

DRAGONBREATH

REVENGE OF THE HORNED BUNNIES

BY
URSULA VERNON

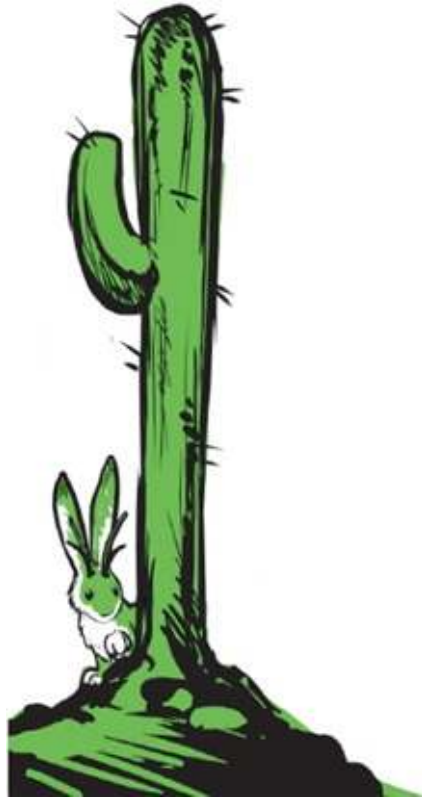
DIAL  BOOKS

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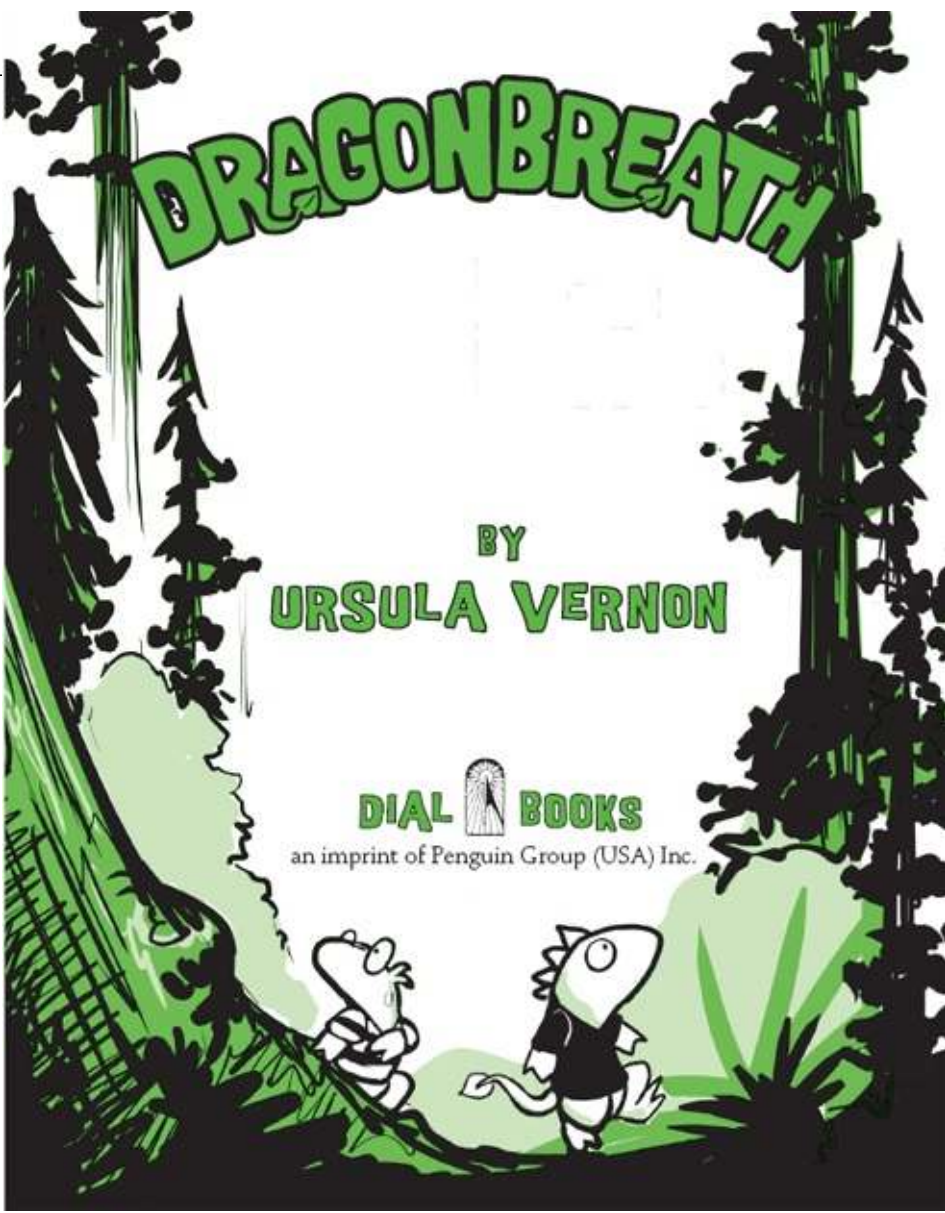


