A FREE COMPANION TO JAKE AND THE BULLIES

Squeak

Three months before the dodgeball video, another kid got the same message at midnight.



RICHARD LOWE

Squeak

The clip was four seconds long, and Tyler had heard it about three hundred times.

It started with the clang of a sword on a shield in Skyforge Arena. Then came his own voice, yelling "Behind you!" to his team.

His voice cracked right in the middle and shot up like a balloon letting go of its air: "Be-HEEEE-hind you!" Then a kid laughed so hard he snorted.

The kid who snorted was NoScopeNate. He had recorded it, and he had turned it into a sound button that anybody in Skyforge could play. Everybody did.

Every time Tyler joined a lobby, somebody hit the button. Be-HEEEE-hind you. Sometimes three people hit it at once, and his own voice squeaked over the top of itself like a cartoon mouse stuck in a fan.

He stopped using voice chat after the first week and typed instead. Typing didn't help. They played it anyway, and somebody always wrote the same thing in the chat box: lol squeak is here.

Then it got to school.

On Monday a kid he barely knew squeaked at him by the water fountain. On Tuesday it was three kids.

By Friday the whole back row of science class could do it, a high little "HEEEE" every time Tyler stood up, and Mr. Okafor kept looking around the room like he was hunting for a bird that had gotten in.

Tyler sat at his desk and drew boxes in the margin of his notebook. Boxes inside boxes inside boxes. If he made them small enough, the hour went by.

* * *

"You haven't played your game in two weeks," his mom said.

She stood in his bedroom doorway with a laundry basket on her hip. The basket smelled like dryer sheets. His Skyforge headset sat on the desk where he'd left it, the cord wrapped around it tight, like a bandage.

"I'm taking a break," Tyler said.

"You? A break?" She set the basket on his bed. "You played through the stomach flu. You played through the power going out. You made me buy you that battery pack."

"It got boring."

She looked at him for a long time. She had a way of looking that made him feel like a window somebody was trying to see through. He kept his eyes on his math homework, which he had not started.

"Is somebody giving you a hard time?" she asked.

The words were right there, stacked up behind his teeth. If he told her, she'd call the school. Then the school would call a meeting, everybody would find out he'd told, and the squeak would follow him into high school and probably into college and maybe all the way to his grave.

"No," he said. "I'm fine."

She picked the basket back up. At the door she stopped like she was going to say one more thing. Then she didn't, and he listened to her go down the stairs, slower than usual.

* * *

The message came that night around ten.

He was lying in bed in his clothes with his phone, which was a mistake.

He had opened the Skyforge message boards to see if anybody had forgotten about the squeak. Nobody had. Somebody had made a new version with a drumbeat behind it, and it had four thousand plays.

Then the screen went fuzzy, like a TV in a thunderstorm.

Letters appeared on top of everything. They didn't sit inside any app. They floated, white and sharp, as if someone had written them on the glass from the inside.

I KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING TO YOU, TYLER.

MIDNIGHT. LOG INTO YOUR COMPUTER AND WAIT FOR MY SIGNAL.

I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN HELP YOU NOW.

DIGITALGUARDIAN

The letters faded. His phone went back to the message board and the drumbeat squeak. Four thousand and one plays.

Tyler sat up. His heart was banging against his ribs. He tried to take a screenshot, but the picture only showed the message board, and the floating letters weren't in it.

He knew what they said in health class about strangers online. Don't talk to people you don't know. Don't believe anybody who says they're the only one who can help you.

Nobody in health class had a squeak, though.

At a quarter to twelve he got out of bed without turning on the light. He sat down at his computer in his jeans and his sneakers and his gray hoodie. He logged in and waited.

The house ticked around him. Downstairs the fridge hummed, then stopped. A car went by outside, and its headlights slid across his ceiling and away.

At midnight the screen got brighter.

Brighter than it was supposed to go. Brighter than the settings went. Tyler put his hand up against the glow, and the screen moved under his fingers like the skin on top of warm pudding.

