THE EYES & THE IMPOSSIBLE

PRAISE FOR *THE EYES AND THE IMPOSSIBLE*

Winner of the Newbery Medal

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Publishers Weekly, starred review

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The TODAY Show

'A work of dazzling ingenuity'
San Francisco Chronicle

'The voices and personalities of Johannes and his comrades are endearing; their unique story will enchant readers'
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'One remarkable creature vividly shows readers that "there is so, so much to see"'
Kirkus, starred review

'Compelling and heartfelt, destined to be read again and again'
Shelf Awareness, starred review

'This outstanding adventure story weaves complex thoughts about loyalty, friendship, and purpose into an epic escape plot that's pure bliss to read'
Common Sense Media

THE EYES & THE IMPOSSIBLE



DAVE EGGERS

ILLUSTRATIONS OF JOHANNES BY
Shawn Harris

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To all my teachers

&

to my stalwart friends
Amanda, Amy, Andrew, Shawn, & Taylor

This is a work of fiction. No places are real places. No animals are real animals. And, most crucially, no animals symbolize people. It is a tendency of the human species to see themselves in everything, to assume all living things, animals in particular, are simply corollaries to humans, but in this book, that is not the case. Here, the dogs are dogs, the birds are birds, goats are goats, the Bison Bison.





ONE

I turn I turn I turn before I lie to sleep and I rise before the Sun. I sleep inside and sleep outside and have slept in the hollow of a thousand-year-old tree. When I sleep I need warmth I need quiet I need freedom from sound. When I sleep I dream of mothers and clouds—clouds are messengers of God—and I dream of pupusas for I love pupusas and eat them with gusto.

I am a dog called Johannes and I have seen you. I have seen you in this park, my home. If you have come to this park, my vast green and windblown park by the sea, I have seen you. I have seen everyone who has been here, the walkers and runners and bikers and horse-riders and the Bison-seekers and the picnickers and the archers in their cloaks. When you have come here you have come to my home, where I am the Eyes.

I have seen all of you here. The big and small and tall and odorous. The travelers and tourists and locals and roller-skating

humans and those who play their brass under the mossy bridge and the jitterbug people who dance over that other bridge, and bearded humans who try to send flying discs into cages but usually fail. I see all in this park because I am the Eyes and have been entrusted with seeing and reporting all. Ask the turtles about me. Ask the squirrels. Don't ask the ducks. The ducks know nothing.

I run like a rocket. I run like a laser. You have never seen speed like mine. When I run I pull at the earth and make it turn. Have you seen me? You have not seen me. Not possible. You are mistaken. No one has seen me running because when I run human eyes are blind to me. I run like light. Have you seen the movement of light? Have you?

You have not seen the movement of light. But still I like you. You did not expect this or deserve this but I do. I like you.

I was born here. It's a story. My mother was housekept and still is. But when she was pregnant, she came here, to a hollow in a tree and waited for us to be born. I don't know and she doesn't know why she chose to have us in the woods rather than in the safety of her human home—for she lived then in a human home, and she has a tag and is fed daily and petted always and cared for by human doctors who have kept her alive so long, so much lon-

ger than she would have lived out here. Why she had us out here, I don't know, but she did, and when we all came out of her, oily and whimpering, she did an unexpected thing: she picked one of us, and brought that one—Leonard, my brother—to her human lair, and apparently her humans were thrilled to have her back home and delighted with her new son. The rest of us she left in the hollow of that tree.

I am not bitter.

I am a comet.

I have vague recollections of another dog feeding us pups in those early days. I have cloudy memories of that dog's smell. But was it a dog? Or was it a fox or raccoon? Janie says it was an owl. Joanie says it was a squirrel. Those are my sisters, Joanie and Janie. There is also my brother Steven. Someone fed us for those crucial first days, and it was only a few weeks before we could fend for ourselves and we did. We fended and we grew and we were good. Leonard was being fed from a kibble bag while we scrounged for what we could find in the park.

