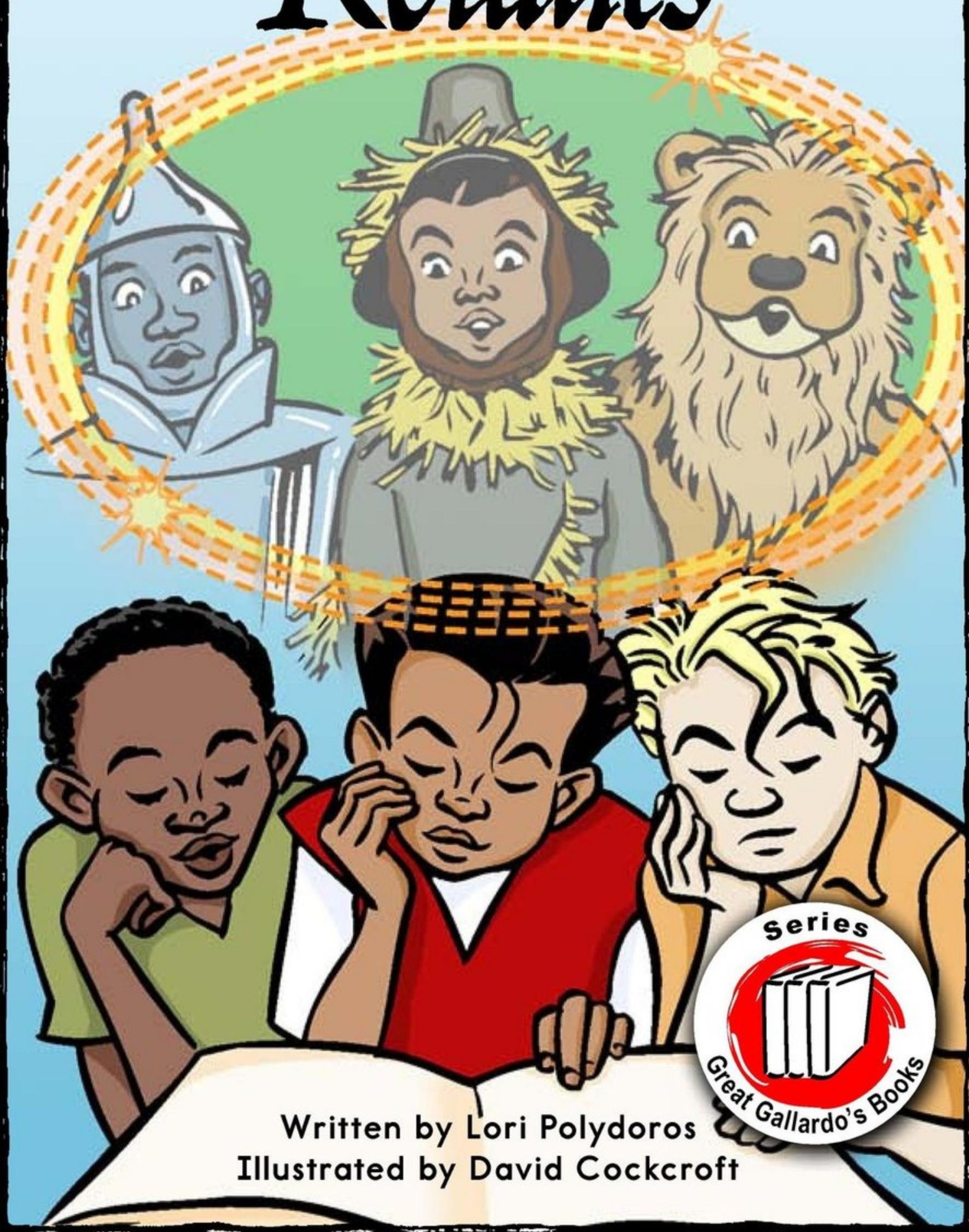
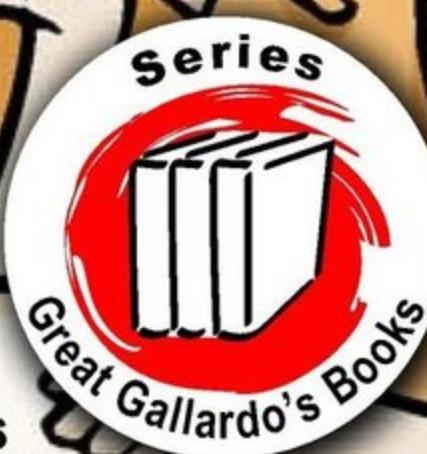