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This one's for my dad, who explained to me what a jackalope was, and then that they weren't real, and then why anybody would make one in the first place, and then what "gullibility" and "profit motive" meant, back when I was younger than Danny.

DIAL BOOKS

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Summary: Danny Dragonbreath is excited about going to camp with his best friend Wendell and classmate Christiana even though his obnoxious, seven-year-old cousin Spencer is going too, but things change when Spencer finds a real jackalope.

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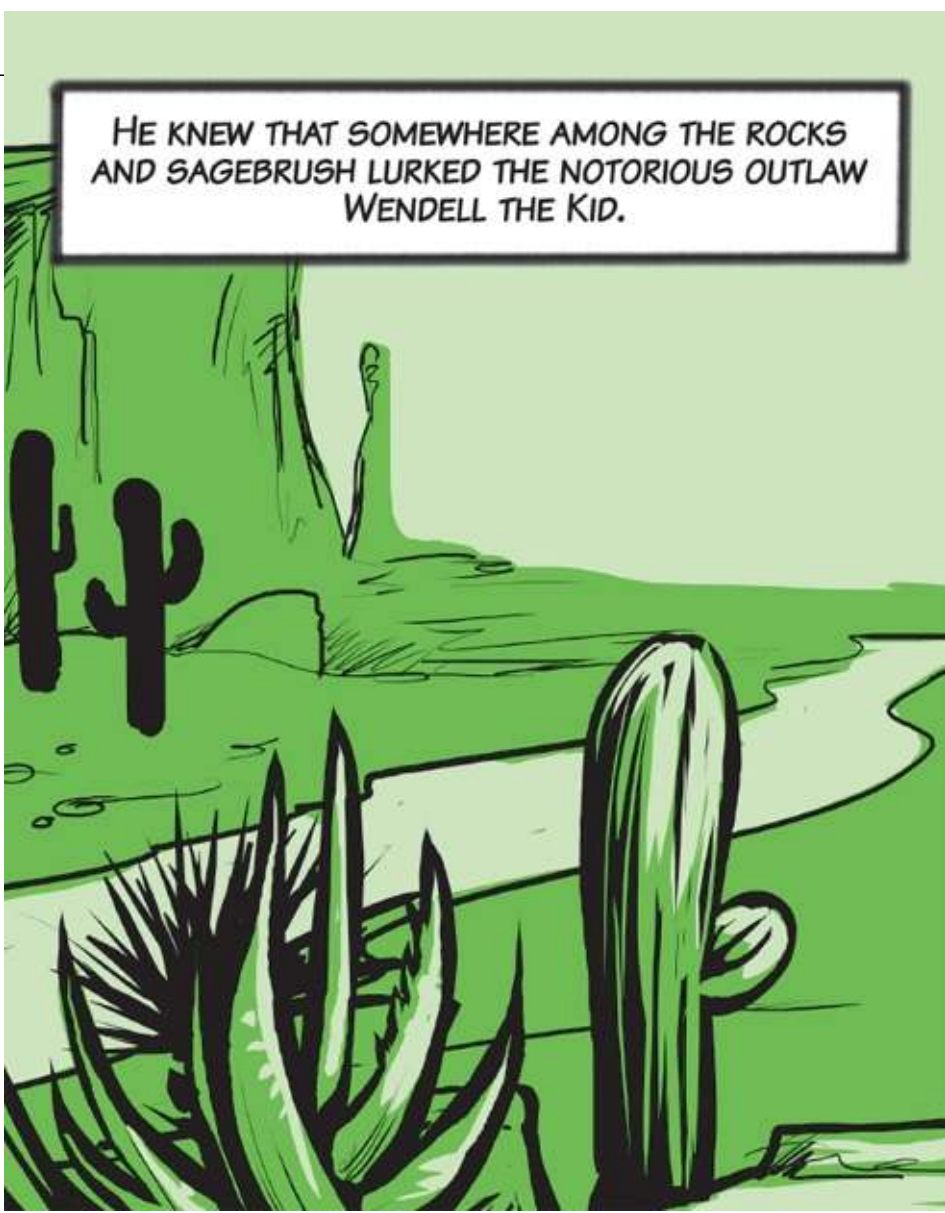
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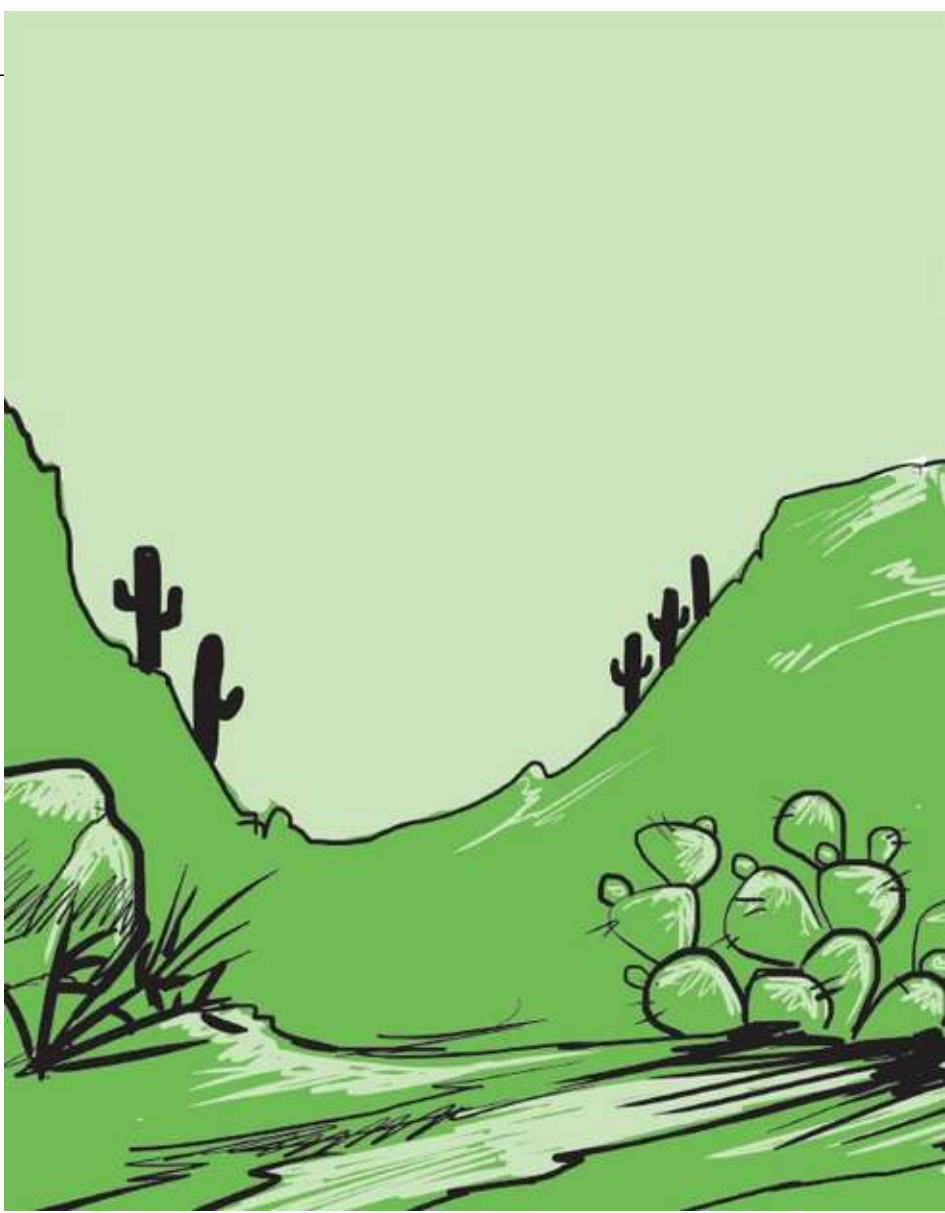
SHERIFF DRAGONBREATH
ENTERED THE CANYON WITH
HIS SIX-GUN IN HIS HAND.

