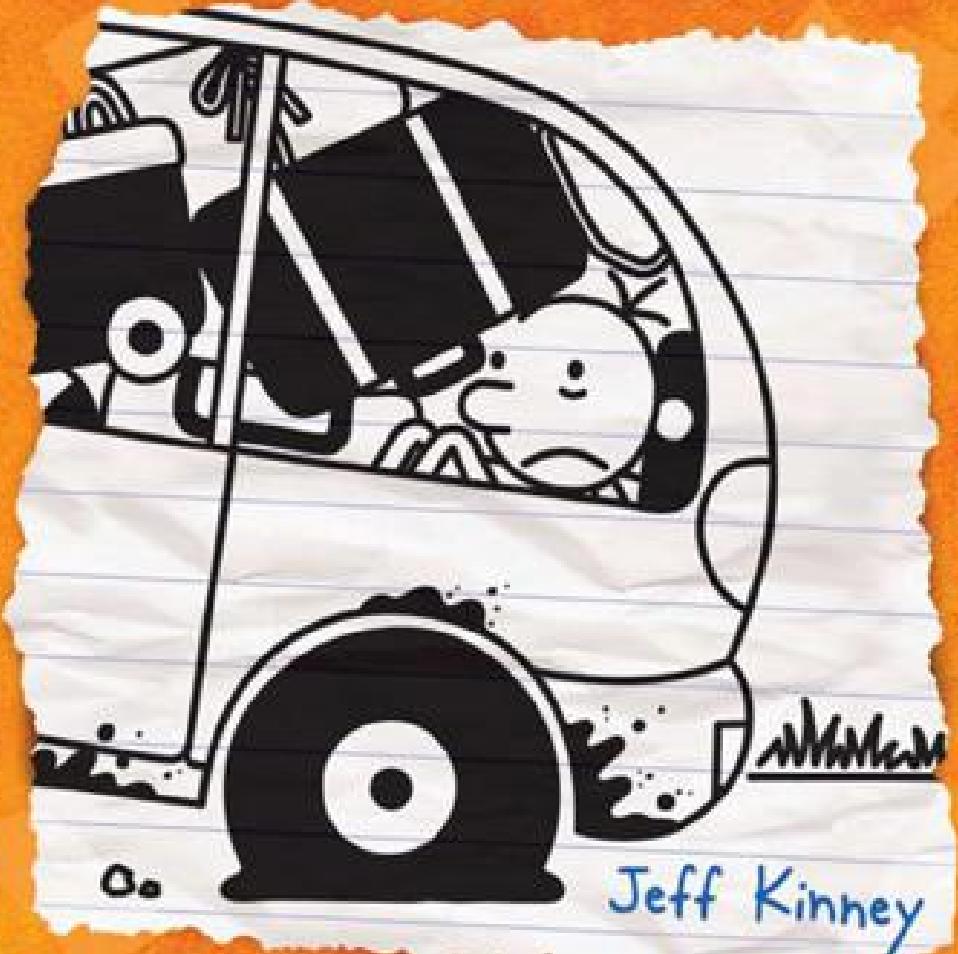


DIARY
of a
Wimpy Kid
THE LONG HAUL



Jeff Kinney

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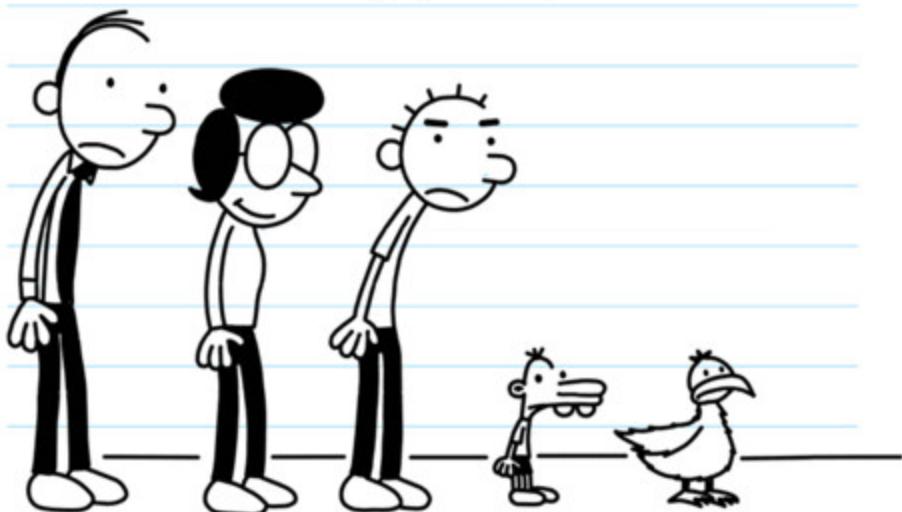
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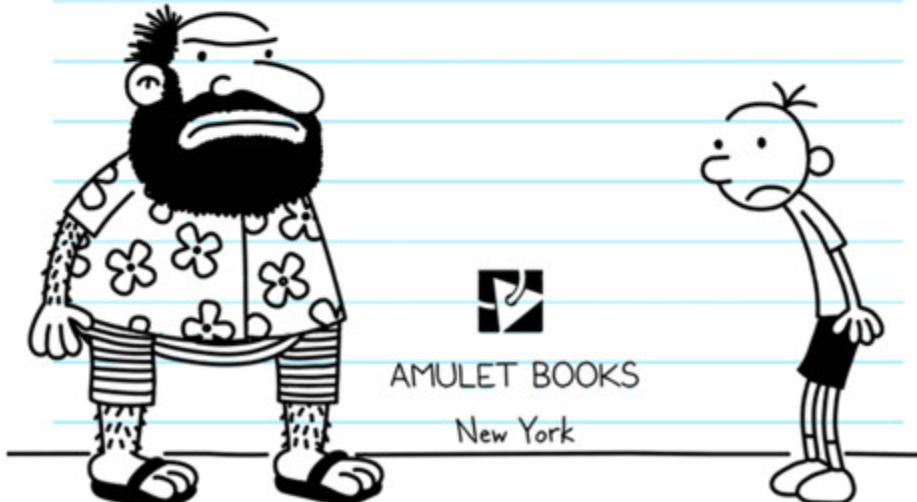
More Diary of a Wimpy Kid



DIARY of a **Wimpy Kid**

THE LONG HAUL

by Jeff Kinney



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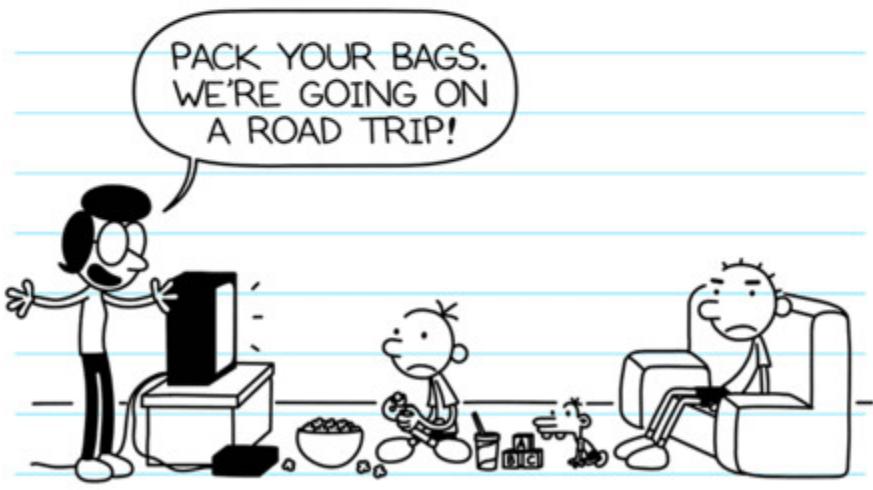
JUNE

Friday

If there's one thing I've learned from my years of being a kid, it's that you have ZERO control over your own life.

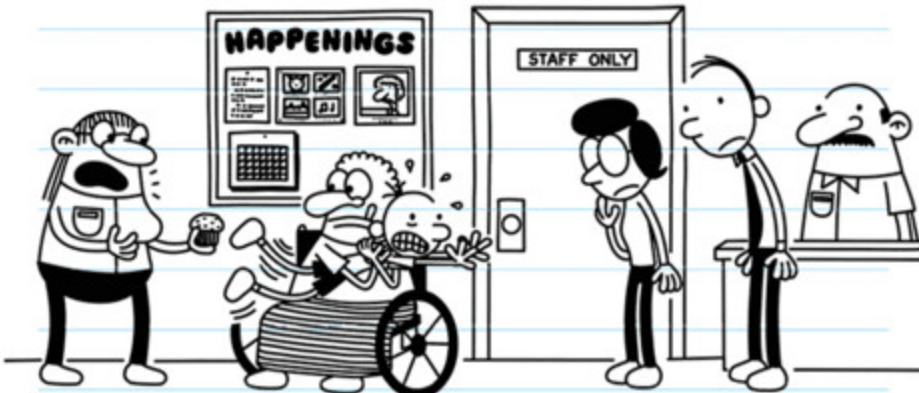
Ever since school let out, I haven't had anything I've needed to DO or anywhere I've needed to BE. As long as the air-conditioning was working and the TV remote had batteries in it, I was all set for a relaxing summer vacation.

But then, out of the blue, THIS happened—



This isn't the FIRST time Mom has sprung a trip on us without any warning. Last year on the first day of summer, she said we were going upstate for a few days to visit Aunt Loretta at the nursing home.

It wasn't exactly my idea of a fun way to kick off the summer. One time when we visited Aunt Loretta, her roommate grabbed me and wouldn't let go until a staffer gave her a chocolate chip muffin.



But Mom was just bluffing about going to the nursing home. At breakfast the next morning, she told us where we were REALLY going.

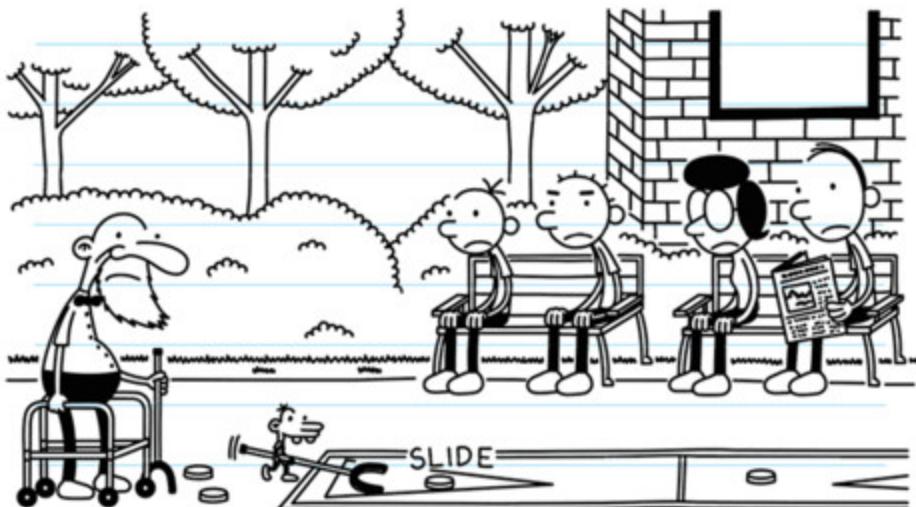


Me and my brother Rodrick were happy, because we were both dreading spending the first week of summer vacation playing shuffleboard at a nursing home.

But when my little brother, Manny, heard about the change in plans, he totally LOST it. Mom had talked up the Aunt Loretta trip so much that Manny was actually EXCITED about going.



We ended up POSTPONING our trip to Disney so we could visit Aunt Loretta. You'd think Mom would've learned her lesson about surprise trips after THAT one.



I know EXACTLY where this road trip idea came from, because the new issue of "Family Frolic" magazine came in the mail today.

If I had to guess, I'd say 90% of everything we do as a family comes from ideas Mom gets from that magazine. And when I saw the latest issue, I knew it was gonna get Mom's wheels turning.



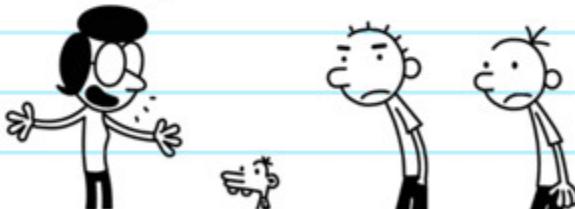
I've flipped through "Family Frolic" a few times, and I have to admit, the pictures always make everything look like a lot of fun.



But there must be something wrong with OUR family, because we can never measure up to the ones they show in the magazine.



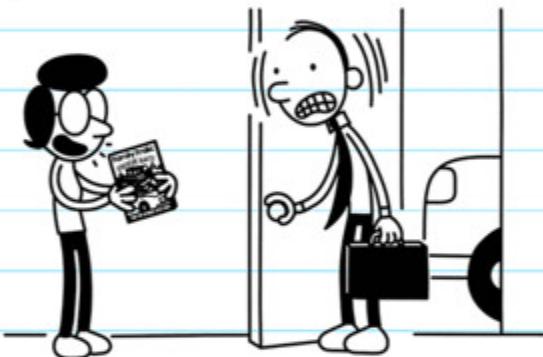
I guess Mom's not giving up, though. She said this road trip is gonna be awesome and that spending a lot of time together in the car will be a "bonding" experience for the whole family.



I tried to talk her into letting us do something NORMAL, like going to a water park for the day, but Mom didn't want to hear it.

She said the whole point of this trip is to do things we've never done before and to have "authentic" experiences.

I thought Mom would've looped Dad in about her road trip idea, but apparently I was wrong. Because when he got home from work, he seemed just as surprised as us kids.



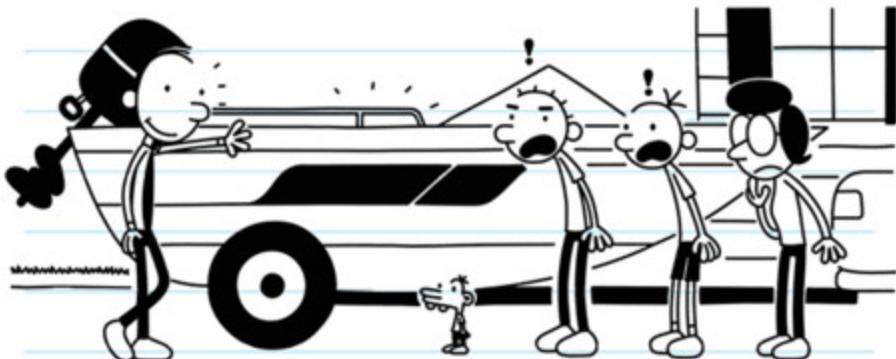
Dad told Mom it was a bad time to be away from work and he didn't want to use his vacation days unless he absolutely HAD to. But Mom said there's nothing more important than spending time with your family.



Then Dad told Mom he was really hoping to get his BOAT out on the water this weekend, and if we went on a road trip, he wouldn't be able to.

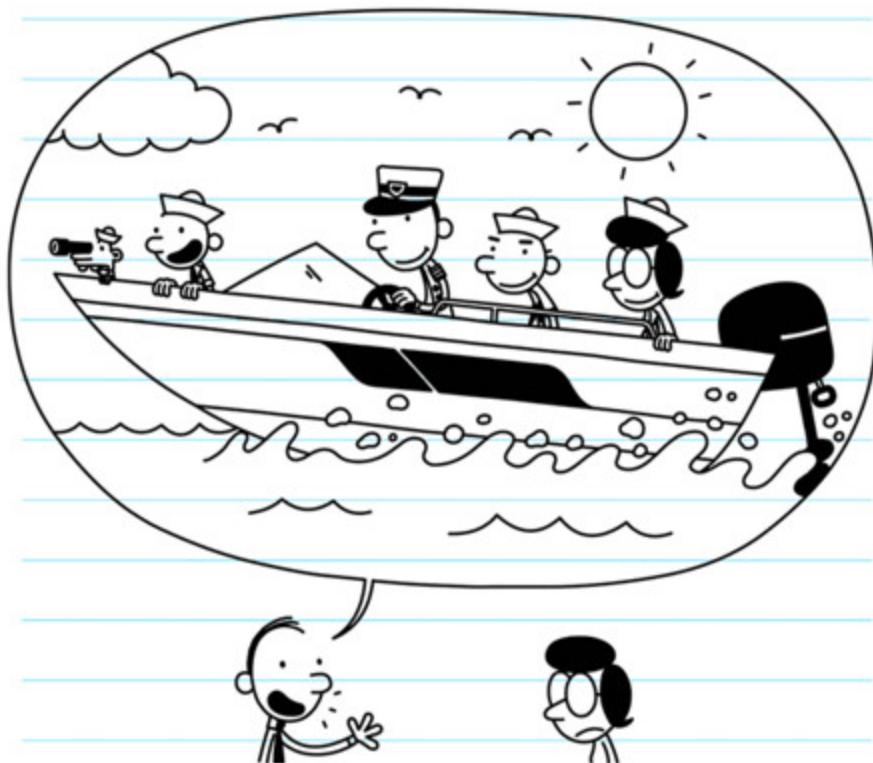
Mom and Dad get along pretty well in general, but the one thing that's guaranteed to cause a fight between them is Dad's boat.

A few years ago, Mom sent Dad out to get some milk, but along the way he spotted a boat for sale in someone's front yard. And before you knew it, the boat was in our driveway.



Mom was mad that Dad didn't check with her first, because having a boat is a ton of work.

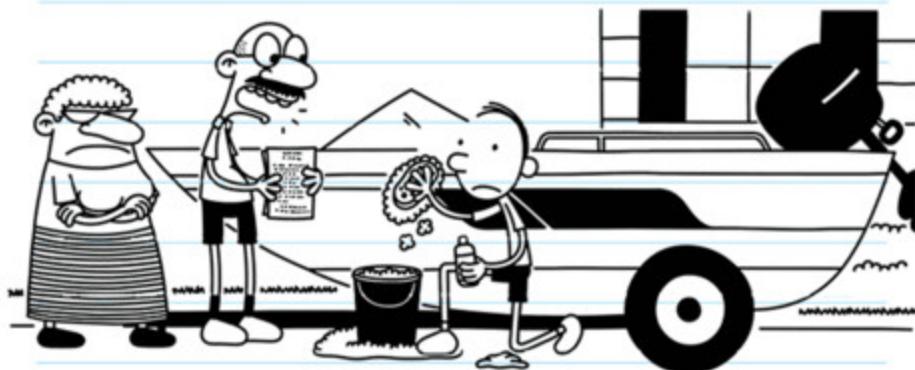
But Dad said it was always his dream to own a boat and that we could spend every weekend out on the water as a family.



So Dad got to KEEP the boat, and he seemed really happy. But things went downhill fast.

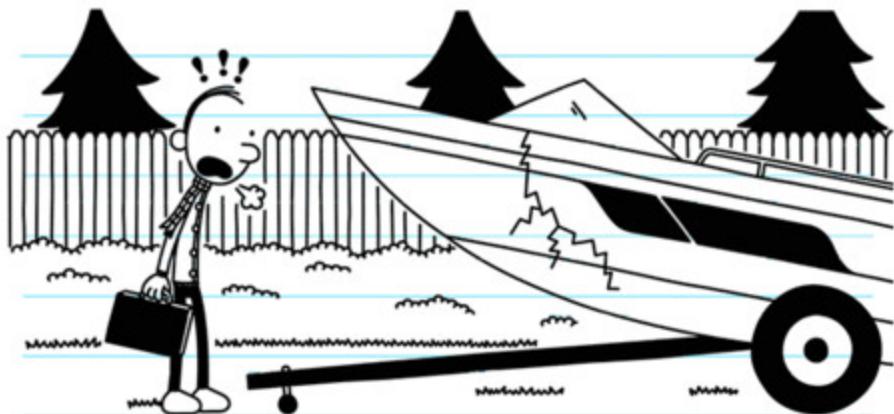
A few days later, some people from the Homeowners' Association knocked on our door.

