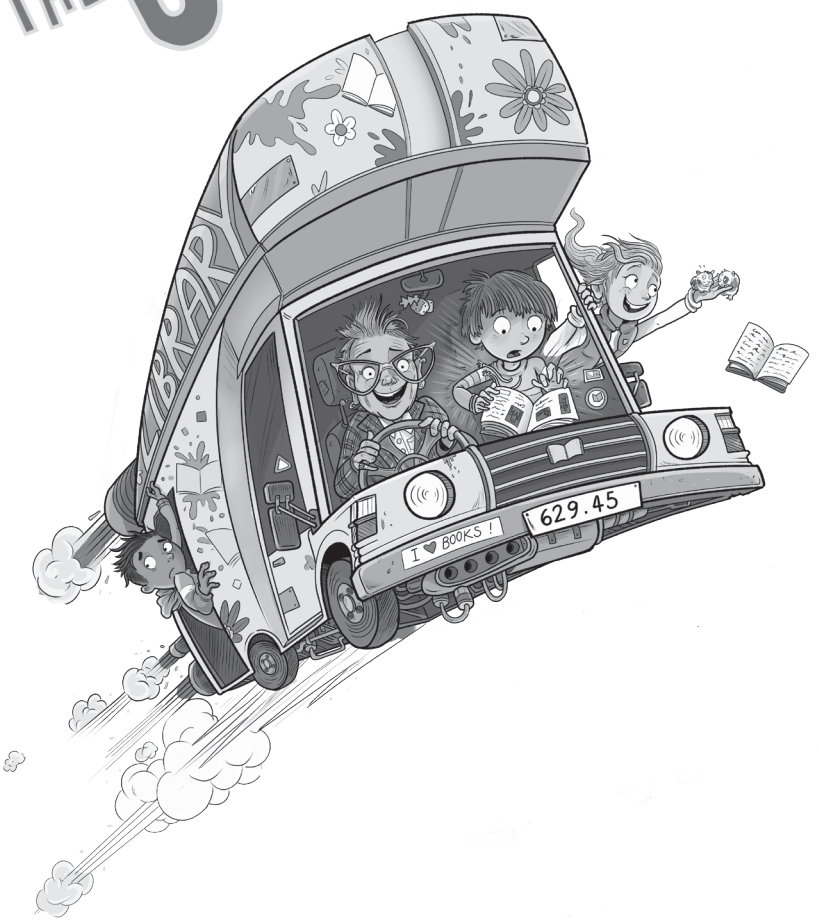
# THE SPYBRARIAN

Jon Mayhew

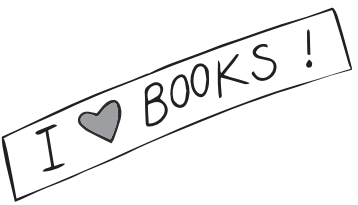


# THE SPYBRARIAN

JON MAYHEW

uclanpublishing






*The Spybrarian* is a uclanpublishing book

First published in Great Britain in 2020 by
uclanpublishing
University of Central Lancashire
Preston, PR1 2HE, UK

Text copyright © Jon Mayhew 2020
Illustrations copyright © Robin Boyden 2020 / istock.com 2020

978-1-9129793-5-6

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

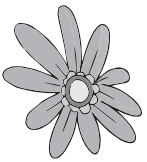
The right of Jon Mayhew is to be identified as the author of this work respectively has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Set in 10/17pt Kingfisher by Toni Murtagh

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

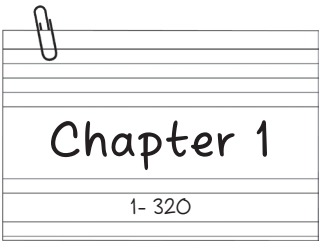


In memory of
Tommy Donbavand

Friend
Mentor
Genius

"READ IT OR THE BATTLE HAMSTERS
WILL NIBBLE YOUR BUM!"

