

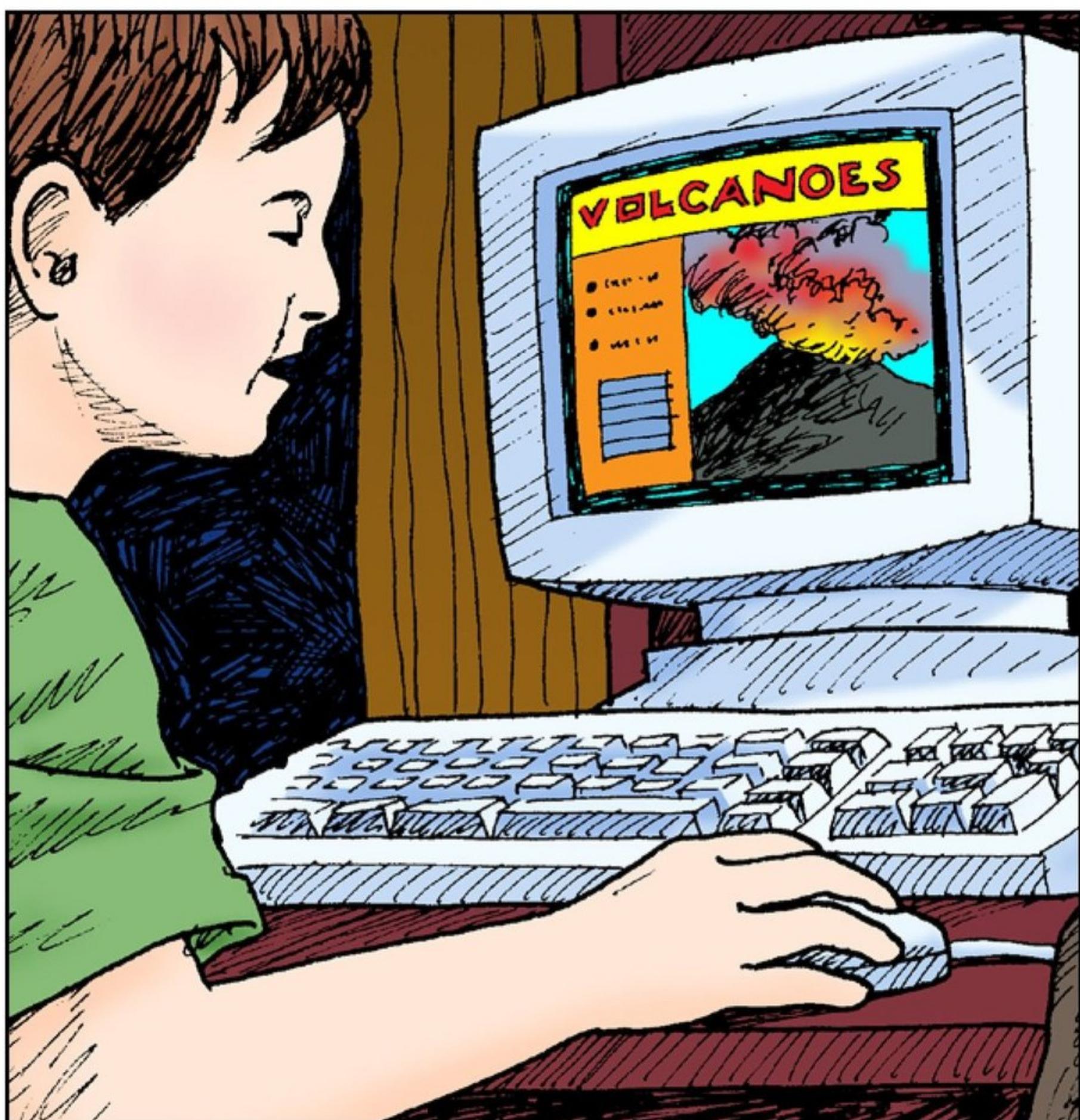
LEVELED BOOK • X

The Eruption of Mount Shasta



Written by William Harryman
Illustrated by John Kastner

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Chapter One

It is four o'clock in the morning, and Kyle Strong is sleeping. Oz, his dog, is curled up on the floor. Oz's tail is wagging a bit and his legs are twitching, which means he is dreaming about chasing rabbits again. Kyle is dreaming, too, but his dream is about changing into a werewolf while standing in front of his class giving a speech about George Washington. Kyle doesn't like this dream.