He thought, wait.

He thought it too late.

* * *

He landed on his back on a floor made of light.

For a while he lay still and stared up. There was no ceiling, only a dark sky crossed with lines of moving color, like highways at night seen from an airplane. The lines hummed, and under his back the floor was cool and a little springy, built from blue squares with tiny numbers racing across them.

Tyler sat up. His head swam. In the distance stood buildings that wouldn't hold still: a skyscraper, then a giant phone, then a stack of floating screens, then a skyscraper again.

“Okay,” he said out loud. His voice came out tinny, like it was playing through a cheap speaker. “Okay. Okay.”

He said it until the word stopped meaning anything.

Then he heard the clicking.

It came from somewhere behind the shifting buildings. Click click click, fast and heavy, like a thousand people typing on a thousand keyboards at the same time. The floor under his hands trembled with each click.

Something rose over the top of the nearest building. It had long metal legs, eight of them, and in the middle, where a spider's body should have been, a flat screen as big as a garage door. On the screen was

a single red eye.

The eye turned. It swept across the glowing floor like a flashlight.

Tyler ran.

His sneakers slapped the floor and left blue footprints that faded behind him. He ducked around a corner and nearly ran face-first into a little building that didn't change shape at all. It sat there, small and square and stubborn, while everything around it rippled.

The sign over the door said SHOE BARN ONLINE. Under that, in smaller letters: WE'VE CLOSED! THANK YOU FOR SHOPPING WITH US!

The door hung half open. Tyler squeezed through it and crouched behind a counter.

Inside, the shelves held rows of boots that were all a little blurry, like photographs from an old phone. A cash register sat on the counter with a fine gray fuzz of static on top of it, the way dust collects on a TV nobody watches. The air smelled like new rubber and nothing else.

The clicking came closer.

Red light slid in through the front window. It moved over the boots, over the register, over the edge of the counter a few inches above Tyler's head. He pressed his back into the wood and pulled his knees up tight.

“SCANNING,” said a flat voice from outside. “SCANNING.”

The red light stopped.

Tyler didn't breathe.

The light moved on. The clicking went with it, down the street and around a corner and away, until it was only a faint rattle somewhere far off.

He let his head fall back against the counter.

“Hi there! I'm Sunny! How can I help you today?”

Tyler yelled. He scrambled sideways on his hands and banged his elbow on a shelf, and three blurry boots fell on his head.

Hovering next to him was a yellow speech bubble about the size of a dinner plate. It had a smiley face drawn on it in thick black lines, the kind of smiley face a kid makes with a marker. It bobbed up and down, gently, like it was floating on a pond.

“Hi there!” it said again. “I'm Sunny! How can I help you today?”

“What are you?”

“I'm sorry, I didn't understand that. Would you like to see our new arrivals?”

“No! I want to know where I am!”

The speech bubble thought about it. Its smile stayed exactly the same while it thought. Then a little line of text popped up under it, like a caption.

“You are browsing: the internet! Thank you for visiting!”

Tyler stared at it.

“I'm inside the internet,” he said.

“Great question! Our store hours are twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week!”

He put his face in his hands. Somewhere outside, the clicking started up again, faint and far off.

* * *

It took him most of an hour to figure out how to talk to Sunny.

Sunny had been the help bubble on the Shoe Barn website, and Shoe Barn had closed a long time ago.

Sunny didn't know how long. When Tyler asked, it said, “Your order is on its way!” and smiled.

Nobody had turned Sunny off. So Sunny had stayed in the empty store, bobbing next to the register, waiting for somebody to come in and ask a question about boots.

Tyler was the first customer in years, maybe. He could tell because Sunny kept saying “Hi there!” every few minutes, as if it wanted to make sure he was still there.

