

BATTLE BUGS

THE SNAKE FIGHT



by JACK PATTON
illustrated by BRETT BEAN
SCHOLASTIC INC.

With special thanks to Adrian Bott

If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

Text copyright © 2016 by Hothouse Fiction.

Cover and interior art by Brett Bean, copyright © 2016 by Scholastic Inc.

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012, by arrangement with Hothouse Fiction.

Series created by Hothouse Fiction.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc. BATTLE BUGS is a trademark of Hothouse Fiction.

No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Hothouse Fiction, The Old Truman Brewery, 91 Brick Lane, London E1 6QL, UK.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

ISBN 978-0-545-94512-7

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 16 17 18 19 20

Printed in the U.S.A. 40

First printing 2016

Book design by Phil Falco and Ellen Duda



SOAPBOX SNAIL

Max Darwin pushed open the door to the garage and grinned. His dad was not an organized person. Unlike Max's bedroom, where the bug tanks were all arranged in neat order, his dad's garage was a mess. Boxes were piled on top of one another. Tools were stuffed into old ice cream tubs.

An abandoned cup of coffee was growing multicolored mold.

Max decided it looked like something out of a disaster movie, where humanity had to survive by salvaging whatever junk it could. Even the corkboard on the wall was covered with random notes, doodles, and designs. But in the entire jumble, one thing in particular stood out. Pinned in the center of the board was a brightly colored flyer. It read:

GRAND SOAPBOX DERBY!

A Day of High-Speed Fun at Hilly Park

Homemade Soapboxes Only—No Store-Bought Vehicles Allowed!

Max had decided to enter, and soon after, he and his dad had begun working on a design for the soapbox. Now, despite the mess all around them, their hard work had paid off, and they were about to put the finishing touches on their vehicle.

“You need a hand with that?” Max asked, as his dad knocked over a jam jar full of wrenches.

“Oof, sure,” his dad grunted. “Let’s assemble this thing together.”

The soapbox was made from wooden slats taken from an old bed, with four old wheels from a baby stroller. The best part of the whole thing was something Max’s

dad had found at a yard sale: a huge, hollow, plastic snail shell!

Max thought snails were awesome. Some people confused them for insects, although Max knew that they were actually mollusks. However, that didn't mean they weren't fascinating creatures, and part of the world of mini-beasts he loved so much. Also, it would be kind of funny having what looked like a super-slow snail in a super-high-speed soap-box derby!

Carrying the shell between them, Max and his dad moved it over to the soap-box and carefully lowered it down. Four bolts stuck up from the frame, and with a loud grating noise, the shell slid over them and into place. Max and his dad tightened

nuts onto the bolts until the shell was secure.

“It looks amazing!” Max cried.

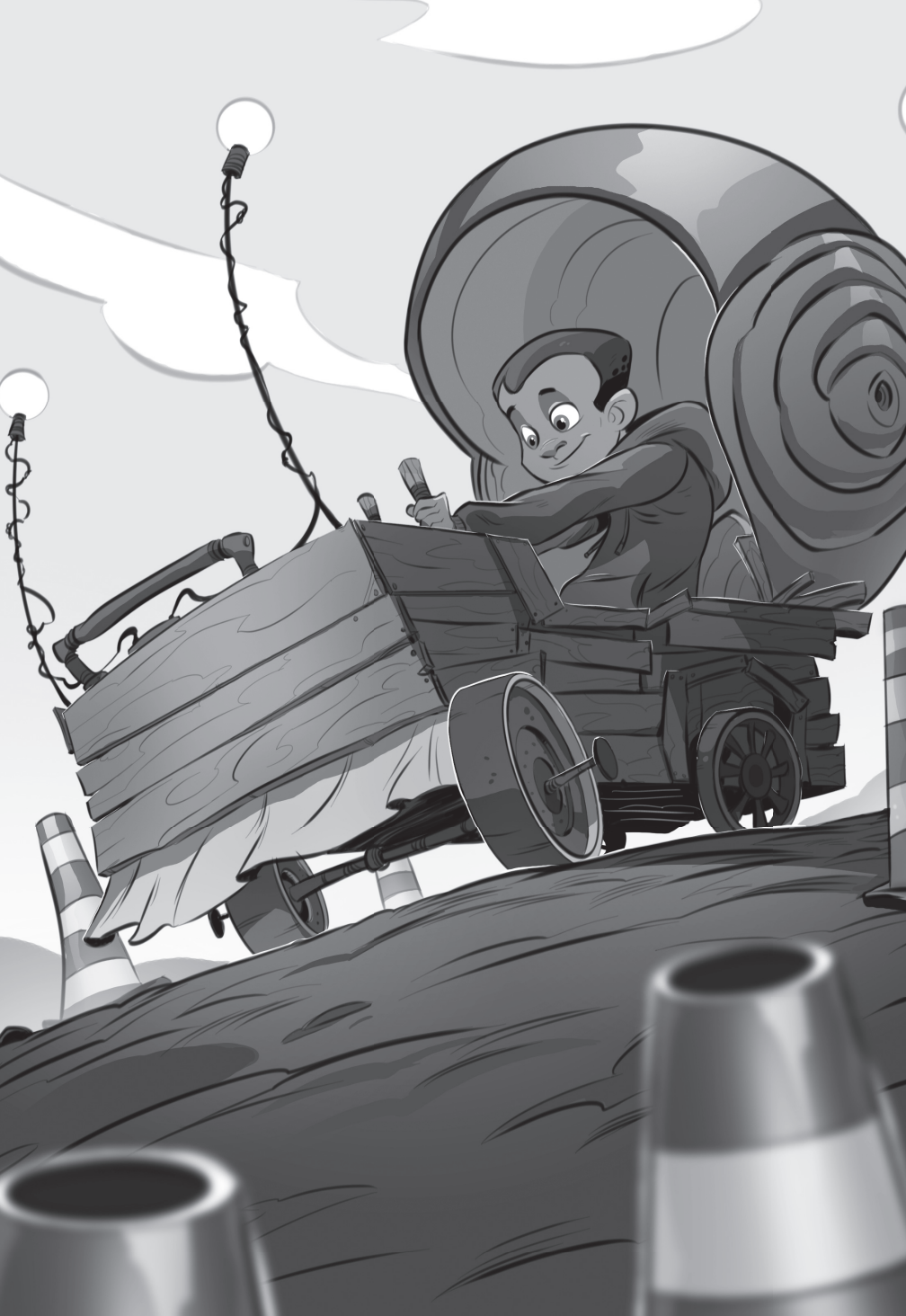
His dad grinned. “Sit inside and see how it feels.”