They said there were rules in our neighborhood against having a boat parked in front of your house and told Dad he had to move it to the back.

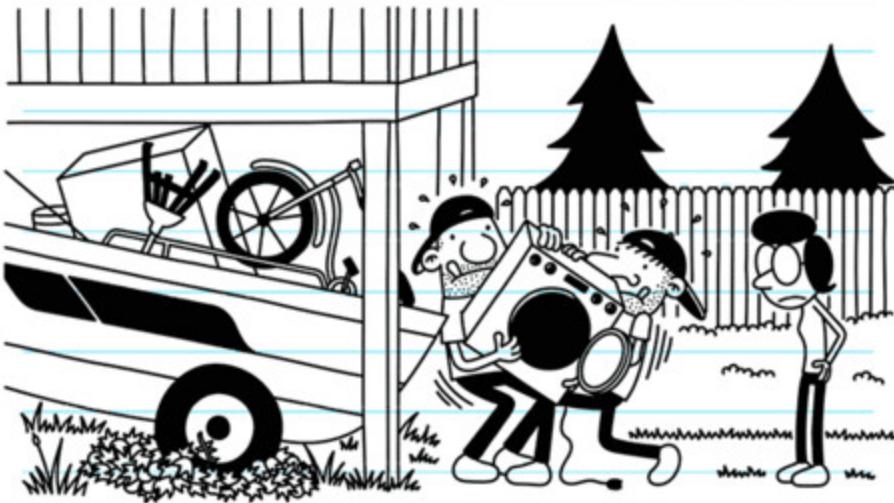


The boat sat in the backyard for the whole summer because Dad was too busy and didn't have time to use it. Then, in the fall, one of Dad's coworkers told him he'd have to WINTERIZE the boat to protect it from the cold weather.

Dad found out it would cost more to winterize the boat than it cost him to BUY it, so he decided he'd take his chances. And sure enough, two weeks later, when the temperature dropped below freezing, a big crack appeared in the hull.



When it started to snow, Dad rolled the boat under the back deck, and it sat there all winter. In the spring, Mom started using it to store all sorts of junk from the house.



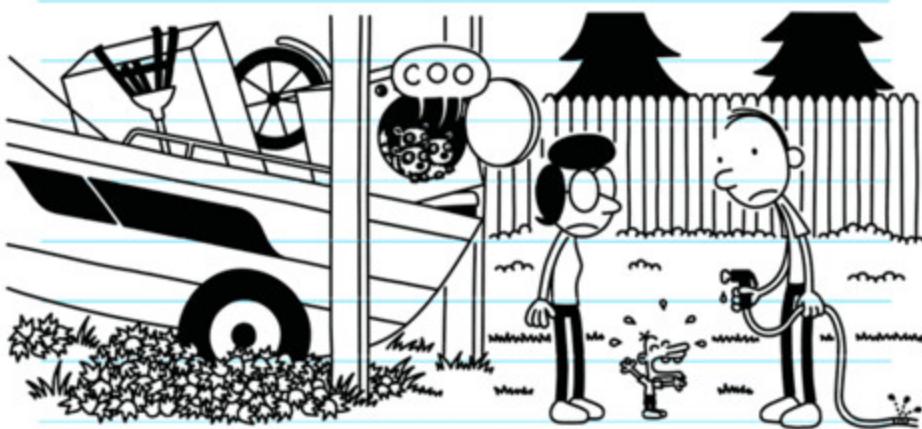
The next summer, Dad decided he was gonna fix the boat.

But when he went to pull it out from under the deck, he discovered a family of raccoons living in our old washing machine.



Dad called an exterminator to get rid of the raccoons, but when he heard how much THAT was gonna cost, he decided to take care of it himself.

By then Manny had heard about the baby raccoons living in the washing machine, and Mom had to step in.

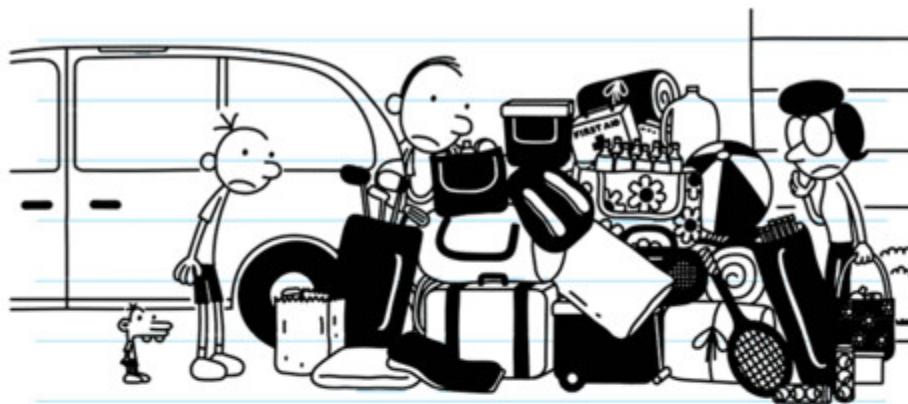


The boat's been sitting there ever since. I haven't heard any scurrying sounds coming from under the deck for a while, so I'm guessing the raccoons moved out.

Today, Mom told Dad he had the whole rest of the summer to get his boat out on the water, and he pretty much gave up after that.

Mom said we were gonna leave first thing in the morning, so we needed to start packing for the trip. She told everyone to bring the "bare essentials" so we could fit everything in the minivan.

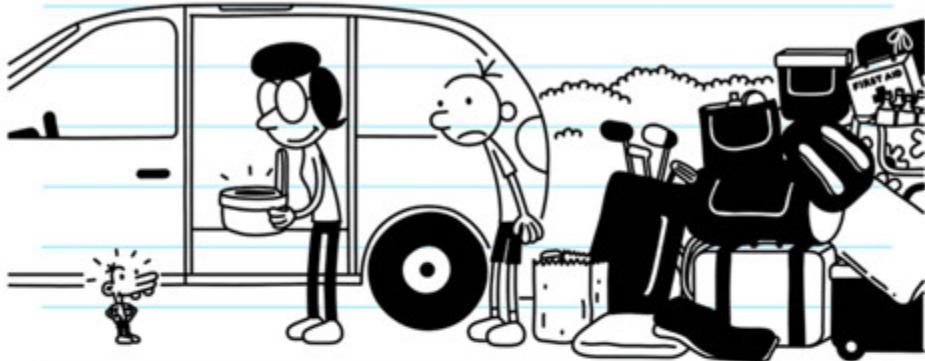
But by the time we got all our stuff out in the driveway, it was pretty clear we had a space problem.



Mom started going through everything and sorting it into two piles — the things we needed and the things we didn't. Rodrick was pretty disappointed when some of his "essentials" didn't make the cut.



Mom made me leave a bunch of small stuff behind,
which seemed pretty ridiculous considering that
Manny's plastic potty was coming along for the ride.



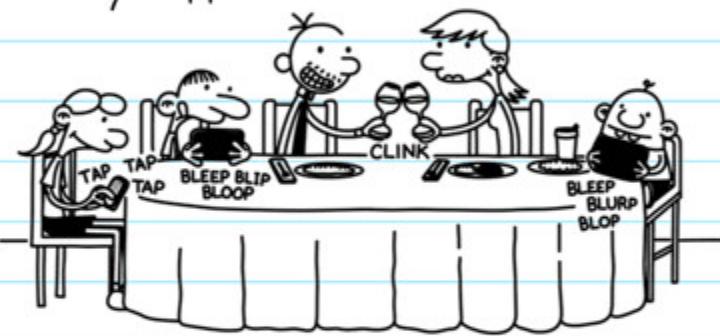
Whenever we take a trip that's longer than fifteen minutes, Mom brings Manny's potty "just in case." But I get really uncomfortable whenever Manny uses it.



Mom wouldn't let me and Rodrick take any electronics on the trip, even though they barely take up any space.

She's always saying kids these days don't know how to socialize because they've constantly got their noses two inches from a screen.

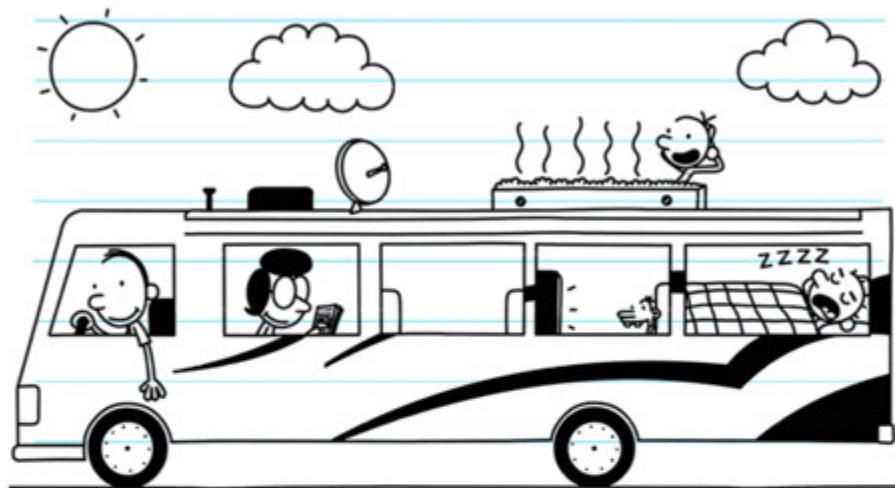
But I'll tell you this: When I have kids, I'm gonna let them play with whatever kind of gadget they WANT. If you ask me, electronics are the key to family happiness.



Even after Mom went through every single item in the driveway and cut out all the things we didn't need, there was STILL way too much to fit in the van.

I suggested we rent one of those giant recreational vehicles, because we could fit all our stuff in it and have room to spare.

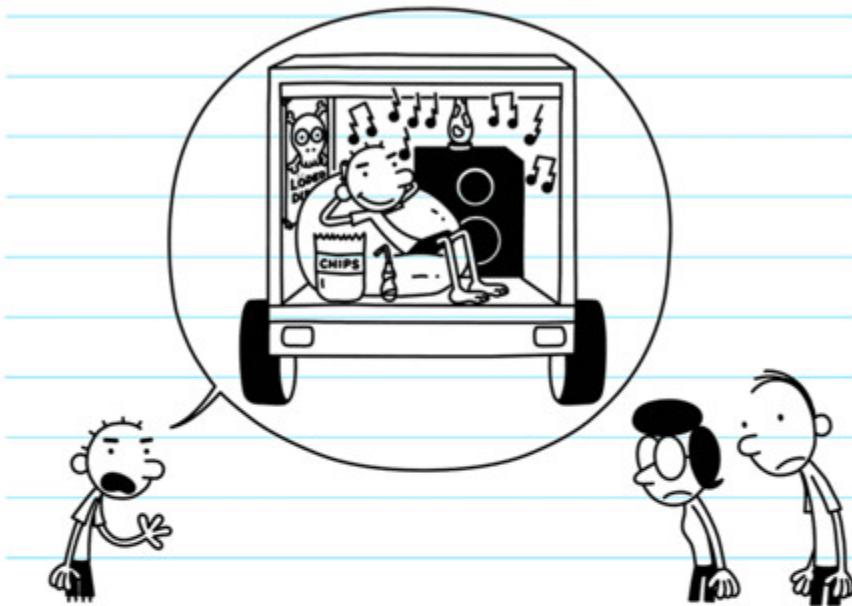
The way I see it, if you want the whole family to get along, everyone needs their own space. And with one of those souped-up RVs, we could spend WEEKS on the road without even bumping into one another.



But Mom said RVs are too expensive and they get terrible gas mileage, so that put an end to that idea.

Rodrick said maybe we could get one of those trailers you tow BEHIND the car, which sounded smart to me.

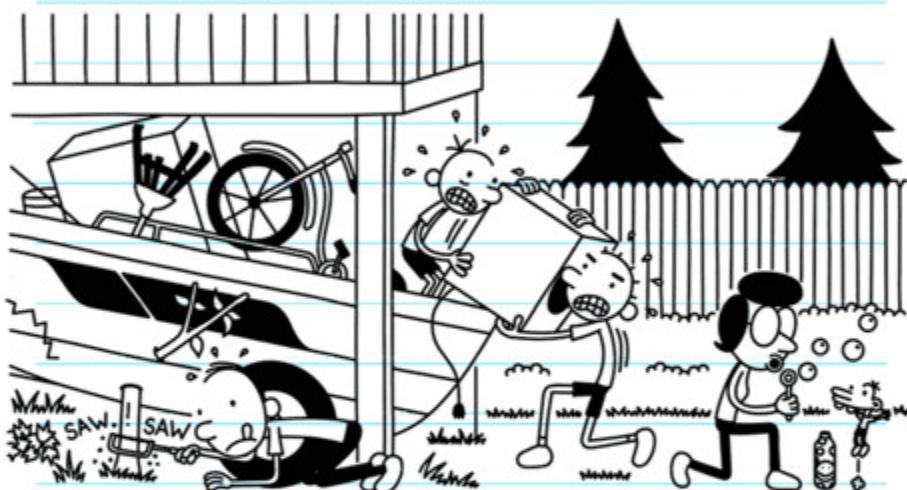
But it was pretty clear Rodrick was imagining the trailer as a sort of mini-apartment for HIMSELF, so that wasn't gonna fly, either.



Then Dad rang in with his OWN idea. He said we could solve the whole space issue by just putting the stuff that didn't fit in the van into the BOAT, which we could tow behind us.

I think Mom realized there wasn't really another option, so she caved in. But getting the boat into the driveway was easier said than done.

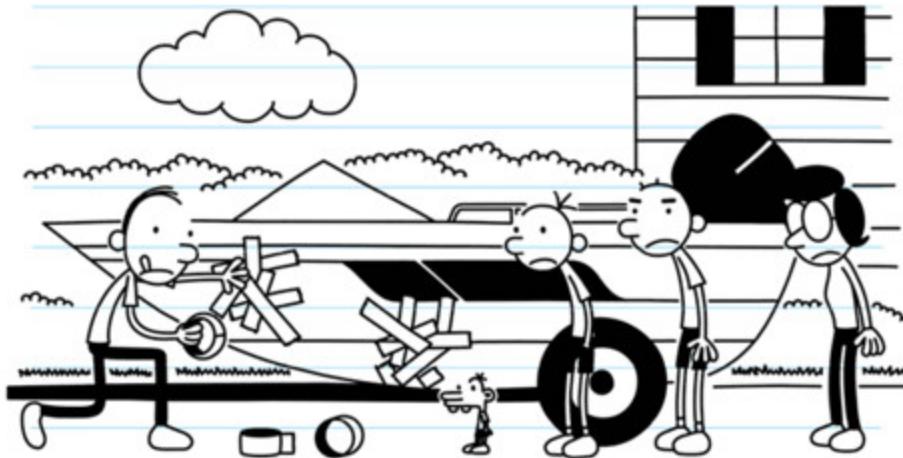
Not only did we have to take all the junk out of the boat, but it turned out there was a TREE growing through the bottom. It took three hours to get the boat out from under the deck, and let me just say Mom did not exactly go out of her way to help.



After we got the boat into the driveway, Dad patched up the hole in the bottom and the crack in the hull with some duct tape.

I just hope we're not going anywhere near water on this trip, though.

Because as far as I know, the boat didn't come
with any life preservers.



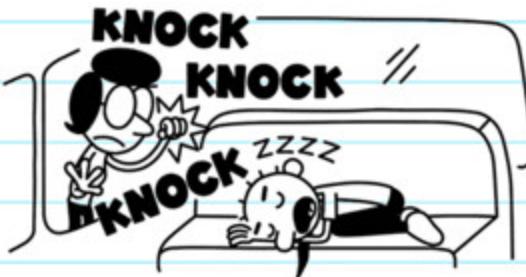
Saturday

Even with the added space we got from the boat,
the minivan was still pretty full. I snuck my pillow
on board at the last second, because I decided I
was entitled to at least ONE luxury item.

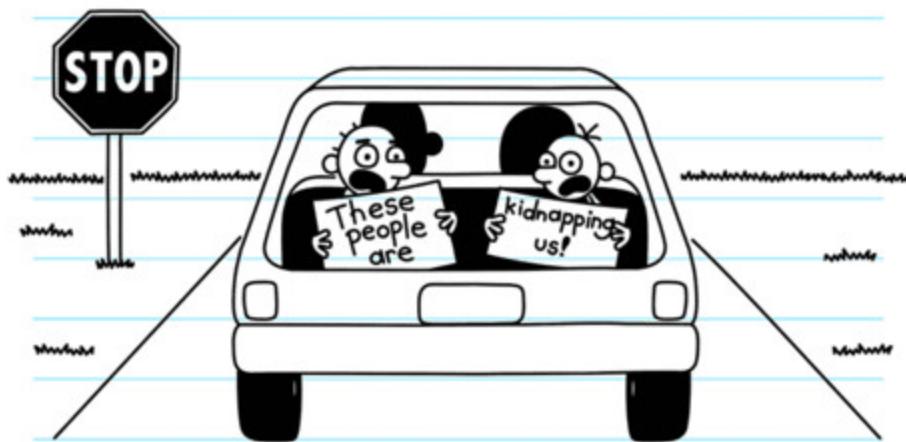
I figured Rodrick would want to sit in the back
of the van, because whenever we go anywhere as a
family, he likes to stretch out and take a nap.

Every once in a while we'll forget Rodrick is even
back there.

This Easter, we made it halfway through church before Mom realized Rodrick never made it out of the van.

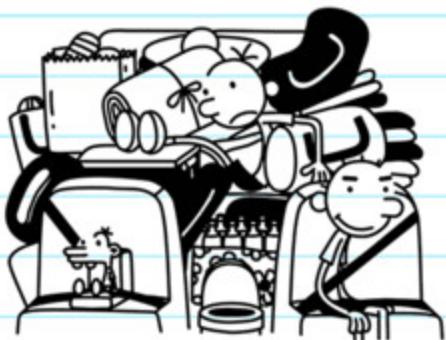


Back when we had a station wagon, me and Rodrick used to sit in the way back TOGETHER, in a seat that faced the rear window. But we got in big trouble when we played a practical joke on Mom and Dad that ended up getting us pulled over by the police.



When we got in the van today, Rodrick offered me the backseat.

I accepted before he could change his mind, but I should've known his offer was too good to be true.

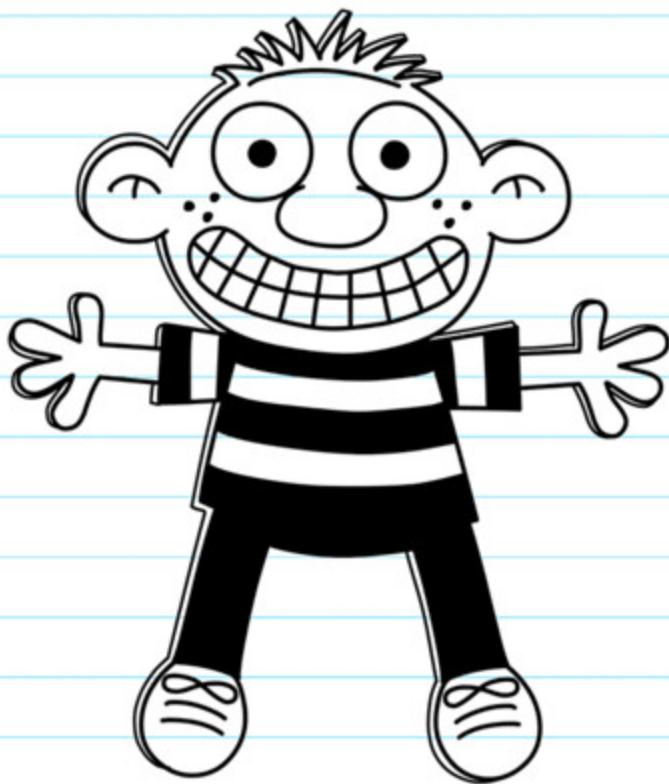


Before we pulled out of the driveway, Mom said we were taking a "special guest" along for the ride. For a second I was worried we were picking someone ELSE up, because with all our stuff in the van they'd have to sit on the ROOF.