LEVELED BOOK • U

Yellow Brick Roadies



Written by Lori Polydoros
Illustrated by David Cockcroft



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A Cloud of Guilt

One week of sixth grade down, one well-earned weekend coming up. Miguel headed down the street with his two friends, Trevon and Leo. Someone screamed from behind, “Watch out!”

Thud.

Crash.

A boy wearing inline skates smashed onto the asphalt; books and papers scattered everywhere.

Trevon and Leo laughed.

The boy’s name was Dorian, and he was in Miguel’s class.



Despite his bloody knees, Dorian tried to stand up, but **winced** in pain. Miguel rushed out to help him, but Trevor stepped between them. “Leave him here,” Trevor said. “He told the teacher we were tackling in flag football yesterday.”

“He needs help,” Miguel said.

“We’re out of here,” Leo said.

Dorian and Miguel stared at each other. Miguel looked away and followed his friends.

“What’s up with you?” Leo asked him.

Miguel had been a friend to Trevor and Leo since first grade, but this year, they were really getting under his skin. They had always attempted to be tough and cool, but they’d never been cruel.

“Nothing,” Miguel said as he opened the door to his family’s sandwich shop. “See you later.”

Trevor raised his eyebrow. Leo shrugged his shoulders.

As Miguel walked in, a cloud spread over him. It was neither a cloud of flour from baking bread nor a cloud of smoke from a burnt roll. It was a cloud of guilt.

The next morning, Miguel moped about the shop.

"Mom wants us to cut some fresh flowers," said his sister Teresa, waving a pair of scissors at him.

"So what happened yesterday to that kid on the skates?" she continued.

Miguel **furrowed** his brow. "How did you know about that?"

"It happened in front of the shop window," Teresa said.

"Nothing happened." Miguel grabbed the scissors from Teresa and stalked out to the flower garden in the empty lot next door.

"Why didn't you help him?" Teresa asked, following at Miguel's heels.

"Don't worry about it." He cut a bunch of bright orange poppies.



“I know a bully or two when I see one,” Teresa said.

“They’re not bullies,” Miguel said.

Teresa lifted her eyebrows.

“They were mad at Dorian for ratting us out in P.E. the other day.”

“Yo, Miguel!” It was Trevon.

“Playing in the flowers?” Leo teased.

“Finish this,” Miguel said, holding out the scissors without looking at Teresa.

What they did to Dorian was wrong, but if he said anything, would Trevon and Leo still want to be his friends?

“So what’s up for today?” Leo asked. “Not inline skating, I hope,” Trevon snickered.

Miguel’s stomach turned, but he tried not to think about what had happened yesterday. He needed to distract Trevon and Leo from **ranting** about Dorian and P.E. class again. The Great Gallardo—that was it! He’d take his friends into one of his Great Grandpa Gallardo’s magic stories. From then on, they’d have no doubt that Miguel was cooler and tougher than them both.

A Road Trip to Oz

Miguel had already traveled into many stories from the chest full of books in the loft and had become characters such as Huckleberry Finn and Sherlock Holmes.

"Follow me," Miguel said as he led the boys into the shop's back room and up the rickety ladder to the loft.

"Hey, what's in here?" Leo opened Gallardo's chest of books. "Books? C'mon, Miguel!"

"These are no ordinary books," Miguel said, as the sparkling red letters of one title caught his eye . . . *The Wizard of Oz*.

The book fluttered open by itself to page 54. That grabbed their attention. Miguel began to read, "This was an eventful day for the travelers. They had hardly been walking an hour when they saw before them a great **gorge** . . ."

"Boring," Trevon insisted as he peered closer at the book.

"Just wait," said Miguel, as the words jiggled around the page . . . "*and big could were so rocks It very deep was there sides steep at many climb many jagged them down. Bottom also the that of none the . . .*"

Miguel's heart sped up. "Shut your eyes!"
Everything in the loft spun as though they were
on a crazy merry-go-round.

