



Paisley Atoms

MYSTERY AT CAMP KOOKABURRA

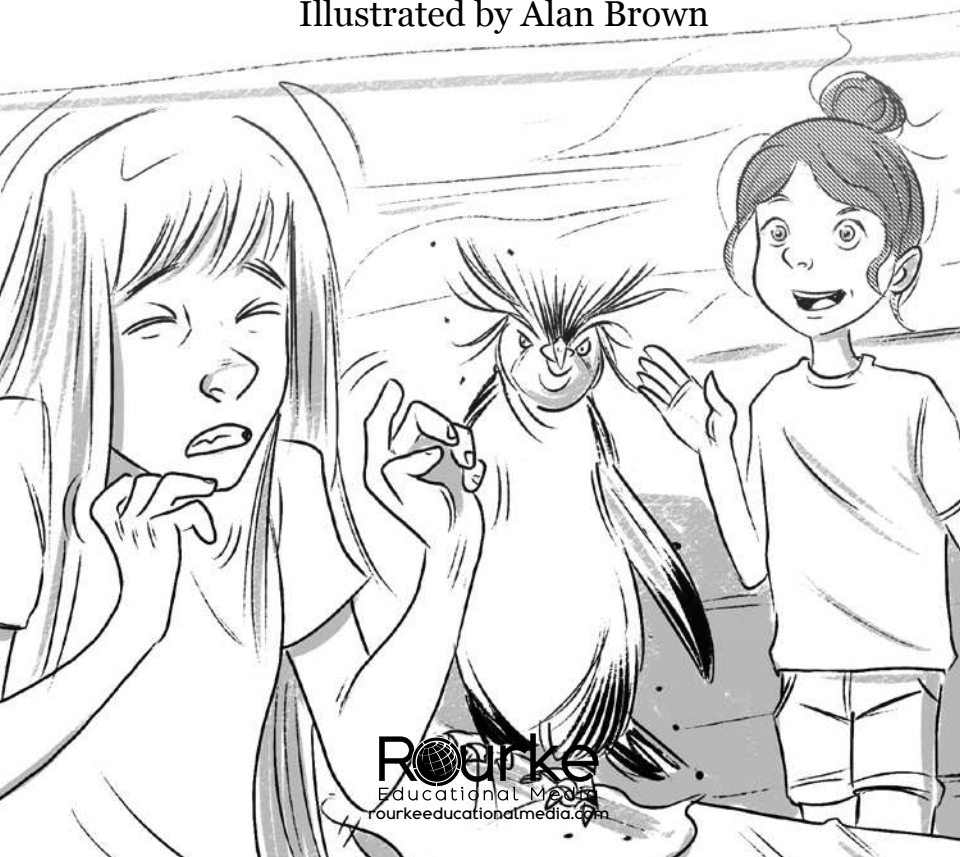


BY KYLA STEINKRAUS
ILLUSTRATED BY
ALAN BROWN

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Dear Parents and Teachers,

Future world-famous scientist Paisley Atoms and her best friend, Ben Striker, aren't afraid to stir things up in their quests for discovery. Using Paisley's basement as a laboratory, the two are constantly inventing, exploring, and, well, making messes. Paisley has a few bruises to show for their work, too. She wears them like badges of honor.

These fast-paced adventures weave fascinating facts, quotes from real scientists, and explanations for various phenomena into witty dialogue, stealthily boosting your reader's understanding of multiple science topics. From sound waves to dinosaurs, from the sea floor to the moon, Paisley, Ben and the gang are perfect partner resources for a STEAM curriculum.

Each illustrated chapter book includes a science experiment or activity, a biography of a woman in science, jokes, and websites to visit.


In addition, each book also includes online teacher/parent notes with ideas for incorporating the story into a lesson plan. These notes include subject matter, background information, inspiration for maker space activities, comprehension questions, and additional online resources. Notes are available at: www.RourkeEducationalMedia.com.

We hope you enjoy Paisley and her pals as much as we do.

*Happy reading,
Rourke Educational Media*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Questions at Camp Kookaburra	6
Weird and Possibly Deadly Creatures.....	16
Penguins and Other Fearsome Beasts	27
Tracking A Mystery	35
To Catch a Tiger by the Toe	44



CHAPTER ONE

QUESTIONS AT CAMP KOOKABURRA

Paisley Atoms blew the hair out of her face with a huff. She aimed her arrow at the red target taped to a hay bale thirty feet away. Her muscles strained as she kept the tension in the bow. She closed one eye to zero in on the target. She could see Ben Striker's arrow quivering just a few inches from the bull's eye. It was her last day at Camp Kookaburra, and there was no way she was ending this awesome week by losing to her best friend. "One, two, three," she whispered under her breath.

Just before she loosed the arrow, a shriek erupted from the direction of the cabins. Paisley flinched and the arrow flew wide, missing the target completely and nearly striking the archery instructor, Captain Mike. The arrow feathers tickled his cheek as the arrow whizzed past his head. “Whoa!” he yelled.

“Hooray!” Ben cried from behind her.

The twins Sumi and Suki groaned in support.

“No fair!” Sumi said.

“There was interference!” Suki said.

“Everything counts in horseshoes and hand grenades!” Ben said, pumping his fist.

“Fortunately for Paisley, you are playing archery, not those other things,” Sumi said over the shrieking noise.

“Someone must be dying!” Arjun cried. He was overly dramatic about everything. If ever there was a human Chicken Little, it was him.

Paisley covered her ears. “I’m sure no one is dying. But it does sound awful. How do we make it stop?”

“Go see what’s up, will you?” Captain Mike asked.

He smiled, his white teeth flashing against his tanned face. Sumi and Suki sighed and fluttered their eyelashes.

Paisley rolled her eyes. She grabbed their arms and pulled them away from Captain Mike. The friends raced toward the cabins. Whitney-Raelynn Sinclair was outside Cabin 3, whirling around, stomping her feet, and wailing at the top of her lungs. She alternated between rubbing fiercely at her bare arms and slapping at her legs. Her normally pin-straight, glossy blond hair was knotted and tangled in a golden cloud around her head. “Get them off! Get them off!”

“Get what off?” Sumi asked.

“The bugs!” Whitney-Raelynn shrieked.

That’s when Paisley saw the tiny red bumps all over Whitney-Raelynn’s arms and legs. “What were you doing in the cabin?” she asked.

“Nothing!” Whitney-Raelynn calmed down enough to stand still and glare at Paisley.

Paisley noticed something else. “So that dark stuff around your mouth is not chocolate from a candy bar?”