But Mom opened her purse and pulled out a piece of paper with a drawing on it.



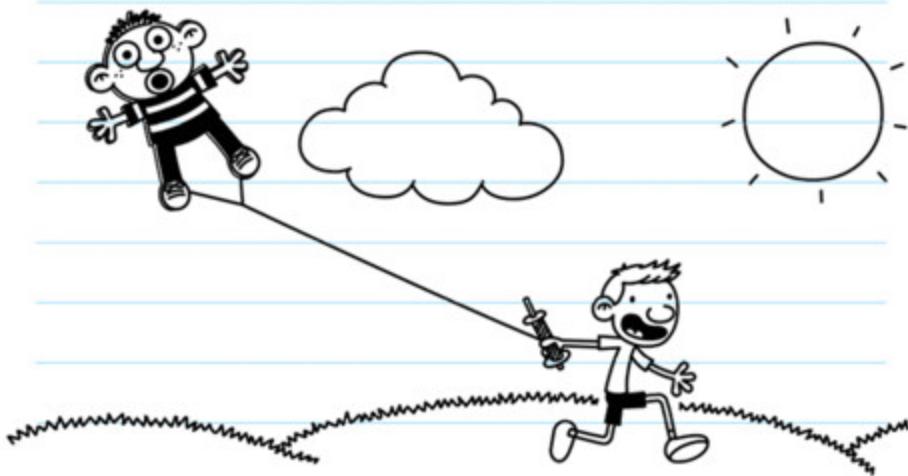
The drawing was Flat Stanley, a character from a book I read in second grade.



Flat Stanley is a boy who gets squashed by a bulletin board that falls off his bedroom wall in the middle of the night.

And when they pull the bulletin board off him, he's as thin as a piece of paper.

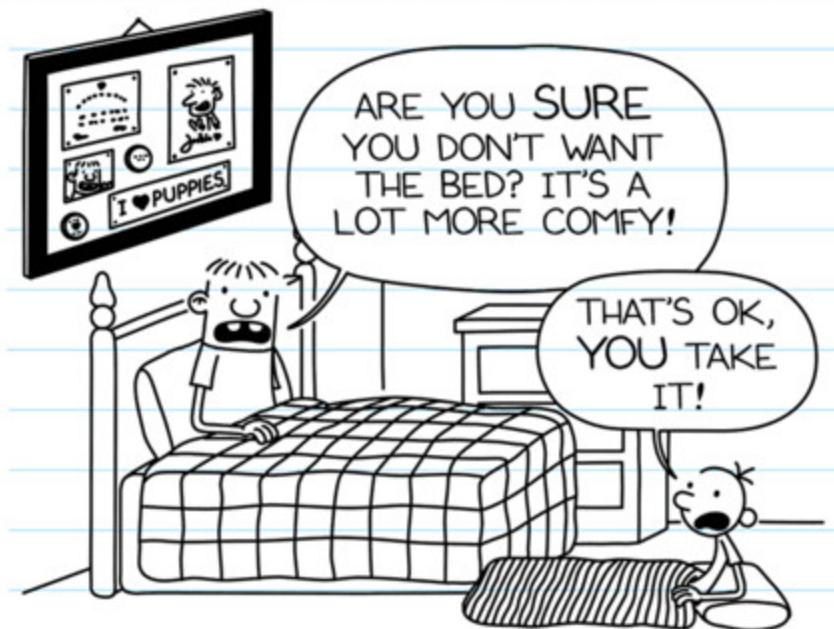
I thought it was pretty cool that Flat Stanley could fold himself up and get mailed to his grandma's, or have his brother fly him like a kite.



But I'll tell you this: If Flat Stanley had a brother like RODRICK, I guarantee he wouldn't survive a whole day.



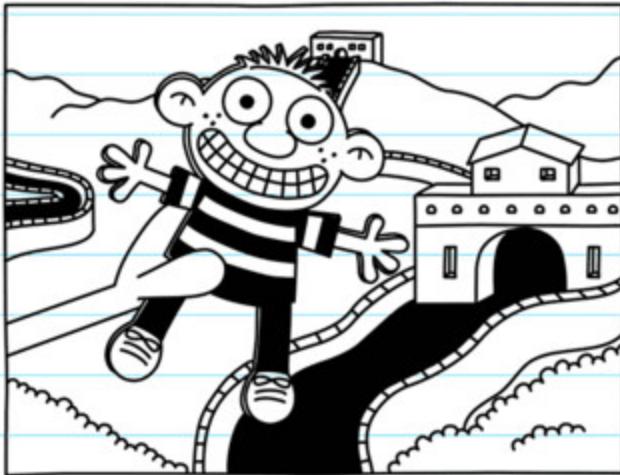
I really liked the book, but it kind of freaked me out, too. One thing it did was give me a deathly fear of bulletin boards.



In second grade, everyone in my class had to color in a cutout of Flat Stanley and mail him to a friend or relative who lived far away.

Then that person was supposed to take a picture of Flat Stanley in front of something interesting and mail him back with the photo.

My friend Rowley sent Flat Stanley to a bunch of his relatives and got lots of cool pictures back. Rowley even sent him to his uncle who lives in Asia, and he took a picture of Flat Stanley in front of the Great Wall of China.

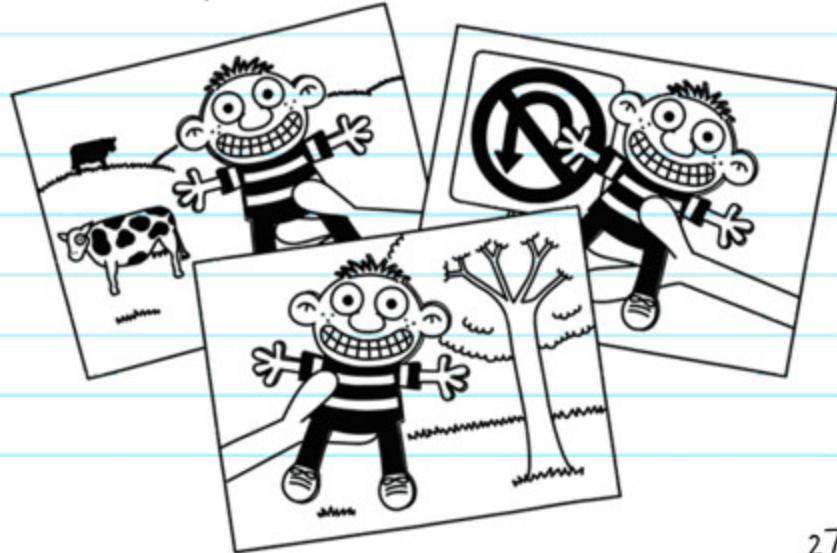


Well, the first person Mom sent MY Flat Stanley to was her cousin Stacey, who lives out in Seattle. But she probably wasn't the best choice.

Stacey is one of those people who hoard all sorts of stuff, like newspapers and magazines, so Mom should've known that once her cousin got her hands on Flat Stanley he wasn't coming back.



Today, Mom said she was gonna take photos of our new Flat Stanley in front of all the cool places we visit and then make a scrapbook of our trip. And as soon as we got on the highway, she started snapping pictures. But she was probably a little too eager, because her first few pictures weren't exactly keepers.



When Mom wasn't taking pictures, Flat Stanley was taped to the front air-conditioning vent.

All I can say is, he was having a lot better ride than I was. The windows in the back of the van don't open, and the vents were blocked by all our luggage, so I wasn't getting ANY cold air.

What made me even MORE uncomfortable was the fact that Mom was in control of the trip. Mom always tries to make things about education, and I knew she was gonna turn this experience into one long lesson.

She's been doing that ever since I was little. I remember when I got scratched by Gramma's cat and Mom tried to turn it into a "teaching moment."



Sure enough, a half hour into the trip today,
Mom started in with the educational stuff.

She had borrowed a bunch of CDs from the library
that teach Spanish, and said we'd use the long
stretches on the road to learn a new language as
a family.



Mom's always saying that learning a foreign
language is the best thing you can do for your
brain. That might be true, but I think she should
leave the actual TEACHING to the schools.

Mom decided it would be a good idea to expose me to a foreign language early on, so when I was in first grade, she would put the Spanish-speaking channels on TV while we ate breakfast.

Mom would repeat whatever they said on the television, but when SHE said the words they came out a little bit different.

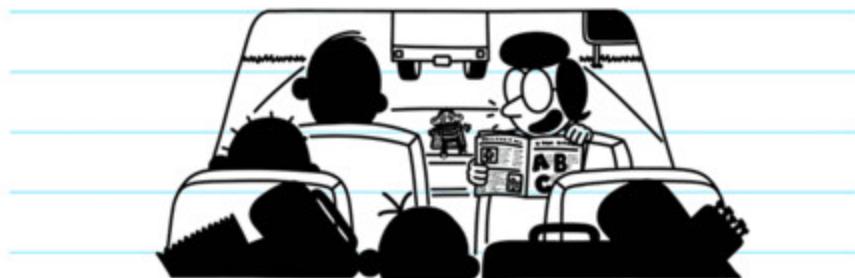


I ended up learning all sorts of phrases that weren't right. For example, the way you're SUPPOSED to say "What's your name" in Spanish is "Cómo te llamas." Well, I know that NOW because I learned it in my middle school Spanish class.

But when I was little, Mom taught me that "What's your name" in Spanish is "Te amo," which ACTUALLY means "I love you." I just wish I had known that before I said it to a million different people.



Today, Mom played the first two Spanish CDs, but she got frustrated that no one seemed to be paying attention. So she switched gears and said we were gonna play a car game she read about in her magazine.

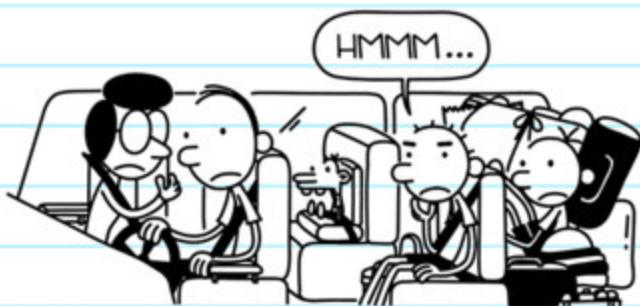


The game was called Alphabet Groceries, and you play it like this: The first player has to name an item you can get at the grocery store that starts with the letter "A." The next person has to come up with an item that starts with "B," and so on.

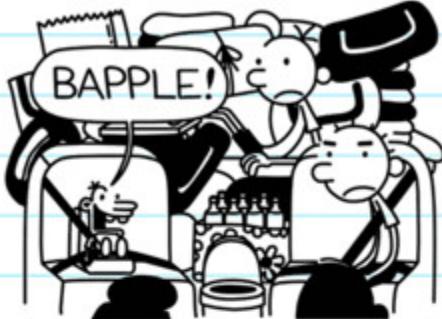
If a player CAN'T come up with an item that starts with their letter, they're out of the game.

Mom said I should go first, so I said "apple," which I guess was kind of an obvious choice. Rodrick was up next, but he said he couldn't come up with any food that started with "B."

I'm pretty sure he was lying to get out of having to play the game, but with Rodrick, you never know.



When Rodrick got knocked out, the turn went to Manny, who came up with his word right away.



Mom started clapping, but I pointed out that "bapple" isn't a real word. She said Manny is just learning the alphabet and that we all need to "encourage" him.

I quit in protest, and from then on it was only Manny, Mom, and Dad playing. I really wished my earplugs weren't buried in my duffel bag under a pile of suitcases, because the next hour and a half was pretty painful.



All that talk of food was actually getting me kind of hungry, and when I saw a sign for a drive-through place at the next exit, I asked Mom if we could pull over. But Mom said we wouldn't be stopping at any of THOSE kinds of restaurants, because they don't serve "real food."

She said fast-food places lure kids in with cheap plastic toys to trick them into eating sugar and fat, and we weren't gonna fall into that trap.

Mom said she had a MUCH better alternative and handed me a lunch bag with my name on it.

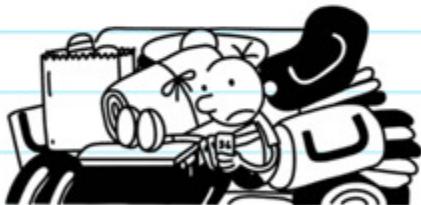


Mom said she got the Mommy Meal idea from "Family Frolic," which I guess should not have come as a surprise.

Inside the bag was a tuna fish sandwich, an orange, and a little carton of milk, plus something wrapped in tinfoil.

Mom said I had to eat my fruit before I unwrapped the tinfoil, because that was my "prize."

But I wish I had just opened it right away, because I wouldn't have eaten the whole orange if I'd known the prize was a pack of math flash cards.



Rodrick got flash cards in HIS lunch, too, and we could both see where this was headed. So before Mom could turn the next hour of the trip into a tutoring session, I pulled out one of the games Mom had packed in a big tote bag.

The game I grabbed was called "I Must Confess," and when Mom saw it she got so excited she forgot all about the flash cards.

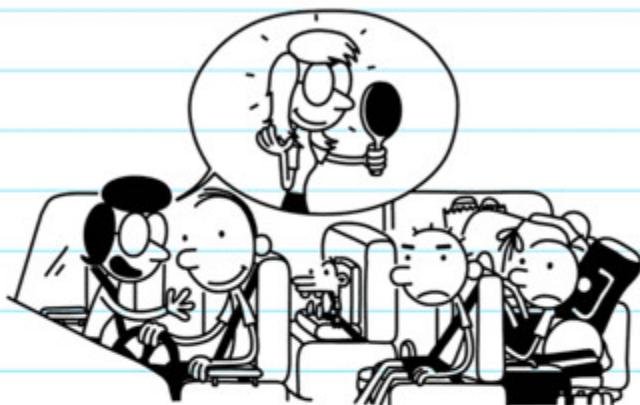
I read the rules, which were pretty simple: One person takes a card from the deck and reads it out loud to everyone else.



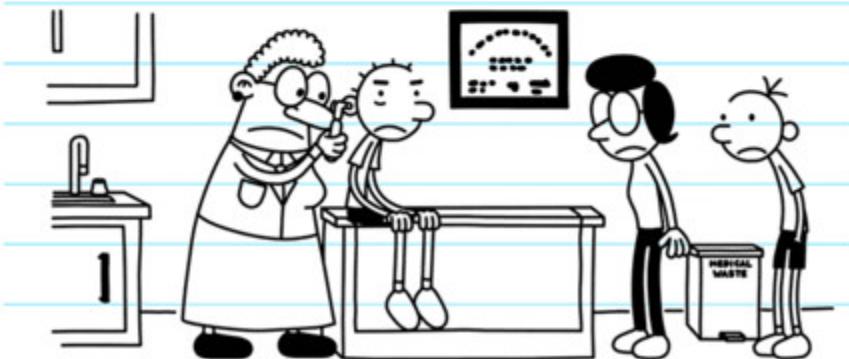
If one of the players has done the thing that's written on the card, they earn a point. And the first player to get ten points wins.

I was a little skeptical at first, but I have to admit, the game was actually kind of FUN. I learned a lot of things about Mom and Dad I never knew before.

I found out that Dad had a pet chameleon when he was a kid and that Mom dyed her hair blond once, which really surprised me.



Believe it or not, even RODRICK was getting into the game. He got a point for being the only person who'd ever slept out overnight for tickets to a concert, and ANOTHER point for getting a bug stuck in his ear, which I remember like it was yesterday.



Dad and Rodrick were neck and neck with nine points, and whoever scored next would win the game. Mom seemed really happy everyone was getting along and having fun.

Then she pulled a new card out of the deck and read it.



I'm pretty sure Mom thought no one was gonna get a point on that card, because she was already reaching for the next one. But Rodrick started acting like he had just won the lottery.



Mom thought Rodrick was lying to get a point, but he told her it was TRUE. He said that a few months ago, he and his bandmates toilet-papered Mrs. Tuttle's house next door after she called the police to complain they were making too

much noise rehearsing.



Rodrick thought the whole thing was pretty funny, but Mom didn't seem amused.

LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT:
YOU AND TWO OF YOUR
BANDMATES TOILET-
PAPERED AN ELDERLY
WOMAN'S HOUSE?



If I was Rodrick, I would've changed my story real quick and said I was just joking around to win the game. But Rodrick didn't seize his chance to bail out.



Mom had Dad pull over to the side of the road, then handed Rodrick her phone and made him call Mrs. Tuttle to apologize, which was awkward for everyone in the car.



After that, it was quiet in the van for a long time. Mom was about to pop the next Spanish CD in the stereo, but luckily Manny had fallen asleep by then, so she couldn't.

If you wake Manny up in the middle of one of his naps, he'll go completely ballistic, and there's NO calming him down. So whenever Manny falls asleep, Mom and Dad do everything they can to KEEP him that way.

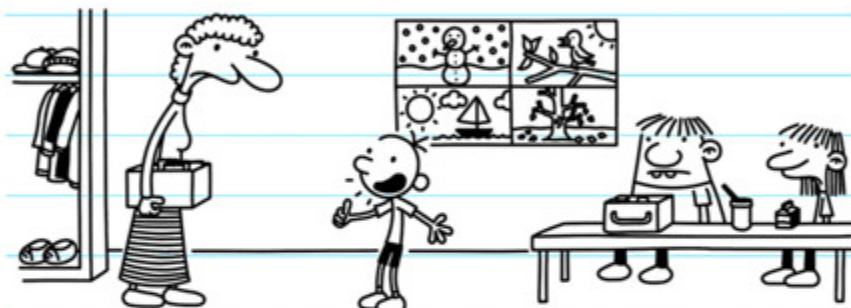


I was big on naps when I was Manny's age, too. I used to take an hour-long nap after lunch every day, and when I started preschool, we had an official nap time where everyone pulled out a mat and slept on the floor.



If you ask me, I think they should give kids nap time all the way through college. But they stop doing it after preschool, which I found out the HARD way.

On the first day of kindergarten, after we had our snacks, I asked the teacher where the mats were, so we could lie down and recharge our batteries.



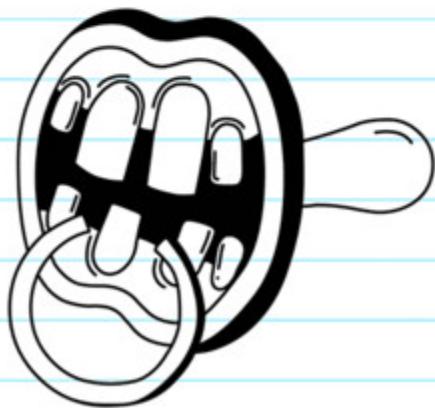
But she said kindergartners don't HAVE nap time, and I thought she was just making a funny joke.



A few minutes later the whole class was making paper bag puppets. Apparently, I was the only one who didn't get the heads-up about the no-nap thing, because for the rest of the day everyone else seemed fine, while I could barely function.



I'm glad Mom remembered to bring a pacifier on the trip, because as long as Manny's got one stuck in his mouth, he can sleep through just about anything. Manny lost his favorite pacifier last night, but Dad ran out to get a new one at a store near our house that sells gag gifts.



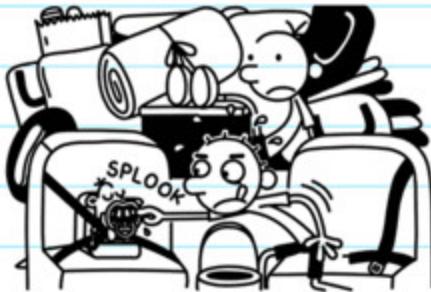
I guess it looks a little strange, but it works
just as well as a regular one.



Manny had been sleeping peacefully for about an hour today when we stopped at a tollbooth. Dad rolled down his window to get a ticket, and the guy in the booth had such a loud voice he sounded like he was speaking through a MEGAPHONE.



