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Opening extract from

Beyond the Spiderwick Chronicles

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Chapter One



IN WHICH Nick and Laurie Get One Lesson and Learn Another

Nicholas Vargas had never been all that good at sports. He liked to play basketball, but he scored a lot higher with a controller in his hand and an animated character shooting the baskets for him. Same with baseball and tennis and even swimming. He saw absolutely no reason why anything would be different when it came to giant-killing.

Nick's stepsister, Laurie, had twisted her blond tangles into braids because she'd read somewhere that it was important to keep hair

off your face in a fight. She was determined to learn how to kill giants, but Nick was pretty sure that she was bad at basketball and baseball and swimming both in real life *and* on the screen. A notebook was balanced on her knees and she had set a microcassette recorder on the ground so she could replay the whole lesson later. She chewed the end of her pencil thoughtfully, ready to take extra notes, as Noseeum Jack started to speak.

"First you got to find the giant," he said, sitting down on a stump. They were in the front yard of Jack's ramshackle house in the middle of the day, and the humid air settled on all their shoulders like a heavy blanket. "If he's moving, things have already gone too far. Your best bet is doing the slaying before they wake up."

Laurie raised her hand.

Jack kept on talking. "Couple o' ways to know there are giants underfoot. They like the

swamps, but they like freshwater better than salt since they gotta drink it through their skin. Look for rocks and hills, especially if they've got odd-colored grass on 'em. Lots o' the time, that grass is really hair."

Laurie waved her hand a little, impatiently. Nick snatched her pencil. On the page of her notebook, he wrote *HE'S BLIND.*

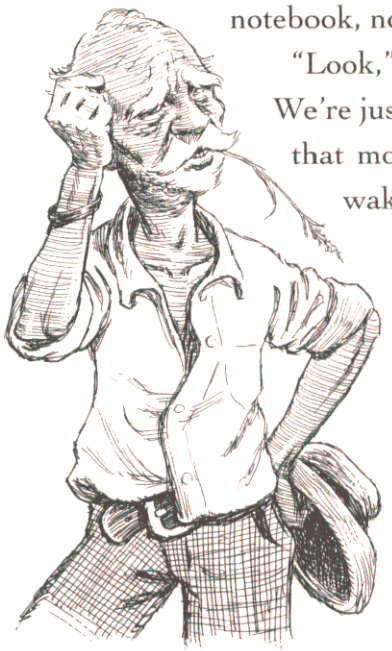
Jack's eyes were cloudy with what Nick thought might be cataracts. His grandma had had cataracts and the doctors did some kind of laser surgery on them, but Jack's eyes looked much worse than Nick's grandmother's had.

Noseeum Jack. It was a really sad nickname. He'd had the Sight, and blindness took it away from him. Maybe he could see a little bit through the cloudiness, but obviously he couldn't see enough to notice a hand waving in front of his face.

"Are there girl giants?" Laurie asked, interrupting a story Jack had been telling about finding a giant by the way his mountainous head and weedlike hair were covered with dandruff.

"Uh," he said, and then scratched his head. "Sure. I guess. Mostly I never noticed any difference."

Laurie wrote something in her notebook, nodding.



"Look," Nick said. "This is dumb. We're just two kids. And you said that more giants were going to wake up. All of them, maybe. All at once. We can't stop that. This is useless."

"We all got to play the hand we're dealt," Jack said, picking up

his machete. "This area's where the highest concentration of giants is. Estimate's maybe thirty still around. There are two good killing blows guaranteed to put down a giant if you just—"

"What hand was I dealt? It's summer," said Nick. "My job in the summer is to have fun. School's out. We shouldn't have to come here every other day."

"But these lessons aren't like school," Laurie said.

"Oh, come on," said Nick. "It's not like you really want to kill anything. You're just excited because you get to talk about giants all day long. This isn't pretend anymore."

She narrowed her eyes. "I know that!"

"Do you?" Nick looked over at Jack, but he was just shaking his head at both of them.

"Wait! I have it!" Laurie said. "We have to get other people to join us."

"That's crazy," Nick said. "No one would believe us."

"We've got to make them believe," said Laurie.

Jack grunted softly. "You think you could?" He looked hopeful, which only made Nick feel more glum. Maybe Jack had already realized what bad students he had and how hopeless this was.