Then the spinning stopped.



Miguel walked in the woods, swinging his straw arms, side to side. He'd become the scarecrow!

A long, golden tail brushed against him. It was a **regal**-looking lion. "Mi . . . Miguel?" the lion said as he cocked his head.

"Leo!" Miguel cried.

Something creaked. Leo and Miguel peeked around a tree and saw the Tin Woodsman. "Oil please . . . ,” he squeaked.

Miguel shot a few squirts of oil into the metal man's joints. He kicked, swung, spun, and jumped. The Tin Woodsman was break dancing!

"Trevon?" both boys said.

He bowed. "At your service."

Miguel told them about the Great Gallardo's books. He described his adventures on the moon and as a pirate on Jackson's Island.

"I don't remember much about this book," said Leo as he looked about.

"Let's explore!" Trevon said.

"Wait, guys," Miguel said. "In every Gallardo book, there's a **mission**." The other boys took off anyway.



"Yip! Yip! Yip!" a dog barked.

Trevon and Leo charged back with a little black dog on their tails.

Toto! Miguel thought. A girl came up from behind them, and the dog jumped right into her arms.

"Don't forget," Miguel whispered, pointing the girl out to Leo and Trevon, "our characters must help Dorothy get to the Wizard of Oz."

Leo and Trevon looked at each other. "We're not helping some girl. We're in Oz!" They ran into the woods.

"Stay on the yellow brick road!" Miguel shouted, wondering what he had done by bringing them here.





A Bump in the Road

"Emerald City is that way," said Dorothy as she pointed across a gorge full of jagged rocks. "How do we get to the other side?"

Miguel had read *The Wizard of Oz* to Teresa. He remembered aloud, "Lion can jump it!"

"Yes, we can ride on his back," Dorothy said.

"I'll find him," Miguel said.

He tramped through the trees until he came upon Lion **looming** in a cave opening. "Leo! What are you doing?" Miguel asked.

In the darkness of the cave, a raccoon and rabbit trembled. Miguel frowned.



"I'm King of the Forest!" Leo roared. "No one can touch me."

"We need you to give us a ride across the gorge," Miguel said.

"Nobody's riding on my back."

"Dorothy needs you," Miguel said.

"I'm not going to spend my time here in Oz taking care of Dorothy," Leo stated.

Miguel muttered something about courage under his breath.

Leo faced Miguel. "What did you say?"

"Nothing." Miguel looked around for Trevon. Miguel remembered his ax could cut down a tree to make a bridge.

Trevon stood within a mess of hacked away trees.

"I'm Paul Bunyan!" he yelled. "I'm strong enough to cut anything. Watch!"

Trevon drew his ax over his shoulder, bringing it down—*thwack*—across an evergreen tree at least five feet thick. The tree swayed, casting a dark, moving shadow across the ground before it slammed against the dirt, causing vibrations like an earthquake.

"Why did you do that?" Miguel asked. "You've destroyed this whole part of the forest!"

"I'm superhuman!" Trevor whacked his ax against a small boulder, causing a spark.

"Stop." Miguel grabbed the ax handle. "Dorothy needs to cross a gorge to get to Emerald City."

"Who cares?" Trevor said. "I'm not going to waste my superpowers on Dorothy."

Miguel mumbled something about not having a heart, like the real Tin Woodsman.

"You got something to say?" Trevor barked.

Miguel felt hot. He shook his head with regret, and then his heart dropped. If Dorothy didn't get to the wizard, would he ever get home?

Stay on the Yellow Brick Road

Dorothy and Toto were busy building some kind of **contraption** when Miguel got back to the gorge.

"What are you making?" he asked.

"A slingshot." Dorothy pulled on a big, stretchy band tied between two pine trees. A piece of leather functioned as a seat in the middle of the band.

"Where'd you get the supplies?" Miguel asked, feeling the stretchy band.

"I'm **resourceful**," she answered mysteriously.

"You're going to fling yourself across?"