Manny started to fuss, and his pacifier came halfway out of his mouth. But luckily Rodrick reacted quickly, and Manny fell back asleep.



I think Mom was a little frustrated that Manny was napping in the first place. She had marked a bunch of places on her map where she wanted us to stop and get out for some sightseeing, but now we had to keep driving.



The problem I had with Manny's nap was that I really needed to get out of the car and stretch, but I COULDN'T.

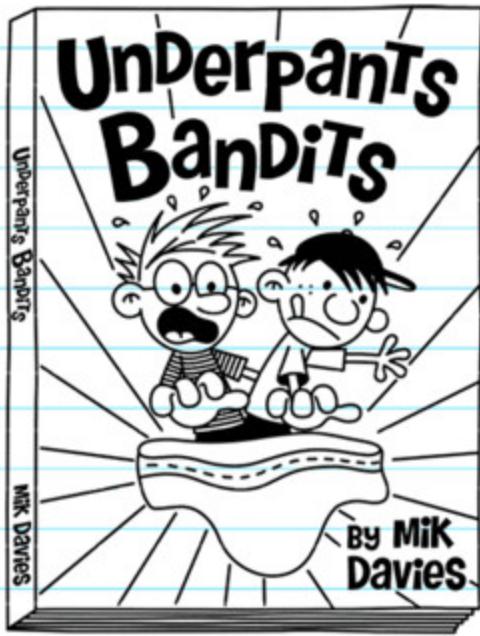
I tried to make myself comfortable, but with all the stuff piled around me, it was impossible.



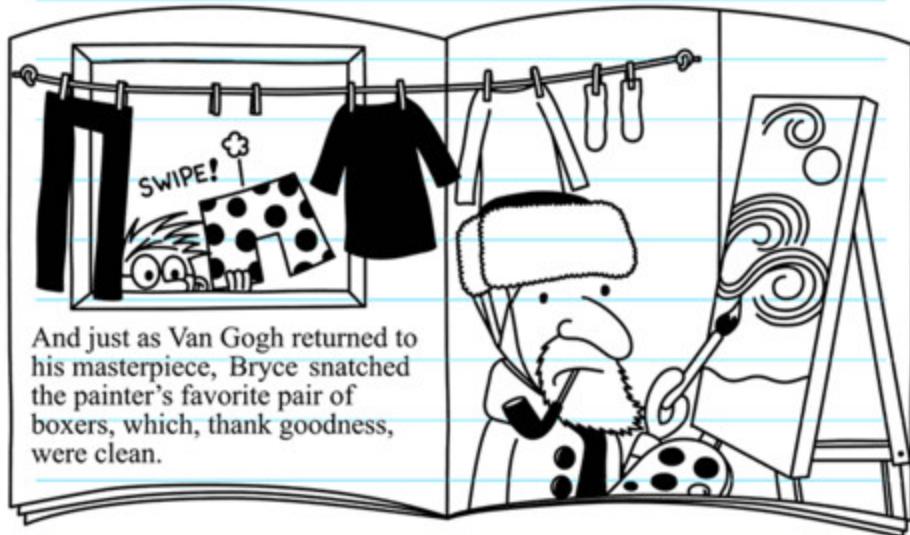
Luckily, my backpack was in arm's reach behind my seat, because it had some books and other things I'd brought to entertain myself.

Mom's always trying to get me to read stuff that's "enriching," but when it comes to books, I know what I like. And ever since elementary school, my favorite books have been the ones in the Underpants Bandits series.

The Underpants Bandits books are about these two kids named Bryce and Brody who go back in time and steal underwear from famous people so they can put the underpants in a museum.



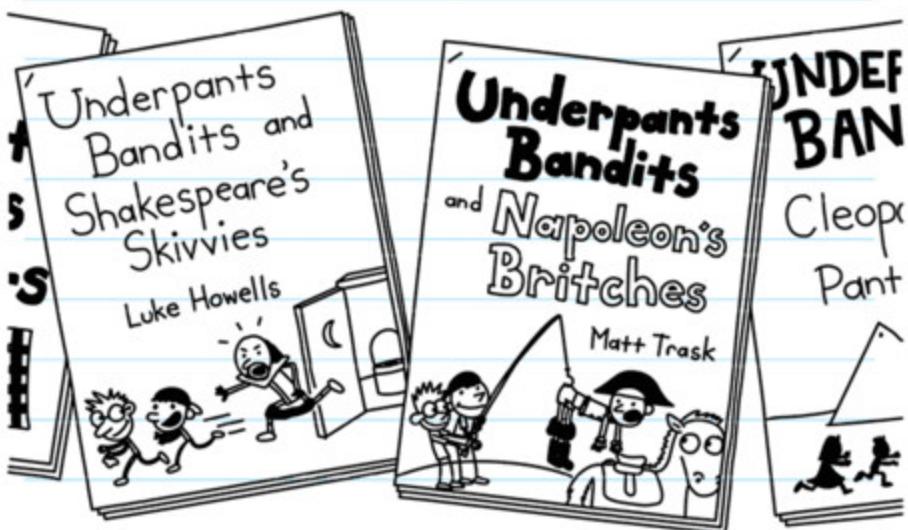
I know that sounds kind of ridiculous, but the books are actually pretty funny.



And just as Van Gogh returned to his masterpiece, Bryce snatched the painter's favorite pair of boxers, which, thank goodness, were clean.

The books are super popular with boys at my school, but the teachers HATE them because of all the "rude humor."

Whenever a book report was due in fifth grade, all the boys in my class did theirs on one of the Underpants Bandits books. And that made my teacher, Mrs. Terry, hate them even MORE.



Our class had a project where we had to write a letter to our favorite author, and of course all the boys chose Mik Davies.

But Mrs. Terry said we had to pick someone ELSE, so I grabbed a random book from the library and wrote my letter to an author I'd never even heard of before.

March 30th

Dear Nathaniel,

My teacher made us write to an author, so I picked you. I have not read any of your books (no offense).

Here are my questions for you:

1. What's your favorite color?
2. What's your favorite animal?
3. What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?
4. What's your favorite super-hero movie?

I would appreciate it if you could answer me soon, because I am getting graded on this.

Sincerely,

Greg Heffley

But I probably should've checked the year the book was written before I wrote my letter.

May 20th

Dear Mr. Heffley,

We regret to inform you that the author to whom you have written, Mr. Hawthorne, passed away more than a century ago.

As such, he will not be able to respond to your questions.

With regrets,



Katrina Welker
Publisher

Most PARENTS don't like the Underpants Bandits books, either.

In fact, the PTA had a meeting that year where they decided parents' tax dollars shouldn't be used to purchase any of the Underpants Bandits books for the library.



When we came back to school from spring break, all of the Underpants Bandits books in the library were GONE.



I hope these adults are happy when a whole generation of boys grow up not knowing how to read.

When the school banned the Underpants Bandits books, it just made them more popular than EVER. Some boys snuck in copies from home and passed them on to OTHER kids.



One kid even brought in a bootleg copy of an Underpants Bandits book from Japan. I couldn't understand a word of it, but it was pretty easy to figure out from the pictures what was going on.



I actually wrote to the author on my OWN just to tell him how much I liked his series.

August 18th

Dear Mr. Davies,

I'm just writing to tell you, don't listen to these people who say your books are garbage, because they don't know what they're talking about. I know a bunch of kids (including me) who think your books are great.

As far as the "rude humor" goes, I find that stuff hilarious, so please don't change a thing. In fact, I would encourage you to put MORE bodily functions and things of that nature in your books.

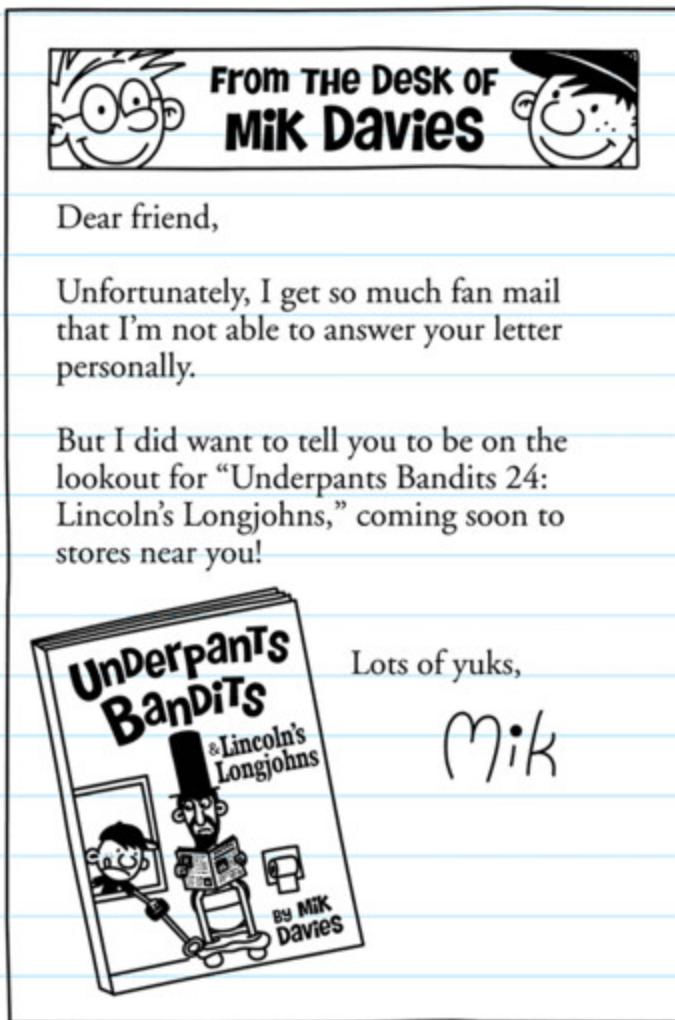
Sincerely,

Greg Heffley

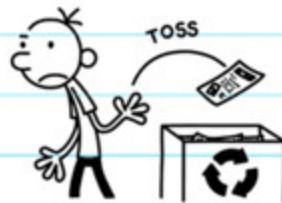
I'd never written a fan letter like that, and every day when I got home from school, I ran to the mailbox to see if Mik Davies had written me back.

I finally got a response almost a year later, and I was really excited.

But when I read the letter, it was a HUGE disappointment.

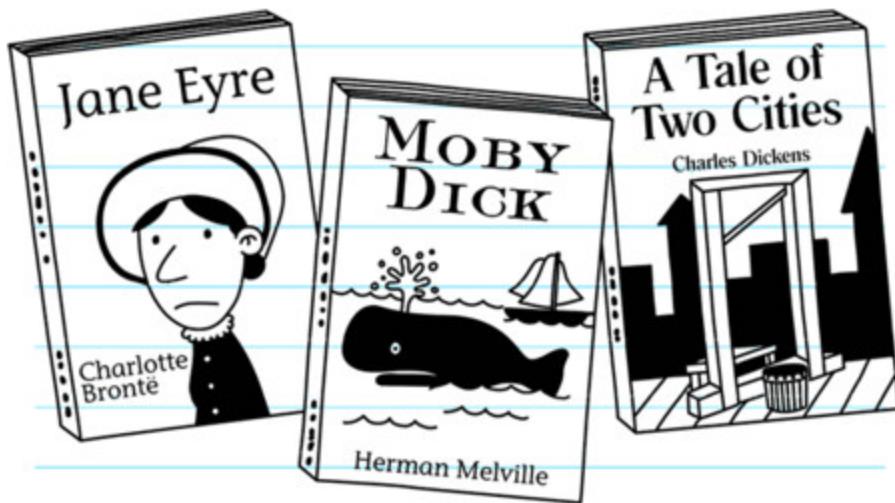


I couldn't believe I poured my heart out to this guy and all I got back was an AD.



Even though that whole experience left a bad taste in my mouth, I still like his books.

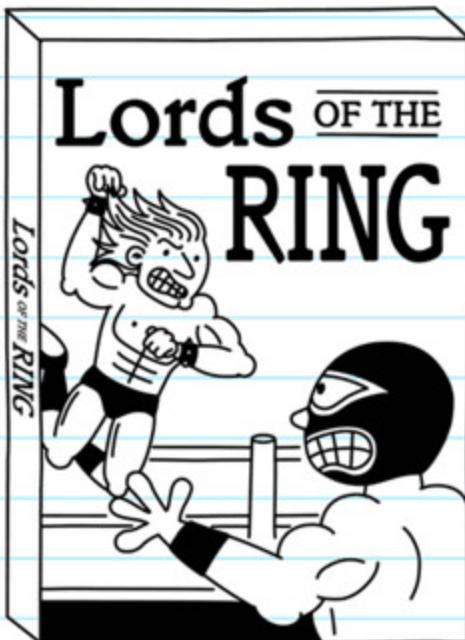
At least I get to read whatever I WANT this summer. Rodrick's school gave him a whole list for required reading, and some of the books look like a lot of work.



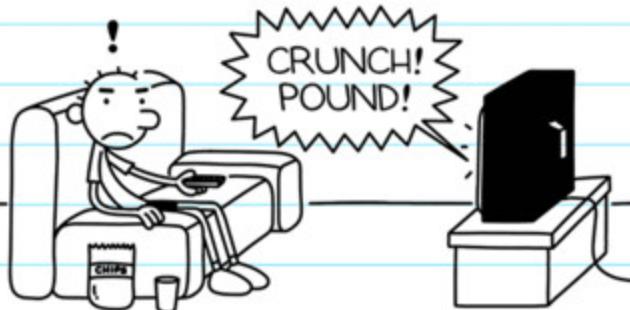
But Rodrick's not much of a reader, so he rented all the MOVIE versions of the books on his list.

Mom said it's not smart to watch the movie without reading the book, because they usually change a lot of stuff. But Rodrick said as long as he got the basic idea, he'd be fine.

I think his approach is gonna cause problems, though. "The Lord of the Rings" is on his summer reading list, but when he rented the movie, he wasn't careful about checking the title.



Rodrick watched the movie TWICE, and after the second time he told Mom that whoever wrote the book must be a genius. But I'm guessing Rodrick's teacher is gonna be pretty confused when she reads his book report in September.



By the time I was done reading today, I really needed to get out of the car to prevent my legs from permanently cramping.

Manny was still asleep, but he had somehow turned himself all the way upside down in his seat.



When Mom noticed, she told Dad maybe we should stop driving for the day, so he pulled off at the next exit.

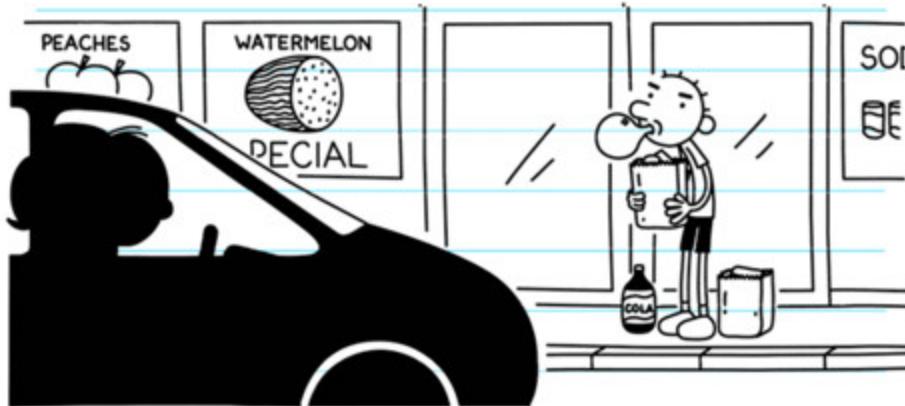
I was really looking forward to eating a meal at a decent restaurant, but Mom said we're on a budget and tonight we were gonna pick up our dinner at a grocery store.

Dad found a supermarket a few miles from the exit. But Mom was afraid that if the van stopped moving, Manny would wake up and have a fit. So Mom wrote out a shopping list for Rodrick and gave him some money, then Dad drove real slow in front of the entrance so Rodrick could hop out.

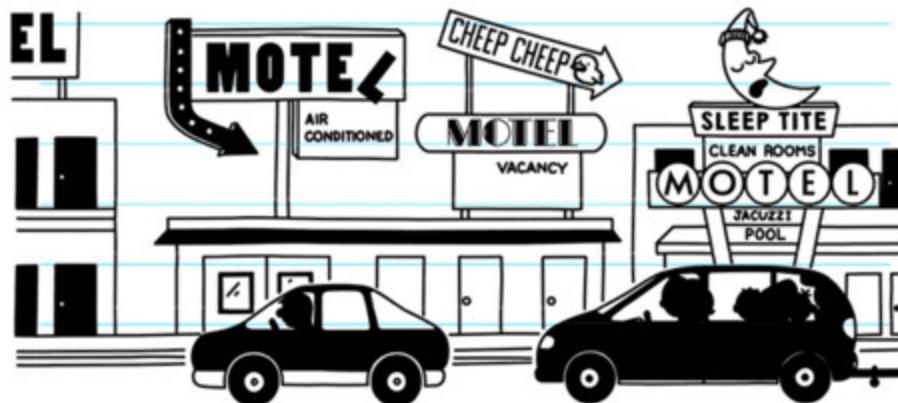


Dad had to circle the parking lot about ten times, which wasn't easy since we were towing a boat.

Eventually, Rodrick came out with a couple bags of groceries. And from the looks of it, he picked up some extra items for himself.



When Dad pulled the van around, Rodrick hopped in. Then we started looking for a place to stay for the night, but the selection in the area wasn't that great.

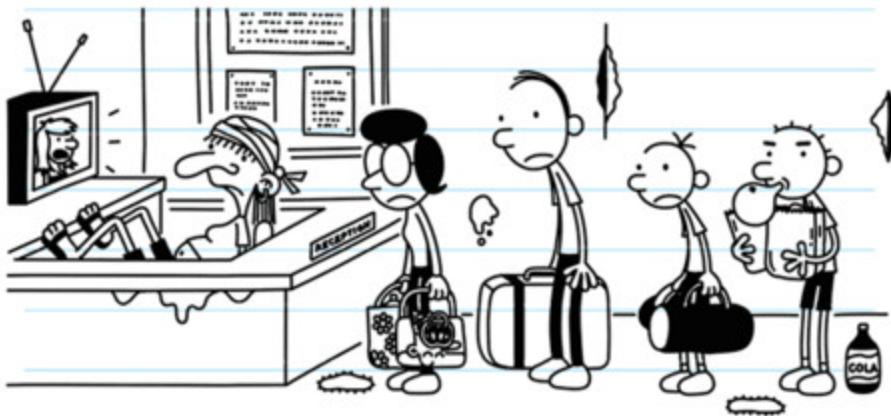


A few of the motels had big signs that said they had "Color TV," which if you ask me is not anything to brag about in this day and age.

Dad finally pulled over at a place with air-conditioning and a pool, which sounded pretty good to me, especially considering that I'd lost about five pounds in sweat sitting in the backseat.

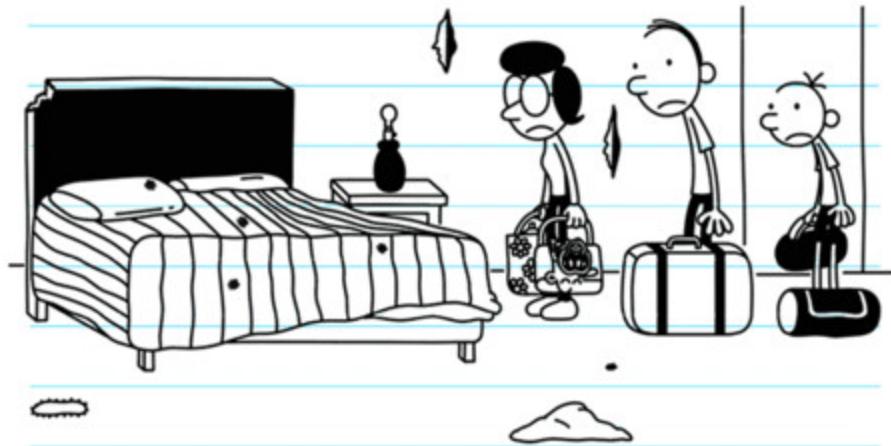
I haven't stayed in a whole lot of motels, but if I had to guess, I'd say we picked one on the lower end of the spectrum.