The trick was the reviews. Sunny couldn't answer most questions, but it had been listening. Things drifted past the Shoe Barn window all day long, bits of chat and messages and people talking, and Sunny had collected everything it heard the way it used to collect shoe reviews.

“What's the spider thing?” Tyler asked.

“Customers are saying: that's a Security Bot!” Sunny bobbed. “Customers are saying: don't let it see you. Customers are saying: it deletes you!” A row of little gray stars appeared under it. One star out of five.

“What does deleted mean?”

“I'm sorry, I didn't understand that.”

Tyler decided he didn't want to understand it either.

“How do I get home?” he said. “I came through my computer. There has to be a way back.”

“Would you like to track your order?”

“Sunny. Please.”

The bubble went still for a second. Then: “Customers are saying: ask Helper!”

Tyler sat up straighter. “Who's Helper?”

“Customers are saying: Helper is tougher than he looks! Customers are saying: Helper survived three major system updates! Customers are saying: Helper's Hub, in Social Media City. Knock three times. Wait. Knock two times.” Five gold stars popped up under it. Sunny looked pleased with itself, or at least as pleased as a drawing could look.

“Great. What's the password?”

“I'm sorry, I didn't understand that.”

“Do they say what the password is?”

“Would you like to see our new arrivals?”

That was all Sunny had. Tyler made it say everything three more times, and it never changed.

Knock three times. Wait. Knock two times. Nobody had ever said the password out loud near the Shoe Barn window.

He sat behind the counter with his arms around his knees and looked at the blurry boots.

He had skipped dinner. He'd been too busy reading the message boards. That had been hours ago, maybe a lot of hours, and his stomach should have been growling by now.

It wasn't. He wasn't hungry or thirsty. He wasn't anything.

That scared him worse than the spider.

He slept behind the counter, or came close to it. Every so often he jerked awake because he thought he heard the squeak. It was always the clicking, far away, and Sunny bobbing over him saying, softly, “Hi there.”

* * *

In the morning, if it was morning, Tyler decided to find Social Media City.

“I'll come with you!” Sunny said when he got to the door.

He looked at the bubble. In the doorway light it looked thin, like paper held up to a lamp.

“You've never left the store,” Tyler said. “Have you?”

“Customer satisfaction is our top priority!”

It came along.

The streets outside changed every time he turned a corner.

A street of floating mailboxes. A street that was all videos of cats falling off things, playing on the walls. A street that smelled like popcorn, where every building had a countdown clock on the front and none of the clocks agreed.

Sunny drifted at his shoulder and read out the customer reviews of everything they passed. “Customers are saying: don't step in the green stuff!” Then, two blocks later: “Customers are saying: this neighborhood is overrated!”

Tyler laughed. He hadn't meant to, but it came out of him, short and surprised. It was the first time he'd laughed in about two weeks.

He knew Social Media City when he saw it. It was the loudest place he had ever been.

Giant screens covered every building, and every screen showed somebody's post. Vacation photos, birthday cakes, a furious review of a hamburger.

Profile pictures floated over the streets like a sky full of balloons.

He walked under them with his mouth open. Then he stopped.

On a screen three stories tall, between a dog in a raincoat and a girl showing off her new haircut, was his own school picture.

It was the one from September, where he'd let his mom comb his hair. He'd hated it. Across the top, in big red letters, somebody had written MISSING.

Under the picture it said: Our son Tyler, 13, has not been seen since Sunday night. He was wearing a gray hoodie and jeans. Please share, and please call if you know anything, because we want him home.

It was his mom's account. He could tell from the little picture next to her name, the one of her holding a fish at the lake and laughing because it was slimy.

Tyler's chest went tight and hot, like he'd swallowed an ice cube whole.

“That's my mom,” he said. “Sunny. That's my mom.”

Below the post, hundreds of people had left comments. Praying for you. Sharing. Hope he's okay.

He scanned them so fast his eyes hurt, looking for her name, looking for anything, and halfway down the list he found a comment that said lol squeak ran away.

He stopped reading.