MARK POWERS




# WHAT DO WE WANT? WHEN DO WE WANT IT?

*I wish aliens would come and kidnap me,* **RIGHT NOW,** I thought. *Or maybe a big hole could open up and I'd fall* **SCREAMING TO MY DEATH**. *Or a* **GIANT SEAGULL** *could swoop down and take me high in the sky.* If any of those things had happened, I was pretty sure that one day, people would say, "Remember that Kian Reader, you know the lad who was snatched from the street by a giant seagull? I'll never forget that." Right now, I was pretty sure I'd be remembered as the "lad whose mum's new boyfriend **DRESSED UP AS THE GRUFFALO** and made a **HOLY SHOW** of himself outside the Town Hall." There was a small crowd of people but they were all dressed sensibly in coats and woolly hats.

Only Anthony, Mum's New Boyfriend, wore a huge, hairy brown suit with fangs and claws. So embarrassing.

Anthony wasn't happy with just dressing up as a character from a soppy kid's book. Oh no, he had also decided to carry a huge sign with 'I Love Libraries' painted on it and to shout out at the top of his voice, "What do we want?"

Then Mum joined in and I could feel myself shrivelling up on the pavement. "No Library closures!"

"When do we want them?"

"Now!" Mum yelled.

Actually, I thought, the best thing in the world right now would be if a stretch limo pulled up and a billionaire climbed out and told me there'd been a **BIG MIX-UP** at the hospital and I was really the billionaire's only son.

"What do we want, Kian?" Anthony bellowed over my head.

"To go home?" I muttered, feebly.

"When do we want it?"

"NOW!"

Mum leant close to my ear. "Come on, Kian, you know libraries are important. Anthony says that —"

"I don't care what Anthony says. He looks like a proper 'nana dressed up like that and libraries are boring. I hope they all close." The daft thing was, I actually had to go to the library before they closed at twelve o'clock! But here I was, wasting my Saturday morning standing outside the Town Hall with a

**GROWN MAN IN A GRUFFALO ONESIE.** I hated my life. Yesterday, Mr Vestibule, the new English teacher, had made an absolute fool of me in front of the whole class because I'd forgotten my homework.

Mr Vestibule was the **POLAR OPPOSITE** of me. That means very opposite to me, it doesn't mean that he was from the North Pole or anything. Come to think of it, he was very cold towards me so . . . who knows? What I meant was that he was old, I was young. He was tall, I was short. He was round, I was skinny. He was bald, I had lots of mousy brown hair that covered my eyes and ears.

Plus, Mr Vestibule had a ***LOOOOOOOONG*** pointy nose and massively ***WIDE*** nostrils full of bristly hairs and if you got too close you could see right up them. If you were ***REALLY, REALLY*** unlucky, you'd catch a glimpse of some bogeys clinging to the bristles. I don't know if my nose is that bristly or snotty because I've got better things to do than get a mirror and try to look up my own nose. I hope my nose isn't that hairy.

"You forgot!" Mr Vestibule said again, as if I had just jumped out of my seat, run around the class yodelling and smeared dog poo all over the whiteboard. "You forgot your reading log?"

"Yes, sir, sorry sir," I said, as innocently as possible. Truth was, I'd just not done it. I hate reading. It's boring.

Mr Vestibule looked around at the class. It was like a signal to the rest of the class that the ritual humiliation was about

to begin. "Did you forget to **GET DRESSED** this morning?"

Everyone chuckled. Almost everyone. Prissy McBeef sat scowling at the top of her biro in the corner of the room but I wasn't sure why.

"No, sir," I muttered, looking down at my hands.

"Did you forget your **BREAKFAST**, this morning?"

Everyone chuckled again, even Velcro Asif and he was meant to be my best friend. I decided we'd have words about that later.

"No, sir," I said.

"Did you forget to **GO TO THE TOILET**, this morning?"

The whole class was laughing now and even Mr Vestibule gave a tight smile. I flashed a look at Velcro who grinned an apology back then straightened his face.

"No, sir," I said.