Max wriggled into the cockpit. The chair had square foam-rubber cushions, which were surprisingly comfortable, and there was an opening in the front of the shell so that Max could steer with a loop of rope.

“It feels great!” he said, steering the front wheels left and right. “But where’s the brake going to be?”

“You don’t have a brake on an old-fashioned soapbox,” his dad said.

“How do I keep from running into a tree?” Max asked nervously.



“You steer around it!” His dad laughed.

I suppose I’ve got the shell to protect me,
Max thought, leaning back. *But still . . .*

His dad knocked on the top of the shell, making a hollow *bonk-bonk* noise. “Come on. Let’s load this beauty into the car.”

Max hopped out and grabbed one end of the buggy. With his dad grabbing the other side, they maneuvered the whole thing out of the garage. Max tried to focus on what he was doing, but his mind raced and his hands felt sweaty.

This afternoon, he’d be racing downhill. All week he’d been excited, but now that the race was actually here, he felt nervous. The hill was steep, and he’d never attempted something like this before.

He took a deep breath and helped his dad lift the buggy into their SUV. Then he stood on the driveway, going through his mental checklist, while his dad started up the car.

“Oh, wait,” Max called. “I forgot one thing.”

His dad rolled down the window. “What’s the problem?”

“Gimme a minute, Dad. I just need to grab something from my room.”

Max bounded inside and ran upstairs. On the desk in his room, he quickly found what he was after. Two long springs with Ping-Pong balls on the ends—the Soapbox Snail’s eyestalks! He couldn’t go anywhere without those.

As he grabbed them, his hand brushed over his prize possession, *The Complete Encyclopedia of Arthropods*.

Suddenly, he froze on the spot—the encyclopedia’s pages were glowing!

He gasped. “The Battle Bugs—they need me!”

The encyclopedia was more than a detailed guide to insects, bugs, and other arthropods of all kinds. It was also a magic gateway to Bug Island, a secret realm where intelligent, talking bugs lived. Max had been there many times, shrinking down to bug size and helping his bug friends in their struggle to survive against the reptile army.

“But I’m supposed to be going to the soapbox derby!” Max groaned. Then he

remembered: Time moved differently on Bug Island. Max had often been away for days in the bug world and returned to find that only minutes had passed in the human world.

“Okay, let’s do this,” he said out loud, as he opened up the encyclopedia. He leafed through the pages until he found the double-page map of Bug Island; light shone up on his face from the glowing pages. There was only one more thing he needed: the magnifying glass that came with the book. He took it out and held it over the map.

Suddenly, a powerful wind whirled around his room, ruffling the curtains and making the paper on his desk fly around in the air. Max felt himself lift off his feet.

“Whoa!” he cried.

The book seemed to grow larger and larger, but Max knew it was actually him that was tumbling down into the pages, through the dark hole that opened up in front of him.

That’s strange—the gateway isn’t usually dark! Max thought.

But before he had time to worry about it, Max was being whisked through the portal, straight to Bug Island . . .