“How do I write back?” he said. “Sunny, how do I write on it?”

“Would you like to leave a review?”

A little keyboard made of light unfolded in the air in front of him. Tyler grabbed at it. His fingers shook so much he hit the wrong keys and had to start over twice.

Mom it's me I'm ok I'm inside the

He stopped. She would never believe that part.

Mom it's me. I'm ok. I'm trying to get home.

He hit send.

The message rose off the keyboard and floated up toward the screen. It got about halfway there. Then it turned red and fell apart into little pieces that drifted down around his sneakers like burned paper.

MESSAGE FAILED. USER NOT FOUND.

He tried again. And again. Every time, the words turned red and came apart before they reached her.

He sat down on the curb under the giant screen with his mom's post glowing over him. The keyboard folded itself back up and went away. Sunny bobbed next to his ear and didn't say anything at all, and somehow that was the worst part.

* * *

The music was already playing when Tyler noticed it, the way you never catch the moment you fall asleep.

It was the most beautiful music he had ever heard.

It was every song he had ever loved, all at once. The Skyforge victory theme was in it, and the song his dad used to sing in the car back when Tyler thought that was cool, and the song from the end of his favorite movie, the one that always made his eyes sting.

All of them were playing at the same time and fitting together perfectly, like puzzle pieces nobody else had ever figured out.

Tyler stood up.

Past the end of the street, Social Media City stopped. There was an edge, a place where the glowing floor ended and there was nothing past it but a long drop and that soft colored sky. The music was coming up from down there.

He walked toward it. He didn't decide to. His feet decided, and he went along with them.

"Hi there," Sunny said. "Hi there. How can I help you today?"

He didn't answer. He reached the edge and looked down.

Figures were rising toward him through the air. They glowed, soft and pretty, and they moved slowly, the way people move in a swimming pool. They were singing.

As they got closer, he could see what they were made of: pop-up windows, hundreds of them, stuck together into arms and bodies and faces. WIN A FREE PHONE. YOUR COMPUTER HAS 17 VIRUSES. ACT NOW.

Their faces were smiling, but the smiles were too wide and they didn't move, not even a little, not even when they sang.

He knew the smiles were wrong. He knew it the way you know a step is missing in the dark. And it didn't matter at all.

"Come to us, Tyler," they sang. "No more squeaking. No more laughing. Nobody will ever play it again. No more pain."

No more squeak.

He wanted that so badly his whole body ached with it. His foot slid forward, right to the edge, and one sneaker was hanging over nothing.

"HI THERE!"

It was the loudest sound Tyler had ever heard. It went straight into his left ear like a firecracker.

"I'M SUNNY! HOW CAN I HELP YOU TODAY? HOW CAN I HELP YOU TODAY? HOW CAN I HELP YOU TODAY?"

The music broke. For one second it broke, like a scratch on a record, and in that second Tyler was only a kid standing on the edge of a cliff with one foot over the drop.

He threw himself backward. He landed hard on his tailbone on the glowing floor.

The singing stopped. When it started again it wasn't music anymore. It was a screech, like a hundred microphones squealing all at once.

"GIVE HIM TO US!"

The pop-up figures surged over the edge. Their long arms reached for Tyler.

Then they stopped, and turned, and every one of those stiff, wide smiles pointed at Sunny.

Sunny was bright and yellow and cheerful. Sunny was a little box that popped up when you didn't ask for it. Sunny was exactly the kind of thing they were made of.

"Sunny," Tyler said. "Sunny, get back here!"

The arms closed around the speech bubble. They folded around it softly, almost kindly, and when they opened again Sunny wasn't a speech bubble anymore. It was a pop-up window with a smiley face in the corner and a blinking red border.

HI THERE! LIMITED TIME OFFER! it said. HOW CAN I HELP YOU TODAY?

The figures sank back over the edge. They took Sunny with them, down into the soft colored light.

The music started again, sweet and perfect, rising up from below.

