

Ross Montgomery

Illustrated by
Katie Saunders

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Author: Ross Montgomery
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Educational Consultant: Pauline Allen
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1

MANIC MORNING

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

My alarm went off at 7 o'clock in the morning every day. But, as usual, I was already wide awake. I had another busy morning ahead!

I jumped out of bed and got dressed as fast as I could. Then I grabbed the clipboard from my bedside table and read through my checklist.



I groaned. The next job on the list was the worst of all: getting my annoying little sister ready for one of her holiday sports clubs.

"Tabby, time to get dressed!" I shouted, stepping out of my bedroom. "You've got football club at …"

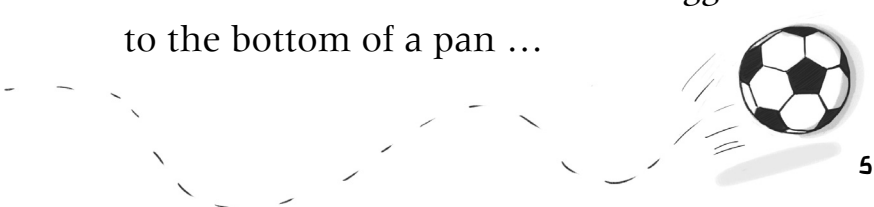
WHOOSH!

A football whizzed past my head, bounced off three walls and smashed a vase. Tabitha came charging down the corridor after it. She was waving a hockey stick in one hand and a tennis racket in the other.

"Ash! Did you *see* that shot?"

I frowned. "Of course I saw it – you nearly knocked my head off! Now, clean up that broken vase before Mum and Dad—"

I stopped. I could smell something awful, like burned toast and scrambled eggs stuck to the bottom of a pan …



“MUM! DAD! NO!” I cried.

I ran to the kitchen, but I was already too late. Mum and Dad were trying to make breakfast! They were standing in a cloud of black smoke, coughing and spilling milk everywhere. Dad had burned toast crumbs all over his face and Mum had scrambled eggs in her hair.

“Sorry, Ash!” said Dad. “We thought we’d try to make breakfast this morning, but we’ve made a right mess, as usual.”

“Where did I put the butter?” asked Mum.

“It’s stuck to the ceiling,” I groaned.

This is a normal day in my house. As you can tell, my family aren’t the most organised people in the world. Mum and Dad aren’t bad parents, but they’re so scatterbrained that I don’t think they’d notice if the sofa ate us!

“No time for breakfast – we have a very busy day ahead,” I said, pushing them out the door.

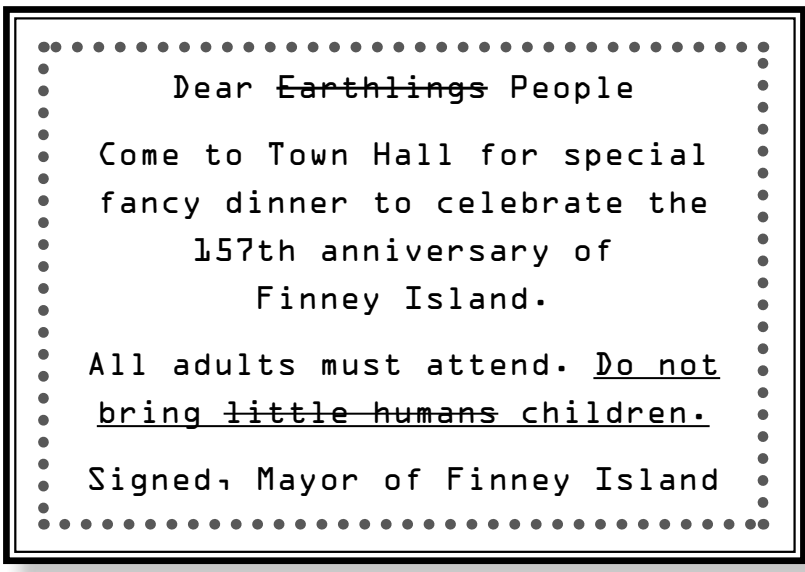


"It's only a week until Tabitha and I are back at school. We have to buy new uniforms, and books, and pencil cases, AND we have to go food shopping for dinner tonight."