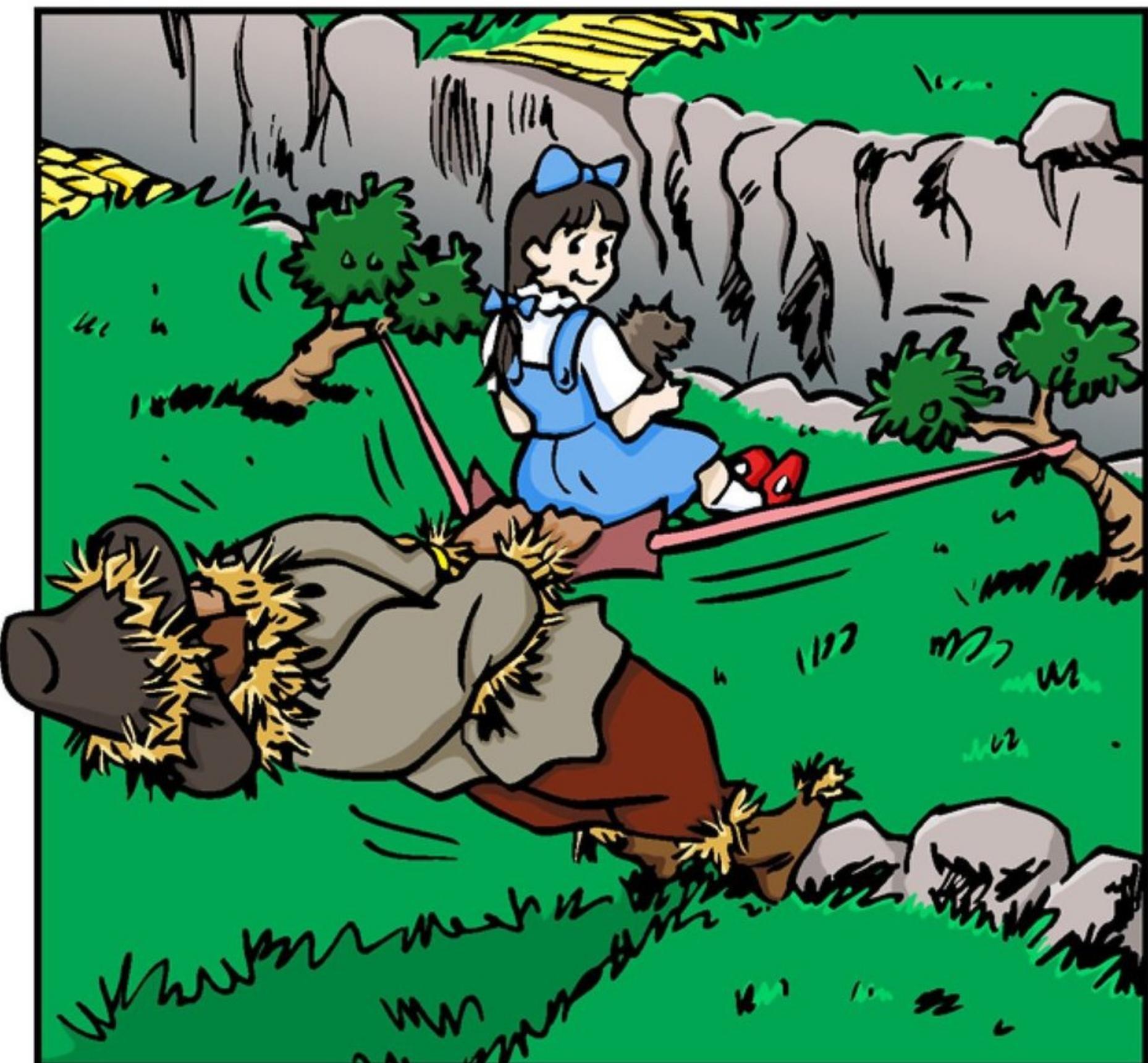
"I have no choice," Dorothy said. "I have no lion to ride on and no woodsman to chop down a tree."

"I'm sorry about that."

"It's not your fault." She placed her food basket in the seat. "I just hope you speak up for what's right. Watch this!"

She pulled back hard on the band and let go. *Wham!* The basket flew across the gap and landed safely in a field of bright orange poppies.

"You did it!" Miguel said, quite impressed.



Dorothy laughed. "Would you be so kind?"
She climbed into the seat, hugging Toto tightly.

Miguel stretched the band, closed his eyes, said a little prayer, and let go.

"Wheee!" Dorothy's voice trailed off.

