

Mollie, Ollie, Laquisha, Ilcharheen and Edwin plopped down into chairs around one of the tables in the common area of the Bunks. Well, the four human kids plopped into chairs; Edwin just rolled to a stop under the table.

The humans stared at each other, glassy-eyed, barely aware of the sounds of other kids playing all around them.

Eventually, Ollie broke the silence. "Group projects suck."

"So does Professor Beans," Mollie added.

Laquisha thumped both fists into the chair. "We'll get through it! We only need to pick a magical artifact from some canon or other, co-write an essay about its properties and relevance to the themes of the story it's in, make a physical model of it, and prepare a scene to act out in front of the class with our model. Easy? Easy."

The rest of the students groaned. (Edwin's groan was more of a metallic ringing.)

In her breathy Calormene accent, Ilcharheen asked, "So, what do we do? How do we start this?" Her eyes were on Laquisha.

Actually, all three of the other humans were staring at Laquisha, so she said, "Hey, what gives? You've all got thoughts, I'm sure?"

"Um, well," Mollie said. "I mean, maybe? Not really."

"You're always so, um." Ilcharheen paused. "You're the one getting ideas, yes?"

Ollie offered, "You're the leadership-type, here."

"Oh, really?" Laquisha asked, trying to sound disapproving, but not entirely keeping the pleased smile out of her voice.

"You're like our Jake!" said Mollie. "From *Animorphs*? The born leader. The natural decision-maker!"

"All right, all right! The praise is appreciated." Laquisha smiled openly now. "But we still need to decide on a topic. Since Mollie brought up *Animorphs*, how about that blue morphing cube?"

"I feel like another group is going to end up doing that," said Ollie. "Plus, that's a long series to potentially need to comb through. We should do something from a canon with fewer entries. Maybe—"

"Laquisha, I need you!" yelled Fox, running up to the group. "Harry's trying to fight an older kid, and you're the only one he ever listens to!"

Laquisha huffed and stood up. "I'll be back when I can. Uh . . ." She tracked her pointer finger over the group, quickly eliminating the robot and the meeker girl before hovering between the rhyming-named pair. "Mollie, you're in charge while I'm gone."

Ollie pouted. "Why her?"

As Laquisha ran off with Fox, she shouted over her shoulder, "More letters in her name!"

Ollie squinted. “What?!”