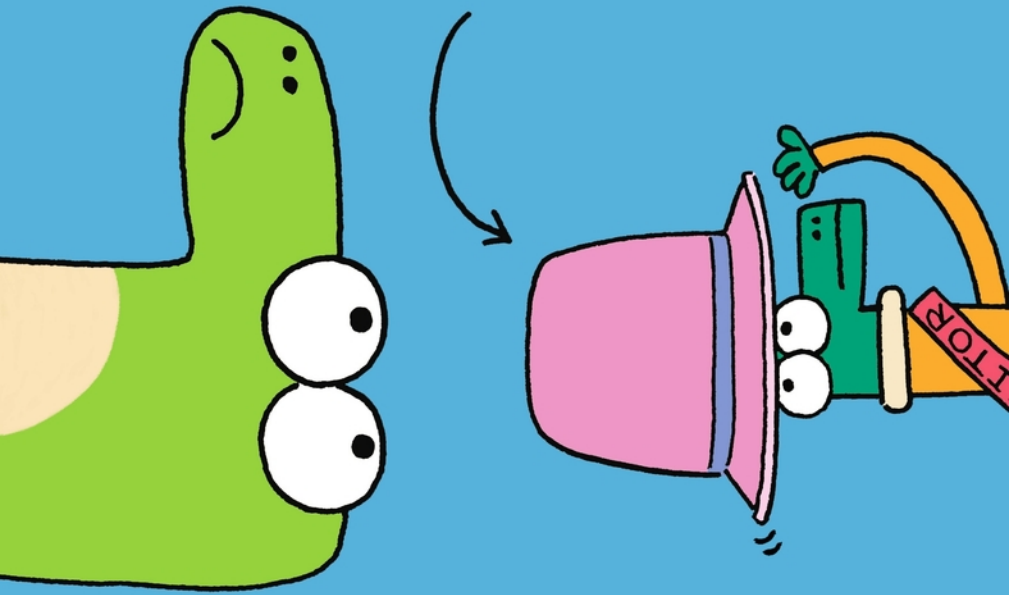
CHRONICLES OF A LIZARD NOBODY

THE HAT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE



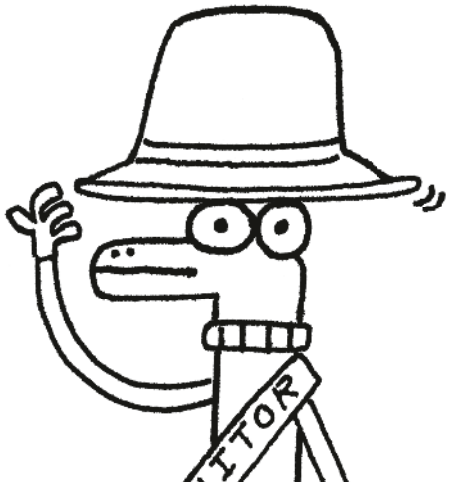
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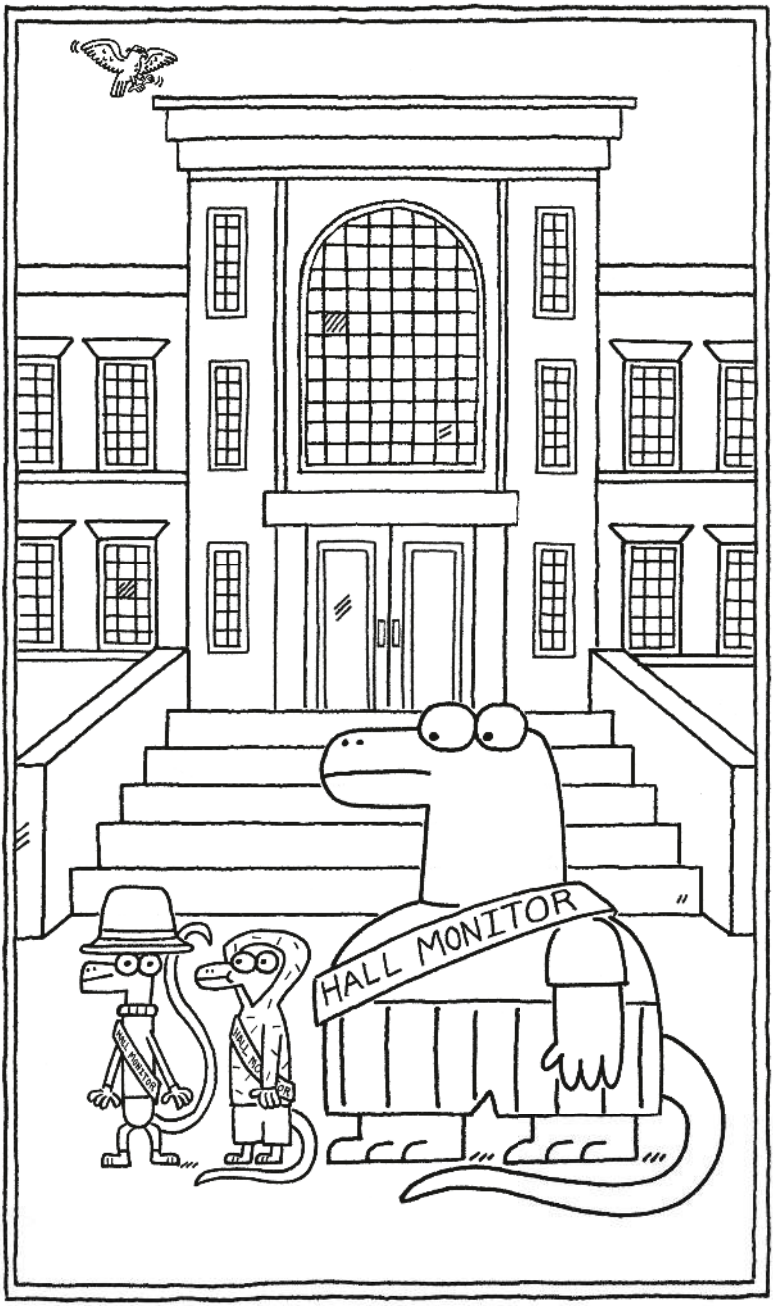
PATRICK NESS