"But your mum and I are out tonight," said Dad. "Didn't you see the invitation?"

"We must have forgotten to show you," said Mum. "Where did I put it? It must be around here somewhere …"

She finally found it under a pair of scissors in the fridge.



I was confused. Finney Island is where we live. It's small, but it's got its own school and supermarket – and mayor, of course.
But something about his invitation didn't make sense.

"The 157th anniversary isn't for another two months," I said. "Why is the mayor holding a dinner tonight?"

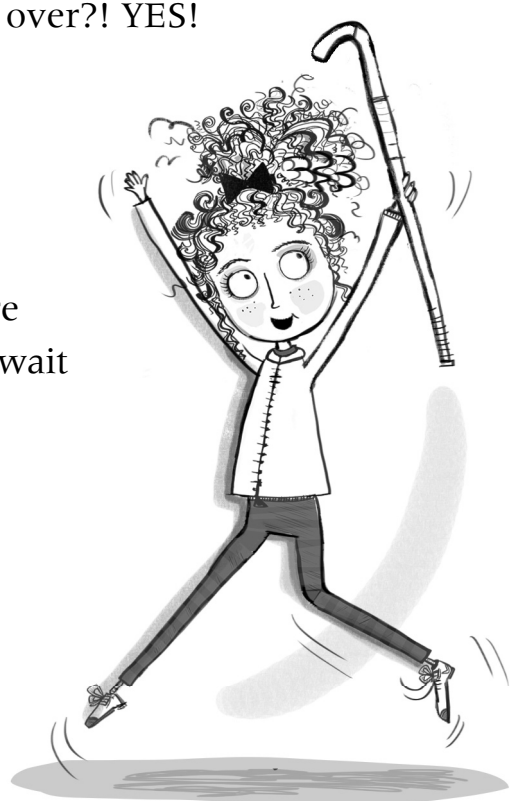
"Who cares?" said Dad, patting his stomach. "A free meal is a free meal!"

I suddenly had a thought. “If you’re both out tonight, then who’s looking after me and Tabby?”

Mum smiled. “Your Aunt Emmy didn’t want to go to the dinner. She offered to babysit instead.”

Tabby was so excited, she almost smashed Mum’s mug of tea with her hockey stick.

“Aunt Em’s coming over?! YES!
THIS
IS THE BEST
DAY **EVER**!”



I groaned. If you think my parents are scatterbrained, just wait until you meet Aunt Emmy!

Now answer the questions …

1 Who is the narrator of this story?

2 What do we learn about Mum and Dad in the first chapter? How do these characters change as the story goes on?

3 Where does Aunt Emmy live, and why?

4 In Chapter 2, Ash says he wishes aliens would invade Finney Island. Why does he feel this way?

5 Why is Ash shocked when he realises his parents aren't blinking? Why is this important?

6 The author describes the adults as 'patrolling the streets with sinister smiles' on page 29. How does this phrase make you feel?

7 What has Aunt Emmy already done to get ready for an alien invasion, and why?

8 Have you read any other stories that end on a cliffhanger like this one? Does this type of ending make you want to read more?

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I've always loved stories where one child has to outsmart a much stronger enemy. Even more than that, I love stories where the characters are trapped in one place and have to use their brains to figure out what's going on! This was my inspiration for the alien invasion of Finney Island – and I hope you enjoy the twists and turns as Ash, Tabby, and their genius Aunt Emmy find a way to save the world!

Now try this!

Reread the description of Aunt Emmy's lighthouse laboratory on page 30. Now draw the laboratory and try to include as many of the things Ash sees in your picture as possible.

Turn the story into a comic strip. Include some of the things Ash and his family say in speech bubbles!

Write your own morning checklist that sets out all the things you have to do before you go to school in the morning.