The lobby smelled like mildew, and the carpet was covered in weird stains.



But everyone was too tired to get back in the car
and look for another place to stay.

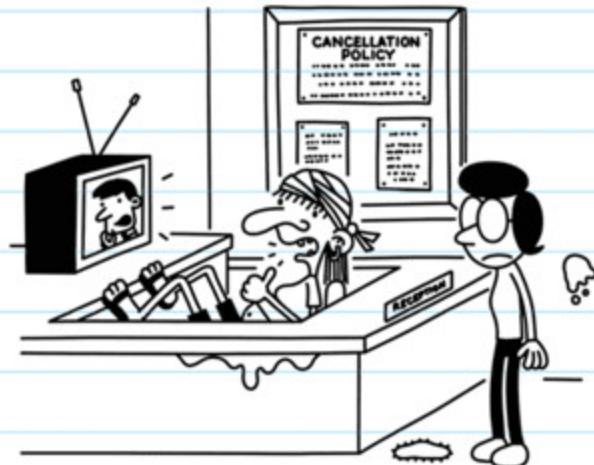
We got the key to our room, and when we walked
in it reeked of smoke. There were little holes in
the comforter and pillows that I'm pretty sure
were cigarette burns.



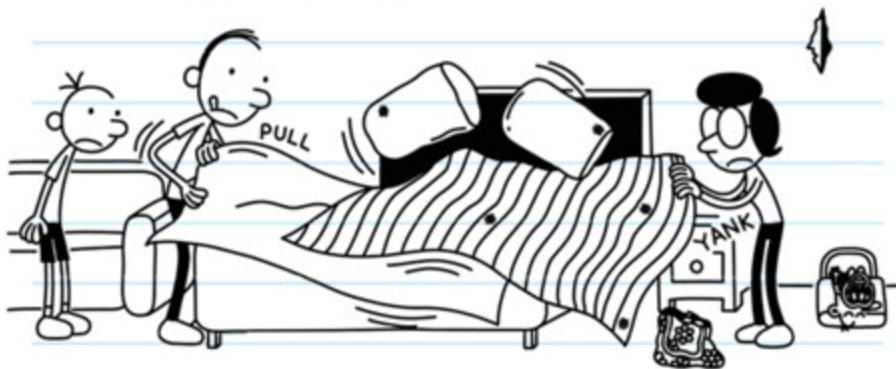
Dad picked a towel off the floor, then dropped it
because it was WET.

Mom went back to the front desk and asked for
a different room, but the clerk said the motel was
full and that we'd gotten the last one.

Mom told her in that case we were gonna leave and take our business to another motel. But the clerk told her there was a twenty-four-hour cancellation policy, so we couldn't get our money back.

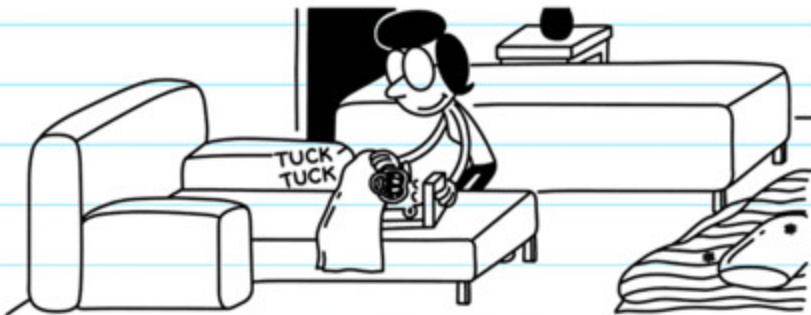


When Mom returned to the room, she said we were gonna have to try and make the best of a bad situation. Then she and Dad stripped the bed down to the bare mattress.

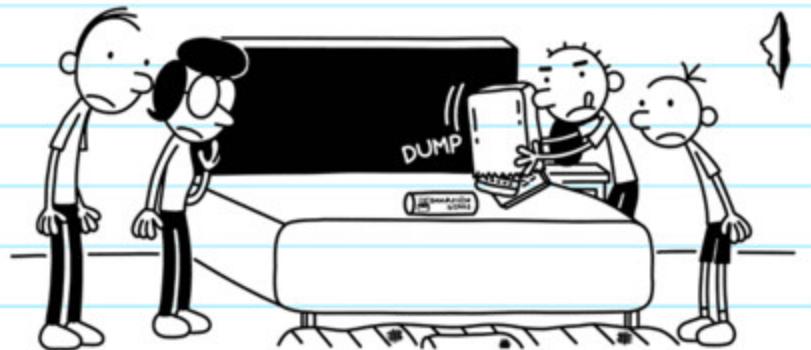


Believe it or not, Manny slept through ALL of this. Mom said that if he woke up now, he'd be awake all night, so she was just gonna let him sleep through till morning.

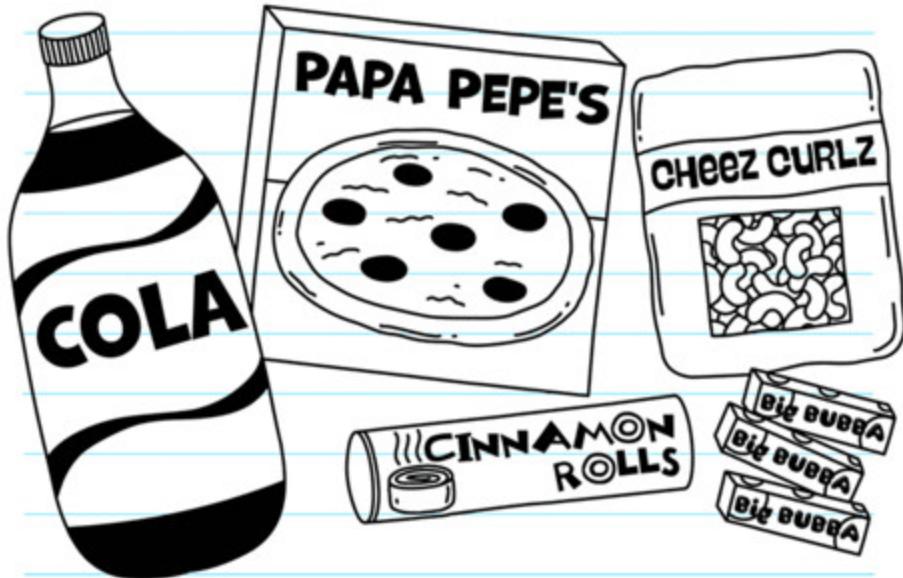
Mom put Manny down in the middle of the sofa bed and pulled a blanket over him.



The rest of us were really hungry, so we emptied out the groceries Rodrick bought. But it turned out he didn't buy ANYTHING on Mom's list.



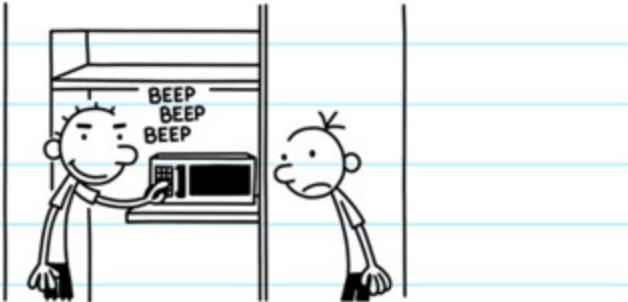
Rodrick was supposed to get sandwich supplies, orange juice, and stuff like that, but he just got a bunch of things HE likes.



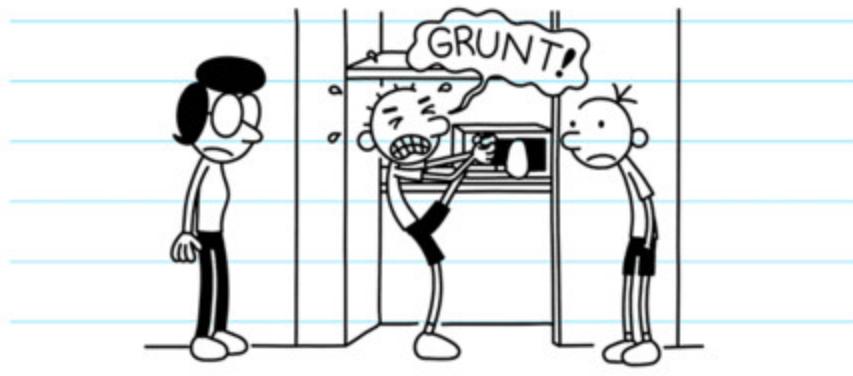
Mom was pretty upset that Rodrick didn't get a single thing on the list she gave him, but his excuse was that he couldn't read her handwriting. Mom told him it wasn't very smart to get cinnamon rolls and a frozen pizza, since those things needed an oven and we didn't HAVE one.



But Rodrick said we could MICROWAVE the pizza. Then he put it inside the microwave oven to prove it.

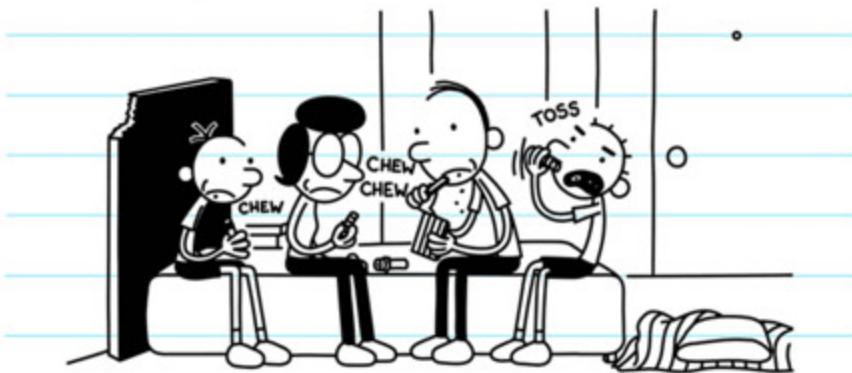


At least, Rodrick THOUGHT it was a microwave. It was actually a SAFE. By the time he figured that out, the pizza was locked inside.



Mom gave me what was left of her cash and said to go down to the vending machine to get the most nutritious stuff I could find.

And that's how we ended up eating sugar wafers and breath mints for dinner on the first night of our road trip.



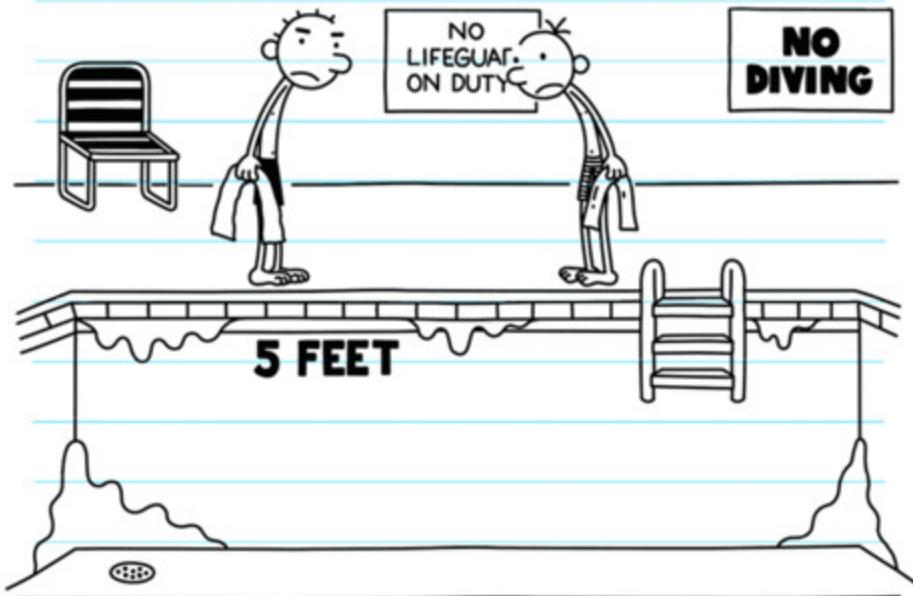
Sunday

Last night we couldn't watch TV or do anything in the room because Manny was asleep on the pullout sofa.

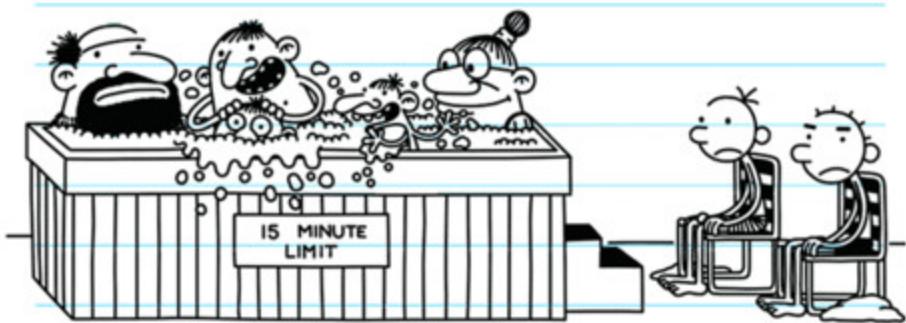
Mom wouldn't even let us keep the light on, so we all sat in the dark for a while until me and Rodrick decided to go down to the pool to kill some time.

Well, the sign outside the motel said there was a pool, but there was no actual WATER in it.

And it didn't look like there HAD been for at least five years.

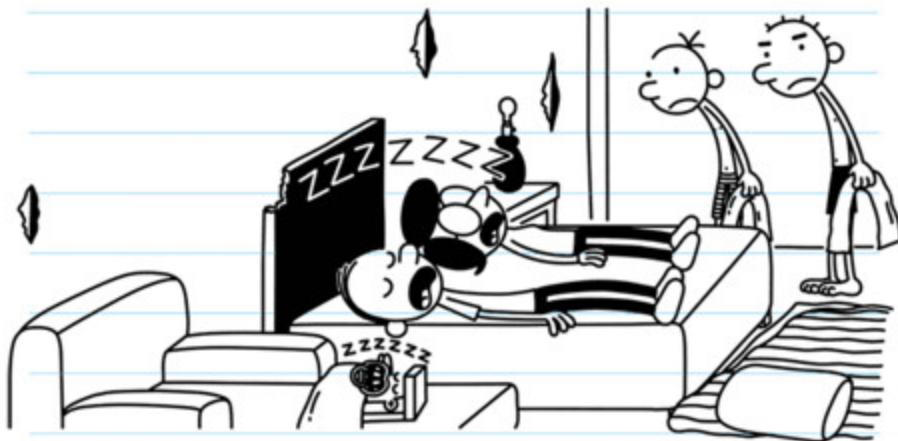


There was a hot tub near the pool that DID have water in it, but some family was already using it. So me and Rodrick waited our turn.



Unfortunately, the family couldn't take a hint that we wanted to use the hot tub, so eventually me and Rodrick just went back to the room.

The lights were still out, and Mom and Dad were asleep on the mattress. I guess they must've been pretty exhausted, because they were still wearing all their clothes.



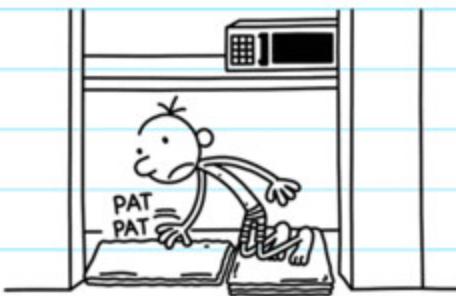
With Mom and Dad on the bed and Manny on the sofa, it didn't leave a lot of good sleep options for me and Rodrick.

We checked the closet for a cot or an air mattress, but there was nothing.

Rodrick was one step ahead of me, though. He gathered up the sofa cushions and made a bed for himself on the floor. Five seconds later, he was out cold.



I figured the closet was as good a place as any for me to sleep, so I got some towels out of the bathroom and laid them on the floor.



After lying there for a minute, I noticed a TERRIBLE smell and thought a mouse must've died in the vent or something.

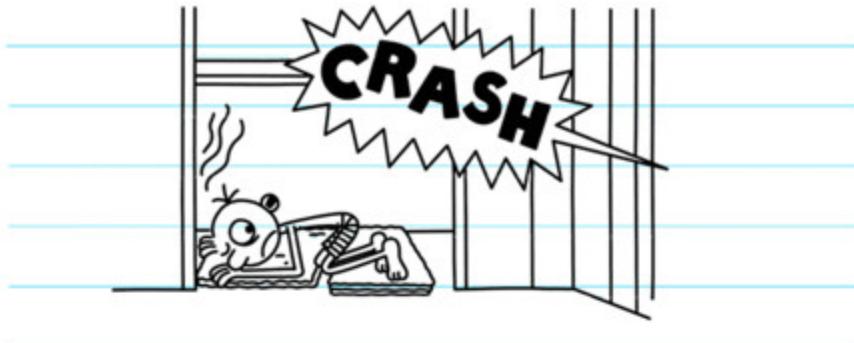
I tried covering my nose with a washcloth, but that seemed to make the smell even WORSE.

It was hard enough trying to fall asleep under those conditions, but then someone in the room started SNORING. Luckily, I was prepared for that. Mom and Dad BOTH snore, which is the reason I thought ahead and brought earplugs on the trip.

But it was so dark in the room I could only find ONE in my duffel bag, so I had to try sleeping with the earplug in my left ear and my other ear pressed to the floor.

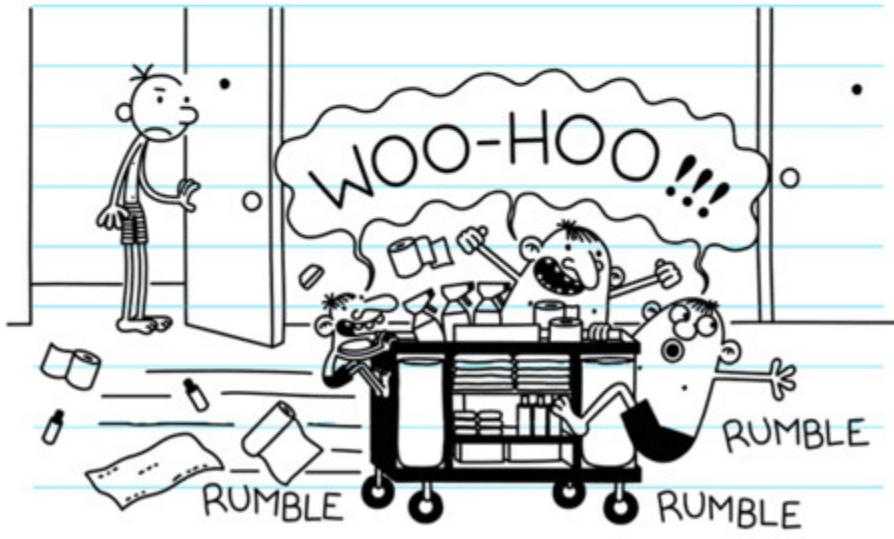


I did actually fall asleep for a few minutes, but woke up to some kind of ruckus going on outside.



When I looked out the peephole, I saw something flash by, but I couldn't tell what it was. So I cracked open the door to see what was going on.