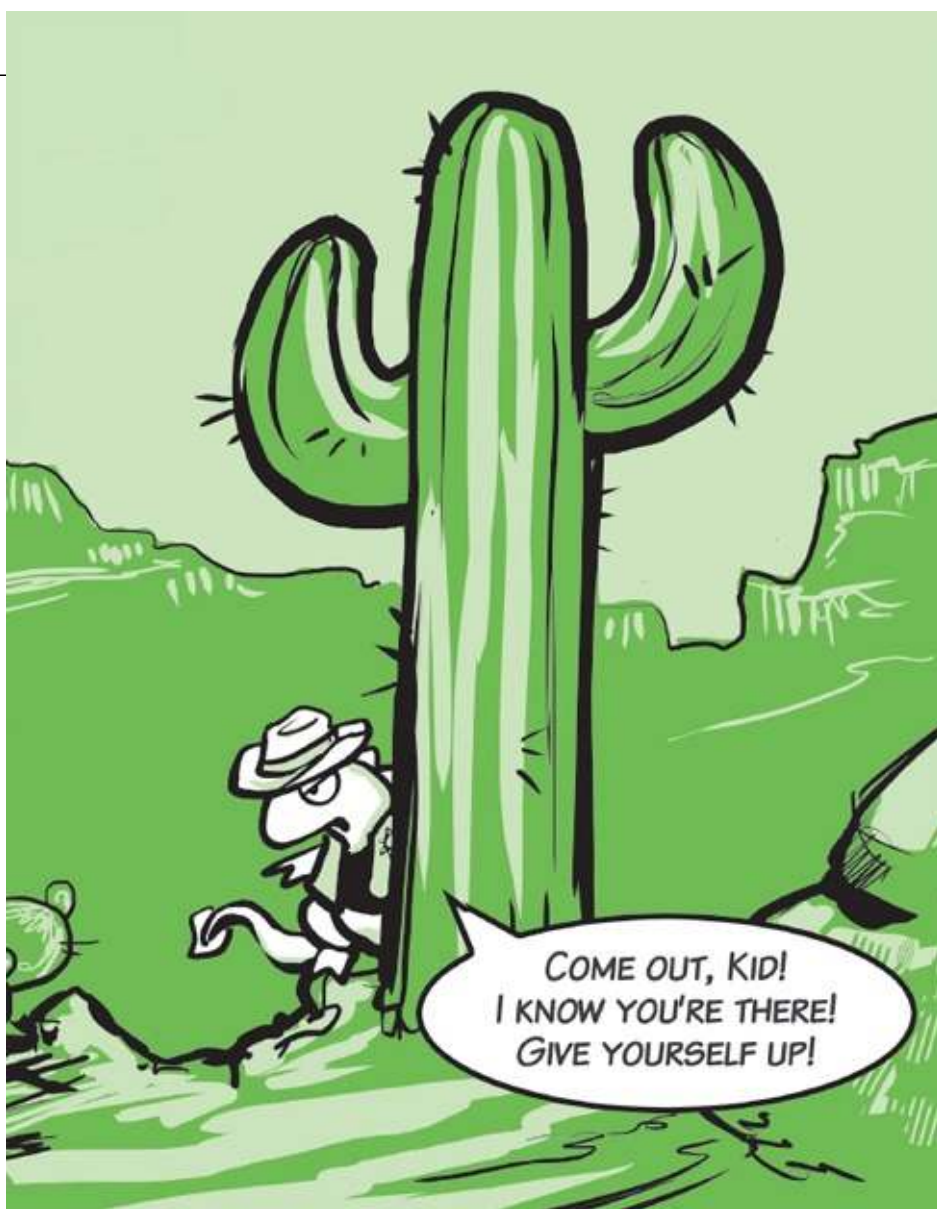


HE KNEW THAT SOMEWHERE AMONG THE ROCKS
AND SAGEBRUSH LURKED THE NOTORIOUS OUTLAW
WENDELL THE KID.