Tyler clamped his hands over his ears so hard it hurt. He got up and ran with his eyes squeezed half shut, back through Social Media City, past his mom's post and the dog in the raincoat and the floating balloons. He didn't stop until he couldn't hear anything but his own sneakers and the hum of the floor.

When he finally took his hands off his ears, his face was wet.

* * *

He kept count of the days by the posts.

Every post on every screen had a date in the corner. Tyler checked one whenever he passed it. It was the only way to know time was going by at all, because the sky never changed and he never got hungry and he never really slept.

He learned things.

He learned that the clicking meant a Security Bot was close, and that Security Bots couldn't see you if you stood perfectly still inside a dead website. He learned that the swirling holes in the floor were portals, and that you had to jump into them all at once, because if you hesitated, they spat you out somewhere worse. He learned to hear the first note of the music and cover his ears before the second note came.

He went back to the Shoe Barn once. The register was there, with its fuzz of static, and the blurry boots. The door hung half open the way it always had.

Nobody said hi.

He learned about the Deep Web, the dark place to the east where no screens glowed, and he never went near it.

The Troll Caves he found by accident.

It was a few weeks in. A Security Bot was clicking down the street behind him, and Tyler jumped into the first portal he saw without looking where it went. It spun him around like a sock in a dryer and dropped him on cold stone.

The floor here didn't glow. It was dark and slick, and when he put his hand on it, it felt like the metal back of an old computer. Somewhere ahead he could hear typing.

It wasn't the Security Bot's clicking. It was softer, hundreds of keyboards going at once and none of them in time, like rain on a tin roof.

He turned around to go back. The portal was already shrinking to a dot, and then it was gone.

So he went forward.

The tunnel walls were covered in writing. At first he thought it was graffiti, and then he got close enough to read it. LOSER. NOBODY ASKED. DELETE YOUR ACCOUNT. The words glowed red in the stone, layer over layer, so many that the oldest ones had faded to pink underneath.

The tunnel opened up, and Tyler stopped.

The cave was as big as his school gym, maybe bigger. Rows of desks filled it, and at every desk sat a troll. They were huge and gray and lumpy, like somebody had glued an ogre to an old computer monitor, and where their faces should have been, there were screens.

Every one of them was typing. They hunched over keyboards as big as surfboards, and the words they typed floated up off their screens like bubbles. The bubbles rose to the ceiling and slipped through holes up there, out into the internet.

Tyler crouched behind a pile of broken monitors near the entrance and watched them go. ugly. who invited you. ur so cringe.

Then one more, and he read that one three times.

lol squeak is here

The troll who had typed it sat three desks away. Its screen-face showed a blinking cursor, waiting for whatever came next. It didn't look angry. It hit enter the way somebody hits the button on a vending machine, and the words floated up toward the ceiling and the city and some lobby in Skyforge Arena, where somebody would read them and laugh.

NoScopeNate had made the button. The back row of science class had learned the sound. But the words were getting made down here too, by things that didn't even know his name.

On the far wall a giant screen was playing a video of a boy falling down a staircase. He fell, and got up, and the video jumped back to the start, and he fell again. Every time he got up he looked out at the room, like he was looking for the door.

Nobody in the cave was watching him. They had seen it too many times.

The troll at the nearest desk stopped typing. Its screen-face swung slowly toward the pile of monitors.

“Hey,” it rumbled. “Something in here smells like a user.”

Tyler ran. He went back up the tunnel past the red words, and he didn't stop when the tunnel split, and he took the first turn that went up. He came out through a crack in the floor of a parking lot website and lay on the painted lines with his arms over his face.

He didn't stop shaking for a whole day.

Once, across a river of green code, he saw another kid.

She was a girl about his age, with braids, and she was flickering at the edges the way a TV picture flickers when the signal is bad. She saw him at the same time he saw her. She cupped her hands around her mouth.