Her cheeks reddened. “So what if it is? I can’t possibly

survive eating that disgusting camp food of beans in a can or whatever it's called. I need sustenance."

"So, I'm going to hazard a guess that you've been sneaking candy bars in your bed since you got here," Paisley said.

"The evidence suggests that hypothesis is correct," Ben said.



“What’s it to you? You aren’t the camp police.”

“No I’m not,” Paisley said. “But I could have told you that food attracts ants. Including fire ants. And lots of them. Apparently, they needed sustenance too.”

Sumi and Suki snickered.

“Ugh!” Whitney-Raelynn shrieked. She pointed at Paisley. “Somehow, someway, this is your fault!”

Paisley shook her head. “No way. I didn’t do anything to you.”

“Never trust Atoms. They make up everything,” Whitney-Raelynn said, using her favorite insult for Paisley. Whitney-Raelynn thought this was so clever, since atoms are the building blocks of matter. Paisley just rolled her eyes.

“Okay, girls, let’s take a break,” Serena Pendlebury said as she walked toward them. She was the best camp counselor in the world as well as Paisley’s next-door neighbor back home in Roarington, aka Boring Town, USA. She was super cool, but she always made time for everybody, even little kids. “Don’t worry, I’ll take you straight to the camp nurse. She’ll have some cream

to help with the stinging and itching.”

“Okay, fine. Just get me out of here,” Whitney-Raelynn said.

Serena turned her gaze to Paisley and Ben. “Possibly weird question. I was picking up pine cones in the woods for my Pinecone Critters art class I’m teaching this afternoon, and I think I saw something . . . strange. Kookaburra Forest is a wilderness area, but, like, we don’t have monkeys here, do we?”

“There is no species of monkey that is indigenous to the United States,” Ben said.

“Yeah,” Serena said slowly. “I thought so. But this creature I saw . . . I could’ve sworn it had a tail. It was grayish-brown and hanging by its hands—er, paws—from a tree branch.” She shook her head. “I must have been seeing things.”

“Yeah, you must have,” Whitney-Raelynn snapped. “Now can I please receive some medical attention for the throbbing bites all over my body?”

“Of course, Whitney,” Serena said with a sweet smile.

Only Serena got away with calling Whitney-Raelynn anything but her full name. Whitney-Raelynn thought she was just as smart as Paisley and tried to one-up her every chance she could. Unfortunately, she did happen to be pretty smart and great at nearly everything she tried.

She also had perfect blonde hair, perfect pink skin, and perfectly fashionable outfits. Except for here, at Camp Kookaburra, where there was no electricity for hair dryers and hair straighteners, no heat for hot showers, no air conditioning, and the only food was cooked over a campfire. “I hate this place!” Whitney-Raelynn growled as she stomped after Serena.

Paisley turned to Sumi and Suki with a grin. “Have I mentioned how much I love this place?”

Sumi and Suki giggled. They shared the same laugh and the same glint in their dark almond-shaped eyes. They were a mirror image of each other, and almost always dressed exactly alike. They loved playing pranks and enjoyed a good joke best of all. Their favorite trick was switching places and confusing their teachers or even their parents. Only Paisley could tell them apart

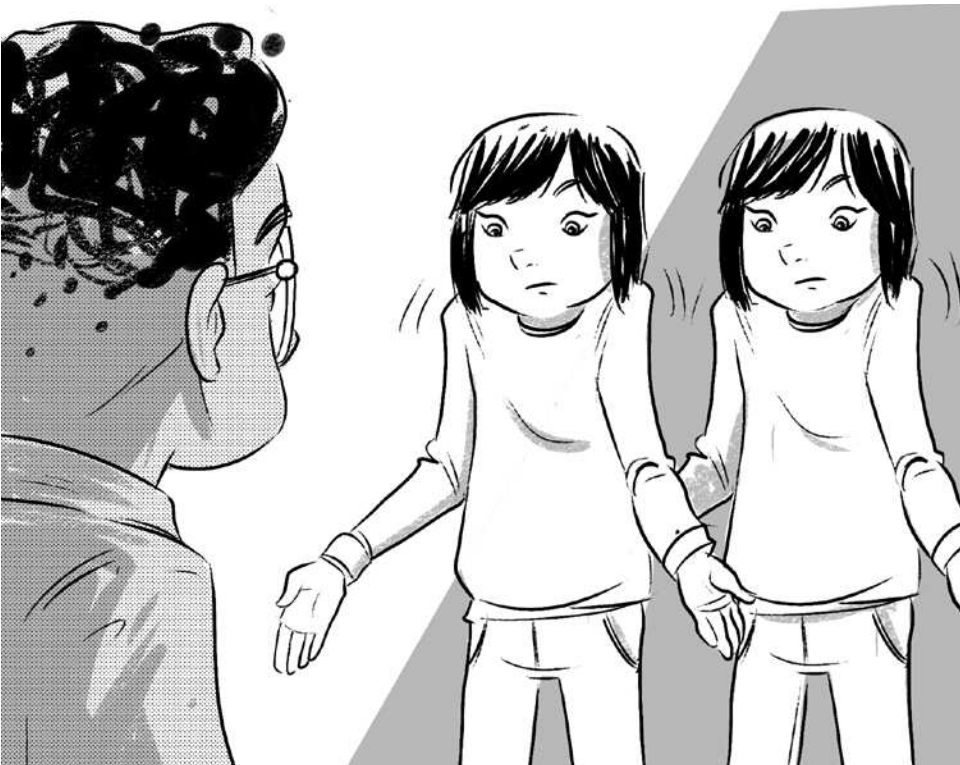
every time. She wasn't sure how; she just knew.

Ben narrowed his eyes. "Did you guys do this to Whitney-Raelynn?"

"No," Sumi said between giggles.

"We wouldn't do that," Suki said. "Shaving cream in her bed? Absolutely."

"Sticking her hand in warm water? Of course!" Sumi said.



“But not fire ants,” Suki said. “Nope.”

“We have standards,” Sumi said.

“She caused her own downfall,” Suki said with a dramatic sigh.

“I just remembered!” Arjun said with wide eyes. “I have saltine crackers in my duffel bag under my bed! Am I next? Are those killer fire ants going to attack me? I’m fairly certain I am allergic to ants. I’ll probably have to be airlifted to a hospital!”

“Whitney-Raelynn will be fine,” Paisley said. “And so will you.”

“A few bugs never hurt anybody. Right?” Arjun asked in a trembling voice.