OF CAMP AND COUSINS

Danny Dragonbreath had a great imagination, much to the dismay of his parents, his teachers, the lunch lady, and the occasional ambulance crew.

Even he, however, had a hard time imagining his best friend, Wendell the iguana, as a desperate outlaw. Wendell would never ride into a town and shoot it up, and given the choice between holding up a train and determining how fast a train leaving Cincinnati going sixty miles an hour would take to catch up to a train leaving an hour earlier and going forty-five miles an hour ... well, Wendell would take the story problem every time.

Danny put his snout in his hand and thought about this. If Wendell wasn't the outlaw ... no, he couldn't be the Indian either. The last time Wendell's mother had caught them playing cowboys and Indians, she'd read them a twenty-minute lecture on the history of Native American oppression, which had really put a damper on things. It was hard to have a thrilling shoot-out while yelling: "I respect your position and hope that we can come to a mutually respectful conclusion!"

Wendell's mother did *not* understand about things like this.

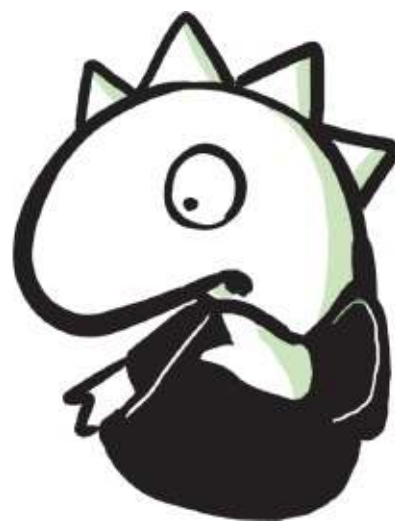
Danny reluctantly gave up on being Sheriff Dragonbreath. It didn't matter anyway. He was going to summer camp in three days, and absolutely nothing could ruin his mood. There would be swimming and hiking, and he'd get to ride a horse like a real cowboy. Plus, there would be sagebrush and cactus and campfires and roasted marshmallows for *a whole week*.



Wendell had gotten permission to go, which was awesome, and apparently Christiana Vanderpool, the know-it-all crested lizard, was also going, which was probably okay. Christiana still didn't believe that Danny was a dragon, but she had to believe in cowboys. There was definite proof that cowboys existed.

Camp was going to be so cool. Maybe they'd even find gold in the desert! Outlaws buried their gold sometimes, didn't they?

OR WAS THAT
PIRATES ... ?



Either way, nothing could spoil his excitement. He loved summer camp.
And then at that moment, his mother came into the room and spoiled his excitement.

GREAT NEWS,
DANNY!



WHAT?

YOUR LITTLE
COUSIN SPENCER
IS GOING TO CAMP
JACKALOPE
TOO!



