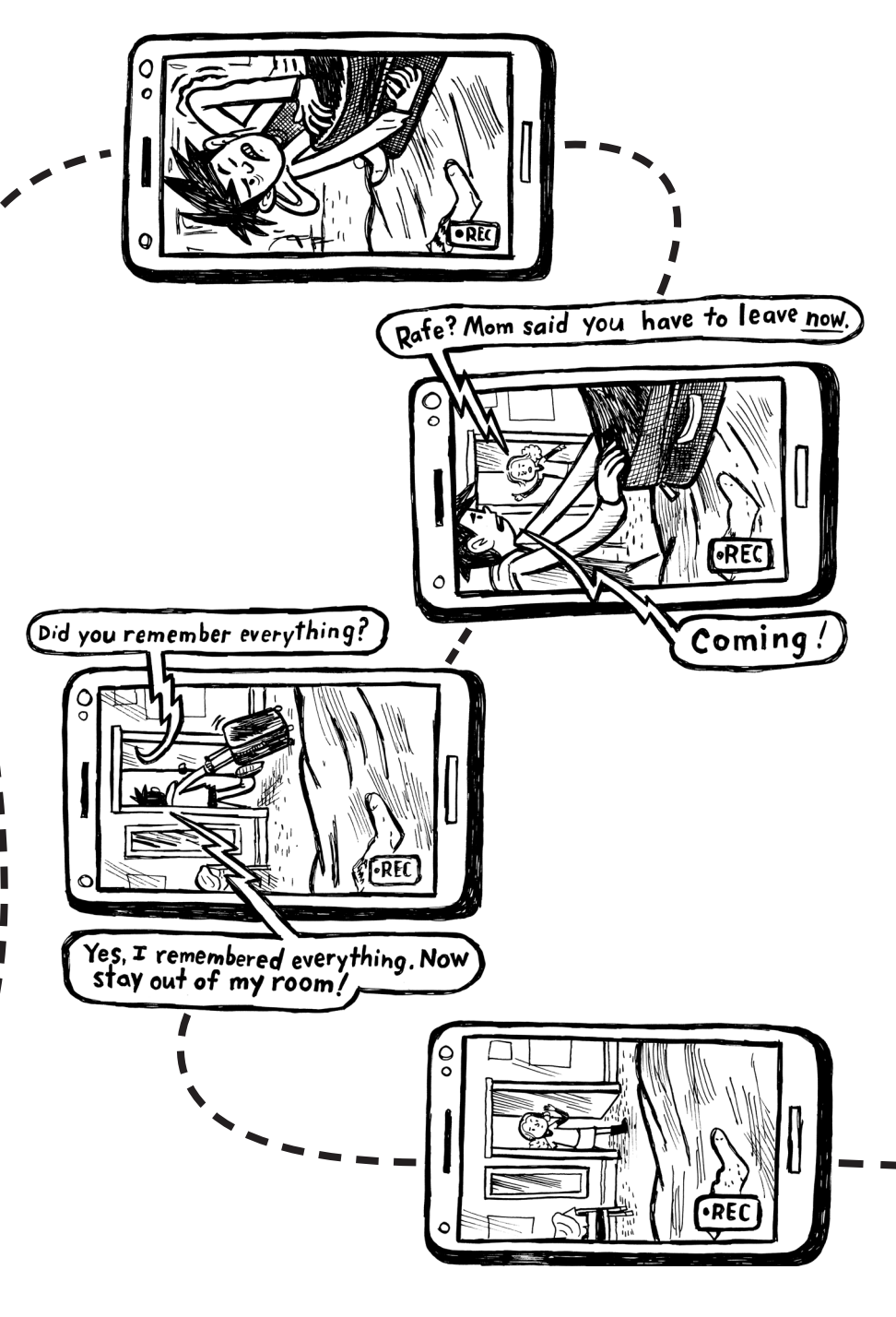


If you know me, you know I never go anywhere without my sketchbook. I like to draw as much as I like to eat. Which, by the way, is a lot.

And I'm borrowing my grandma's phone, too, so I can keep making these videos. Everyone on the trip has to do a report on it, and mine's going to be full-on multimedia, with video, drawing, writing, and I don't even know what else. I guess I'll find out when I get there.




•REC
Okay, I better start packing! Next time you see me, I'll be on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Well, unless I miss my plane, and then you can forget everything I just said. Wish me luck! Later!
•REC
•REC
•REC


•REC
Rafe? Mom said you have to leave now.
•REC
Coming!
Did you remember everything?
•REC
Yes, I remembered everything. Now stay out of my room!
•REC


•REC
What an idiot.
•REC
REC
Seriously, Rafe? You're already losing things. This trip is going to be one big disaster. I could be wrong, but let's face it, big brother: you're the king of disasters. So, good luck—you're going to need it. And watch out, London, because here comes Rafe!
Click!

CHAPTER 2

TIME TO GO

At the airport, everything was crazy. There were kids and parents and chaperones trying to find each other, plus half a zillion other people, all traveling in half a zillion other directions.