Ben adjusted his glasses. “Well, actually, fire ants can be deadly. So can hornets, wasps, bees, black widow spiders, bark scorpions, certain centipedes, and of course, the mosquito.”

Arjun looked like he might faint.

“Ix-nay on the details, eh?” Paisley said. Ben loved astronomy and clocks, just like his famous namesake, the mathematician Ben Banneker. He also loved insects

and other creepy crawly things, so much that he had several ant colonies and worm farms stored in his closet instead of his clothes. He liked to watch them when he was concentrating on a problem.

“Who wants to go horseback riding?” Sumi said, clapping her hands.

It was a good distraction. Suki and Sumi put their arms around Arjun’s shoulders and steered him toward the gravel path leading to the horse barn.

Paisley loved animals. Her dad was a biologist for the state university just outside Roarington. He’d been teaching her about nature since before she could talk. “Shall we also ride the *Equus Caballus*?” she asked Ben.

Ben grinned at her use of the scientific name for horse. “Of course.”

Paisley yanked her thick unruly hair up into a messy bun. Outfitted in her usual loose jeans and Converse sneakers, she was already dressed to ride. “Race you!” she yelled as they took off down the gravel path toward their friends.



CHAPTER TWO

WEIRD AND POSSIBLY DEADLY CREATURES

Paisley rode a chestnut mare named Firefly. Ben was ahead of her, riding a huge black horse called Night. Arjun was somewhere behind them on the row of horses sniffing each other's tails and shuffling along the narrow trail through the wild woods of Kookaburra Forest. Sumi and Suki rode at the end of the line, next to their new friends J.J. and Tito, identical twins who were also tricksters and goofballs. The camp counselors sighed in defeat whenever the four of them

were together.

“Check this out,” Ben said, twisting around in the saddle. His mom had given him her smartphone for the week. Paisley had a feeling she would come to regret that decision. Ben had brought along a handheld grocery store scanner he’d somehow wrangled from Mr. Pringle, the owner of Roarington Grocery and Pharmacy. Between the edible plants, archery, canoeing, and survivalist training classes he’d signed up for, he’d been hunched over his newest invention in the cafeteria, the only building with electricity. Ben had found a way to connect the scanner to the smartphone, both of which he’d reprogrammed. Now, he held the phone in one hand and pointed the scanner toward Paisley’s horse with the other.

“Don’t fall off,” Paisley said as she ducked beneath a branch of pine needles. Sunlight streamed through the leafy canopy above them, dappling the forest with shadows that seemed to dance and swirl.

The scanner chirped three times. “American Quarter Horse,” a robotic female voice said from the

smartphone's speaker. "An American breed of horse that excels at sprinting short distances. Some have been clocked at speeds up to fifty-five miles per hour. The American Quarter Horse is well known both as



a racehorse and for its performance in rodeos, horse shows, and as a working ranch horse.”

“Cool,” Paisley said. “Does it work on everything?”

“Only vertebrates so far,” Ben said. “I recalibrated it to scan for identifying characteristics, like size, bone structure, teeth, fur, tail, and blood type. It’s called AniPedia.” He pointed the scanner at Paisley.

The scanner chirped. The phone whirled, then spoke in a stilted, mechanical voice: “Human female, approximately eleven years old. Known to be highly intelligent. Also known to be stubborn. Seems incapable of using a clock or keeping track of appointments. Cannot function properly without the aid of genius sidekick.”

“Hey!” Paisley squealed. “Those are highly inaccurate opinions!”

Ben shrugged. “Valid criticism does you a favor,” he said, quoting his favorite astronomer, Carl Sagan. He tucked the phone and scanner in the small backpack he’d been carting around all week. He kept his pencils and field journal with him at all times, filling the pages

with sketches of plants, birds, constellation formations, and notes for future inventions.

“All lies,” Paisley said to Firefly, patting her warm neck. “I am not stubborn at all.” Firefly snorted and swished her tail, obviously displaying her agreement with Paisley.

Suddenly a loud cry pierced the wooded stillness. A horse neighed, followed by a crash and a hard thump.

Firefly and Night stomped their hooves and arched their necks against their reins as they tried to turn around.

“Hold steady!” yelled the counselor at the front of the line of horses. There was no room to turn in the narrow path, anyway. The thick trees crowded close together.

Paisley and Ben exchanged glances. They both slid down from their horses and started back toward the commotion. Horses whinnied and shied away from them as they worked their way to where Arjun sat on the ground. He was sniffing and wiping his nose with the back of his hand.

“Are you okay?” Paisley asked.

Arjun shook his head. “No, I am not. I almost had a heart attack. A most terrible creature nearly leapt out of the trees and ripped my throat out with its terrible teeth!”

“He’s got an active imagination, anyway,” Ben murmured under his breath.

“Calm down and start from the beginning,” Paisley said. She knelt next to Arjun and put her hand on his back.

“It was a beast,” Arjun gulped. “He was gigantic with huge teeth and yellow eyes and I’m sure he was a werewolf!”

Paisley shook her head. “There’s no such thing.”

“We saw something, too,” Sumi said from the back of her pinto pony. “We saw it first. It was in the trees, though. And definitely not a werewolf.”

“Describe it,” Ben said. He pulled out his pencil and field book to take notes.

Sumi closed her eyes. “Grayish fur. A couple feet tall, I think. It was holding on to the tree trunk with

its claws. No tail. Round furry ears. A round, beakish nose.” She opened her eyes. “I feel like I’ve seen one before.”

“You have,” Ben said. “In a zoo. What you are describing is a *Phascolarctos cinereus*.”

“Otherwise known as a koala,” Paisley said.

“A koala bear?” Suki squealed in delight.

“Just a koala,” Paisley corrected. “They aren’t bears. They belong to the marsupial family. They have pouches, like a kangaroo.”

“A koala’s habitat is in Australia,” Ben said. He put his notebook away. “That is approximately ninety-nine hundred miles from here. There are no koalas in Kookaburra Forest. You must have seen something else.”

“What are your koalafications to make that deduction?” Sumi asked as she and Suki dissolved into giggles.

“But what about the werewolf?” Arjun said.

Ben helped him to his feet. “There aren’t any werewolves here. Not even regular wolves. It was



probably just a coyote. There are no weird animals here, okay? Just the native species.”

Sumi’s new friend Tito had left his horse and was standing next to Sumi’s pinto. “I don’t know. Last night a group of boys from Cabin 6 said they saw a giant turtle the size of a dog crawling along the lake.”

“Not a turtle, a *Genus Chelonoidis*,” Ben said.