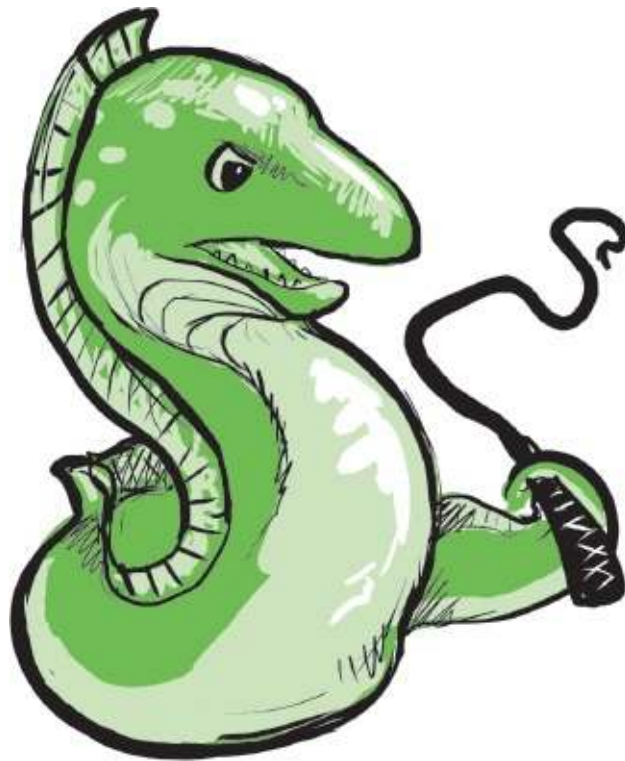


“Spencer?” asked Danny weakly.

“Yes. Your aunt Shirley just called and told me the news! Spencer’s crazy about you, you know.”

“Mom, *no!*”

Danny did not like his little cousin Spencer. He supposed he probably wouldn’t want Spencer to be eaten by ravenous eels, but that was only because his aunt Shirley was pretty nice and sent good Christmas presents (never socks and underwear), and having her son eaten by eels would make her sad. On the other hand, if Spencer were merely *kidnapped* by ravenous eels and forced to work in an eel-owned salt mine, that would be just fine with Danny.



Spencer was one of those annoying people who would sit on the couch while Danny played video games and keep up a running commentary about what Danny should do next, what he was doing wrong, how many lives he had left, and how his friend had played this game way better and gotten through this bit way faster. He would intersperse this commentary with random statements like “Lav is made of fire and rocks!” and “If you were as light as a feather, somebody could kill you with one

punch, probably.” His statements had no bearing on anything and didn’t even make *sense*, and whenever Danny died in the video game, Spencer would make a *wa-waaaaah* noise.

He couldn’t even tell Spencer to shut up, because his cousin was a tattletale and would run to Danny’s mom and aunt Shirley to say that Danny was being mean. So Danny had to grit his teeth instead of breaking the controller over Spencer’s head. Then when Spencer finally left, Danny’s mom would poke her head in the doorway and say, “It’s so *nice* that you and Spencer get along so well.”

It is a cruel injustice of childhood that if you are related and born within five years of each other, your family assumes that you should be friends and play nicely together, regardless of how you and the other kid in question might feel.

“Mom,” said Danny. “I am going to be absolutely reasonable here.”



“Mom. You cannot send Spencer to camp with me. He will ruin everything. I realize that you think we’re buddies, but Spencer is *horrible*.”

“First off, I’m not sending him, his mother is. And second, I realize he might be a little annoying at times, but he’s really excited that you’ll both be going to camp together. The least you could do is make an effort.”

Danny groaned. There it was: “Make an effort.” That was his parents’ answer to most of the woes afflicting him. Can’t breathe fire? Make an effort. Failing math? Make an effort. Beets for dinner? Make an effort.

The world’s most obnoxious seven-year-old about to destroy the single best week of summer? Make an effort.

“Mooooommm!” said Danny, which hardly ever worked, but was worth a shot.

“You’ll live,” said his mother mercilessly. “Frankly, you should just be grateful *you* get to go to camp, after the Bottle Rocket Incident last year.”

Danny felt this was unjust. Camp Jackalope was in the desert! Who knew so much of it would be flammable?

And anyway, this was clearly only a tactic to distract him from the issue at hand:



HE WHINES!
AND HE'S
A TATTLETALE!



I'D TELL
YOU NOT TO
DO ANYTHING
WORTH TATTLING
ON, BUT I REALIZE
THAT'S ASKING
TOO MUCH.



Danny tried to look wounded. His mother snorted and tossed a pillow at his head.

“You’ll be fine,” she said. “Look, you don’t have to stay with him every waking minute, but I do want you to keep an eye on him. This is his first time at camp, and he might be homesick.”

“My life is *ruined*,” said Danny, determined not to let her change his mind. “I might as well *die*.”