ILLUSTRATED BY **TIM MILLER**

CHRONICLES OF A LIZARD NOBODY

THE HAT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE




HALL MONITOR

CHRONICLES OF A LIZARD NOBODY

THE HAT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE

PATRICK NESS

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WALKER BOOKS

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or, if real, are used fictitiously.

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For my brother Joe,
who reads everything and who
still lets me call him Joey (but you can't)

1

DANIEL WEARS A HAT

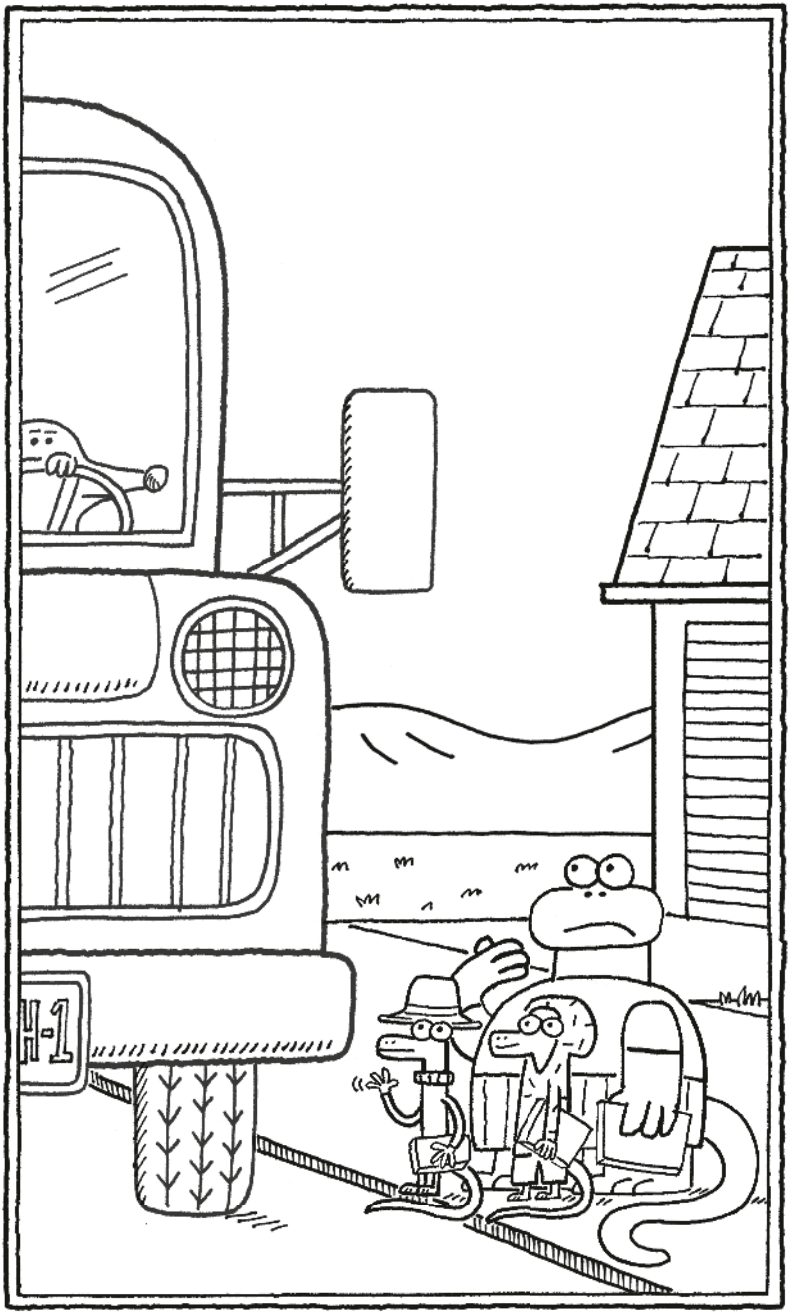
Two lizards looked at the hat a third lizard was wearing while they all waited for the school bus. The hat was pink, though that wasn't the problem.