“Huh?”

“A giant tortoise,” Paisley explained. “No turtles get that big. A giant tortoise can weigh six hundred pounds and reach four feet long. But those don’t live around here either. They’re from the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador. That’s where Charles Darwin developed the theory of evolution.”

“The Galapagos Islands are twenty-six hundred miles away,” Ben recited from memory.

“Someone must be playing an elaborate prank,” Paisley said, looking straight at Sumi. This was exactly something the twins would do.

“Not us!” Sumi cried.

“We’re innocent!” Suki said, batting her eyelashes.

Paisley wasn't convinced. "I am sure there are no werewolves, or anything else in these woods, okay?" she said to Arjun.

Reluctantly, Arjun agreed. Everyone climbed back on their horses, and they finished the ride. They arrived at the stables just as the big bell rang to signify the opening of the swimming hole. Camp Kookaburra was nestled next to Kookaburra Lake, where the camp had rope swings, a diving board, and a giant water trampoline. Everybody loved swimming at the hole.

Paisley, Sumi, and Suki split up from the boys and headed to their cabins to change.

Whitney-Raelynn was sitting on her bottom bunk bed when Paisley and the twins entered Cabin 3. The first thing Paisley noticed was how pale Whitney-Raelynn's skin looked against the red bumps dotting her body. Her hair was a matted nest. Her hands trembled in her lap.

"Thank goodness you're here," she said through clenched teeth. That was about the last thing Paisley expected to hear from Whitney-Raelynn.

“What’s up?” Sumi asked.

“I was in the woods looking for those edible berries they talked about in survivalist class. Something followed me back.”

“What do you mean, ‘something’?” Paisley asked.

But then she saw it. It waddled out from behind Whitney-Raelynn’s back. It peered at them with beady eyes.

Suki gasped. “It’s a—that’s a—”

“A penguin!” Paisley yelped.



CHAPTER THREE

PENGUINS AND OTHER FEARSOME BEASTS

Paisley was shocked. A penguin of all creatures! What in the world was going on? The prank theory was fading fast. But if it wasn't a prank, then something more sinister was afoot. She felt her blood jump in her veins. A mystery! How exciting!

She took a step closer.

"Watch out!" Suki gasped.

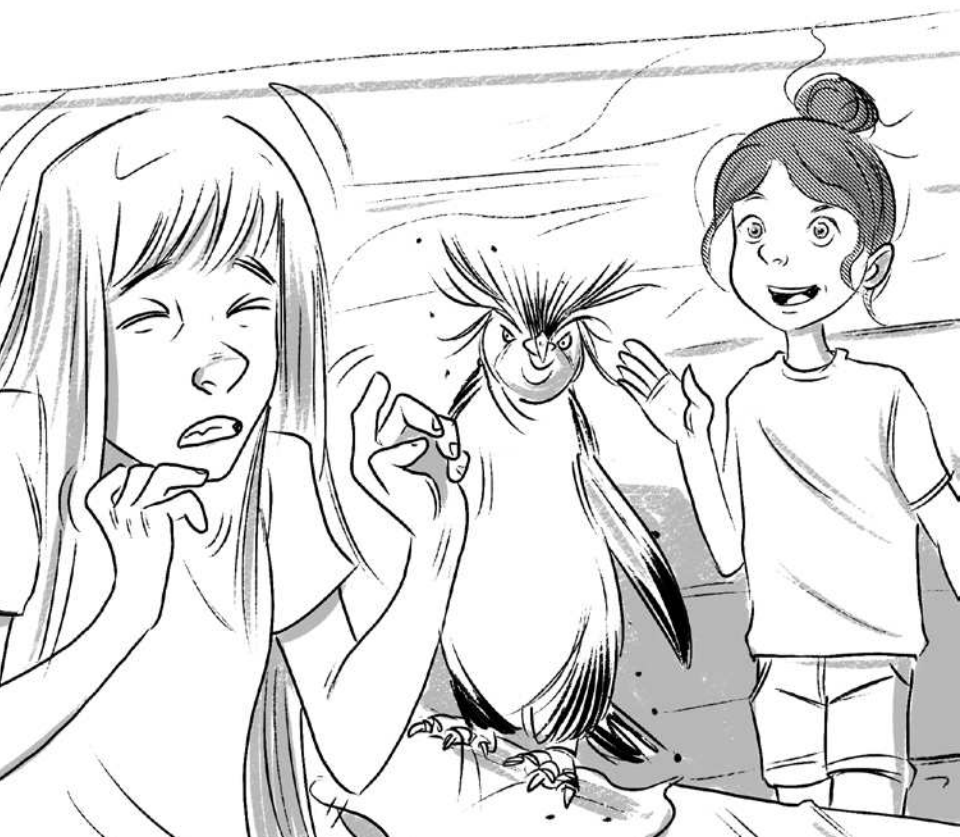
"It's a penguin, not a tiger."

The little penguin was the typical black with a white tummy and an orange beak. But he also had a beautiful crest of yellow feathers that started above each eye, like eyebrows, and ran back along the top of his head.

He pushed his beak into Whitney-Raelynn's shoulder. She flinched and scrambled up from the bed like she'd just been touched by a snake.

"He won't hurt you," Paisley said, laughing.

"Is it really a penguin?" Whitney-Raelynn asked. She gulped. "He looks mad with his yellow eyebrows like that."



Paisley crouched in front of the penguin. The penguin turned his head to the side and blinked at her with one eye. He opened his beak and made a soft trilling sound. “He’s some kind of crested penguin, but I don’t know more than that. We need Ben’s AniPedia.”

“His what?” Sumi asked.

“AniPedia. Ben’s newest invention. And we need fish to feed him.”

“I’ll get Ben,” Suki said.

“The cafeteria might have cans of sardines or anchovies,” Whitney-Raelynn said, sounding more interested now that she wasn’t terrified.

It was a good idea, but Paisley couldn’t quite bring herself to say so. “Can you go check it out?”

Within five minutes both Whitney-Raelynn and Sumi had returned, along with a cluster of curious campers. They crowded into the cabin, oohing and aahing as the little penguin slurped up a tinful of sardines.

“Time to put the AniPedia to the test,” Paisley said.

“It’ll work,” Ben said confidently. He pulled out the

scanner and pointed it at the penguin. The mechanical voice said: “*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*, otherwise known as the Fiordland crested penguin. The yellow-crested penguin grows to approximately twenty-four inches long and weighs eight pounds. This penguin nests in colonies in dense temperate forests along the southern coast of New Zealand. It is an endangered species, with a current population of less than six thousand.”