He opened his eyes and there she stood, waving at him from the other side. "We'll meet you on the yellow brick road," he shouted after her.

Miguel hurried back into the forest. He found Trevon and Leo crashed out by the side of a lake.

"I can't believe you're tired of bullying little creatures, Leo," Miguel shouted. "And you, Trevor, why don't you go destroy more forest?"

"What is your problem, Miguel?" Leo growled. "You've been a pain ever since we started sixth grade. It's like you're judging us all the time."

Miguel's blood boiled. He took a deep breath and started to count to ten. *One . . . two . . . three . . . four.* Before he made it to five, a strange sound filled the air. Hundreds of flying monkeys hovered like helicopters above them.

"Run!" Miguel yelled as monkeys dove at them. "Oh no!" Two flying monkeys lifted Trevor. Miguel hurried toward Leo. "We've got to save Trevor!"

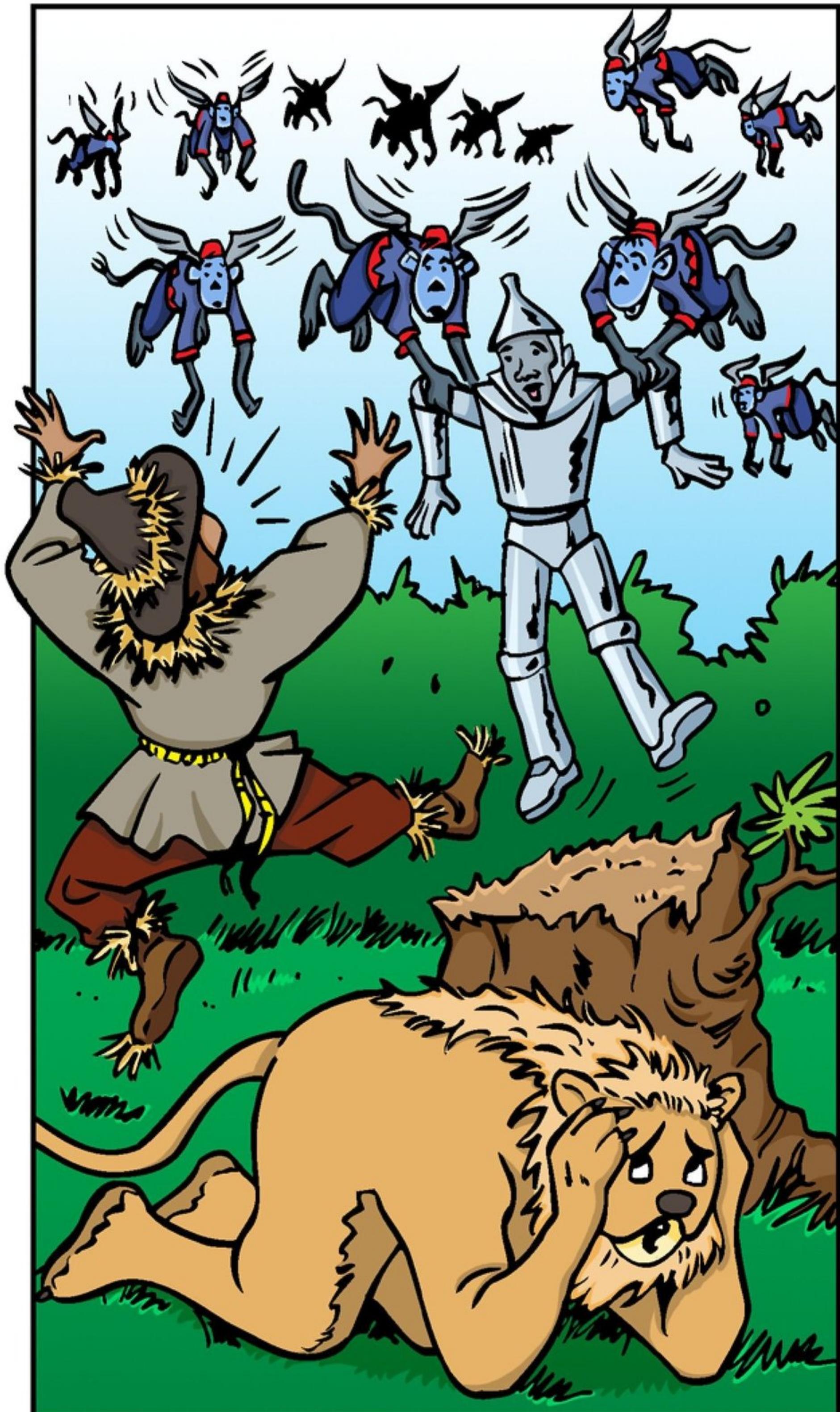
The lion **cowered** behind a tree stump.