"No sir," Mr Vestibule repeated, and took a deep breath. "You've been at St Jeffery of the Immaculate Hot Cross Bun Middle School for only four weeks and already, you're slipping into bad habits . . ." Apparently hundreds of years ago, Hinderton had been **HIT BY THE PLAGUE** and Saint Jeff had fed the **ENTIRE** population of the town with **ONE HOT CROSS BUN**. That was why he became a saint and our school got the daftest name in the country.

"I know, sir, sorry, sir," I said again.

"Very well," Mr Vestibule said. "I want that reading log first thing on Monday and you will go to the local library this

weekend to get a particular book out. Do you know what the title of the book is, Kian?"

"No, sir."

Mr Vestibule gave a nasty grin. "*Improve Your Memory Skills*," he said. Everyone gave a murmur of wonder. You had to hand it to him. It was a **REALLY CRAFTY PUNISHMENT** because it used up your time without Mr Vestibule having to do anything and sometimes it even used up your parents' time and you'd get into trouble twice. Once with Mr Vestibule and then once with your parents for messing them about. "Bring me the book and your reading log on Monday without fail. Or else!"

"Kian!" Mum said, snapping me out of my daydream, or should I say, my **DAYNIGHTMARE?** I looked up at Mum. "Pay attention, look! The Mayor has just come out to talk to us all."

A lady with a huge cloud of blonde hair on her head and a thick gold chain around her shoulders stood on a wooden platform, ready to speak into a microphone. But I wasn't really looking at the mayor, I had my eye on the men behind her. One was incredibly tall and thin, wearing a long, black leather coat and a weird, wide-brimmed hat. The other was . . . **MR VESTIBULE** and he was staring right at me!

The Mayor tapped the microphone and it gave a sad whine. "I understand that many of you are concerned at the proposed library closures . . ."

Everyone booed. Anthony shook his placard. "Shame on

you!" He yelled. I just kept my head down but I could tell Mr Vestibule was glaring at me. I could feel his eyes drilling a hole in the top of my head! What was he doing here anyway? And why was he standing behind the mayor?

"It's not something I like doing . . . but unless the Government . . . give more to local councils, then we simply can't afford to pay for them," the mayor continued. She looked a bit wide-eyed and her words sounded a bit mechanical. Why was she speaking like a robot? "Rest assured that the central library will still be open and will have a one-stop shop, plenty of computers to access the internet . . ."

"What about picture books?" Anthony yelled, shaking his placard again. "What about fiction?"

"Our volunteers will be able to help you find any kind of book you require and, of course, there is the internet . . ."

"Why do you keep going on about the internet?" Anthony shouted. "We need real books on real bookshelves . . ."

I could feel myself not just DYING WITH EMBARRASSMENT but also SHRIVELLING under the SCORCHING gaze of Mr Vestibule. I turned to Mum. "Mum, I've got to go. I've just remembered that I have to get a book from the library!"

Mum blinked at me. "There won't be a library if we don't make a stand," she said.

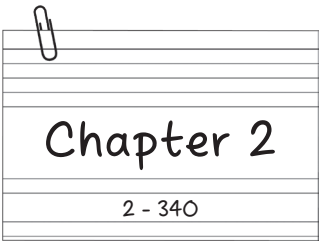
"Please Mum, it's for homework. I'll get into trouble if I don't go now and they close at twelve."

Anthony grinned at me. "Go on then, sport, Hinderton Central's just over there.

I glowered at Anthony. He thought I just wanted to get away, but I wanted to get Mr Vestibule's book AND get away from Mr Vestibule AND get away from Anthony! "Erm, the book I need is only at the branch library. You know the one by our house?"

Mum pursed her lips. "Why didn't you say before we came out? Go on then, we'll meet you back at home."

"Thanks," I said and ran off, leaving Mr Vestibule's EVIL glare far behind. It was only as I ran down the street that I remembered that I'd thrown my library card away last week. Anthony had been going on about how great reading was and how it changed his life. I dumped my card in the bin on the way to school that morning. If I was going to get the book, I was going to have to steal it!