There was a long silence.

Tito finally spoke. “So this little guy isn’t from Antarctica? Like, with all the snow and ice?”

Ben shook his head. “He’s a penguin who lives in a forest. Pretty cool, huh? Only he doesn’t belong in THIS forest. He belongs thirteen thousand miles away.”

“Then how did he get here?” Suki asked.

That was the million-dollar question, all right. Paisley and Ben looked at each other. There wasn’t anything the two of them liked better than a mystery with science at its heart. She could see the excitement on Ben’s face mirroring her own. Ben nodded.

“That’s what we’re going to find out!” Paisley said

with a grin. “There’s a mystery at Camp Kookaburra, and it’s up to us to solve it!”

Paisley pulled a huge duffel bag from under her lower bunk. She unzipped it and started moving supplies from the duffel bag to her backpack. “We’ll need snacks,” she said to Ben. “Who knows how long we’ll be gone.”

“I can help,” Whitney-Raelynn said. She always loved to be a hero. “I’ve got nuts, granola bars, fruit snacks, Snickers, Twizzlers, M&Ms, Tootsie Rolls . . .” Her voice trailed off as everyone stared at her. Her face reddened. “What? I don’t like beans, okay?”

Paisley laughed. “Whatever you have, we’ll take it.”

Whitney-Raelynn brought over a handful of candy and dumped it into Paisley’s backpack. “What is all that junk in your duffel bag? Did you even pack any clothes?”

Paisley’s duffel bag was stuffed with everything from her basement lab that she could fit inside: nuts and bolts, two flashlights, skateboard wheels, rubber bands,

batteries, pliers, a bundle of rope, copper wire, gloves, safety goggles, a magnifying glass, and of course, plenty of duct tape. A scientist never knew when she would need an important tool to aid her research. “Sure I did,” Paisley said, pointing. A few outfits, a sweater, and her toiletries were squeezed into one small corner of the bag.

Whitney-Raelynn groaned and smacked her own forehead.

“Wait a minute!” Captain Mike pushed through the throng of campers. He looked like a giant in the cramped cabin. “Did I just hear that you two are planning to trek off into the wilderness alone? Without adult supervision?”

“Yes, sir,” Paisley said. She pointed at the penguin. “We need to find out where that came from.”

Captain Mike seemed taken aback at the presence of the penguin, who had settled into a nap on Whitney-Raelynn’s bed, his little beak tucked beneath his right wing. “Uh . . . be that as it may . . . there are still rules . . . kids can’t just . . . uh . . . That’s really a penguin?”

Serena appeared at Captain Mike's side. "It is. I'm sure there's nothing dangerous in those woods. And besides, Paisley and Ben can take care of themselves. We should let them go investigate."

Captain Mike couldn't take his eyes off the penguin. "We should? But shouldn't we . . . ah . . . tell the camp director? Or something?"

Serena winked at Paisley. She touched Captain Mike's arm. "We will, Michael. But let's wait a bit first, okay? We could go get some more food for this little guy. I bet he'd like that."

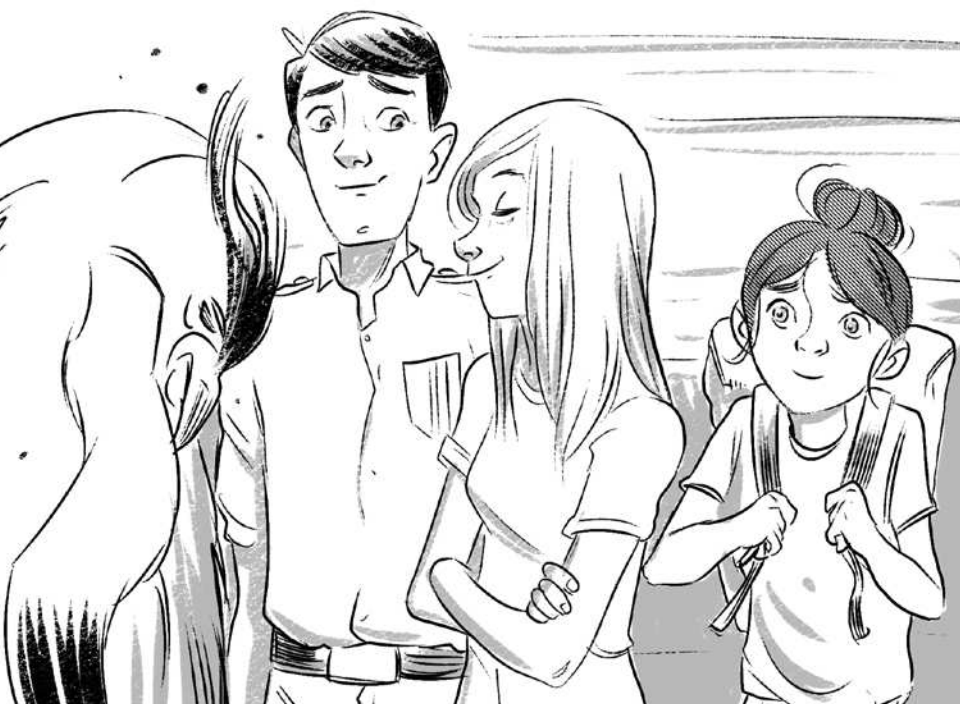
Captain Mike turned to her, his tanned cheeks turning red. She smiled and he smiled back. "Sure thing, Serena."


Paisley just shook her head as Ben returned with his own backpack full of gear. They were ready to go! The campers followed Ben and Paisley to the edge of the woods. "Good luck!" Sumi called.

"Please don't get eaten by the werewolf," Arjun whispered. He looked sick with worry.

"We'll be back before it gets dark," Paisley promised.

They set off into the woods. Paisley's arms prickled with excited goosebumps. There wasn't anything more intriguing to a scientist than a mystery to solve! But they didn't have much time. The next morning was camper pick-up day. Camp Kookaburra would be over for the year. They had only today to solve the mystery!





CHAPTER FOUR

TRACKING A MYSTERY

Paisley was sure they'd been going around in circles for hours. Deep in the Kookaburra Forest, the shadows were long and dark. The trees seemed to tower over them, blocking the sunlight. The forest itself seemed to breathe, to sigh, to watch them with invisible eyes. Paisley shivered. "Anything, yet?" she asked Ben.