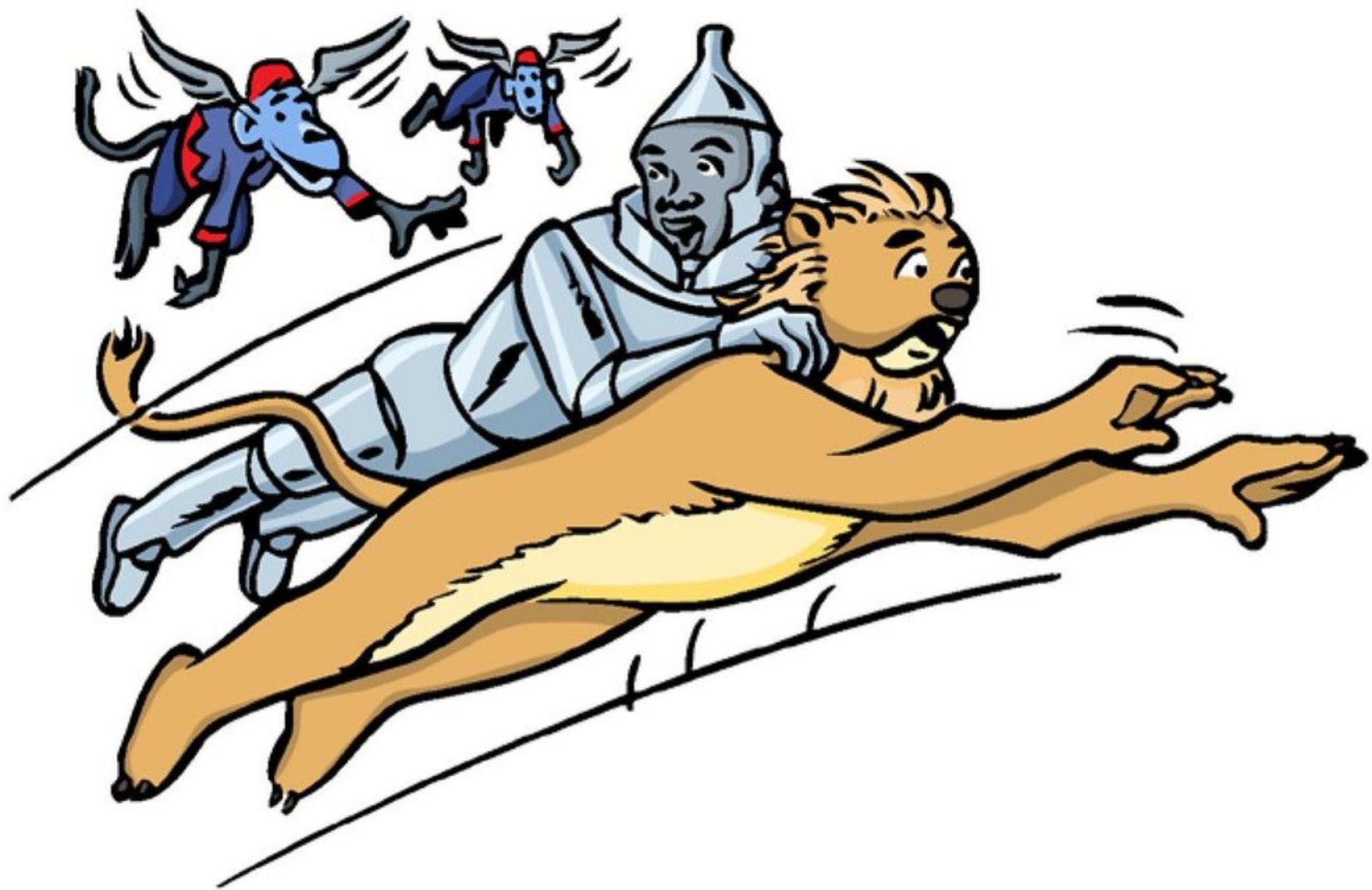
"I'll distract the other monkeys, you swat Trevor out of the claws of those two," Miguel said.