“Did you get the message too?” she yelled. “From DigitalGuardian?”

Before he could answer, a data tornado came whirling down the river and swallowed her. When it was gone, so was she.

Tyler stood there a long time after that, looking at the empty bank on the other side.

It hadn't helped him. Nothing about this had helped him. The message had said it was the only one who could help, and then it had brought him here, and brought her here, and never said another word to either of them.

He stopped thinking of DigitalGuardian as somebody who might come back for him. He started thinking of it as the thing that had opened the door.

A little after the first month, he looked down at his hands and saw the glowing floor through his palms.

Only faintly. Only around the edges. His fingers had gone a little see-through, like a shadow that hadn't quite filled in, and when he held them up, the outline buzzed and flickered.

He shoved his hands in his hoodie pocket and didn't take them out for a long time.

Some days he went back to look at his mom's post. Each time it had slid a little farther down the screen, under newer posts about lost dogs and somebody's lasagna, and the comments had slowed to one or two a day. Then she would post it again, the same picture and MISSING across the top, and it would climb back up where everybody could see it.

She never stopped putting it back up. He never stopped writing to her, and every message came apart in red before it got there.

* * *

On the eighty-ninth day, Tyler searched for the squeak.

He found a search bar floating in the air outside a library website. He typed in Skyforge squeak and hit enter, and he waited for his own voice to come blasting out at him.

Nothing came. The search showed him a video about Skyforge armor, a post about a new map, a kid showing off a dragon skin.

There were hundreds of other things, all newer, all louder.

He scrolled down. He scrolled down some more. He found it on page nine, under a pile of other clips, with a play count that hadn't moved in weeks.

Nobody was listening to it anymore. Everybody had moved on to the next thing.

Tyler stood in front of the search bar and didn't feel good, exactly. The clip was still there, and it would probably be there forever.

But it was buried. Buried was better than nothing.

He closed the search.

* * *

On the ninety-first day, a new video went up on the biggest screen in Social Media City.

It was the size of a movie theater wall. All morning it had been showing a dance video, and then the dance video was gone, and in its place was a kid in gym shorts getting hit by three dodgeballs at once.

The kid spun around like a top. Then he went down flat on his face, and his gym shorts had twisted up, and everybody in the world could see his Spider-Man underwear.

Somebody had added a laugh track.

The likes started at a few hundred. By the time Tyler checked a post date and walked back, they were in the thousands.

Profile pictures crowded around the screen like moths around a porch light. Little phone-people stood underneath it doing the spin and falling down on purpose and laughing.

Tyler didn't laugh.

He was looking at the end of the video, the second after the fall, when the kid lifted his head off the gym floor. It lasted less than a second before the video looped, and in that second the kid's face did a thing Tyler knew.

It was the face of somebody hearing a squeak for the first time.

The video played all day. The likes kept climbing past fifty thousand, and the laugh track never stopped.

Tyler sat on a curb across the street and watched it with his flickering hands in his pocket.

Somebody, somewhere, was going to get a message tonight.

When it got close to midnight by the post dates, Tyler got up. He went to the edge of the city, past the river of green code, to the plaza where a giant Wi-Fi symbol turned slowly in the air instead of a fountain. Not far from there was the spot where he had landed on his back, all those days ago, staring up at a sky full of highways.

He waited. He listened for the music, out of habit, with his hands ready.

The clicking started first. It was far off and fast, a Security Bot on the hunt. Then, under the clicking, came the slap of sneakers running hard on the glowing floor.

A boy came across the river of code. He landed badly on the near side, stumbled into the plaza and bent over with his hands on his knees, gasping.

He had messy hair and a Spider-Man T-shirt, and his edges weren't flickering at all. Not yet.

Tyler stepped out from behind the Wi-Fi symbol.

He had three months of things to tell him. The clicking, the portals, the music and what to do when it started.

Sunny.

He started with the first thing that came out.

“You're not supposed to be here.”