Ben walked with a stoop, peering through his magnifying glass, trying to decipher paw prints in the dirt. Paisley searched for bent and broken leaves and other signs of large bodies moving through the forest. They'd found some coyote and raccoon prints and caught sight of a doe and her fawn, but nothing else. They were both feeling hungry, tired, and frustrated.

“This tracking stuff is harder than it looks,” Ben said. “There’s never a perfectly clear print like on TV.”

Paisley elbowed Ben. “Think like a proton and stay positive.”

Ben smiled. “I’m trying.”

“How about a snack to revive our spirits?” Paisley pulled two Snickers bars out of her backpack and handed one to Ben.

Paisley’s foot hit a root, and they both tumbled forward onto their hands and knees. Paisley brushed the leaves and dirt off of her knees and looked around. They’d landed in a small clearing. A huge maple tree stood in the center of the clearing. An animal was munching the leaves of the lower branches.

Paisley tapped Ben’s shoulder. “Look!”

“Wow,” Ben breathed. The animal stood not ten feet away from them. It turned its handsome neck to peer at them with large dark eyes. It stomped its hooves, but didn’t run away. Neither of them needed the Anipedia to identify this marvelous creature. *Equus quagga*. A zebra.

The zebra flicked its tail and moved slowly toward the forest on the other side of the clearing.

“What do we do?” Ben whispered.

“We follow it!” Paisley whispered back, excitement tingling through her whole body. “Can people ride zebras?”

“I don’t think that’s a relevant question right now,” Ben said. They carefully trailed the zebra, always keeping it in sight. Its black and white stripes flashed between the trees. After a minute, he asked, “Are zebras black with white stripes or white with black stripes?”

Paisley grinned. She remembered asking Dad this question a few years ago. “Black with white stripes. The actual color of the fur is black, and the white fur is a lack of pigmentation. Plus, the skin beneath their fur is dark.”

“Makes sense,” Ben said. They fell into silence as they concentrated on following the zebra. After a half hour or so, they broke into a very large clearing.

The clearing was filled with metal cages of all shapes and sizes, from dog-sized cages to cages so big Paisley’s bedroom could fit inside a couple times over.



The zebra ambled over to one of the cages, sniffed a few times, and lowered its head to eat the grass. “They’re all empty,” Paisley said.

Ben nodded and pointed. In the middle of the cages stood an old, run-down log cabin. Tendrils of smoke puffed out of the leaning stone chimney.

“Should we check it out?” Paisley asked.

“Not yet,” Ben said softly. “First, we need to have a plan, a plan B, an escape plan—”

“Great. Let’s go.” Paisley started toward the cabin.

“Wait a minute! We have to prepare for contingencies!”

“There’s no time for that,” she said. She heard Ben groan behind her, but she was already knocking on the cabin door.

“Come in,” a gravelly voice said.

The inside of the cabin was dark and dingy. Dust mites danced in the sunlight streaming through the opened front door. There was a saggy blue couch and a faded rug next to a fireplace. Along the right wall was a small kitchen, and a wooden four-post bed stood against the back wall of the cabin. A woman was

propped up in the bed, leaning against several pillows. Her hair was fiery red streaked with white. Her face was a sickly yellow and lined with wrinkles.

“Does this remind you a bit of the Little Red Riding Hood story?” Ben whispered.

Paisley laughed.

“I didn’t mean it as a joke!”

The lady coughed and beckoned with her hand. “Come in, come in. I’m so sorry I can’t be a better hostess. I fell ill yesterday, and I haven’t left my bed since.”

“Who are you?” Paisley asked.

“My name is Ruby Stine.”

“And all of the animals loose in the forest belong to you?” Paisley guessed.

The woman nodded. “Yes. I spent over two decades gathering my fine collection of rare and endangered specimens.”

“With all due respect, ma’am, they aren’t specimens,” Paisley said. “They are animals, living things.”

“Of course,” The woman said as she coughed.

“And again, respect and all that, but collecting

endangered species is illegal.” Ben pinched her arm, but Paisley couldn’t stop. Her face reddened in anger. Those poor animals, trapped in those tiny cages for so many years.



The woman looked away. “I’m not the only one. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to be surrounded by rare and expensive creatures.”

Now Paisley’s blood started to boil. “Expensive? You determine an animal’s worth by how much it costs to own one?”

“Of course dear. It’s just like purchasing a work of art or a piece of jewelry.”

“What?” Paisley sputtered. She was about to say something she would probably regret later when Ben interrupted her.

“Be that as it may, the issue at hand is that the animals have escaped. How did that happen?”

Ruby Stine groaned and leaned back on her pillows. “My favorite pet is Artie, my Roloway Monkey. He’s usually loose in the house most of the time. I always keep my keys hidden from him. You know how tricky monkeys can be. But when I got sick suddenly, I could barely drag myself to my bed. I forgot that I left my keys on the kitchen counter. Artie must have gotten them and opened some of the cages. Oh, I hope he didn’t open ALL of them.”

“What does that mean?” Ben asked.

Paisley’s heart sank. “Ms. Stine, are any of your animals dangerous?”

Ruby averted her gaze. “Not dangerous, per say. But still . . . it wouldn’t do to have him loose. It wouldn’t do at all. Would you check on Tiny Tim’s cage for me?”

“Sure,” Paisley and Ben said together. They left the cabin and searched the cage name tags.

“Tiny Tim doesn’t sound too scary,” Ben said. “What do you think it is? Maybe a badger or something?”

“I don’t think she would be interested in a badger,” Paisley said as she checked the cages of Mosley the giant tortoise, Buggy the slow loris, and Mouse the fennec fox. She came to one of the largest cages. She read the name tag, gulped, and reread it again. “I found Tiny Tim.”

Ben heard the tension in her voice and hurried over. They stared in growing dismay at the huge, empty cage. “Well, that’s false advertising,” Ben said in a shaky voice. “What kind of name is Tiny Tim for a Bengal tiger?”



CHAPTER FIVE

TO CATCH A TIGER BY THE TOE

Paisley and Ben rushed back to Ruby Stine's cabin. Paisley wanted to yell at Ruby until her throat was raw, but Ben convinced her the number one priority was finding Tiny Tim. Act now, yell later.

"Do you have anything we can use to catch him?" Ben asked.

Ruby shook her head. "I've never had this happen before. You could call the forest rangers."

"I'm fairly certain the Kookaburra forest rangers aren't equipped to capture anything bigger than a raccoon," Paisley snapped. "By the time they find a large enough tranquilizer gun, Tiny Tim will have eaten all of our friends!"

Ruby Stine started to cry. “He’s usually such a good boy.”

