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WONKY STAR

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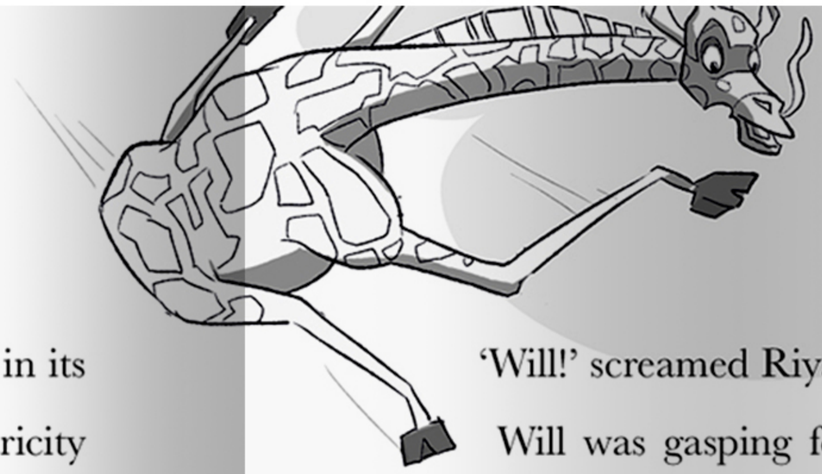
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had moved, leaving nothing but thin air in its place! A surge of fear raced like electricity through his entire body as he realized he was falling. He heard a scream of shock above him and Sam snorting in alarm. As Will picked up speed, plunging towards the ground far below, the air roared in his ears and forced tears from his eyes.





'Will!' screamed Riya. 'Do something!'

Will was gasping for breath, gripped by terror. His body began to spin and tumble until he didn't know which way was up.





An idea flashed through Will's mind. His zookeeper's jacket had helped him out before. He shoved his hand up the cuff of his jacket and his fingers closed around a toggle. He yanked it. The collar of Will's jacket ripped open and a huge expanse of multi-coloured fabric whipped out and unfurled above him. It was a giant parachute.

'Hold on tight!' he said as the parachute snapped and filled with air. The force almost jerked Riya free. 'Riya, where's Sam?' Will asked in a panic.

'I . . . I'm . . . u-u-p . . . h-here!' came Sam's voice.

far below in the canyon. He took a few deep breaths. Stella's words came back to him: *Remember: the fears we do not face become our limits*.

'I can do this,' Will said between gritted teeth.

He carefully uncoiled the kind rope and tied one end around his waist. Will realized the rope wasn't very long and he wasn't sure what he was supposed to do with it. Again, Stella's words echoed in his mind: Just ask for help when you need it.

'Hey, umm, rope,' he said, feeling a bit silly. 'Would you mind giving me a hand?'

Nothing happened. 'Err, rope,' said Will.

'I hear you're really kind. Please would you—'

Just then, his left foot slipped. Panicking, Will looked down for the first time. A horrible, sickly, dizzy feeling flooded through him and the ground seemed to rush up towards him. Will scrambled to place his dangling foot securely on the ice again, his heart hammering in his chest.



'You have no idea about Nulth!' snapped Grudge.

'Actually, we just defeated him,' said Riya proudly.

'Yeah, that's right!' said Sam, reappearing. 'Nulth destroyed Tusk Temple but then Will sent him and his Voids packing!'

Grudge turned slowly away from the fire and faced them. 'So, Night Zookeeper, if you defeated him, then why on earth do you and your so-called heroic friends need my help?'

'Maji told us that the Lord of Nulth will return with even more Voids and we will need the Night Zoo's best warriors to defeat him.