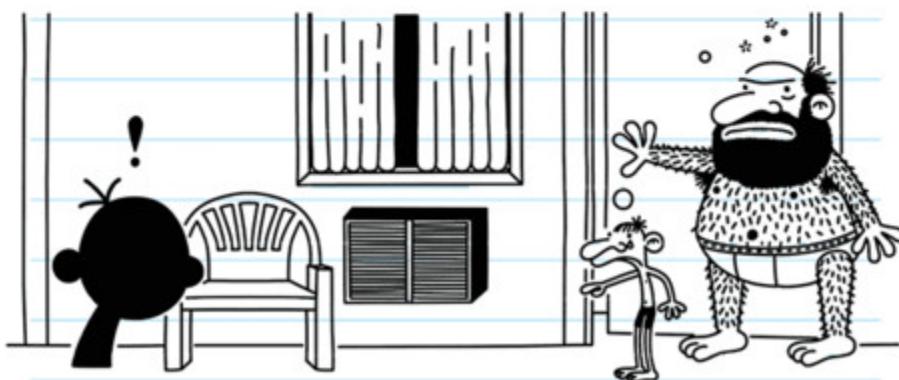
It turns out those kids from the hot tub had gotten their hands on a cleaning cart and were ramming it into a wall.



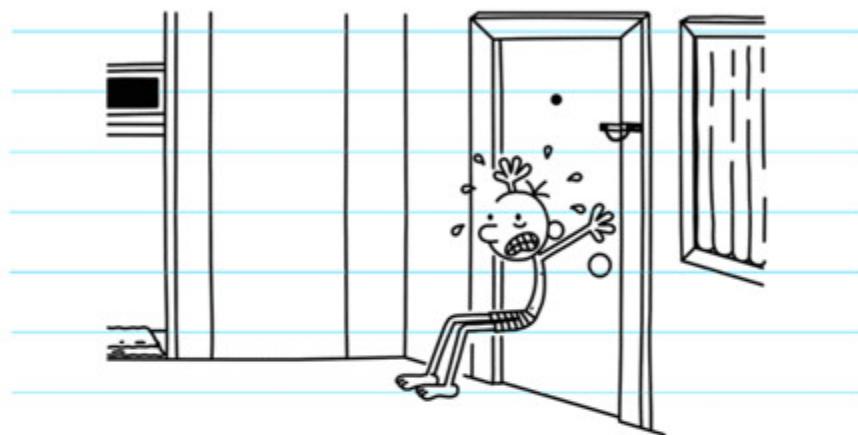
I couldn't BELIEVE these kids' parents were letting them run wild in the middle of the night, so I stepped out of the room and went over to give them a piece of my mind.



The littlest kid burst into tears and ran into his room, and I didn't feel bad for even one second. But a minute later his door opened again, and his FATHER came out.



I wasn't about to get yelled at by a grown man in his underwear, so I ran back to our room and locked the door. Then I prayed with all my might that the chain lock was strong enough to keep him out.



I guess the kids' dad didn't see which door I went into, because he knocked on the wrong one. Then he pounded on the door right next to ours before giving up and going back to his room.

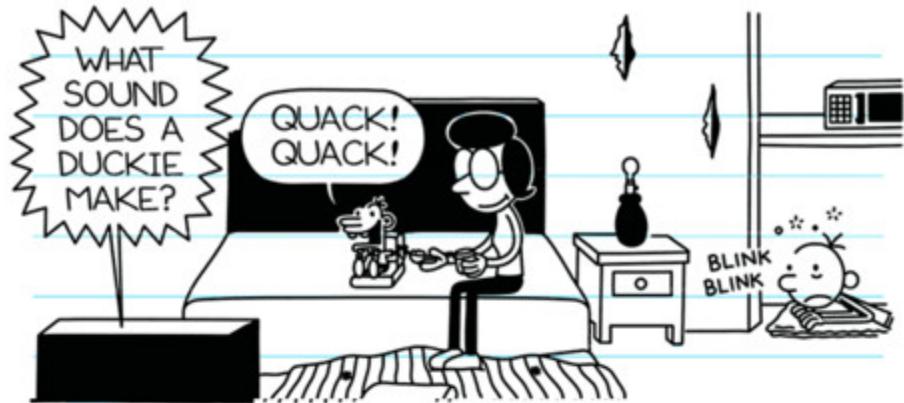


Once the coast was clear, I hung a little sign on our doorknob in case the guy decided to come BACK.



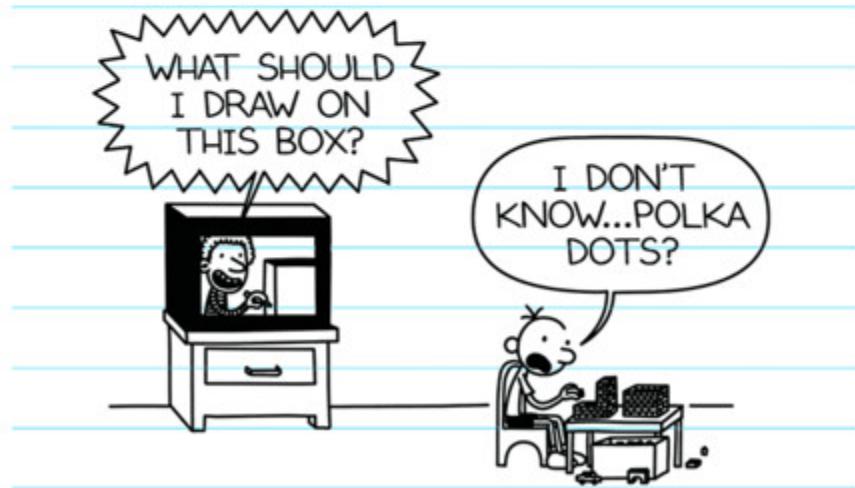
It was REALLY hard falling asleep after that, because every time I heard someone outside the door, I held my breath until they passed by.

Before I knew it, the sun was up and so was Manny. Mom turned on the television, and whenever Manny watches TV, he TALKS to it.

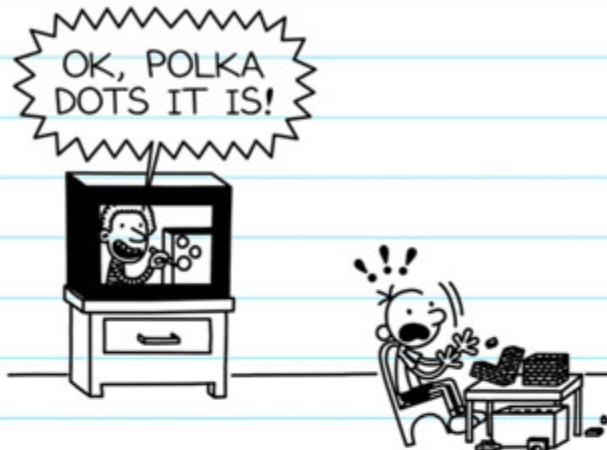


I was a little annoyed with Manny blabbering away, but I guess I can't complain. I used to do the same exact thing when I was younger.

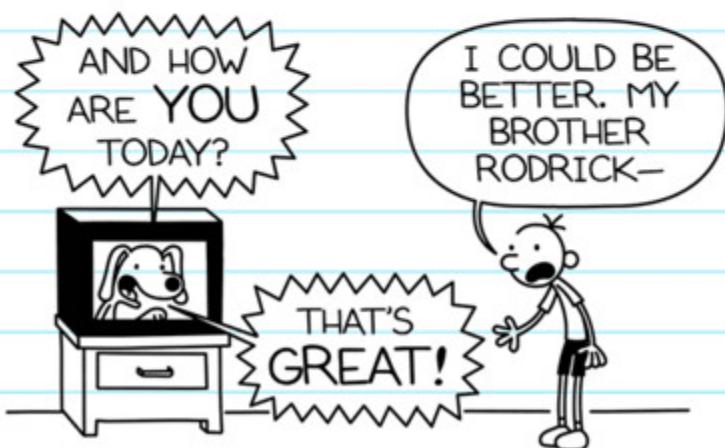
One time when I was watching my favorite show, the host asked a question.



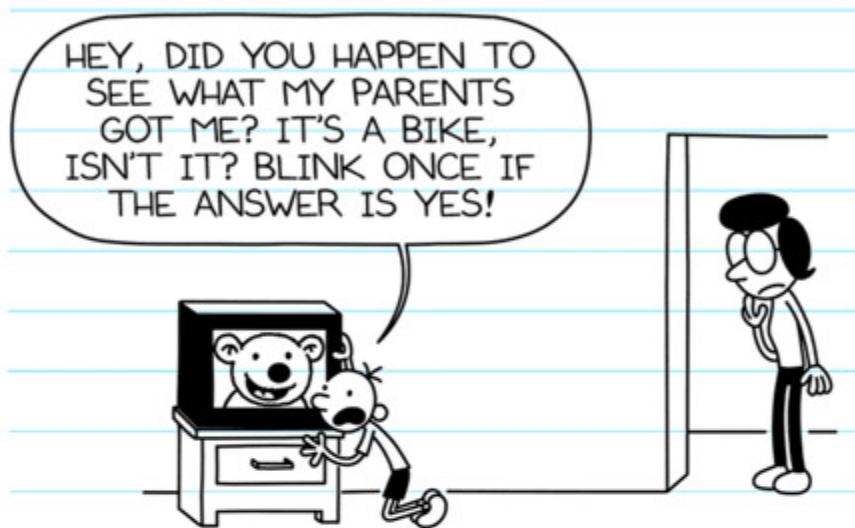
I was just goofing around when I answered, but
the guy on TV actually RESPONDED.



I wish it never happened, though. Because for a long time after that, I thought the people inside the TV could hear everything I said.



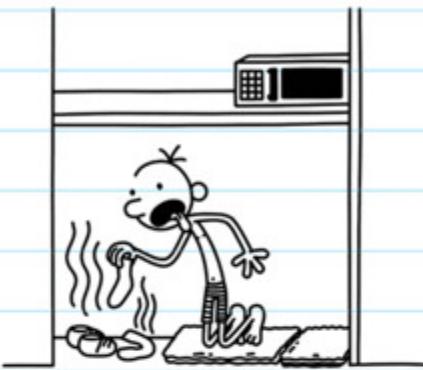
In fact, on my sixth birthday, Mom had to sit me down and have a talk about the difference between "imaginary" friends and "real" friends.



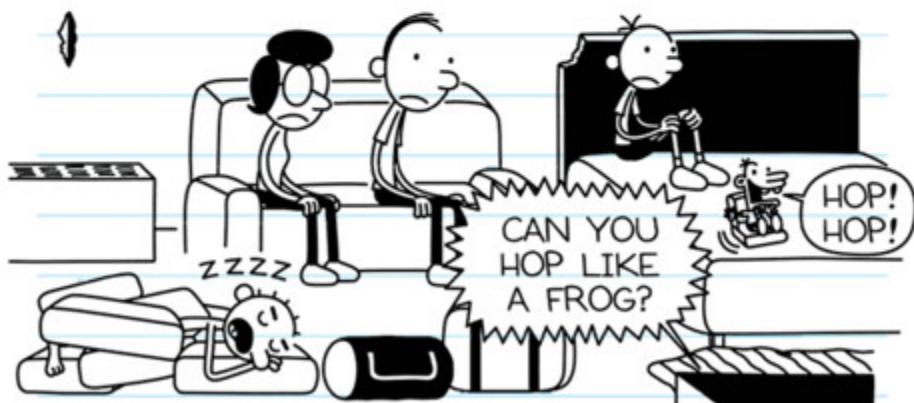
Once Manny got going in a conversation with his favorite TV characters this morning, I knew there was no point in trying to fall back asleep. So I just got up for the day.

And when I did, I found out the source of that awful smell. Rodrick had put his shoes in the closet, and I had spent the whole night breathing in his fumes.

But even WORSE was that the "washcloth" I had used to block the smell was actually one of Rodrick's SOCKS.



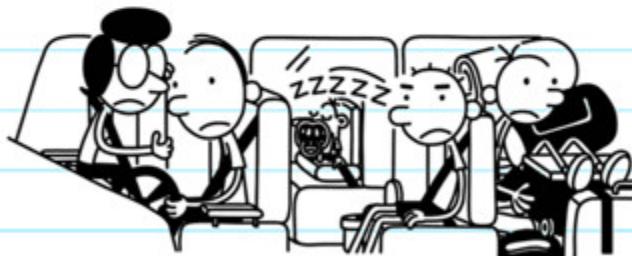
Speaking of Rodrick, Manny's conversation with the TV didn't bother him one little bit, because he just slept right through all the noise.



Dad was getting a little restless waiting for everyone to get going this morning. He's one of those guys who gets up every day at the crack of dawn so he can arrive at his office early, and this whole late-start thing wasn't working for him.

Eventually, Mom made Rodrick get up and take a shower. We went to a diner right next to the motel for breakfast, then got back in the van.

Mom said that from now on we were all gonna be on the same sleep schedule so we wouldn't waste any more time on our trip. But before she was even done talking, Manny passed out in his car seat.



Mom's big plan for the day was for us to go to a country fair she read about in "Family Frolic."

I'd never been to anything like that before, but it looked like it was worth checking out.



The fair was a few hours away, so that meant me being cramped in the backseat again, which was starting to get old. Thankfully, after an hour, Mom offered to switch places with me.

When I got up to the front seat, I couldn't believe how much ROOM there was.



And it wasn't just all the space that was awesome.
I even had individual temperature settings and my
own cup holder.

I went to change the radio station, but Dad
stopped me. He said only the DRIVER gets to
pick the music. I didn't think that was fair, but
I wasn't gonna complain and risk getting sent to
the backseat.

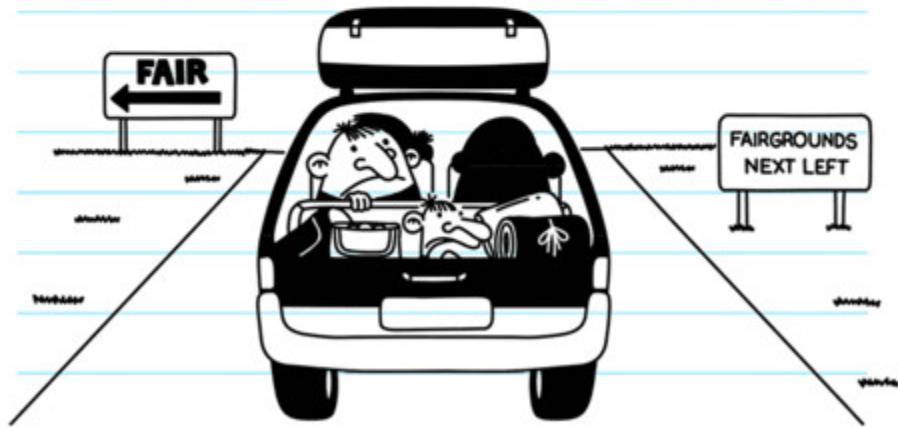


Dad's music was pretty awful, but the view totally made up for it.

When you're in the back, you don't have any sense of what's ahead. Sitting up front, I had a whole new perspective and could almost see why Mom was so gung ho about taking this road trip.

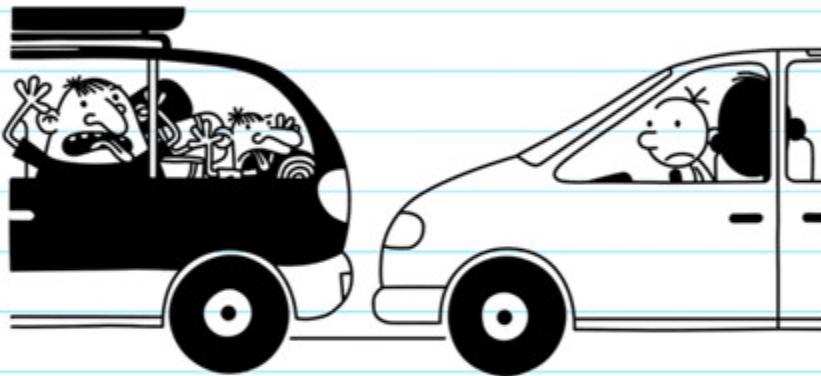
When we took the exit for the country fair, we came to a stoplight. We were behind a minivan that was the same exact model as ours, only purple.

The kids in the van looked kind of familiar. It took me a second to realize they were the same ones from last night.



I hadn't told Mom and Dad about the incident with the kids and the cleaning cart, because I was worried I wouldn't come out looking too great. And they definitely didn't need to know about my run-in with Mr. Beardo.

The kids in the purple van recognized me right away, and started making obnoxious faces.



I wasn't gonna just sit there and take it from those little punks, so I made a face at THEM.



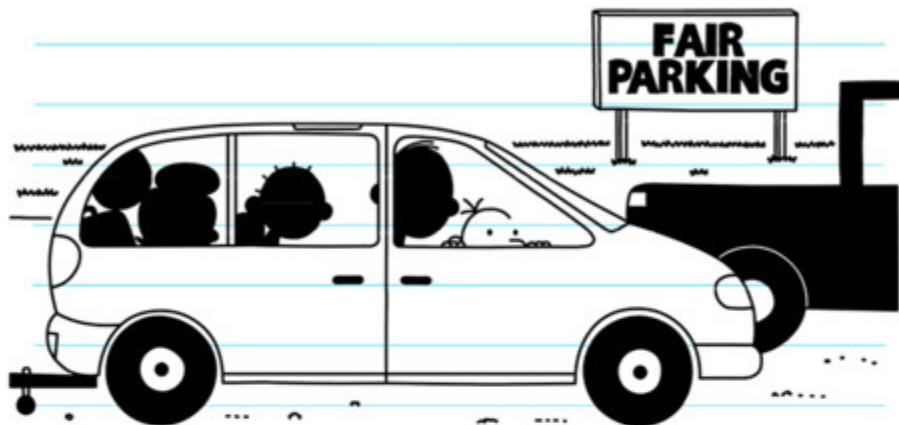
The skinny one made the same face back at ME,
and the second he did, the light turned green
and they accelerated. When their van lurched
forward, the little kid face-planted into the
back window.



Dad passed them on the left, and Mr. Beardo
got a real good look at me.



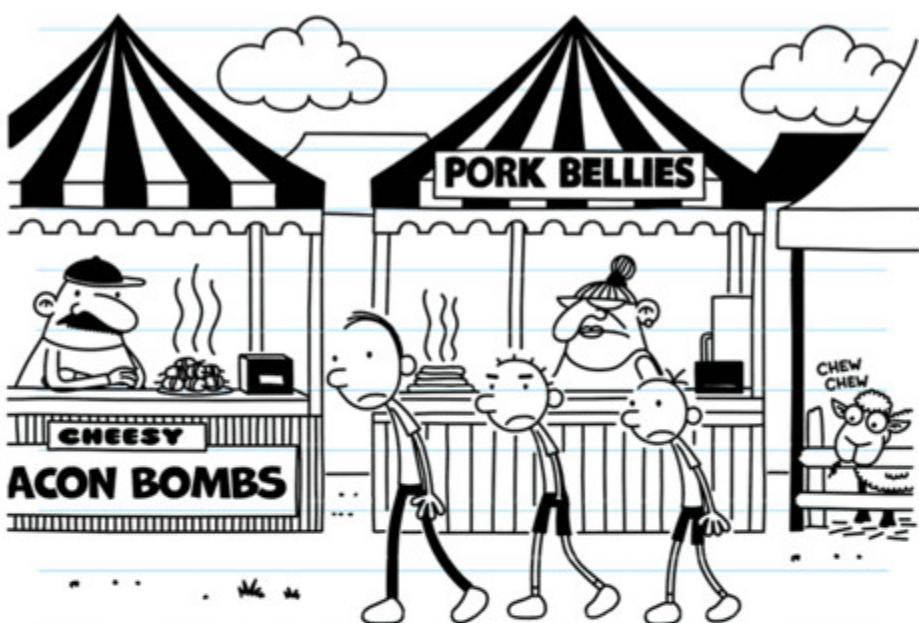
Luckily, the parking lot for the fair was only a few hundred feet up the road. Once we stopped, I wanted to stay inside until I was sure we weren't being tailed by the purple van.



But it looked like we were in the clear. Manny was still asleep in his car seat, so Mom said she'd stay back with him and the rest of us could go on ahead.

The fair was a LOT different than I thought it was gonna be. I expected it to have a Ferris wheel and a merry-go-round and stuff like that, but instead there were a bunch of tents with farm animals and booths with homemade food.