Paisley threw up her hands. “We’re on our own!”

Ben sat down on the saggy blue couch. The springs groaned and popped. He pulled out his field book and pencil. “Tell me everything you know about Bengal tigers.”

“What about AniPedia?”

“Unfortunately, right now it only works when the animal is present to be scanned,” Ben said.

Paisley thought about the hundreds of afternoons she’d sprawled on the beanbag in Dad’s office, listening to him talk while he researched and wrote about the animals he loved so much. She closed her eyes. “*Panthera tigris tigris*. The Bengal tiger is endangered. Their habitat is the tropical forests and grassland of India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. They grow up to ten feet long and weigh up to six hundred pounds.”

“Not really helpful.”

“They can leap over thirty feet.”

“Not helpful.”

“Their teeth are three inches long.”

“Still not helpful.”

“Their claws are four inches long.”

“Very not helpful! Paisley!”

“I’m trying!” Paisley said. “Okay, how about this fun fact? Tigers love catnip just as much as regular house cats. They go crazy over it.”

“Oh, that’s true!” Ruby Stine said. “Tiny Tim loves it. I have some catnip plants growing in my garden behind the cabin.”

Paisley and Ben looked at each other. Paisley could almost see the lightbulb going off over their heads. “Do you have a large stuffed animal?” She asked Ruby. Artie the Monkey did. They unstuffed Artie’s teddy bear and re-stuffed it with the fragrant green leaves of the catnip plant.

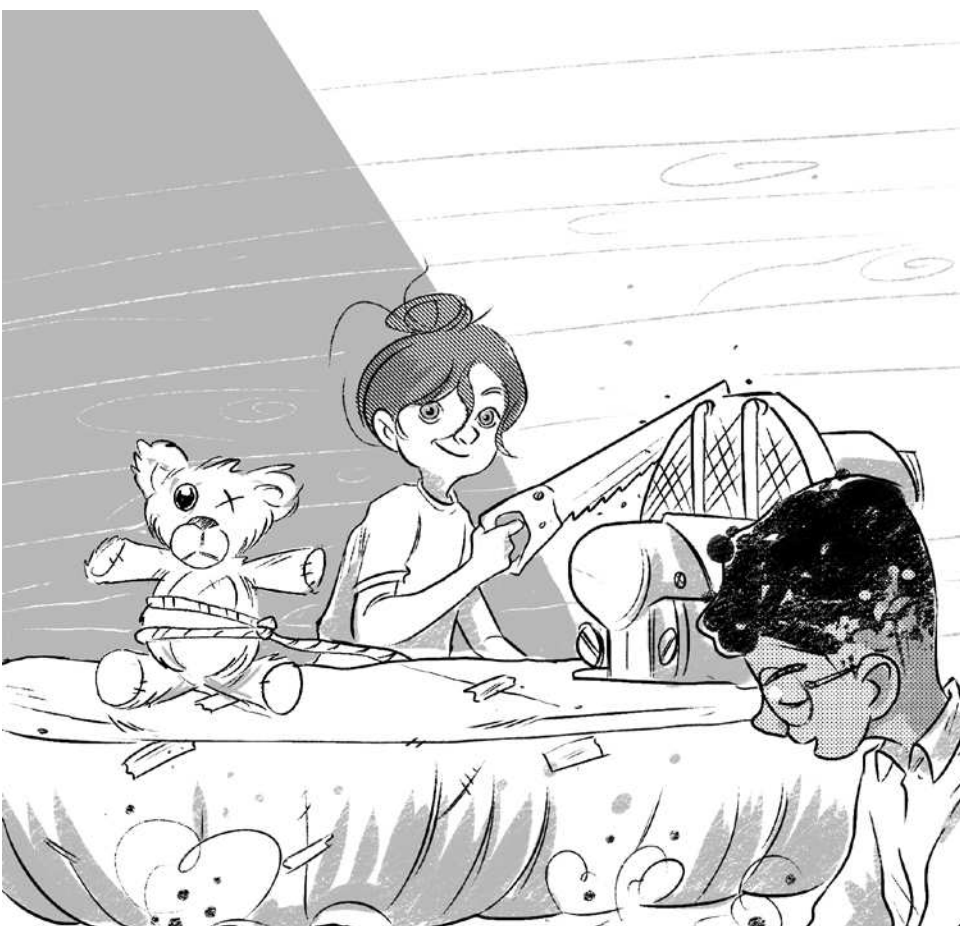
“We need something to pull it,” Ben said. “There’s no way I’m leading a tiger through the forest. He’ll decide to eat me instead!”

“Hmm.” Paisley chewed on her lower lip. “Something with wheels won’t work; the forest floor is filled with

tree roots, branches, and rocks.”

Ben nodded. “We need something that can float or fly, but close to the ground.”

Paisley scanned the room. “How about a hovercraft? We can use that fan in the corner!”



Paisley dumped her supplies out of her backpack. First, they broke off the base of the fan. Then they wired Paisley's battery pack to the fan engine so it would work without electricity. Ben recalibrated the GPS system he always kept in his own supply pack. He programmed the GPS to deliver the hovercraft right to Tiny Tim's cage. Using part of Ruby Stine's shower curtain, Paisley cut and sewed a skirt around the fan to trap the air currents. They sealed everything with duct tape. Then they tied a long piece of rope around the teddy bear and attached it to the fan.

Finally, Paisley grabbed the ancient key from around her neck and pressed it against their hovercraft invention. "Science alliance!" she and Ben whispered. Paisley felt a small thrill ripple through her body as the engine whirled to life.

With the fan facing down, the air currents from the fan pushed against the ground, creating an air cushion for the craft to hover on. The fabric skirt kept most of the air trapped beneath the hovercraft. It would move easily through the forest. "It works! Oh, but how do we

keep it from bumping into the trees?" Paisley asked.

Ben smiled. "I already took care of that. I might have borrowed the sensor from my mom's Roomba vacuum. I knew I'd need it for something."

"Good thinking!"

"Now what?" Ben asked.

"Now we save our friends!" Paisley said.

"But where do we find the tiger? He could be anywhere."

Paisley shook her head. "He's been loose for almost two days. He'll be hungry and thirsty. Where would he find both prey and water?"

Ben gulped. "The closest lake is at Camp Kookaburra!"

"Right. So let's go."

The zebra snorted at them as they passed through the clearing. This time it didn't take as long to trek through the forest, even though they were lugging the hovercraft and the teddy bear. The shadows were long and thick. The trees seemed darker, more dangerous. It would be night soon. The campers would be getting ready to gather wood for the big bonfire. Then she

remembered something even worse. “Ben. Tigers hunt at dusk.”