A short story

NIGHT ZOO KEEPER

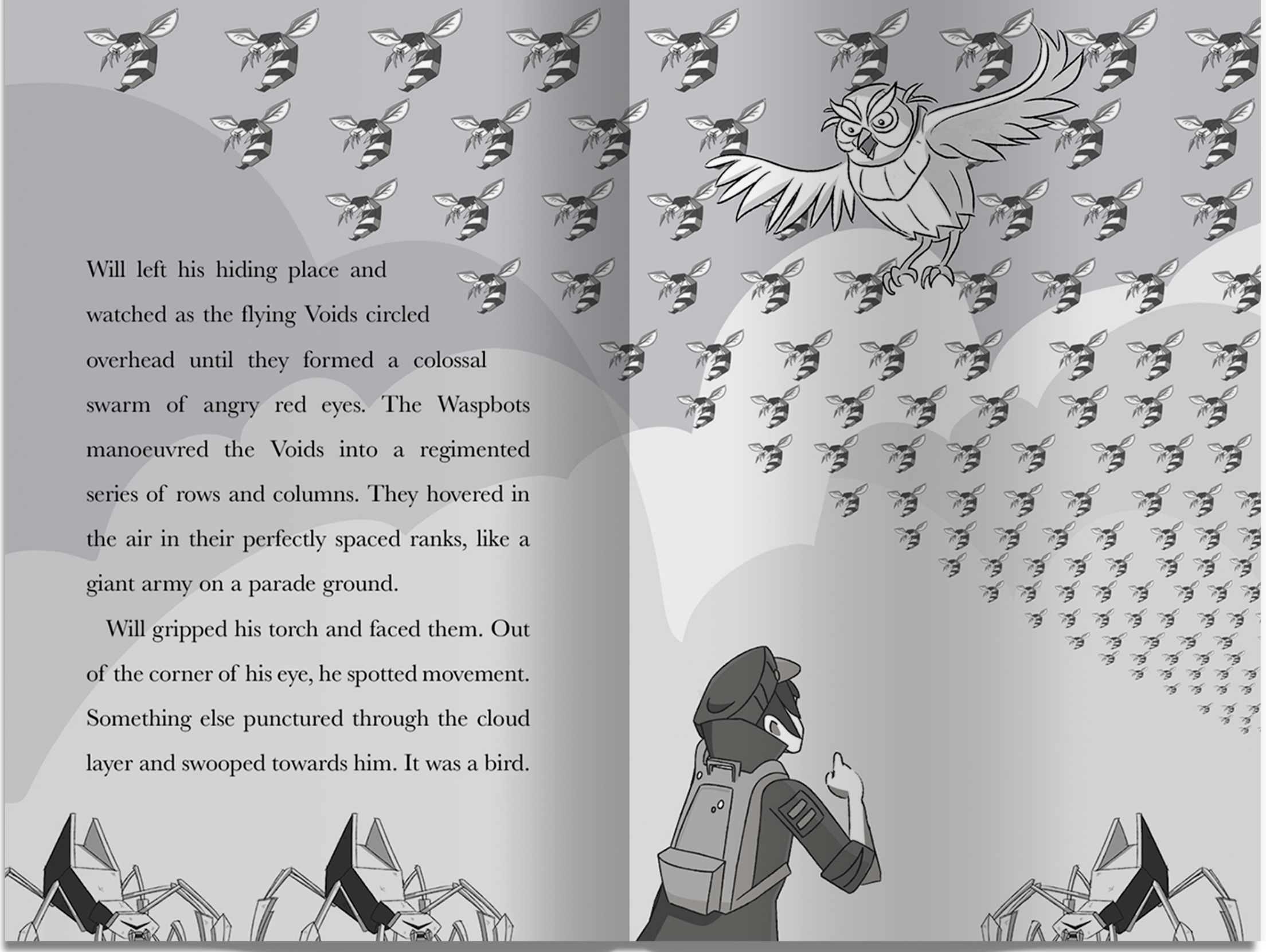
The History of Grudge the Bear



This isn't a book. It may look like a book, smell like a book and read like a book but it isn't a book. Rather, it is a bear. To be more precise, it is a bear called Grudge. I suspect you will never meet Grudge in person, so all that you will ever know of him are these carefully chosen words. So when I say this isn't a book, but rather a bear, it is my hope that when you hold these folded pieces of paper,

Will left his hiding place and watched as the flying Voids circled overhead until they formed a colossal swarm of angry red eyes. The Waspbots manoeuvred the Voids into a regimented series of rows and columns. They hovered in the air in their perfectly spaced ranks, like a giant army on a parade ground.

Will gripped his torch and faced them. Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted movement. Something else punctured through the cloud layer and swooped towards him. It was a bird.





together in delight.

'Oh là là, le Night Zookeeper! Why didn't vous say? It is a grand pleasure to meet vous. What brings vous to the Desert of Diamonds?'

'We are trying to get up to the Mountain in the Sky,' explained Will.