"It's pink," Zeke said to Daniel, who wore the hat.

"I like pink," Daniel said.

"I know you do," Zeke said, still staring at the hat, worried for no reason he could exactly put his finger on, though, again, it wasn't to do with the color. Daniel liked pink. This was known, much in the same way Zeke liked, say, potatoes cooked in any form. "If you were going to wear a hat, I would have guessed it would be pink."

"I know!" Daniel said, still smiling. He turned to Alicia. "Do you like it?"


H-1

"I'd say it was more of a salmon color, really," said Alicia.

"I've never met a salmon!" Daniel said.



None of them had ever met a salmon. Fish were incredibly hard to meet. They had their own schools[1] in their own neighborhoods in lakes and rivers and the ocean. They were a whole other world.

"Why are you wearing a hat?" Zeke asked, still uneasy.

"Don't you like it?" Daniel asked, sounding worried now, too.

"No, no!" Zeke said. "I like it. It's cool. Pink is cool."

"Or salmon," said Alicia.

---

1 This is not a pun on "schools of fish." Puns will not be tolerated here. Fish literally had their own elementary, junior high, and high schools. It's not a pun. Puns are the worst.

"But?" Daniel said, a little more observant than usual.

"Well," Zeke said. "Don't only birds wear hats?"

"Is that a rule?" Daniel asked, sounding genuinely curious.

And at that, the three lizards paused. Because no, there wasn't a rule exactly . . . But there sure *seemed* to be a rule. Was it a rule if it wasn't actually written down anywhere but was something that everyone knew anyway and acted like it was?

"Huh," Zeke said.

2

OUR LIZARDS, HERE THEY ARE

Here are our lizards, Zeke, Daniel, and Alicia, stepping back as the school bus pulls in. All three are what's known as monitor lizards: Alicia and Daniel were clouded monitors whose green skin was covered in patterns of little yellow spots, and Zeke was a peach-throated monitor whose throat was, well, peach-colored. He was considerably larger than his two clouded monitor friends even though peach-throated monitors were, on the whole, smaller than clouded monitors. Such was life. Averages are just



averages, and you meet people outside them all the time.

They got on the bus, driven by the same shrew who had always driven it. The lizards lived the farthest away of any student, being bused in from the poorest part of town under a program to get species to mix more at school, which also meant they were the first people on the bus every morning, aside from the very quiet triplet daughters of the shrew who'd just started that year and were so small even Daniel could have put them in a pocket.

None of the shrews, father or daughters, commented on the hat. But Zeke could see them looking.

"There's going to be trouble," he thought, but he said it out loud, too.

Alicia shoved him gently and said, "Let him have his hat."

Zeke followed his friends to their normal seats, Daniel at the window, Zeke next to him,

Alicia on the seat in front of them, leaning over to keep talking. They were on their way to a normal school day at their normal school—recently rebuilt at great expense by the town's supervillain after her son had destroyed it with a giant robot pelican suit (it was a whole thing). Daniel and Alicia were already wearing their Hall Monitor sashes, while Zeke's was in his backpack with his books. Principal Wombat had made three monitor lizards into the only three Hall Monitors in school. This was probably a pun, but if so, it was the fault of the Principal and not your narrator.

It was their job to watch out for late-arriving students or students who were in the hallway when they weren't supposed to be. In other words, they monitored the halls[2]. Being a Hall Monitor, though, was not, as the lizards had repeatedly pointed out to Principal Wombat, a job that was going to help their already quite low popularity.