We were getting kind of hungry anyway, so we went looking for something to eat.



They had corn dogs and fried dough and all the stuff you'd expect at a big fair. But then they had crazy things like deep-fried butter on a stick.

I was actually glad Mom was still in the van, because I was pretty sure that kind of thing didn't qualify as "real food" in her book.



After about an hour of walking the fairgrounds, Dad went back to the car to see if Manny was awake yet, and he told me and Rodrick to go explore on our own.

The two of us wandered around for a while until we came across a tent where there was something big going on.

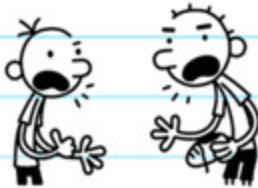
It was a Fouldest Footwear contest, and they were offering a prize for whoever had the nastiest shoe.

There was a big line of people ready to submit their entries.



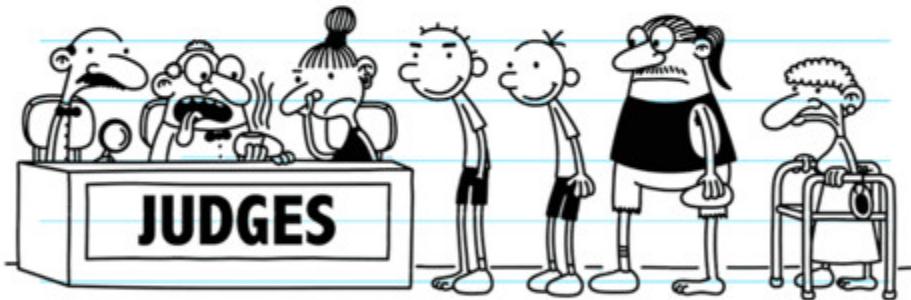
I told Rodrick HE should enter, because if ANYONE deserved to win this thing, it was him.

While we were waiting in line, me and Rodrick got in an argument over who would get to keep the prize. I said we should split it 50 - 50 because it was my idea, but he said he should get the whole thing because it was HIS shoe and he was the one who made it stink.



Right before we got to the judging table, we reached a compromise where I'd get 10% of the prize as Rodrick's agent.

Some of the other shoes looked a lot worse than Rodrick's, and I was losing confidence that he'd win. But when the judges got to the smell test, it was all over.



Rodrick won first prize, which turned out to be a coupon for one deep-fried butter on a stick. I told Rodrick he could have it all to himself, because the thought of eating any more butter made me feel a little nauseous.

Rodrick asked the judges for his shoe back, but they said they were gonna send it on to the national competition. So that left Rodrick walking around with only one shoe. I decided to explore the nearby stalls while Rodrick was polishing off his stick of fried butter.



But I had a SERIOUSLY close call when I turned a corner and almost ran smack into the entire Beardo family. Luckily, I was able to duck for cover just in time.



Now that I knew the Beardos were on the fairgrounds, I was eager to get out of there.

I went to look for Rodrick, but he must've gone back to the van. I decided to head there myself, but on my way out I spotted the top of Mom's head in a crowd under one of the livestock tents.

People were packed shoulder to shoulder, and I tried pushing my way through to get to where Mom was.

But when I got halfway in, a big cheer went up.

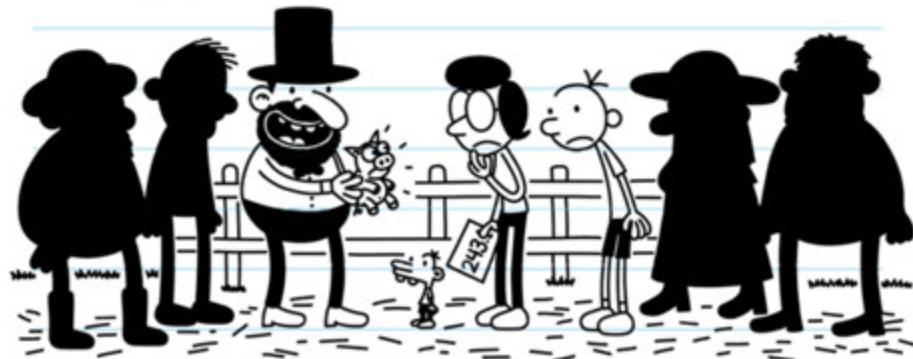


When I finally made it up to the front, I was surprised to see Manny standing in the middle of the crowd, holding a piece of paper.

Apparently, there was a contest to see who could come the closest to guessing the weight of a hog, and Manny got it exactly right.

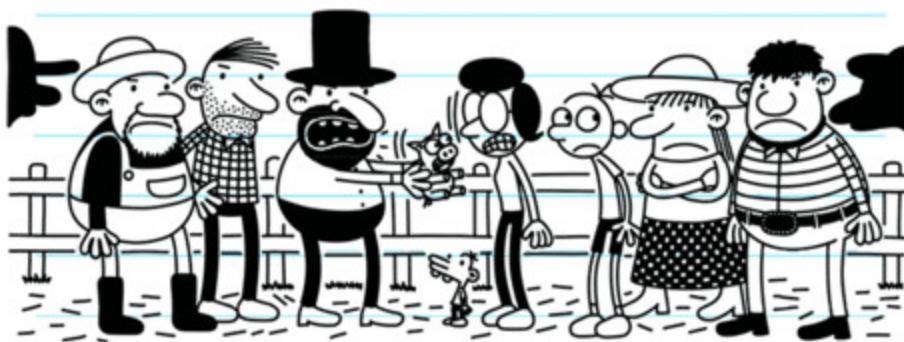


The prize for guessing the hog's weight was a real live baby pig.



Mom explained to the judge that they'd just entered the contest for fun and didn't actually WANT the pig.

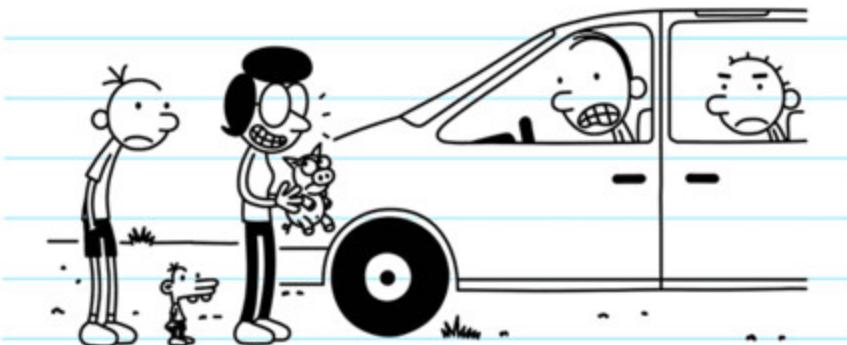
But the people in the crowd seemed kind of insulted and wouldn't take no for an answer.



With all the commotion this was causing, I was nervous the Beardo family was gonna come over to the livestock tent to see what was going on. Luckily, by then Mom seemed ready to get out of there herself, and we made our way to the exit.

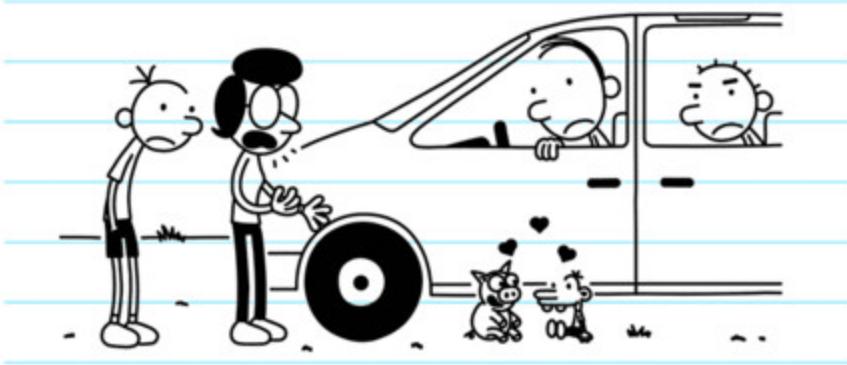
Dad was sitting in the van with the air-conditioning cranked up, and when he saw Mom carrying a pig, he was a little taken by surprise.

Mom filled Dad in on how Manny won the pig in the contest, but he didn't seem too thrilled with the news.



Dad said we had no business owning a pig and that we needed to take it back to the fair immediately.

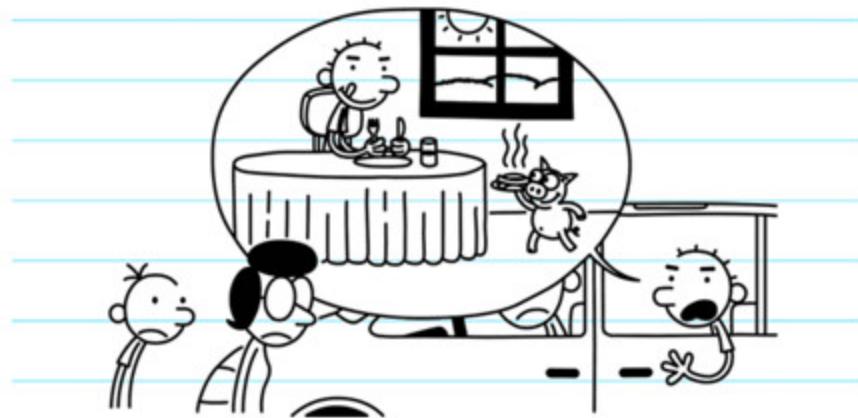
But Mom said it was too late, because the pig had already "imprinted" on Manny.



Dad still wasn't on board, though. He said a pig is a "barn animal" and could be carrying all sorts of parasites and whatnot. But Mom said a LOT of people keep pigs as pets, and she'd heard they're just as smart as dogs.

Then Rodrick got in on the conversation. He voted for KEEPING the pig because he said we could get free bacon from it every morning, the way you get eggs from a chicken.

So either he doesn't understand how pigs work, or he just wasn't thinking it all the way through.



I was all in favor of keeping the pig if it meant we could hurry up and get going.

I noticed a purple van parked a few spaces away from ours, and I was nervous the Beardos would show up any second.

Dad finally caved in. He said if we were gonna keep the pig, it would have to ride in the boat. But Mom said putting the pig in the boat was "inhumane" and that we needed to find a place for it in the van.

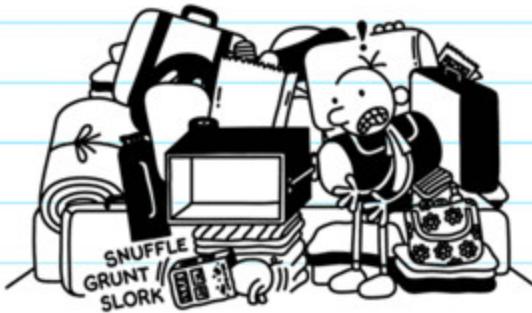
The thing is, there wasn't anywhere to PUT the pig in the van. We couldn't just let it roam free, and we couldn't exactly strap it in with a seat belt, either. So Mom emptied out the cooler and put the pig in THERE.



Once that was settled, we finally pulled out of the parking lot.

After we put a few miles between us and the fair,
I could finally breathe again.

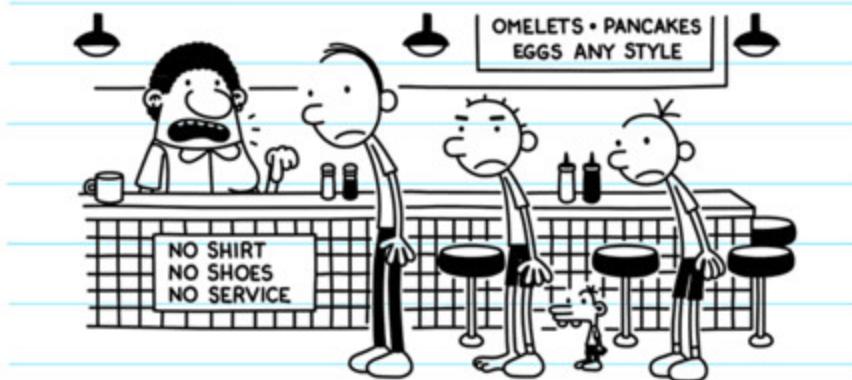
But the pig started causing trouble right away.
By the time we got back on the highway, it had
tipped over the cooler and was rooting around in
one of the Mommy Meal bags.



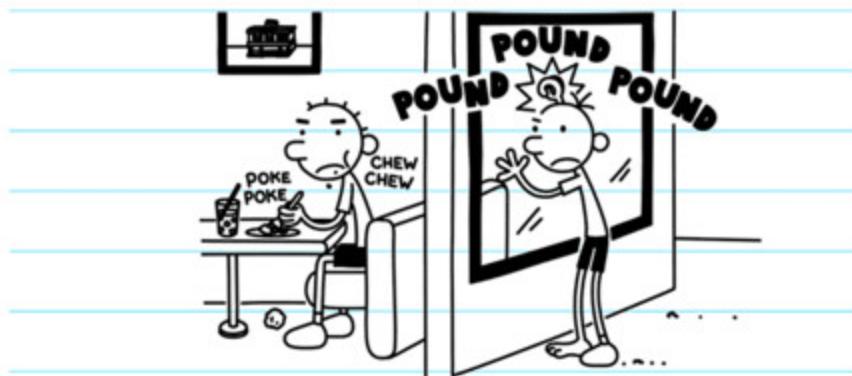
I had to wrangle the pig back into the cooler,
and THIS time I strapped the seat belt across
it so it wouldn't tip over.

Mom figured the pig was hungry, so she said we
needed to stop and get it some food. Her idea
was for us to go to a restaurant and then give
the pig our leftovers. That sounded like a good
deal to me, since it meant we'd actually get to
have a sit-down dinner.

We found a place to eat a few miles away, and Mom stayed back in the van with the pig while the rest of us went inside. But when the waitress saw that Rodrick was only wearing one shoe, she said she couldn't serve him.

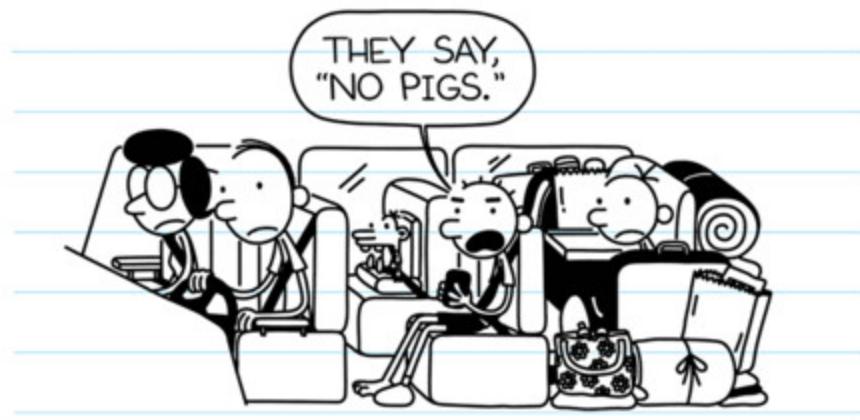


Dad said me and Rodrick could take turns using MY shoe. But I wish I hadn't let Rodrick go first, because he's the world's slowest eater.



When we got back in the van, we gave the pig our leftover corn and vegetables, which it ate straight out of the styrofoam container.

Mom started looking up places to stay for the night on the GPS. She asked Rodrick to call a hotel to see if they had any rooms available. They did, but Rodrick blew it by getting too specific.



Mom found another place a few miles away, and this time she did the talking.

The hotel was just after the tolls. A few hundred feet from the exit, traffic came to a crawl.

That was a problem for me because I had two big glasses of lemonade at the restaurant and REALLY needed to use the bathroom.

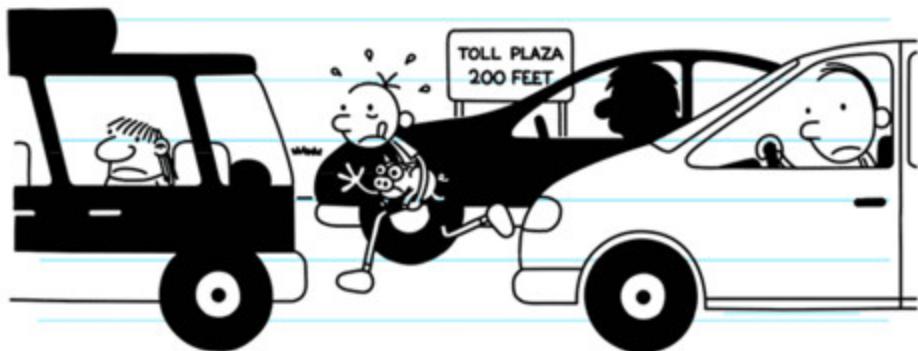


I spotted a gas station up ahead and asked Mom and Dad if I could hop out and use the bathroom, then catch up with the car after I was done.

Dad didn't like the idea because he was worried that by the time I got back, they might already be through the tollbooth. By now it was pretty obvious the pig needed to go, too, because it was running in little circles inside the cooler.

Mom said I could use the bathroom at the gas station as long as I brought the pig WITH me.

So I tucked it under my arm and ran across three lanes of traffic to the gas station.



I tried the handle to the men's room, but it was locked. I waited for the person using it to come OUT, but whoever was in there wasn't in any rush to wrap things up.

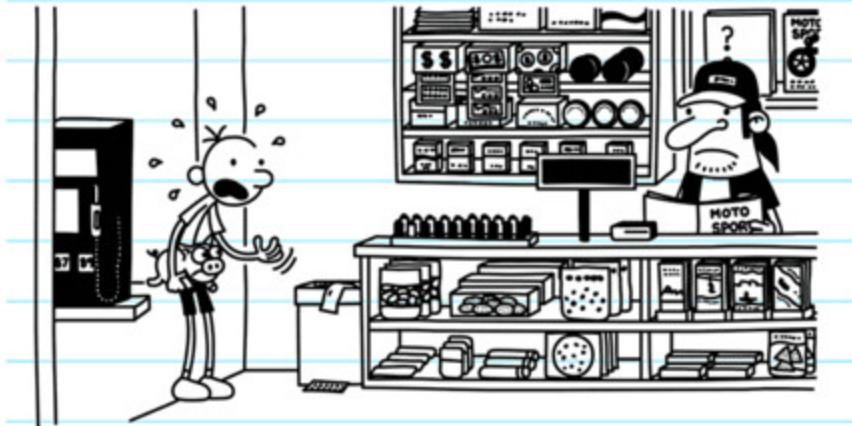


I was getting kind of desperate, so I tried the handle to the women's room, but THAT was locked, too.

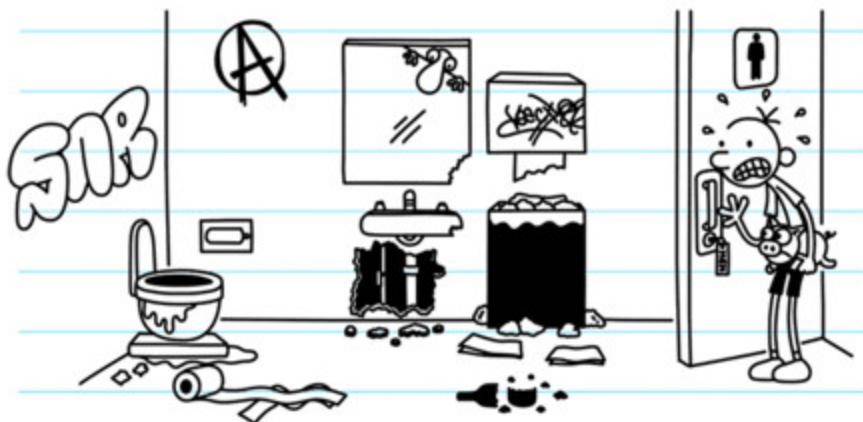
I ran back to the car, which had only moved forward about five feet in the time I was gone.