# THE GREAT LIBRARY ROBBERY

By the time I got to the branch library, it was almost twelve and the place had emptied out. It was a funny little square building that reminded me of a lunch box. The rows of books in the library glared at me and I glared back. ***BOOKS REALLY ARE RUBBISH,*** I thought. Only ***LOSERS*** read books.

I thought about Anthony in his Gruffalo suit and snorted. Dad, my *real* dad, didn't read books. He went **FISHING**. Right then, I wished I was sitting on the canal side with him, rather than crouching behind a bookcase in this stupid place.

The smell of the book covers mixed with floor polish, tickling my nose. A few low, comfy chairs lounged around beside the dark, wooden bookshelves. The hum of the traffic outside

seemed miles away.

The librarian stood at the counter, the light reflecting off her pointy glasses. Her grey hair was all spiked up on top of her head and two dangly earrings swung back and forth as she glanced from one book to another. A gold bracelet rattled on her skinny wrist as she plonked a pile of World Record books on the smooth surface. I had to admit, the bright red, checked suit she wore made her look kind of cool. Like a retired rock star. But she was *ancient*! Older even than Mrs Jefferson who lived opposite us and threw digestives to the pigeons in Hinderton Town Square.

*She probably wouldn't even notice if I grabbed a book and ran for it,* I thought. *Even if she did notice, she wouldn't be able to catch me.* There was nobody else in the library to stop me either. The old librarian picked up another pile of books and files. I noticed a small bottle of blue liquid on the top of the pile.

*Improve Your Memory Skills* sat waiting for me on the bookshelf. It was just as well, really, I couldn't have walked up to the old biddy at the counter and said, "Excuse me but I'm looking for a book to steal, yes, one about memory skills." I felt awful. I'm not in the habit of stealing things but I just couldn't bear the thought of Mr Vestibule tearing me off a strip on Monday. Plus he'd probably keep me in, too. There was no choice. Taking a deep breath, I reached for the book, ready to stuff it under my jacket and RUN FOR IT.

At that moment, the library door creaked open and in walked **MARTIN MARVELLO THE FAMOUS, LOCAL, BEST-SELLING, AWARD-WINNING CHILDREN'S AUTHOR.** I couldn't believe my eyes but it was him all right! He'd visited our primary school when I was in Year 6 and his picture was all over school for weeks. And there could be no mistaking the yellow trousers and jacket he always wore. He looked weird and walked like a robot or like he was sleepwalking.

The librarian stopped and frowned at Marvello. "Hello, Martin," she said, peering at him. "Are you all right?"

I ducked behind a bookcase and peered through a gap in the books at the two of them.

Martin Marvello pulled a gun from his pocket and pointed it at the librarian!

"I . . . must . . . kill . . . Paige . . . Turner," he said, in a weird voice. He sounded like he was repeating an order. It reminded me of the Mayor giving her speech.

The librarian blinked. "I beg your pardon?" she said.

"I . . . must . . . kill . . . Paige . . . Turner," he said again.

"Really, Martin! Guns are *not* allowed in the library!" The librarian said. "Put that *away!* Someone will get hurt, or worse, you might damage a book."

**BAM!** The gun shot went off and my eyes widened as, at the same time, the old lady ducked under the counter, dodging the bullet. Then, she popped up again. "Martin, this is no way

for a famous, local, best-selling, award-winning children's author to behave!" she said, her voice really shrill now. "And mind the displays!"

**BAM!** She ducked again and then popped her head up once more.

"I'm warning you Martin," she said. "I'll take action if I have to!"

**BAM! BAM!** Bullets smacked into the varnished counter, sending splinters of wood everywhere.

"Right, that does it," the librarian snapped and, still holding the pile of books and the bottle, she leapt up, vaulting over the desk. She flew forwards, spinning twice, her dangly earrings rattling and a biro flying out of her suit pocket. "**HIIIIIIIIIYAAAAAAH!**" Her leg stretched out straight. She landed, spinning like a ballet dancer, and **WHAM!** planted a stunning roundhouse kick to the side of Martin Marvello's head. He staggered back into a display of picture books. The gun spun off into the air, landing safely in the large print section.