'Ah! Vous are adventurers like me!' exclaimed Stella. 'Always looking for a new challenge. And perhaps a little crazy.'

'What do you mean?'

'Vous want to go up there? Very dangereux place! No visitors welcome.'

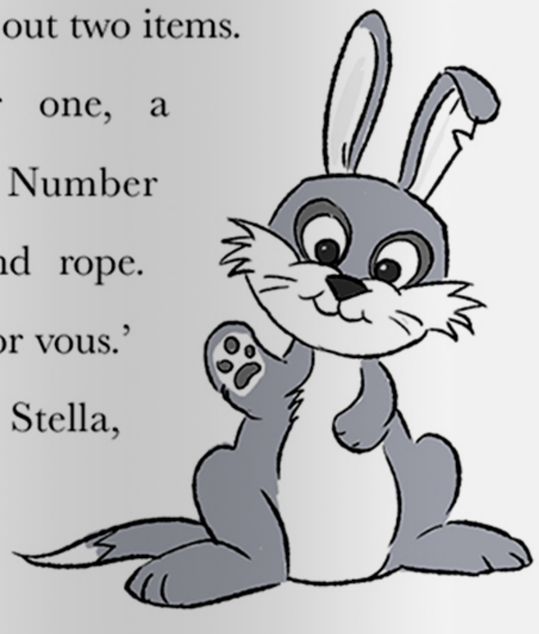
'But I'm looking for someone,' said Will. 'So, from one adventurer to another, can you

help me?' He quickly explained his mission and how he needed to climb the approaching frozen waterfall but wasn't sure he could.

Stella nodded. 'I understand. I do not like les serpents or les spiders. Très scary! But, remember, the fears we do not face become our limits. I have something that might help vous. Voilà.' Stella reached into her rucksack and pulled out two items.

'Number one, a pickaxe. Number two, a kind rope. They are for vous.'

'Sorry, Stella,



Desert; how he had used his imagination to create a huge mug of hot chocolate in Igloo City; and how he had passed the tests in Tusk Temple. He almost smiled to himself as he remembered how he had shrunk the leaping Void just in time in the temple ruins. Will clenched his jaw. 'The only way is up,' he told himself and looked for his next handhold.

Will began to climb. It was slow work at first, but his plan was working. He knew he could trust the kind rope and became more confident in his technique. Even so, every time he looked up he still couldn't see the top of the waterfall. All of a sudden, Will noticed a flash of bright



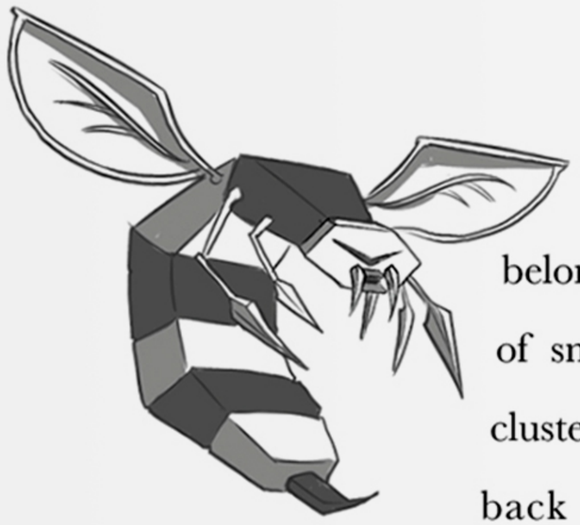
colour out of the corner of his eye. He looked round slowly to see a strange bird hovering a few feet from his head. It looked like a blue jay with its pretty wings covered in blue and white spots. But its body was a shiny red, with yellow dots like a strawberry. It even had a tuft of green feathers on its head that looked like the leaves on top of a strawberry! Will had never seen such a bird before, but he decided instantly that it should be called a jayberry.

'Hello,' said Will. The bird didn't reply. It tilted its head and watched him curiously for a

'HELP!' he said.

The kind rope suddenly seemed to come alive. It tightened around his waist and the loose end jumped out of his hand and wriggled up the ice wall at lightning speed. The loose end then burrowed into the icy surface above him. To his relief, Will felt the rope take his weight as it went tight. He was now hanging from the rope. Will rested for a few moments, breathing slowly to calm his nerves and his racing heart.