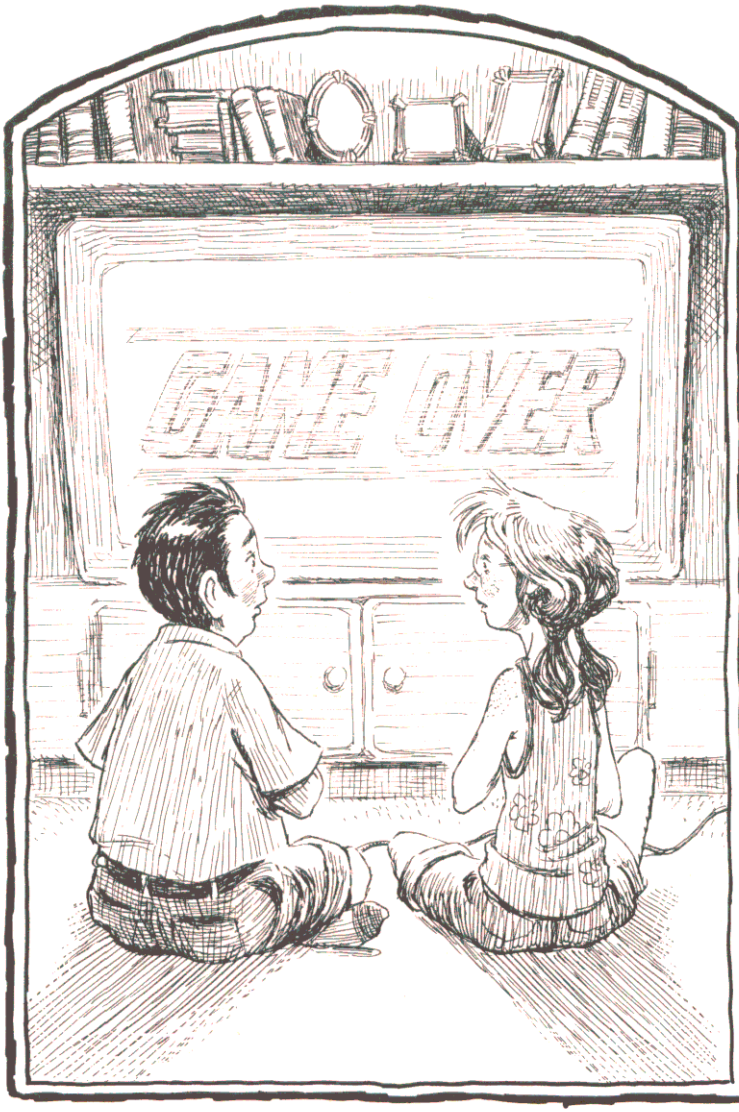
"I know I could," Laurie said, full of stupid certainty. "And we could get Jared and Simon to come back, and maybe they will bring Mallory this time. And maybe they've met other people who would want to help."

"Jared and Simon went home to Maine. They're not coming back," Nick said. "They got what they wanted. They got their uncle's papers."

"Either way," said Jack, "there's one thing we can be sure about: The more people we got to

train, the more you both better know. So listen up." With that, he began telling a complicated story about what had appeared to be two giants sleeping side by side, but turned out to be a rare type of giant with two heads.

Laurie recorded every word.



Nick stopped smiling.

Chapter Two



IN WHICH Nick and Laurie Are Surprised by Their Visitor

Nick pressed his finger down harder on the controller, making his car on the screen accelerate. He swerved it in front of Laurie's Volkswagen, knocking into its side and making virtual sparks fly.

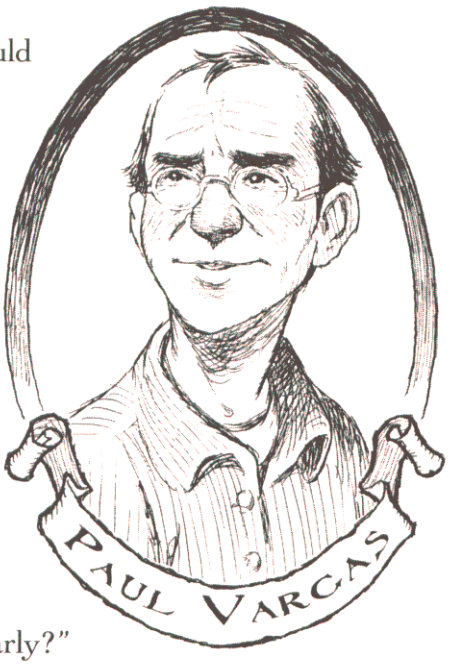
She scowled, biting her lip in concentration.

Rockets shot out of her bumper. His car exploded in a whoosh of orange flame as she crowed with laughter. "I'm getting better," she said with a huge smile.

He grinned too. He didn't mind her winning.



He was having fun. The air-conditioning filled the house with cold, sweet air, and just breathing it in made him feel safe. Rain smeared the windows, making the outside blurry and far away. And the more he concentrated on the game, the less he had to think about the nixie waiting in her pond for him to find the rest of her sisters, or all of the giants that might be waking up, or how some blind old guy thought that they could do anything about it. This was how summer was supposed to be.