But as she had jumped, she had dropped the books and files she had been holding.

And the bottle.

The books tumbled left and right, smacking on the floor.

The files spun off into the corners of the library, sliding along the polished floor with a hiss.

And the bottle whirled high in the air. I watched it as if in

slow motion. It was small and the fluorescent lights shimmered through the blue liquid contents reminding me of those advertisements for sunny Mediterranean holidays. Then things speeded up and the bottle described a perfect arc through the air towards me.

I *reached* up to catch it.

I *fumbled* as the glass slid through my fingers.

I *gasped* as the bottle shattered right on my forehead.

Stars splintered before my eyes and a warm, wet liquid stung my face, filling my nose and mouth, making me cough and splutter.

The liquid burnt my skin, the inside of my mouth, my nostrils. Even that funny little bit between my nose and top lip (what's that called then?).

I lay on my back staring up at the lights in the ceiling. Everything looked blue at first but slowly the stinging stopped and my sight returned to normal. I blinked and sat up.

Martin Marvello and the librarian were engaged in a **DEADLY MARTIAL ARTS FACE-OFF**. The librarian leapt high into the air and backflipped away from Martin Marvello's deadly kick. Then she landed and planted a powerful punch right on the author's nose.

**POW!**

Martin Marvello staggered backwards, crashing into a glass cabinet.

"Mind the local history display!" the librarian screamed and brought a karate blow down on his shoulder. "And how did you get so good at Kung-Fu, Martin?"

"Research for . . . my . . . bestselling . . . Ninja . . . Wallabies . . . Series . . . Die!" Martin Marvello said in his monotonous, robotic voice. He staggered towards her, his face bruised, his jacket torn at the shoulder.

The librarian stood squarely in front of him, brown shoes planted firmly on the ground. "I never liked those books. I much preferred War Gerbil," she said, blocking his blow and **BURYING** her right fist into his stomach.

"**OOOOFFF!**" He doubled up, gasping as the breath left his body. With a sharp left uppercut to his chin, the librarian put him onto the floor. Martin Marvello lay groaning but still.

With a puzzled frown and a grunt of dissatisfaction, the librarian, straightened her tweed suit. Then she turned and looked directly at me. "Are you all right?" she said. Then her eyes widened and her hand flew to her mouth. "Oh my word. Did the bottle hit you?"

I clambered to my feet. It hurt between my eyes where the bottle had hit me and I felt a bit dizzy but otherwise I felt all right. "Yes," I said. "It really stung but it's okay now."

The librarian looked from Martin Marvello to me and then back again. The famous, local, best-selling, award-winning children's author wasn't going anywhere. She turned to me and

grabbed a book from the shelf close to him.

"Read this," she said.

"W-what?" I stammered. "No. I don't like reading . . . I . . ."

The librarian went pale. Small red spots appeared on her wrinkled cheeks. "Never mind all that nonsense young man. Just. Read."

I stared down at the open book. My head SPUN and then the words seemed to rush towards me. I felt as if I was going UP IN AN ELEVATOR. It felt like my brain had been put on fast-forward. Suddenly, I knew it was a book ALL ABOUT HOW JET ENGINES WORK. "The-compressed-air-is-then-sprayed-with-fuel-and . . ." I zoomed through the text. "Electric-spark-lights-the-mixture . . . burning gases expand . . . blast out through the nozzle, at the back . . ." I couldn't stop.

Finally, the librarian SLAMMED the book shut. I felt like I'd been dragged off a roundabout going at SIXTY MILES AN HOUR. I wobbled a little and she grabbed my arm to steady me.

I rubbed my head "What happened?" I said. "Why do I suddenly know how a jet engine works?"

The librarian just shook my hand. "My name's Paige Turner, SLS," she said. Martin Marvello started to rise but Paige Turner leapt over and gave him a sharp blow to the top of the head. "Welcome to the dangerous world of books!"