'Thank you,' he said to the kind rope. Feeling a little bit more secure, he looked up and planned his next move. He realized he could use the pickaxe to climb to the top of the rope and then ask it to move higher. That way he could complete a series of short climbs. Despite the cold, he felt a trickle of sweat roll from his forehead down the side of his face. His mind still swirled with doubts. He shook his head to drive them away. 'Focus,' he told himself. 'You've got this far.' Will forced himself to remember other things he had achieved so far. Things he never thought he was capable of. He remembered how he had used his torch to revive Sam during the battle in the Whispering Wood; how he had rescued Captain Claw from the giant Void in the Fire



belonged to a number of smaller grey robots clustered on the Void's back that were transporting it through the air. As the Void neared the ground, the robots suddenly released it and it dropped to the surface with a shuddering clang. Will could see the flying robots clearly now. There were four of them, hovering above the Void. They looked like vicious wasps with boxy metal bodies, long serrated claws like those of a praying mantis and sharp, shiny stingers.

'Quick, hide!' he shouted. He shouldn't

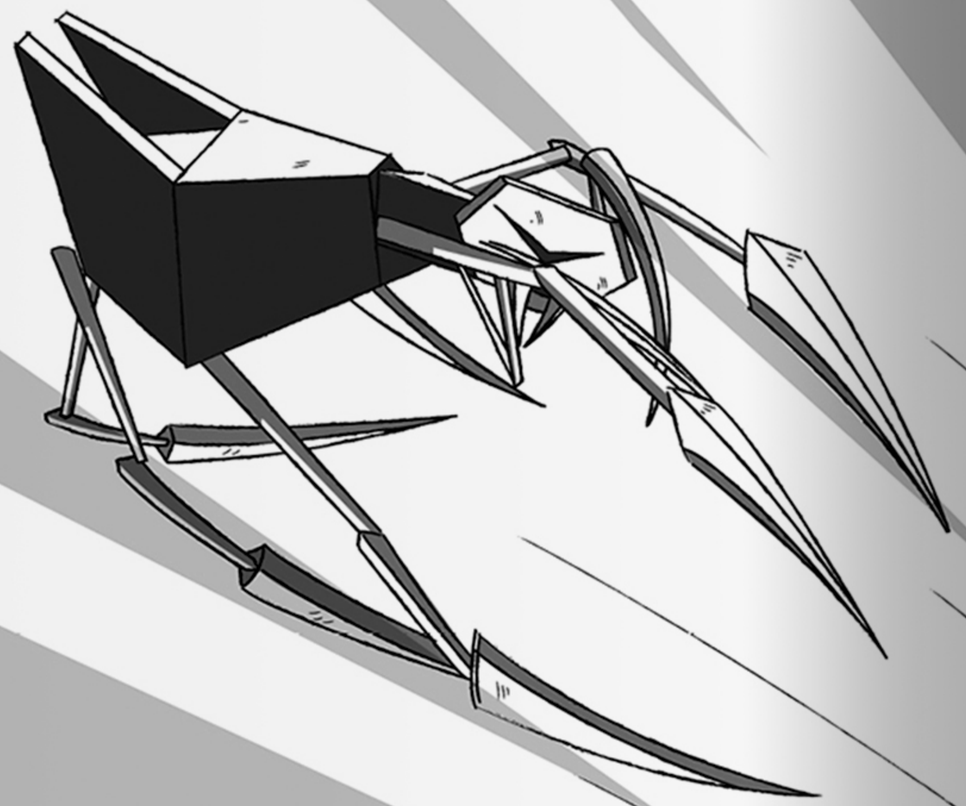


have opened his mouth. The Void's eye pulsed and flared, bathing Will, Riya and Sam in bright-red electric light. The three of them sprinted towards a huge boulder and ducked behind it. The red spotlight followed them.

Clicker-clacker! Clicker-clacker!

'Do you think it saw us?' asked Riya, breathing fast. 'And what are those flying things?'