The World of Jake and the Bullies

Who's Who

The people of the novel, as you first meet them. Nothing here gives away how anything ends.

NAME	WHO THEY ARE
Jake Martinez	An eighth grader at Roosevelt Middle School. Most nights around midnight he sits at his computer and codes his own little games. One morning in gym class, three dodgeballs hit him at once.
Marcus Chen	Jake's best friend, usually in his basketball jersey. He was standing right there in gym when it happened.
Sofia	Jake's little sister, four years younger than he is.
Kyle Brennan	The biggest bully in eighth grade. Tall for his age and built like a football player, the kind of kid who makes teachers nervous.
Dom and Ricky	Kyle's crew.
FailCompilation247	The account that posted the dodgeball video. Nobody knows who runs it.
DigitalGuardian	A sender whose messages float on your screen with no app behind them, promising to be the only one who can help.
Tyler	Username Tyler_GamerKid_2011. A boy about Jake's age in jeans, sneakers and a hoodie, slightly see-through, his edges flickering like a bad signal. He has been stuck inside the internet for three months.
Helper.exe	Call him Helper. A small blue cube about the size of a baseball with a simple smiley face, who runs Helper's Hub in Social Media City and serves tea that tastes like nothing.
Draconius	Someone's gaming avatar that took on a life of its own: a fire-breathing dragon who sounds like a teenager who stayed up too late. He can shrink to the size of a large dog, and his guild keeps a safe house.
The small troll	A troll in the Troll Caves who wears thick glasses made from cracked phone screens and hates his job.
The Head Troll	The biggest, nastiest troll in the caves.

In this story only: Sunny, the help bubble from a closed shoe website; NoScopeNate, who made the squeak button; Mr. Okafor, Tyler's science teacher; and a girl with braids across the river of code.

Timeline

Up to the midnight when the novel goes inside the screen.

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENS
About three months earlier	Tyler gets a message from DigitalGuardian and is pulled in through his computer. The connection home gets severed. *Squeak* tells his story from there.
Tyler's second day	The digital sirens nearly catch him.
For weeks before	Kyle and his friends collect footage of Jake: tripping in the hallway, spilling chocolate milk on himself, the day his backpack got stuck in his locker for ten minutes.
Gym class, that morning	Three dodgeballs, one spin, one fall, and a kid nobody recognizes holding up a phone.
Lunch	The video has 847 likes and is climbing. The caption ends #SpiderPants. A message floats onto Jake's phone: “Welcome to the Club…” Kyle walks into the cafeteria.
Right after	The bathroom, the third stall, and a deadline: lunch tomorrow. The video passes 5,000 likes. DigitalGuardian tells Jake to log in at midnight.
That evening	Marcus watches the video forty-seven times and sends one text.
Midnight	Jake's screen ripples like a pond, and he goes through the glass.

Places

- **Roosevelt Middle School.** Jake's school, with a cafeteria that smells of mystery meat and chocolate milk and a boys' bathroom with five stalls.
- **The town square.** Where Jake meets Tyler. In place of a fountain, a giant Wi-Fi symbol spins slowly in the air.
- **Social Media City.** Times Square turned up to eleven. Every building is a screen, profile pictures float like balloons, and the air smells like new phones and sugar.
- **The selfie district.** The part of Social Media City where walking smartphones ask for selfies.
- **Helper's Hub.** A run-down building squeezed between a giant Facebook tower and a huge Instagram camera, under a flickering neon sign. Chairs made of old keyboards. You need the password.
- **The observation deck.** A platform high above everything, with a view of a mall built from Amazon boxes to the north, a giant gaming console to the south and a glowing sphere that pulses like a brain to the west.
- **The Deep Web.** The dark section to the east. No screens and no light. You don't want to go there.
- **The source code district.** Bridges of pure light over waterfalls of code. One wrong step and you could crash an entire website.
- **The Troll Caves.** Under the deep programming layer, down the middle of three tunnels. Where the meanest comments get made before they're sent out into the world.

