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My Fecal Fortress

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NOTES ON WINNING ENTRIES

1st Place
Cole Dahle
My Fecal Fortress

2nd Place
Samuel Cantrell
A Hot Day

3rd Place
NyEma Sims
Flight
My First International
Honorable Mention
Donnie Drobny
Haunted Past

MY FECAL FORTRESS
This story's vivid imagery immediately captures the reader's attention. The children described as “monsters,” “creatures,” and “rabid animals” are a perfect counterpart to the helpless, hiding narrator. This reversal of expected roles provides the impetus for a swiftly moving, comically entertaining and highly creative story. The author knows how to make readers laugh, and is not afraid to have the laughter be at his expense.

A HOT DAY
“A Hot Day” is built upon layers of carefully constructed conflict. The author uses seeming contradictions and false expectations to build conflict, and then holds in the tension with the tight interior setting, pulling the characters inexorably together. The ending is wholly unexpected, a powerful shift in character that causes the reader to rethink the entire story. The language is tight and clean, letting the action speak for itself.

MY FIRST INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT
The narrative is nicely framed by the flight time; it is a self-described “nineteen hour race to our final destination.” The varied views out the airplane window are used as an introspective look into the narrator's thoughts and emotions, making the story one of self-discovery as well as exploration. The reader is left (along with the narrator) standing on the edge of a journey, waiting to see where it will take them.

We hear the chanting and activity ten minutes earlier than usual. Looking across the emerald grass, we see one hundred monsters scampering about in boredom. I look around at my fellow coaches to see them all staring at me, unblinkingly. Facundo's buck teeth show as he addresses me, “It's all you, Coley.” I look around at the other coaches one last time before releasing a long sigh and standing upright, making my way towards the largest congregation of campers. The creatures recognize my approach while I still have thirty yards of ground to cover and swarm around me, instantly. Putting a broad smile on my face, I begin to interact with them, laughing at their lame jokes and ruffling the tops of their heads. But things take a turn for the worst when the biggest and bravest boy decides to undress me. He takes a firm grip on the bottom of my black shorts and attempts to rip them off my body. I leap into the air and bolt out of the pile of small bodies. Wrong choice.

The horde screams in delight and races after me, misinterpreting my flight for a game of tag. I am a magnet for children; my following grows with every lap around the field. While my feet can cycle infinitely faster than the tiny legs pursuing me, I do not have the vast reserves of fuel that drive their little engines. My breath comes in short gasps, and I know that any attempt at surrender will result in a mouthful of dirt. At that instant, I spot a miracle; a beautiful sanctuary that will protect me until the stitch in my side can settle. I make a beeline for it, hurling myself into the sultry honey bucket and slamming the lock.

The kids arrive and encircle my place of solitude. The shaking of their stampede shifts the contents of the port-a-potty and a fresh aroma of urine and feces wafts its way into my nostrils. I cannot see the rabid animals, but the banging on the side of my fortress and their deafening voices unite in chaos. I can only lean up against the door and shake my head with a smile of disbelief. Then the voice of a child stops my heart.
"Let's tip it over!"

Suddenly, my hideout begins tilting back and forth, gradually growing in magnitude. In a flash, I explode out of the mobile toilet. Sending bodies flying, I hurdle the siege in a single bound, a solitary sheet of toilet paper streaming off my right foot. I rejoin my circle of colleagues, turning to survey the scattered corpses lying on the ground from my flight. My focus returns to the coaches and Facundo catches my eye. The hairy Argentine shakes his head as his chest heaves with laughter. "Only you, Cole. Only you."

A mosquito landed on the bank's glass window. It swatted its wings impatiently, almost fanning itself off, before it took off again. Inside, I stood impatiently in line, clasping my deposit slip. I wiped my forehead, but there was too much sweat on my face from the sweltering heat outside.

The heat had made the lone teller lethargic, and the line I was in wound around tables and signs until nearly the door. I looked down at my watch, shaking my head anxiously, and shifted my weight.

Another man in line caught my interest. Dressed fairly well, in a dark suit, he was wearing dark sunglasses, which, on account of the bright day, could be understandable, but he felt wrong. The reader probably knows the feeling; there wasn't so much proof. Well, there was one thing: he didn't hold a check or some other scrap of paper, like most of us did.

I looked down at my deposit slip, ensuring everything was in order. I exhaled loudly, hoping it would help cool me off, and looked slowly around the bank. The security officer had exited, probably for his smoking break. I frowned, and then looked over at the dark-suited man. He was looking over at the exit, his right hand now inside his coat pocket, and he seemed to be grasping something inside. My eyes widened. He's got a gun, I thought.

I breathed slowly. No sense in getting excited. If he started shooting up the place, dozens of people could get hurt. I reached inside my coat, feeling for my badge: it was there.

The dark-suited man looked around the room, probably checking for the security guard. I guessed that he wouldn't be back for another ten minutes—plenty of time for a heist. Good thing I was here.

He moved towards the teller window. I moved a little to the side so I could watch his movements. He smoothly walked up to the window, removing a gun from his pocket, and shot the customer who stood there. I twitched at the shot.