"No way," Leo roared.

"This is Trevor's life." Miguel grabbed the lion's mane and stared hard into Leo's eyes. "After you get Trevor, jump across the gorge with him on your back. I'll meet you on the other side."

Leo nodded.





Miguel ran ahead, zigzagging in and out of the trees, causing the monkeys to scatter.

Leo charged, leapt high into the air, and grabbed Trevon. The Tin Woodsman clung to Lion's back as they dashed for the gorge. Leo stopped hard at the edge, crouched low, and sprang high into the air.

Miguel's only hope was the slingshot.

With arms and legs flailing, Miguel launched himself across the gorge. Dorothy, Trevon, and Toto sat upon Leo's back awaiting Miguel. Leo tossed Miguel the Scarecrow onto his back and ran hard until the monkeys were out of sight. But as in the original story, the **toxic** scent from the poppies soon overwhelmed Leo and Dorothy.

"Trevon, you have to chop off the wildcat's head to save the Queen of the Mice," Miguel said. "Later, the mice will help carry the lion out of the poppy field."

"What? Chop off whose head?" Trevon asked.

"It's the only way to save Dorothy and Leo," Miguel said. "We have to get back to the yellow brick road."

A loud howl rushed at them. Foaming at the mouth, a huge wildcat chased a tiny mouse through the poppies. The Tin Woodsman clanged his eyelids shut and drew back his ax. Miguel closed his eyes, too.



A cloud of thought and emotion swirled about his head before he awoke in the loft with his two friends. They had done it! Dorothy and her gang were back on track to Emerald City.

"Was all that real?" Leo asked.

Miguel nodded.

"That was like a bad nightmare," Trevon said.

Miguel had a huge lump in his throat. "You two were the nightmares."

Trevon and Leo stared at Miguel.

"All you care about is yourselves," Miguel said. "We almost didn't make it back because of you two."

"It was wrong how you wouldn't help Dorothy," Miguel said. "And it was cruel what we did to Dorian the other day."

Trevon's eyes grew large. Leo fidgeted with the buttons on his shirt.

"You can count me out of this friendship," Miguel said. "See you guys around."

"Miguel, wait up." Leo ran next to him, and Trevon blocked his path.

"We've been jerks," Leo said.

"I don't know why we've been acting like this," Trevon said. "We're sorry."

Miguel's heart felt lighter as they walked out of the shop and into the garden.

"Thanks," said Trevon, "for helping us find the right road."

"The yellow brick road?" Miguel asked.

"Yeah, that's the one." The boys high-fived before Trevon and Leo walked home.

Miguel saw Teresa in the garden. She had a slingshot in her pocket.

"Wait a minute, you haven't been reading *The Wizard of Oz*, have you?"

Teresa giggled. "No, not really."

"Not *really*?"

"Well, I might have given Dorothy a little advice . . ."

"Advice?"

"How to stay on the yellow brick road, of course!" Teresa smiled, and so did Miguel. He put his arm around her, and they walked into the shop.



Glossary

contraption	a strange device made to do something (p. 16)
cowered	hid from danger (p. 18)
furrowed	wrinkled the skin on one's face and forehead (p. 6)
gorge	a long and deep valley surrounded by higher land (p. 8)
looming	standing over someone else menacingly (p. 13)
mission	a set purpose for doing something (p. 10)
Oz	a mythical place (p. 12)
ranting	loud, continuous talking (p. 7)
regal	appearing like a king (p. 10)
resourceful	good at using available materials to solve problems (p. 16)
toxic	poisonous; dangerous to life (p. 20)
winced	involuntarily moved part of one's body because of a sharp pain (p. 5)

Note: *Yellow Brick Roadies* is the fourth in a continuing series written by Lori Polydoros, inspired by L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Travel with Miguel Ventura and his family as they experience classic adventures.

Yellow Brick Roadies
Level U Leveled Book
© Learning A-Z
A Great Gallardo Book
Written by Lori Polydoros
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