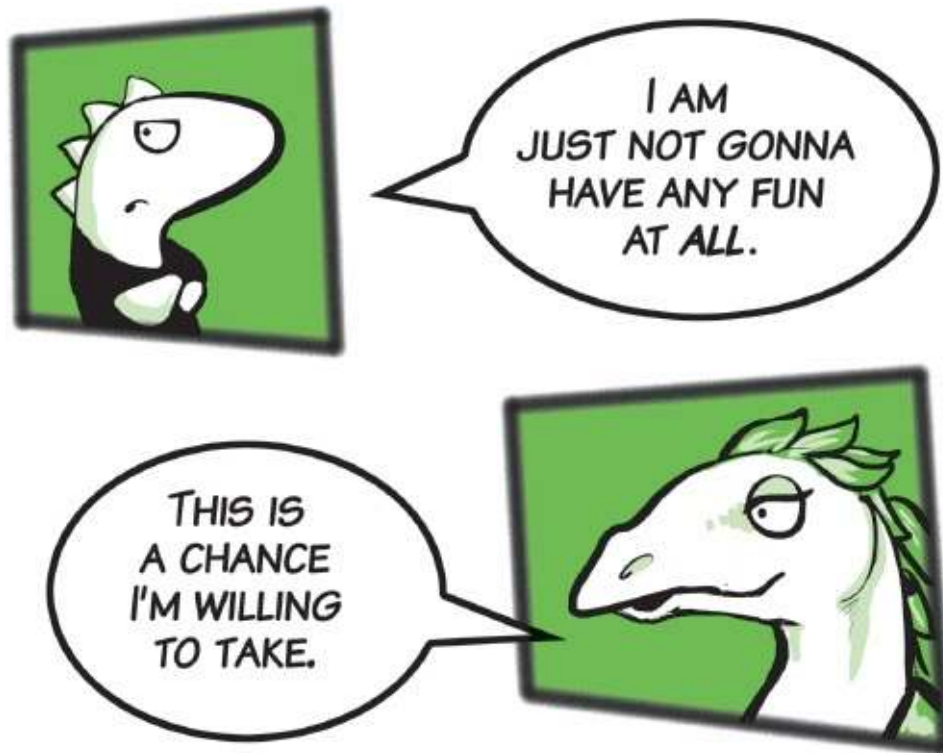
“Truly, my heart bleeds for you.” His mother stepped out of the room. “If you decide to stay among the living, though, we’re having mac and cheese tonight. With hot dogs in it.”

Danny grumbled. His summer vacation was ruined. It would be a wonder if he didn’t expire of sheer disappointment.

After dinner, of course.



The next few days passed so quickly that Danny barely had time to worry about his cousin. There were clothes to pack and sleeping bags to find and towels to wash. And then his mother went through his duffel bag, and not only did she confiscate all of his fireworks and most of his comic books, she insisted on packing the bag full of far less vital stuff, like socks and underwear.



Despite the lack of explosives and the addition of Spencer, Danny couldn't help being excited on the morning of departure. The buses left from the parking lot of the community college, and there was already a large turnout of campers, parents, and harried-looking people trying to stuff suitcases into the buses. Danny spotted Wendell through the crowd, talking to Christiana, and waved them over.

“Hey.”

“Hi.”

“Yo.”

“Any sign of your cousin?” asked Wendell in an undertone.

“Nothing yet.”



“Maybe aliens got him,” said Danny hopefully. “In a UFO.”

“Unlikely.” Christiana looked down her snout at him.

“Most UFOs turn out to be weather balloons or the planet Venus.”

“I don’t mind if the aliens take him to Venus. I bet Venus is very nice this time of year.”

ACTUALLY,
IT RAINS SULFURIC ACID
ON VENUS.



SMELLS
LIKE ROTTEN EGGS
AND EATS THROUGH
FLESH.



THAT. IS.
SO. COOL!



“Don’t look now,” said Christiana, “but there’s a short kid who looks like you coming this way.”

Danny sighed.



Spencer looked at Wendell, looked at Christiana, dismissed both of them as uninteresting, and turned back to Danny. "Did you ever beat *Poison Sands*? 'Cos my friend Alan did."

"Yes," said Danny. "I did. Ages ago." (This was not, strictly speaking, true. Danny had gotten to the very last boss and been beaten twenty-three times in succession, whereupon he had finally looked up the hints and found out that he was missing a crucial item and would have to replay the last three hours of the game. This was so frustrating that he had decided to go play outside and by the time he thought about the game again, he'd lost the disk under a pile of dirty laundry.)