Besides, this could be considered a kind of training. Maybe. Laurie's reflexes were definitely improving.

Downstairs, a door slammed and his father shouted. "That's not what I said!"

Nick stopped smiling.

"You didn't say you would be home early?" Charlene demanded. "You said you would call if something came up. The kids ate hours ago."

"I said I would *try*. The weather, the rain, it's making things hard."

Didn't they realize that just because they

couldn't see anyone else didn't mean they couldn't be heard? His father was a contractor; shouldn't he be aware of vents?

Laurie put down the controller with a sigh, looking at Nick's face. "Everybody fights."

"You tell me everything will be different after the development is done, but there's always going to be another crisis," Charlene yelled. "I don't think you're ready for this. For being married again."

Nick didn't hear the rest because he clapped Jules's headphones over his ears and plugged them into the game. He turned up the sound and set it to single player. He didn't want to hear anyone say anything about his mother. Didn't Charlene know you were supposed to shut up about the dead?

He blew up three of his own cars before Laurie tapped his arm. He shook her off.

"Nick," she said, pulling one side of his headphones down. "Jack's here."

He blinked at her in confusion. "What?" Nick looked around, like Jack was hiding somewhere in the room.

"He's downstairs. Says he has something to show us." She wore a satchel on her hip and had her flip-flops on. "Your dad is freaking out."

"Uh . . ." Nick hadn't even realized she'd left. He took off the headphones and followed her downstairs.

Charlene's back was toward them, her shoulders hunched and shaking slightly as if she were crying. She walked into the study and slammed the door.

Jack stood in the front entrance. He was grinning like a loon.

"Come on, kid," he said. "We got work to do."

"Do you know this man?" asked Nick's dad.

Laurie smiled and started in on one of her elaborate lies. "He's my friend's dad. From where we used to live. Turtle eggs are hatching at the beach and he promised to take us."

"It's very late," Nick's dad said, but he glanced toward the room Charlene was in. Nick bet he wanted to get back to his fight. "Where are you all going? And what did he mean about work?"

"Down to the beach," Laurie said. "My friend Emily is waiting in the car. Her dad thinks we can do a science project about it."

Jack smirked in a way that seemed too amused to be parental.

Nick cleared his throat. "Isn't Jules there? Maybe we can meet up with him."

Jules was always at the beach. It didn't matter if it was sunny or raining, early or late. He could be counted on to surf until his skin



The thunder got louder.

"What if one of them storms out?" Ladies on the soap operas his aunt watched did that all the time.

"Into the rain?" Laurie was looking at him like the idea was ridiculous.

"Come on!" said Jack. He made a sweeping gesture with his hands and started walking. They followed him.

overhead, but the rain had slowed to a drizzle.

"Let's go," Jack said.

The lake was choked with newly planted water lilies. Raindrops rippled the water, but there was no sign of the nixie.

"Hey," said Nick, "we promised to help Taloa find the rest of her sisters. Maybe we should—"

"Later! I came to show you both something important, not to dawdle."

"Just one more second," Laurie said. She grabbed a stick of gum out of her bag, chewed it, then used it to affix a piece of paper to the garage door.

Nick watched her as she scrawled on it: JULES—WE SAID WE WERE WITH YOU. DON'T SQUEAL ON US.

"You're crazy! What if they see that?"

She rolled her eyes. "They're going to fight for ages."

No, we wouldn't have to be really close by or anything. Just so you could see us. We promise not to bother you. Okay. Okay." She put down the phone.

"He says okay," Laurie reported. If Nick hadn't watched her hold the off button on the phone the whole time, even he might have believed she'd really had that conversation.

Nick's dad looked at Noseeum Jack again and sighed. Then he glanced at the study again. "All right. Be back by ten." He pulled his cell phone out of his pocket and handed it to Nick. "Call me if you can't find your brother. Oh, and look out for a raccoon on your way out. Something's been getting into the garbage."

Nick and Laurie walked out onto the lawn with Jack. As the door closed, Nick heard Charlene say something in a shaky voice and his dad shout something back. Thunder cracked



wrinkled up and he got hungry or tired enough to come home.

Nick's dad looked at Noseeum Jack's bare feet and the machete at his hip.

"It's for cutting open fruit," Nick said, following his father's gaze. "And cutting weeds, of course."

"Fruit," repeated his dad. "Fine. Why don't you call your brother?"

"I'll do it." Laurie went to the phone and punched in a bunch of numbers. Then she waited for a few moments, like it was ringing.

"Hi, Jules. It's Laurie. Yeah. No. Um, we were wondering, if we came down to the beach, would it be okay if we hung out with you?



Jack stood in the front entrance.