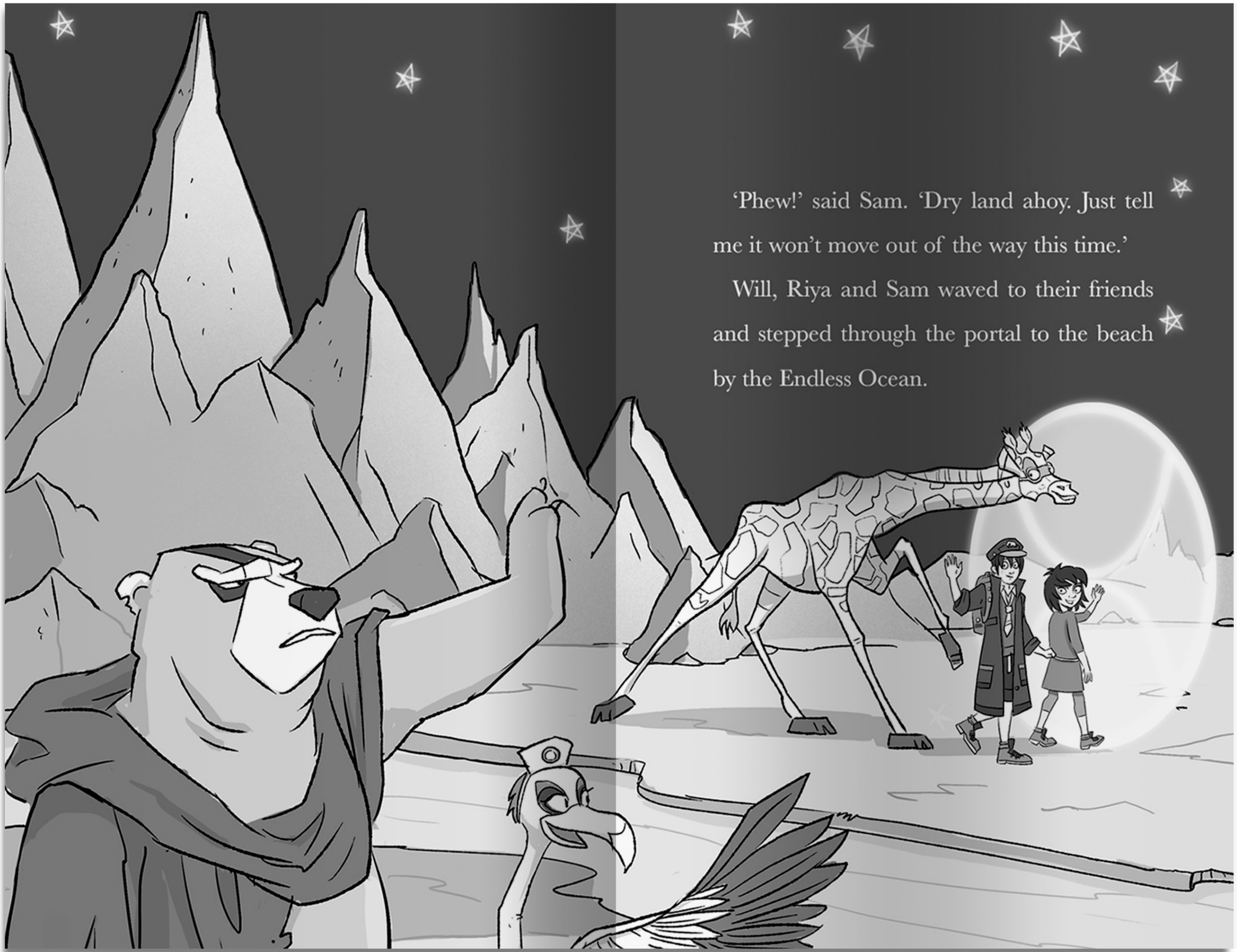
'Those are Waspbots!' exclaimed Sam. 'I saw a squadron of them flying over Whispering



The Waspbot struggled out from under his huge paws and tried to escape to the sky again. Grudge roared and jumped up to catch it. He shoved it to the ground again and blasted it apart with the rainbow beams from his claws. Grudge launched himself onto the back of a large Void and used it as a platform to ascend

into the air. Will held his breath as Grudge rose higher and higher, bashing through the Waspbots protecting Circles. The owl flapped her wings in a panic, but Grudge was too quick. He swung a huge paw at her and





‘Phew!’ said Sam. ‘Dry land ahoy. Just tell me it won’t move out of the way this time.’

Will, Riya and Sam waved to their friends and stepped through the portal to the beach by the Endless Ocean.