Wendell, who knew all about this (except for maybe the bit with the laundry), said, "Yeah, he tore through it. I saw him." Wendell was a very good friend.

"So, Christiana," said Danny, attempting desperately to change the subject, "this is your first time at Camp Jackalope, huh?"

"Yeah," she said. "The waiting list for space camp this year is so long that Dad said I'd just have to pick something else." She shrugged.



Wendell shoved his glasses farther up his snout. "There are crafts," he told Christiana, in much the same tone that a doctor in a movie would say "There is smallpox in the village."

"I suppose that was inevitable." She considered. "Still, it probably won't be all bad. There are nature walks and stuff. Nature is good."



"They don't have any video games," said Spencer. "I read the brochure. You're not even allowed to bring them."

"Well, no," said Danny. As much as he loved video games, he hadn't really missed them at camp before. You were generally too busy trying to start a fire with tinder and flint or trying not to fall off horse to think about it.

"I wish my mom wasn't making me go," said Spencer glumly. "I told her I didn't want to."

This put a rather different face on things, but before Danny had a chance to absorb it, the suitcases were loaded and whistles were blowing and it was time to get on the bus.



ATTACK OF THE CHEERFUL COUNSELORS

It was a three-hour bus ride to Camp Jackalope. Danny spent most of it staring out the window and trying not to listen to Spencer.

“So in this TV show, then, the alien, right—well, he’s the kid, but he’s got an alien in him, and, and, the bad guy has a death ray and it’s wired to go off as soon as the alien hatches—”

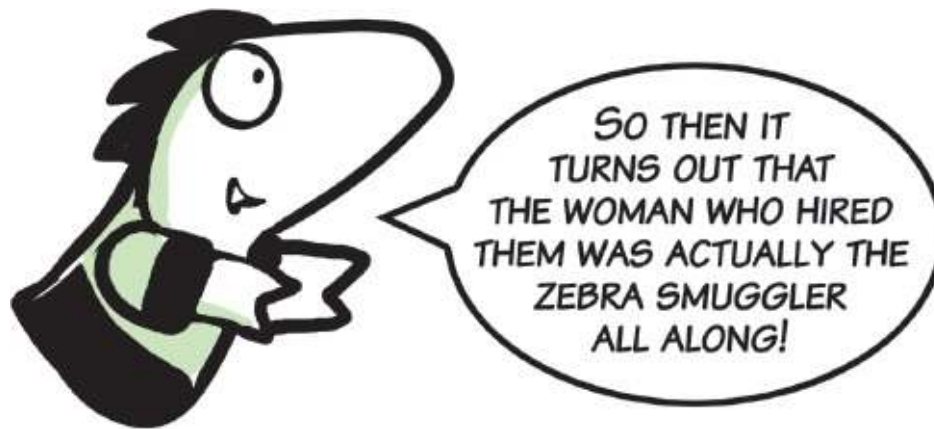
Death rays, thought Danny bleakly, had never been so boring.

He envied Wendell and Christiana. Spencer had scooted into the seat next to Danny before anyone could protest, and so Wendell and Christiana were sitting together, swapping comic books. Christiana did read comic books, although she tended to get very sarcastic every time Super Skink swooped and caught someone who was falling from a great height. “They’d impact just as hard on his arms as they would on the pavement,” Danny could hear her saying irritably. “It’s not like momentum goes away just because you’re a superhero. Super Skink’s costume would have a lot of splattered tourists on it.”



Danny ordinarily would have argued that Christiana was missing the point. But compared to Spencer’s nonstop monologue about every TV show he got to watch, the notion of Super Skink

cleaning tourists off his spandex was positively fascinating.



Danny tried reading a comic book. It did not go well. Spencer had a friend who'd read it, and the friend said it wasn't very good and if you wanted to read a *real* comic book you should totally read the *Fishslinger* series and had Danny read the *Fishslinger* series because Spencer had and what was his favorite character because Spencer liked Odamagong the ninja manatee and did Danny like ninjas?

sample content of Revenge of the Horned Bunnies (Dragonbreath #6)

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