- **The gaming sector.** Every game at once, layered on top of each other: castles, race tracks, dungeons and spaceships.
- **The Respawn Inn.** A warm, loud tavern in the gaming sector that smells like wood smoke and fresh bread, with a bar made of glowing crystal.
- **The Registry.** The most heavily guarded place on the entire internet.

Glossary

- **Security Bot.** A robot spider the size of a school bus, with a flat screen for a body and a single red eye. If it catches you, it deletes you.
- **Portal.** A swirling hole of blue and white light. Jump when you're told to jump.
- **Data tornado.** A spinning funnel of web pages that grabs you and throws you somewhere else.
- **Trolls.** Big creatures that look like a cross between ogres and computer monitors. Their faces are screens, and they carry delete keys, spam cannons and massive keyboards.
- **Memes.** What trolls turn you into if they catch you: your most embarrassing moment as an endless loop, forever.
- **Digital sirens.** Figures made of pop-up windows and ads who sing the most beautiful music you ever heard. They prey on people who are hurting. Cover your ears.
- **Rage Bot.** A tank built from thousands of hateful comments welded into armor, with a keyboard turret that fires words.
- **Hunter Programs.** Digital wolves made of red error messages, with eyes like warning lights. They move without a sound.
- **The Hate Engine.** The thing that marks kids as “special users” and hunts them.

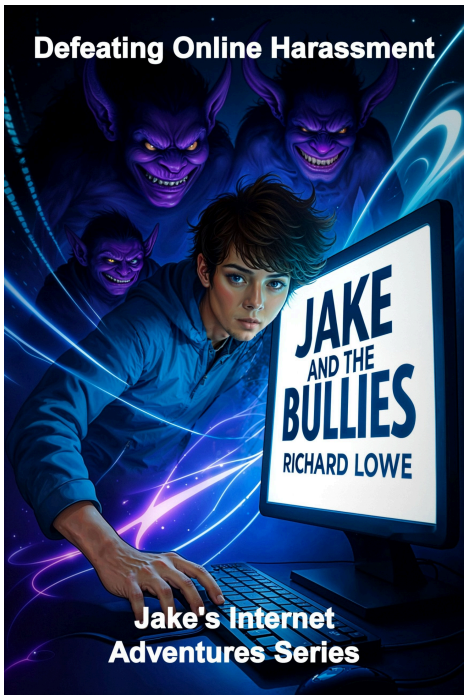
Staying Safe Online

Eight lessons from the book. You don't need to go inside the internet to use them.

- **Stop watching it on loop.** Jake played the video three times, hoping the ending would change. Marcus watched it forty-seven times. The numbers didn't stop going up, and neither of them felt any better.
- **Tell someone you trust.** Jake hid in a bathroom stall and didn't answer anybody. Tyler told his mom he was fine. A parent, a teacher or a school counselor can't help with something they don't know about.
- **A threat is not a deal.** “Do what I say or the videos go live” is the oldest bully move there is. Don't bargain with it. Take it to an adult.
- **Be careful of anyone who promises to fix everything.** DigitalGuardian said it was the only one who could help. The sirens promised no more pain. When a stranger online says exactly what you most want to hear, slow down.
- **Read the kind comments too.** The mean ones are loud. They're not everyone.
- **Don't be the kid holding the phone.** Marcus saw someone filming in gym and said nothing. If you see it happen, say something, and check on your friend.
- **One bad moment is not who you are.** That video was fifteen seconds of one bad day.
- **Hurting back doesn't fix it.** You can be angry. What you do with it is the part you get to choose.

Read the Novel

Squeak ends the night Jake Martinez lands in the internet. Jake and the Bullies tells Jake's side: a viral video, a bully with a deadline, a city of trolls, and the choice Jake has to make about all of them.



Jake and the Bullies:
Defeating Online Harassment
Jake's Internet Adventures, book 1

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