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2 As you may have guessed from "Hall Monitors."

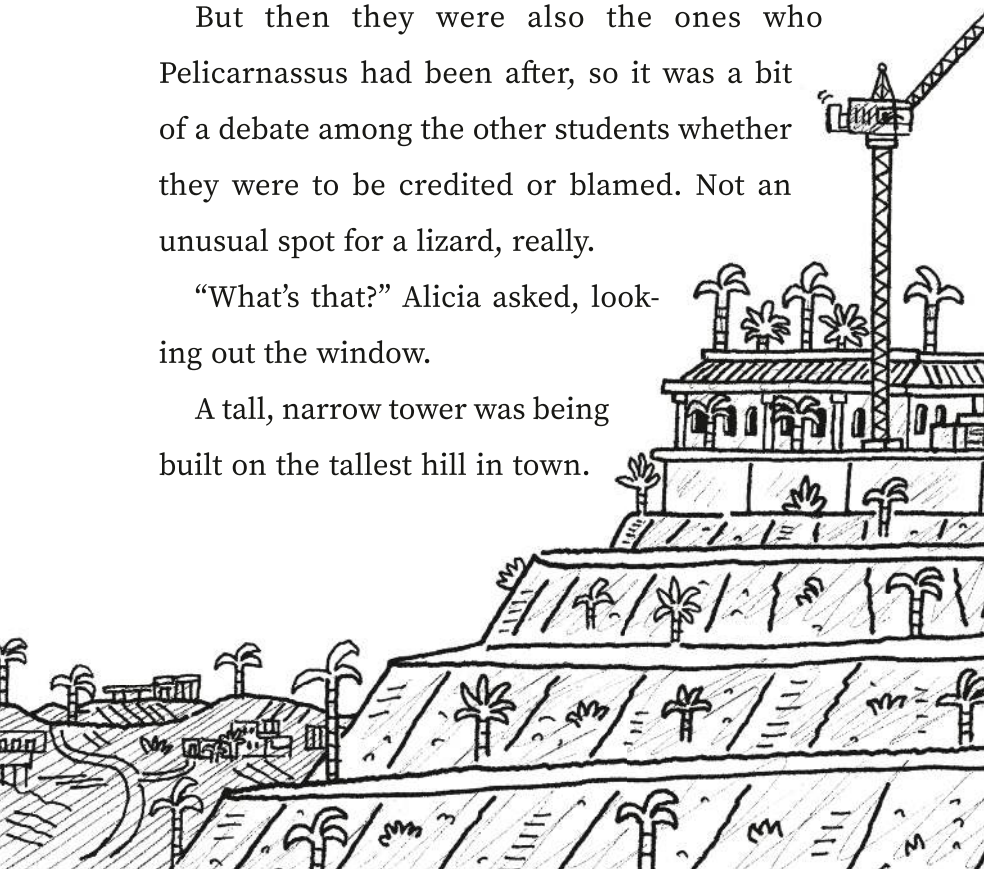
Except Zeke had been the one to stop the giant robot pelican suit, as well as the regular-sized pelican, Pelicarnassus, who had been flying it. Zeke and his friends—not just Alicia and Daniel, but Miel, too, the blind hawk with the very loud voice who was probably cooler than the entire school put together but didn't seem to know it.

They were the ones who'd done that.

But then they were also the ones who Pelicarnassus had been after, so it was a bit of a debate among the other students whether they were to be credited or blamed. Not an unusual spot for a lizard, really.

"What's that?" Alicia asked, looking out the window.

A tall, narrow tower was being built on the tallest hill in town.