When I told Mom that both bathrooms were occupied, she said gas station bathrooms are ALWAYS locked and that I had to ask the ATTENDANT for the key.

So I ran BACK to the gas station and told the guy at the desk I needed to use the restroom in a hurry.



I'm not sure what I was expecting from a gas station bathroom, but it was actually a lot WORSE than I could've even imagined.



Let me just say it was pretty awkward using the toilet with a farm animal staring right at me.

But the pig was even MORE embarrassed than I was, because when it was the pig's turn to go, nothing happened.



After I gave the key back to the attendant,
I spotted our van just as it was about to go
through the tollbooth. So I sprinted all the way
across traffic to get to it in time.

But before I opened the door, I wish I had
noticed that the van didn't have a BOAT
attached to it.



OUR van was actually still a few cars back, and
by the time I got inside, the pig looked like he
was about to burst.

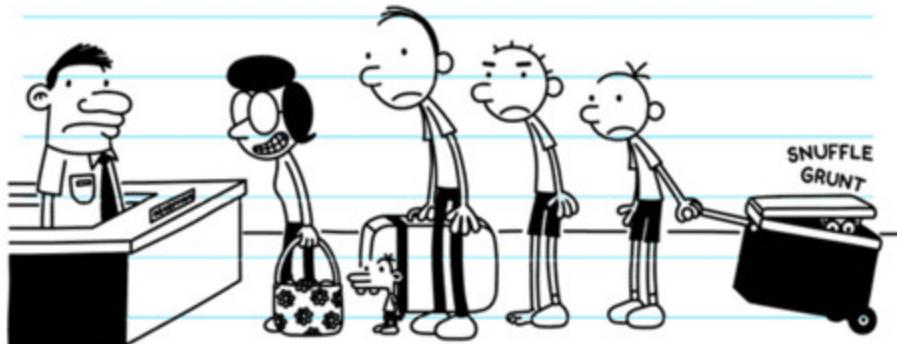
I guess Mom was right about pigs being smart,
because when I put him on Manny's potty seat,
he knew EXACTLY what to do.



Monday

When we pulled up to the hotel last night, I was relieved that it looked a lot nicer than the place we stayed the night BEFORE.

Mom and Dad weren't taking any chances on getting turned away at the desk because of the pig, so we kept it in the cooler until we got into our room.

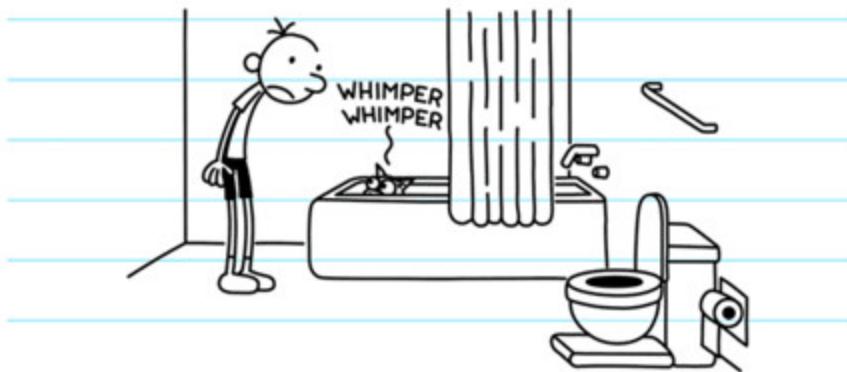


I think Mom felt bad about the sleep situation at the motel the first night, because this time she rented TWO rooms so everyone would have a bed.

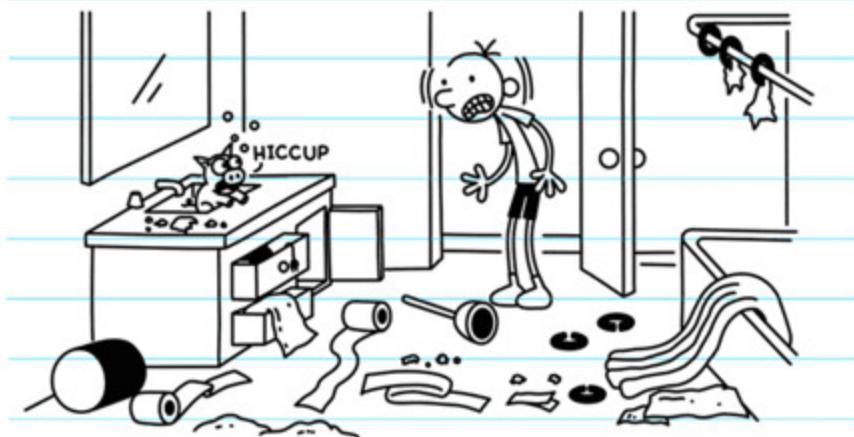
But I should've known there was a catch. Mom said since she and Dad had Manny in THEIR room, the pig was gonna have to stay in OURS.



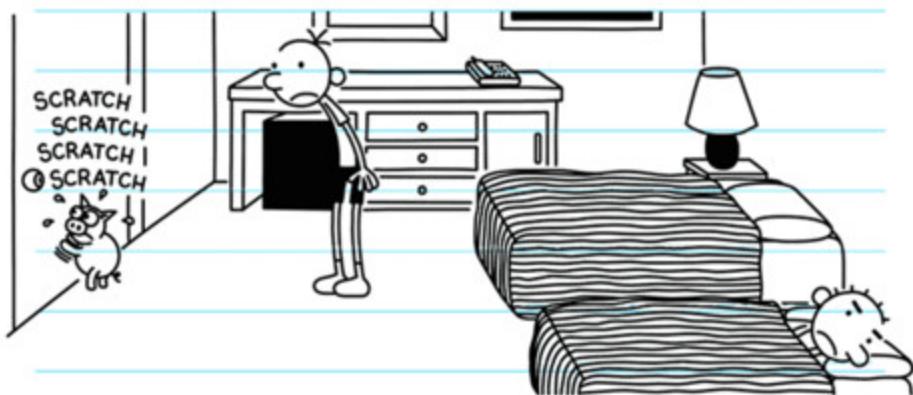
I didn't know what I was supposed to do with the pig, so I tried putting it in our bathtub. But it started whimpering the second I set it down.



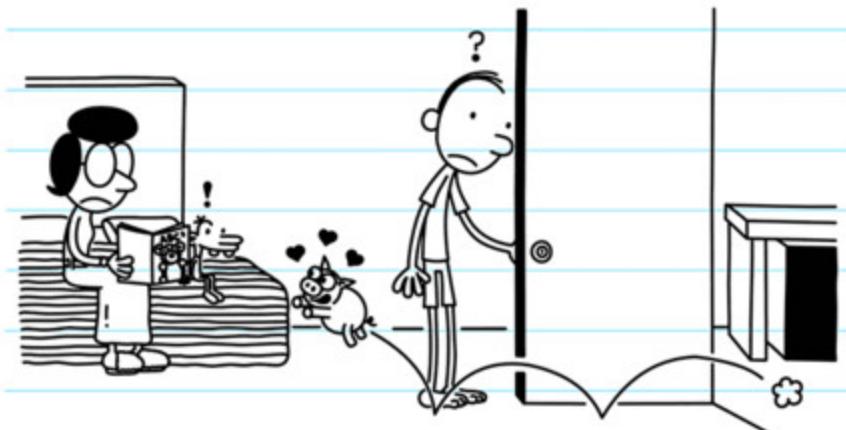
I decided to let the pig loose in the bathroom,
but when I peeked inside a few minutes later, it
had made a TERRIBLE mess in there. And I'm
pretty sure it ate a bar of soap, too.



I let the pig free in the bedroom so I could keep
an eye on it, but the first thing it did was go
straight to the door connecting the two rooms.

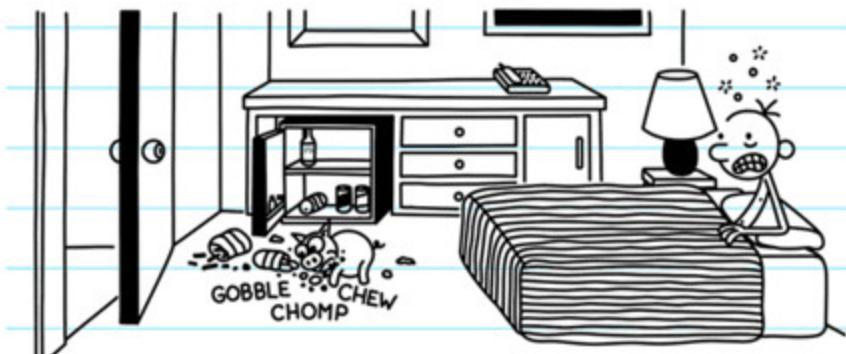


Eventually, Dad got sick of all the noise and opened the door to let the pig in.



I was so tired I fell asleep before my head hit the pillow.

This morning I woke up to the sound of weird noises coming from the foot of my bed. At first I thought Rodrick had gotten up early, but then I realized the sound was coming from the PIG.



It had somehow figured out how to open the minibar door and was rooting through the candy and other snacks inside.

I picked the pig up and put it in our bathtub, then went next door to tell Mom and Dad what happened. But it turned out the pig had raided THEIR minibar, too.



Somehow it had even gotten into the DRINKS. I counted at least three empty cans on the floor, and don't even ask me how a pig managed to do THAT.



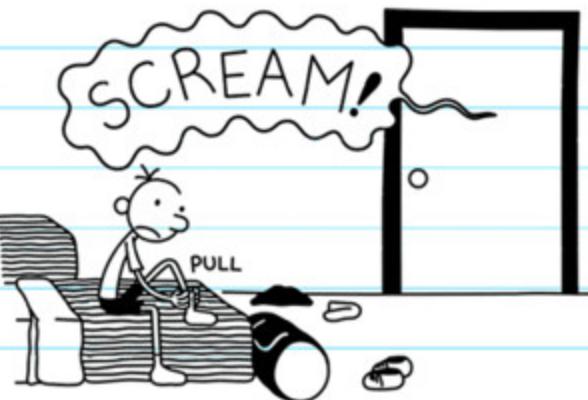
Dad went down to the front desk to tell them our "pet" had gotten into the minibar and we shouldn't be charged for all the stuff it ate.



But the clerk told Dad we were gonna have to pay for the stuff from the minibar, and on top of THAT, there was a fifty-dollar penalty for violating the hotel's "no pet" policy.

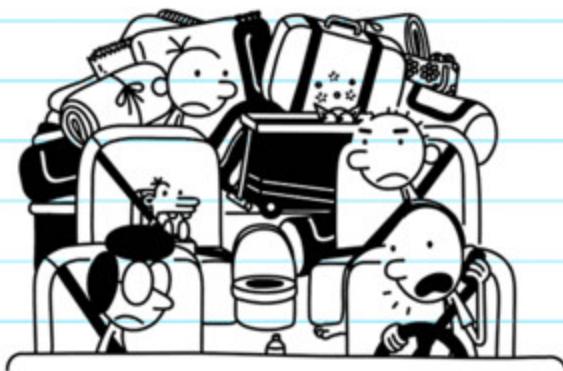
After the final tally, the pig ended up costing us more than the ROOMS did.

Mom was eager to get on the road, so she woke Rodrick up and told him to get in the shower. But I probably should've mentioned to him that the pig was in the bathtub before he stepped in.



When we got in the car, Dad was on the phone with his office. Apparently, there was some sort of emergency, and he was the only one who knew how to take care of it.

Mom had planned a big day for us with lots of stops, so she wasn't happy that Dad had to deal with a work situation. But we hit the road anyway, and Dad talked on the phone while he drove.



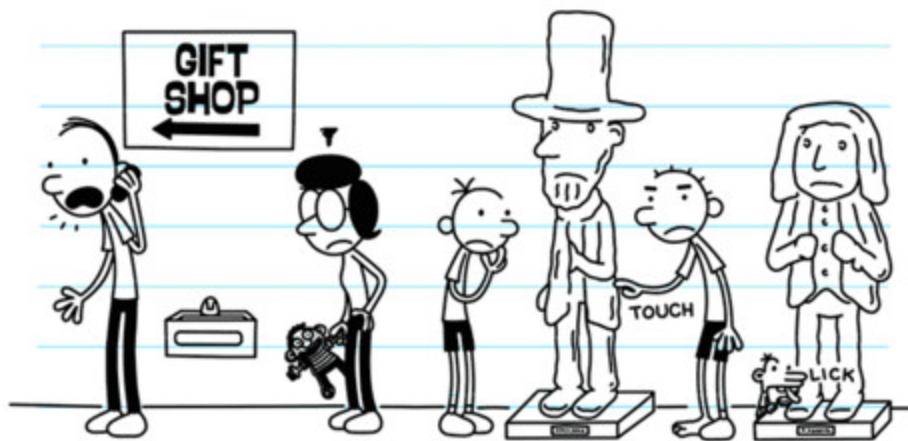
Our first stop was a place that claimed to have the largest piece of popcorn in the world, which ended up not being that impressive. First of all, it wasn't a real piece of popcorn, it was a wood carving, and second, it wasn't even all that big.

When we got out of the car, Dad stayed back on his call. The pig stayed, too, sleeping off the drinks from the minibar.



Next we went to a place that's supposedly "world famous" because it has life-size carvings of all the U.S. presidents in butter.

This time Mom made Dad get out of the van and join us, but he stayed on the phone the whole time.



When we got back in the car, Mom let Dad know it wasn't OK for him to be missing out on "family time." Dad told her he just needed to deal with one more work issue, and after it was taken care of, he'd give us his full attention.

Dad said he was about to get a call from one of his international clients and that when he DID, it was really important for everyone to stay quiet so it would seem like Dad was in the office.

It didn't look like that was gonna be a big problem.
Manny was already down for his afternoon nap,
and the pig was still passed out in the cooler.



A few minutes later, Dad's call came in. You could tell by how loud the guy was talking that he was upset. But Dad spoke in a real even tone, and his client seemed to calm down.

The rest of us stayed as quiet as we could. But then Rodrick got out one of his packs of bubble gum and put all five pieces in his mouth and started chewing it real loud.

Mom snapped her fingers to try and get him to stop making so much noise.

But her finger snapping was actually LOUDER than the gum chewing, which you could tell was irritating Dad.

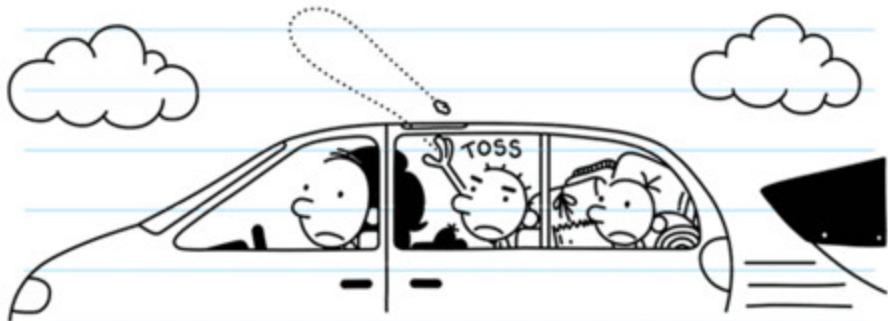


Mom wanted Rodrick to get rid of his gum, so she pressed the button to open the sunroof. But when she DID, the sound of air blowing inside the van was like a jet turbine.

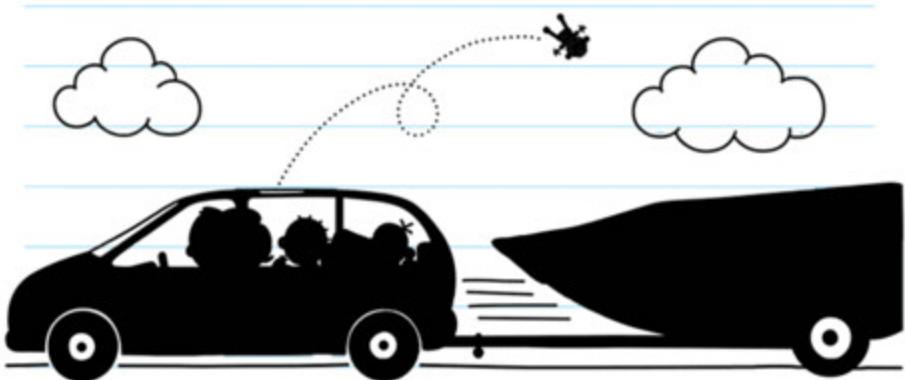


Mom realized she had made a mistake, so she pressed the button to CLOSE the sunroof. But before it shut all the way, Rodrick chucked his gum through the opening.

The gum boomeranged right BACK and got stuck in the gear track of the sunroof.



Mom frantically pressed the "close" button, but the sunroof was jammed open. At that moment, the air rushing in from outside dislodged Flat Stanley from the vent, and he went flying.

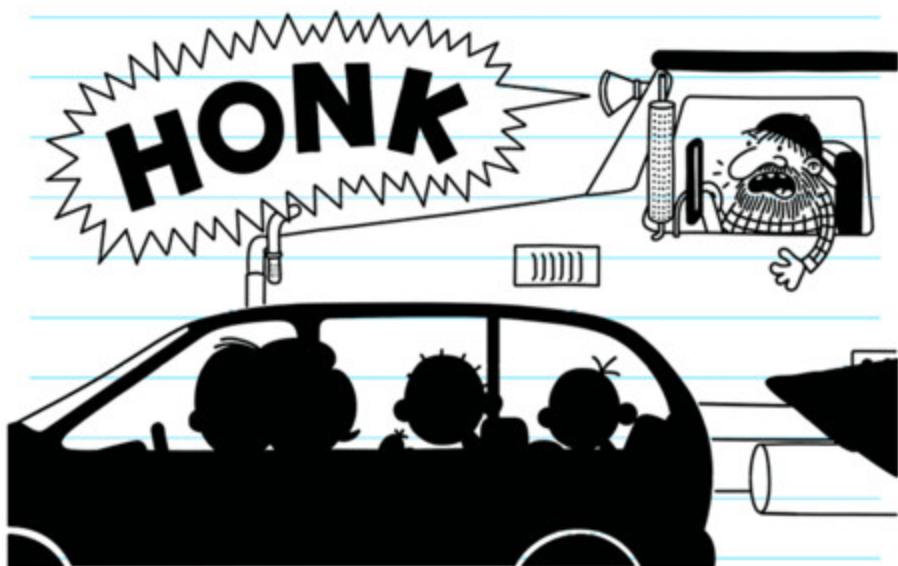


Dad was having a really hard time concentrating on his call and was fumbling with the buttons to try and shut the sunroof himself.

But now he didn't have a hand on the wheel and
was steering with his KNEES.



Dad started drifting out of his lane, and the
driver of a huge tractor-trailer let us know it,
which made Dad drop his phone.



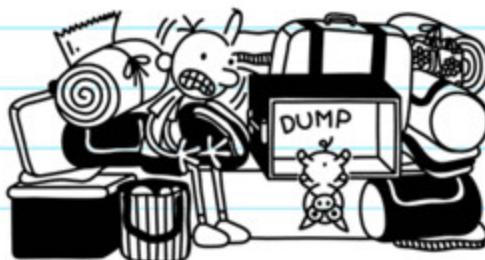
The horn also startled Manny, and his pacifier popped out and onto the floor.

Manny was sucking air like he still had his pacifier in his mouth, and I knew we had about ten seconds to find it before he had a full-on tantrum.



I spotted the pacifier on the floor in front of me and tried to unfasten my seat belt so I could reach it. But instead I accidentally unbuckled the seat belt holding the COOLER in place.

Dad was trying to reach for his phone at the same time, and he jerked the car to the left, which made the cooler tip over.



Now it was total chaos. The pig was loose, Manny was crying, and Dad was cursing because he couldn't reach his phone.

But the main problem was the PIG. It was going bananas, running around on the floor and squealing like crazy. Everyone was trying to grab it, but the pig was too slippery.



Then, all of a sudden, the pig went quiet. And when he popped back up, we knew why.











































































































































































































