

Mr. Lemoncello, looking like a beanpole wearing a tailcoat and a tiny birthday-party fireman's hat, strode into the room through a side door.

"Thank you, thank you," he said, stretching the elastic band to raise his kid-sized hat and tipping it toward the crowd. "You are too kind."

When he let go of the hat, it snapped back with a sharp **THWACK!**

"As Dr. Zinchenko informed you, I'd like to say a few brief words. Here they are: 'short,' 'memorandum,' and 'underpants.' And let us pause to remember the immortal words of Dr. Seuss: 'The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.' Children? . . ."

Mr. Lemoncello flourished his arm toward the ballroom doors.

"It's time to go across the street. Your amazingly spectacular new public library awaits!"

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Eager to see what was inside the new library, the twelve essay contest winners quickly gathered behind Dr. Zinchenko.

"This way, children," said the head librarian. "Follow me."

The crowd cheered as they marched out of the ballroom, all toting their sleeping bags and suitcases. There was more cheering (plus some hooting and hollering) when they reached the hotel lobby and went out the revolving doors into the street.

The new public library, with its glistening gold dome, took up half a downtown block, its back butting up against an old-fashioned office tower. The building was a boxy fortress, three stories tall, with stately columns that acted like bookends, because the windowless walls had been painted to resemble a row of giant books lined up on a shelf.

"It's like a majestic Greek temple," gushed Miguel.

"And the world's biggest bookcase," added Sierra Russell, who had finally put away her paperback.

Velvet ropes lined a path across Main Street that led to a red carpet leading up a flight of steps to the arched entryway and seriously steel (not to mention *round*) front door.

Kyle had to smile when he saw what was tethered to the railings on either side of the steps: balloons!

A big bruiser—maybe six four, 250 pounds—in sunglasses and a black sports coat stood in front of the library's circular door, which had several large valve wheels like you'd see on a submarine hatch. The burly guard wore his hair in long, ropy dreadlocks.

"What's with that door?" asked Haley Daley, who, of course, had pushed her way to the front. "It looks like it came from a bank vault or something."

"It is the door from the old Gold Leaf Bank's walk-in vault," said Dr. Zinchenko. "It weighs twenty tons."

Akimi turned around and whispered, "My dad designed the support structure for that thing. Check out the hinges." Kyle nodded. He was impressed.

"Why a vault door?" asked Kayla Corson.

"Because," said Dr. Zinchenko, "one sleepy Saturday, when Mr. Lemoncello was your age, he was working in the old public library over on Market Street. He was so lost in his thoughts, he did not hear the sirens as police cars raced past the library to the bank, where a burglar alarm had just been activated. This door serves as a reminder to us

all: Our thoughts are safe when they are inside a library. Not even a bank robbery can disturb them."

Miguel was nodding like crazy. He could relate.

"It also helps us keep our most valuable treasures secure."

"There aren't any windows," observed Andrew Peckleman. "Probably to stop bank robbers from busting in. But shouldn't you people have added windows when you turned it into a library?"

"A library doesn't need windows, Andrew. We have books, which are windows into worlds we never even dreamed possible."

"An open book is an open mind," added Charles Chilton. "That's what I always say."

Dr. Zinchenko pulled out a bright red note card. "Before we enter, please listen very carefully. 'Your library cards are the keys to everything you will need,' she read. "The library staff is here to help you find whatever it is you are looking for."

She smiled slightly, tucked the card back into her pocket, turned to the security guard, and said, "Clarence? Will you do the honors?"

"With pleasure, Dr. Z."

Clarence turned one giant wheel, spun another, and cranked a third.

Noiselessly, the twenty-ton door swung open.

The first thing Kyle could see inside was a trickling fountain in a grand foyer of brilliant white marble. The fountain featured a life-size statue of Mr. Lemoncello standing on a lily pad in the middle of a shallow reflecting pool ten feet wide. His head was tilted back so water could spurt up from his mouth in an arc.

Kyle noticed a quote chiseled into the statue's pedestal: KNOWLEDGE NOT SHARED REMAINS UNKNOWN. —LUIGI L. LEMONCELLO

Beyond the fountain, through an arched walkway, was a huge room filled with desks.

When everybody had shuffled into the entrance hall, Dr. Zinchenko turned to the security guard.

"Clarence?"

Clarence hauled the heavy steel door shut. Kyle heard the whir of spinning wheels, the clink of grinding gears, and a reverberating clunk.

"Wow!" said Miguel. "Talk about a lock-in!"

"I'll be in the control center, Dr. Z," said the security guard.

"Very well, Clarence."

Clarence disappeared behind a red door.

"Now then, children," said the librarian, "if you will all follow me into the Rotunda Reading Room."

As the rest of the group started filing into the gigantic circular room, Kyle checked out a display case beside the red door. A sign over it read "Staff Picks: Our Most

Memorable Reads." A dozen books were lined up on four shelves.

One cover in the middle of the bottom row caught Kyle's eye. It showed a football player wearing a number nineteen jersey dropping back to hurl a pass. Kyle made a mental note of the title: *In the Pocket: Johnny Unitas and Me*. Tomorrow morning, when the lock-in was over, he might use his library card to check it out for his big brother, Mike.

"Wow!"

Everybody gasped as they stepped into the Rotunda Reading Room and looked up. The entire underside of the dome looked like space as seen from the Hubble telescope: A dusty spiral nebula billowed up, a galaxy of stars twinkled, and meteorites whizzed across the ceiling.

"Ooh!"

The space imagery on the ceiling dissolved into ten distinct panels, each one becoming a display of swirling graphics.

"Those are the ten categories of the Dewey decimal system," whispered Miguel, sounding awestruck. "See the panel with Cleopatra, the guy mountain climbing, and the Viking ship sailing across it? That's for 900 to 999. History and Geography."

"Cool," said Kyle.

Tucked beneath the ten screens in arched niches were incredible 3-D statues glowing a ghostly green.

"I believe those are holographic projections," said Andrew Peckleman, waving up at a statue that was waving down at him.

The room under the dome was huge. It was circular, with a round desk at the center that was surrounded by four rings of reading desks.

Kyle saw that half of the rotunda was filled with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. The other half had balconies on the second and third floors that reminded him of the open atrium of a hotel he and his family had stayed at once.

While everybody was gawking at the architecture, Dr. Zinchenko said the words Kyle had been waiting to hear all day:

"Now then, who's ready for our first game?"

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"Will everybody please line up behind that far desk in front of the Children's Room?" said Dr. Zinchenko, gesturing toward one of the wooden tables in the outermost ring of the room.

"How many of you are familiar with Mr. Lemoncello's classic board game *Hurry to the Top of the Heap*?"

Twelve hands shot up.

"Very good," said Dr. Zinchenko.

Overhead, the Wonder Dome dissolved into a gigantic, curved *Heap* box top.

"This will be a live, three-dimensional version of that game. Each of you will be asked a trivia question. If you are able to answer it correctly, you will roll the dice and advance the equivalent number of desks. When you return to the starting point, you will move into the next concentric circle of desks. When you complete that ring, you will