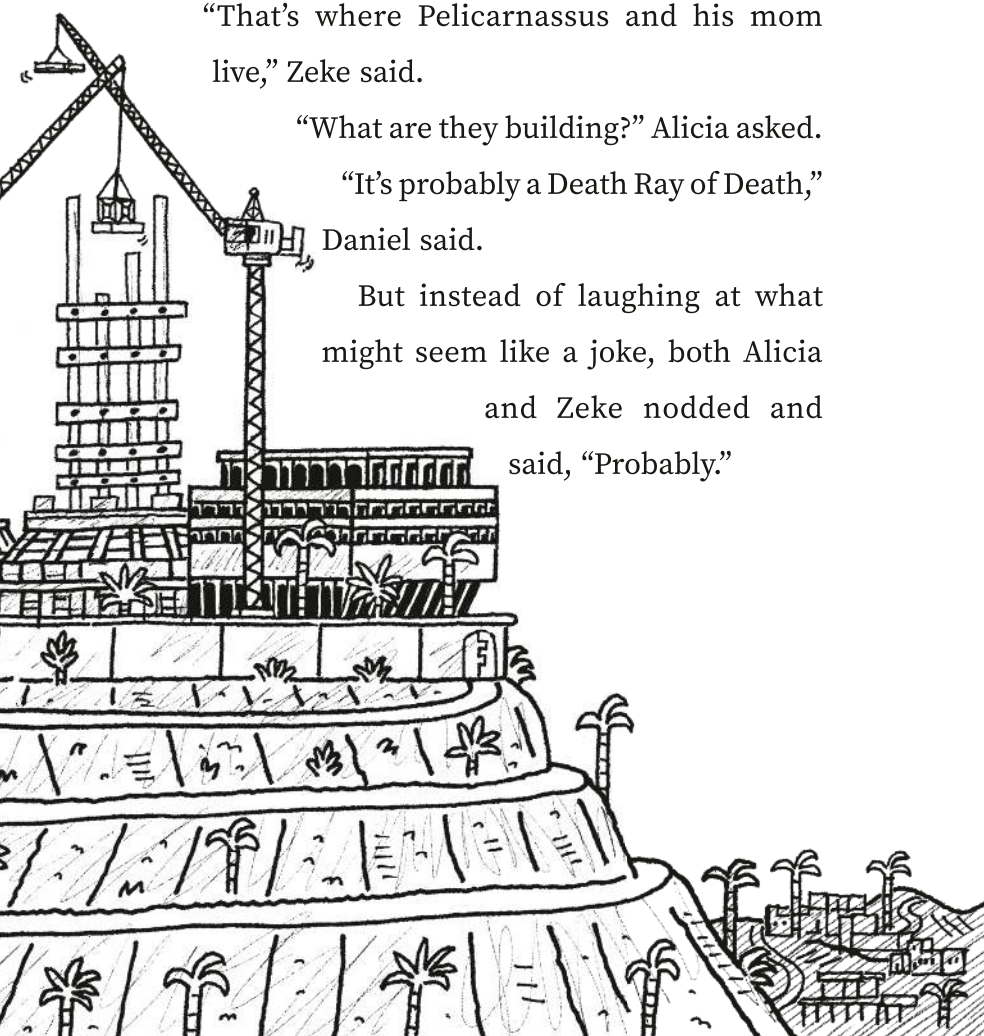
Two cranes—machines, not birds, though they were in fact operated by cranes—brought materials up to the very top of the tower, building something that couldn't quite be made out. Then it was gone as the bus drove through some trees.

"That's where Pelicarnassus and his mom live," Zeke said.

"What are they building?" Alicia asked.

"It's probably a Death Ray of Death," Daniel said.

But instead of laughing at what might seem like a joke, both Alicia and Zeke nodded and said, "Probably."



"Anyway," Daniel said, cheerful again as the bus made another stop (it never took him long to be cheerful again), "I like the hat. I'll bet everyone else will, too."

"ARE YOU WEARING A HAT?" said Miel, tapping his way to the seat he always took across the aisle. His voice was very shouty, even though he tried to keep the volume down. There were only so many ways a hawk could speak[3]. "I AM SURE IT IS A FINE ONE!"

"Don't only birds wear hats, though?" Zeke asked.

There was a pause, as Miel seemed to think about this behind his sunglasses. "DO WE?"

"We only ever see them on birds," Zeke said. "And now Daniel."

"MY DAD DOESN'T WEAR A HAT. NOR DO I. DO MOST OTHER BIRDS REALLY WEAR HATS? NO ONE'S EVER SAID!"

---

3 There was, in fact, only one. Very shouty.

"Pelicarnassus wears a hat," Zeke said.

"PELICARNASSUS IS NOT A GOOD GUIDE TO BIRD BEHAVIOR," Miel said, frowning.

"That's certainly true," Alicia said.

"Most of the other birds wear hats, too, though," Zeke said. "You look up on the jungle gym and it's just birds with hats all the way up."

"I DO NOT LIKE THAT I DID NOT KNOW THIS," Miel said. "THEY COULD HAVE SAID SOMETHING. ESPECIALLY AS I DO NOT WEAR A HAT."

"You want to wear my hat?" Daniel offered.

"OH, NO, THANK YOU, I DO NOT LIKE HATS. THOUGH, AGAIN, I AM SURE YOURS IS WONDERFUL."

"It really is," said Daniel.

"See?" Alicia said. "It's going to be fine."

Reader, it was not fine.