And then there was a little room where we could all finally stop and gather up for our big goodbyes before I had to find the other kids. It was definitely insane, but I could actually start to see the adventure I had been imagining.



"Excited?" Grandma asked me.

"Yep," I said, but honestly, I was kind of nervous, too.

"You sure you have everything?" Mom asked me.

"Yep," I said, even though I had this weird feeling I was forgetting something.

"Are you *really* sure you have everything?" Georgia asked, in that annoying way where you know she's not *really* asking a question. Then she held up the phone Grandma was lending me for the trip with a really smug smile.

"Where'd you get that?" I asked her.

"It was sitting on your bed while you were walking out the front door, genius," she said.

"I told you to stay out of my room," I said, and grabbed it back.

When it comes to snooping, my sister has superpowers. And she was definitely going to do some supersnooping while I was in London. That's why I'd spent the last week blowing my nose and leaving all the used Kleenex in my desk and dresser drawers. There was also some mega-realistic plastic dog puke on my closet floor, and a note under my mattress that said "STOP SNOOPING OR DIE!"

But that was it. I couldn't worry about Georgia anymore. It was time to go. Mrs. Stricker was yelling at the parents to say goodbye so we could all get ready to hop into the security line, which looked about two miles long.

"All right, off you go," Mom said, and then walked me a little closer. When it comes to saying goodbye, Mom always likes a little time alone with me. I kind of like it, too.

"This is so exciting. Your first time out of the country without me!" she said. "And who would've thought you'd turn into such an international jetsetter? I thought Australia was exciting enough, what with the surfing and drop bears and the bunyip adventure, which I would personally rather forget." She stopped, embarrassed.

She was rambling about my last trip abroad—I won a school art competition and the prize was a free trip to the Land Down Under. Things didn't turn out so well, but I was glad I had the chance to go.

Even if it did end in disaster.

"You're going to have a great trip, sweetheart," Mom finished.

"Yeah…," I said. "I guess so."

"You guess?" Mom said.

"Well…"

"What is it?" she said.

She can always tell when I'm feeling weird about something. And this wasn't the kind of weird I wanted to put in a video, where everyone would hear about it. But I could tell Mom, even if it came out a little awkward.

See, this was supposed to be some great thing, right? I was really lucky to go somewhere as crazy exciting as London. (Grandma helped out and got her friends to buy about twenty thousand rolls of wrapping paper in our school fund-raiser, and I got a scholarship, thanks to Ms. Donatello.)

But here's the problem: the only real friends I had were staying back in Hills Village, on the wrong side of a pretty huge ocean. That included Flip Savage, the funniest kid I've ever known, and Junior, my dog and best non-human friend.

In other words, I was on my own for this trip. *Totally friend-free*. Which was like going back to the bad old days at Hills Village Middle School, when I was about as popular as Mystery Meat Monday in the cafeteria.



"It's just…I don't have any friends on this trip," I told Mom.

"What about Jeanne Galletta?" Mom asked.

"Jeanne doesn't count," I said. "She's really nice, but it's not like we're actually friends."

I probably (definitely) wasn't supposed to like Jeanne as much as I did. But try telling that to my brain. I just couldn't help it.

Right now, Jeanne was standing with the rest of the kids along with her stupid perfect boyfriend, Jared McCall, who I am NOT jealous of. It's just that Jared's so good at everything, you kind of

want to stick his head in a toilet sometimes.

"Well, I see at least one girl looking your way, Rafe. I think you might be more popular with the ladies than you realize."

"Don't say *ladies,*" I said. "And besides, you're my mom. You have to say that stuff."

"How about Ms. Donatello?" Mom said. "You like her, don't you?"

"Sure," I said. "For a teacher. But that doesn't really count."

"Well, here's an idea. Why don't you try making a few *new* friends?" Mom asked me.

That one was harder to answer. I mean, everyone in middle school already knew me, and it wasn't like I'd been sitting on all the good parts of my personality so I could bust them out now and start winning popularity contests. I pretty much knew by now who my friends were and *who wouldn't be caught dead talking to me*.

I didn't know if Mom would understand all that, but I'll bet you do, right?

"I guess," I mumbled, which was easier than telling her everything I just told you.

"It can't hurt to be friendly," Mom said. "I

wouldn't want you to spend the whole trip alone with that sketchbook of yours."

She had a point. I did bring my sketchbook, for sure. I love to draw, including my Loozer comics, which you may already know about. You'll definitely see some more of those later.

"Now, you better go or Mrs. Stricker is going to leave without you," she said.

Mrs. Stricker is the principal of Hills Village Middle School. She also happens to hate the ground I walk on. Right now, she was evil-eyeing me like I was holding up the whole airport.

"Sorry, Ida," Mom called out to her. "He's coming!"

"Mmglrrr," Mrs. Stricker mumbled, which I think was something about *should have left without him.* But I couldn't be sure.

"Bon voyage, sweetie!" Mom said, and gave me one more quick hug for luck. "I love you. And remember what I said."

"I will," I told her.

And I would.

I'd remember every word…just as soon as I got busy being the *least* popular kid on that whole trip.

Hey, it's a tough job, but someone has to do it.