We were hungry but we were free. I still fend and I still scrounge and am still free, have always been free. No one feeds me. I am unkept and free. This is my life. God is the Sun. Clouds are her messengers. Rain is only rain.

* * *

This park is enormous. I am not a math expert but I believe it is ten thousand miles along its length and about three thousand along its width. It is long and narrow and it leads from the gray city all the way to a rough gray patch of angry ocean that meets a vast windy beach where people drown three or four times a year in the sinewy muscles of the savage sea.

I have been to this beach and have not drowned. I have crossed roads and highways and I remain unharmed. I have bitten a leg or two when necessary and I have leapt from a rooftop and came away fine.

I am strong.

I stared straight into a solar eclipse and nothing happened.

I cannot be defeated.

Maybe I'll never die.

In those early days, Joanie and Janie and Steven and I found the garbage near the snack vendors and we ate heartily from said garbage. It was so easy and we ate well. We ate half-eaten hot dogs and parts of pretzels and drank incomplete juices and sodas and spit out the sodas for they were offensive to us then and still are now. There was so much food here, so much that it was, and still is, so easy to eat often and well.

Then Joanie and Janie and Steven disappeared and it was strange how it happened. We were still puppies, I know that now. We were all puppies and were watching the humans dancing near the bridge one day, just the four of us sitting and watching the band and the dancing, when suddenly human hands lifted them, Joanie and Steven, saying things about how they were puppies and so small and so fuzzy, and I thought, *No*. I thought *No*, and told Janie *Run*, but she thought *Yes* and said *Yes*, and stayed, and she was lifted up too.

So they were taken by humans and I assume they became kept dogs—pets—and I ran into the woods where I remained free and became the Eyes.

TWO

How I became the Eyes, yes. It is a story. One day, as I ran like light through the park, I heard a rumbling voice.

"Stop," it said.

I would never think of stopping for anyone for I am free and fast but this voice was both commanding and kind, a motherly sort of voice, so I did not stop, no—I did not stop just like that, how could I?—but I slowed to the speed of sound.

"Come here please," the voice said, and I slowed to the speed of an airplane and came closer to the voice, which seemed to be coming from a fur-covered boulder. The boulder was speaking to me through the woods.

"Come closer," the voice asked, and I slowed to regular mortal mammal at top speed and came closer and saw that the boulder was a living thing, a Bison. I had seen the Bison from far away, from the road that cuts through the park and along which I sometimes run

because I like to race the cars. Oh lord I am so much faster. It's just a cruel joke how much faster I am. It is embarrassing to cars and the humans that drive them and the humans that make them. I render them silly but I am not sorry.

"Come here and talk to me," the voice said, and when I did so, I could see this Bison up close and could see that she was very old. This was Freya. I am not a scientist of time but I estimate she was six thousand years old. She is now older still.

She was one of three Bison—the other two are Meredith and Samuel—who live in a large fenced-in park within the park. They have been here always and they are slow-moving and often tired, it seems, but they have ruled the park for millions of years or more.

"I have seen you run," Freya said to me, her eyes huge and heavy-lidded. "You are very fast," she said, and I nodded seriously, pridefully. "We, the rulers of this park, need to know what happens within it, and most of the rabbits are gone now, and the owls are unreliable."

"They make up things and they have their own agenda," Meredith said, not unkindly. Meredith was the warmest of the three, the first to believe, the first to encourage.

"And of course the ducks are morons," Samuel said. He was the most cynical, the most tired, the most funny.

I knew the rabbits had disappeared, but did not know this about the owls, about their unreliability. I made a mental note

to remember that owls have their own agenda. The ducks, though—I already knew they were morons.

"We would like you to be our eyes," Freya said.

"You would be good," Meredith said.

I wanted to be their eyes. So I became the Eyes.

"Don't screw it up," Samuel said.