“Not helpful!” Ben said.

They heard a low, throaty growl. The tiger slunk out of the bushes. His yellow eyes stared right at them! His lips curled back into a snarl. He was so close, she could see his whiskers

Beside her, Ben froze.

The hairs on Paisley’s arms and neck stood up. Her heart thundered in her chest. Was this the end? Was Paisley Atoms, future famous scientist, about to become tiger chow?

“The plan!” Paisley said in a shaking voice. She pinched Ben.

Very carefully, they lowered the fan and switched it on. The fan hovered over the ground. It moved smoothly over the bumpy earth, dragging the teddy bear slowly behind it.

Tiny Tim snarled. Suddenly, he caught a whiff of the catnip. He lifted his massive head, sniffing. His long tail lashed back and forth. He made a rumbling



sound deep in his throat that sounded an awful lot like purring. After a long moment, he crept after the teddy bear.

The hovercraft pulled the teddy bear between some trees and out of sight. Tiny Tim stalked after it.

“That was too close for comfort!” Paisley said when she could finally breathe again.

“You can say that again!”

“Now we’ve got to run back and make sure we close the cage in time!” They chose a roundabout path to make sure they didn’t accidentally run right into the hungry tiger. Once they reached the clearing, they crept to Tiny Tim’s cage. He was inside! He had ripped the stuffed animal to shreds. He was rolling around on the crushed catnip leaves, his paws in the air, growling with pleasure. Quickly Paisley slammed the cage door shut and clamped the padlock.

“We did it!” Ben and Paisley cheered.

“What about the rest of the animals roaming around Kookaburra Forest?” Ben asked.

“They aren’t dangerous,” Paisley said. “The forest

rangers can find them tomorrow. My dad has connections with all the area zoos. I'm sure he will help us find good homes for them. And the police can decide what to do with Ruby Stine. But for right now, let's enjoy our last night at camp."

They clicked on their flashlights and made their way back to Camp Kookaburra. All the campers were gathered around the bonfire, sitting on logs and roasting marshmallows. The night sky was sprinkled with bright stars. "What a great way to spend our last night at Camp Kookaburra," Ben said.

As soon as the campers saw Ben and Paisley, they started begging for answers. Paisley held up a hand to silence them. Fighting back a grin, she turned to Arjun. "Arjun, what exactly did you see on the horse trail?"

Arjun rubbed his arms. "Honestly? I only saw yellow eyes and big white teeth. I just assumed it was a werewolf."

"Well, it wasn't."

"That's good to know," Arjun said with relief.

"It was a tiger."

The next sound was the thud of Arjun's body hitting the ground in a dead faint.

The campers laughed long into the night. It was the best ending to the best week at Camp Kookaburra ever.



Science Alliance! Build Your Own Hovercraft

Materials:

- old CD or DVD disc
- nine-inch (22.86 cm) balloon
- pop-top cap from a water bottle
- hot glue gun
- tape
- push-pin or small nail

Step 1

Cover the center hole of the CD or DVD disc with a piece of tape. Poke about six holes in the tape with a push-pin or small nail. This will slow down the flow of air and allow your hovercraft to hover longer.

Step 2

Use the hot glue gun to glue the cap to the center of the disc. Create a good seal to keep the air from escaping.

Step 3

Blow up the balloon all the way and pinch the neck of it, but don't tie it.

Step 4

Make sure the pop-top is closed. Fit the neck of the balloon over the pop-up portion of the cap. This will be easier with two people.

Step 5

When you are ready to try your hovercraft, simply put the craft on a smooth surface like a table top. Pop the top open and enjoy!

The air flow from the balloon causes a cushion of moving air between the disc and the surface, which lifts the DVD disc and allows it to hover.

Women in Science

Jane Goodall is a scientist who studied and lived with chimpanzees in the jungles of Tanzania for years. Her observations revealed that chimpanzees are highly emotional, intelligent, and socially complex animals. After five decades of research, Jane focuses on chimpanzee conservation and awareness, advocating for an end to chimpanzee experimentation across the world.



Jane Goodall (b.1934)

Author Q & A

Q. How did you come up with the idea for this story?

A. I was watching a nature documentary with my kids. The show featured the New Zealand crested penguin waddling through the woods. I didn't know there were penguins that lived in forests. I thought it would be fun to have a story about other out-of-place animals running around the Kookaburra woods.

Q. What was your favorite part?

A. I love Arjun's dead faint when he discovers he was nearly a tiger's lunch.

Q. Were any characters hard to write?

A. This was one of those stories that just kind of wrote itself. I really enjoyed taking Whitney-Raelynn out of her comfort zone and having a little fun with her.

Silly Science!

Why did the tiger loose at poker?

Because he was playing with a cheetah!

What do penguins have for lunch?

Icebergers!

What's black and white and red all over?

A sun-burned zebra!

Websites to Visit

All about animals!

<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/animals>

More fun animal facts:

www.animalfactguide.com/animal-facts

Learn about endangered species by country:

www.kidsplanet.org/factsheets/map.html

About the Author

Kyla Steinkraus lives with her husband, two kids, and two spoiled cats in Atlanta, Georgia. She loves animals almost as much as Paisley and Ben, although she would not want to run across a tiger loose in the woods! In her free time, Kyla enjoys reading, photography, hiking, traveling, and playing games with her family.



About the Illustrator

Alan Brown's love of comic art, cartoons and drawing has driven him to follow his dreams of becoming an artist. His career as a freelance artist and designer has allowed him to work on a wide range of projects, from magazine illustration and game design to children's books. He's had the good fortune to work on comics such as *Ben 10* and *Bravest Warriors*. Alan lives in Newcastle with his wife, sons and dog.



HOW'D THAT PENGUIN GET IN THE BED?

Paisley Atoms and her friends are having a great time at Camp Kookaburra. Then some campers start seeing mysterious animals where they don't belong. What are a koala bear, a zebra, and a penguin doing in Kookaburra Woods? When Paisley and Ben investigate, they find more than they bargained for. A tiger is loose in Kookaburra! Paisley and Ben need to use all their brain power to find and capture it before it finds his way to camp—or the campers will be tiger food!

Includes activities, spotlight on women in science, jokes, websites to visit, author Q & A, and extended online home/classroom/maker space activities.



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A bit of science, a bit of fantasy, and a whole lot of fun! These books weave fact and fiction to delight and inform.

Appeals to 2nd - 5th Grades