And so it was. My task was simple but crucial. I would run the park daily as I already did, but now, after sunset each day, I would report to the Bison what I had seen. Was there anything new, the Bison wanted to know. Was there anything troubling? Was there anything that they needed to know about that might upset the Equilibrium?

The park has an Equilibrium, as all natural places do, and the Bison watch it and protect it. They are the Keepers of the Equilibrium. If the Equilibrium is upset there are problems. If the Parks People cut a new path across the width of the park, that means more people will come where the animals had been alone and undisturbed, and that might upset the balance. If there are new buildings, that upsets the Equilibrium. New roads, new rules. All affect the Equilibrium.

The system, our system, is a good one. I see something, I tell the Bison, they conjure a solution. When there was a new road

cutting through the forest where most of the raccoons lived, I told the Bison and they decided where and when the raccoons needed to relocate. When the foxes and the squirrels have disagreements over territory, I report this to the Bison, and they decide who gets what. When a mass of humans is being too destructive and disrespectful of the land, I tell the Bison and they direct Bertrand and his birds to drop truly uncomfortable amounts of feces on these humans. Problem solved. And it all starts with what I see. The news I gather.

Most of my news is about the humans. They run and rollerskate and picnic and generally do what they should do in parks. They play croquet. They climb trees. Bikes are ridden and paths are walked. Such people are not a problem. But then there are people who are a problem. There are the Concerteers and the Campers, both of whom can be problems. The Concerteers come once a year, and when they do they play deafening music in the grass in the oval and this is a problem. The Concerteers come from near and far and generally have not been to our park before and they have no idea where they are, or that it is a place in and of itself, a place inhabited by thousands of permanent residents like myself, and not simply a stage for their standing and nodding and twirling. The Concerteers nearly ruin the park once a year with their noise and garbage and vomit and indiscriminate urination.

But they leave. They leave and we can recover.

The Campers are complicated. Some stay and have stayed for years and we know them by name and some of them are not at all a problem. Marianne and Dennis sleep in a tidy tent near the duck pond and have been here as long as I have. Thomas, near-blind, feeds birds and squirrels and lives by the sea; he's been here for what some say is a thousand years. All of these Campers are like us—they live quietly, and they walk gently, gently, gently in the woods. They respect the Equilibrium.

But then there are Trouble Travelers. These humans are not so good. They eat and drink smelly things and are sick and loud. They fight and they steal. They leave bottles and papers and feces. They attack strangers and mistreat animals. They make the woods perilous and they make them smell. Usually they travel through the park in big and loud vehicles. They are passing through, on their way from and to other places. They do not care about our home.

Most humans, though, pass through and are fine. I know this is their park as much as it is mine. The Bison understand this, the turtles and squirrels understand this. The ducks understand nothing, but that's another thing entirely.

Most humans live in their pale concrete homes on their gray asphalt streets and come through for an hour or two and I watch them. I watch the runners and horse-riders and the archers. I watch

the soccer players and soccer watchers. I watch the families and their children suddenly let loose. I watch the dog-walkers and laugh at the kept dogs. Ha ha hoooooo!

I laugh like this: Ha ha hoooooo!

Ha ha hoooooo! Pets!

These kept dogs on their leashes, they pretend I am laughing with them and not at them and that makes me laugh harder.

Ha ha hoooooo!

Ha ha hoooooo!

Delightful. Delightful. Delightful.

I laugh at how they are kept and how they pretend to be free like me. They act all casual with me, like the leash is no problem, like they would just as soon be free like me, like they could be free if they wanted, but that is a joke I laugh at with great fervor. Ha ha hoooooo! I laugh so much I cry and cry and cry enormous tears of limitless mirth.

Not-free is not free. These kept dogs know the difference and have chosen the kibble in a bag. They have chosen the under-table leftovers. They have chosen the roof overhead and the leash. The leash! The leash! The leash!

Ha ha hoooooo! I say, for I am a different breed.