In the corner of the room, a large black bird sits in a nest built snugly in the top shelf of a bookcase. The bird is a crow. But Kyle named him Raven, which has created a great deal of confusion for Raven. You see, throughout history, ravens have been seen as smarter, stronger, and wiser than crows. Crows have always **aspired** to be ravens. So Raven, being a crow, is more than a little confused. But not as confused as Kyle, who doesn't know a crow from a raven.

Kyle found Raven when he was still a baby. The mother crow had been killed by an eagle while protecting her nest. Raven was the only survivor. Kyle's dad caught the small bird and brought it home with them. After talking to some wildlife experts, they were given a permit to keep the crow as a pet.

So, where was I? Oh yes, four o'clock in the morning and everyone is sleeping. Mostly, this is just like any other night. Some sleeping, some snoring, a little dreaming, nothing out of the ordinary. So, what follows is a surprise—a surprise that was getting a little too common during the last few weeks.

The shaking is mild at first, and Raven opens one eye to see what is happening. Quickly, though, the slight shaking becomes a full earthquake, with

things bouncing on the floor, books falling from shelves, and a window shattering from its pane. Kyle jumps from his bed, opens the window to let Raven outside, and takes Oz downstairs.

Kyle can barely keep his balance as he runs. The coat rack falls across the bottom of the stairs, so he and Oz jump over it and the pile of jackets. Kyle slips and falls, but he is not hurt. They make it downstairs just as the shaking stops.

His younger sister, Janet, and his parents are already downstairs standing in the main entrance, where the ceiling beams are the strongest.

“Is everyone okay?” Kyle’s mom asks. Her voice is shaky, and she is holding onto Kyle’s father. Kyle’s father reaches out and pulls the whole family into his arms—everyone except Oz. Poor Oz always feels left out. He sneaks into the tangle of feet and rubs against any leg that is near him. He is scared, too, and wants to feel safe and loved like everyone else.

“Wow,” says Kyle, “that was cool.” He likes the excitement of an earthquake, but not until after it is over and he feels safe. “I’m going to call Justin.” Kyle races back up to his room, with Oz close behind.



Chapter Two

Kyle dials Justin's phone number, but the line is busy, so he hangs up and tries again, getting through this time. "Hey, Justin, wasn't that cool?"

"I'm not Justin. Wait a minute, Runt, and I'll get him." Yuck! Justin's big sister, Amanda, answered. Kyle hates when she calls him "Runt." He's almost as tall as she is. He has mixed feelings about her. She can be **obnoxious**, but she is kind of cute. He kind of likes her, but she is three years older,

and he never knows what to say around her.

"Hello?" Justin's voice is quivering a little, but he's trying not to sound scared.

"Hey, Justin, wasn't that cool? That's the fourth big earthquake this month. That's so cool." Kyle is still very excited and likes the feeling.

"Hey, Kyle. Yeah, that was cool," says Justin **unconvincingly**. "But, you know, the volcano guys on the news said that all these earthquakes might mean that Mount Shasta is getting active again. That's not so cool."

"Well, there must be plans for this sort of thing. It'll be cool. Even if Shasta explodes, it would be so rad to say we were there—that we saw it explode." Kyle can see it in his head, a newsperson interviewing him about his experience. He can imagine his face on television and the fame he will have.

On the other hand, Justin imagines his house burning down and lava destroying the school. "Hey, wait," he thinks to himself, "no school. This might be cool after all." But instead he says to Kyle, "I'd rather say I saw it on the news, from far away."



Chapter Three

When he gets off the phone with Justin, Kyle begins to clean up his room. He puts the books back on the shelf and picks up the compact discs that are on the floor. His computer is not harmed, which is a relief.

While Kyle cleans up his room, Raven flies up to the window and comes in through the cat door Kyle's dad installed. Having to use a cat door is another source of confusion for Raven, who would rather tease cats than use things created for cats. If he were human, Raven would be in **therapy**.

Kyle turns on the computer, logs onto the Web, and does a search for volcanoes. He finds a lot of information—so much that he feels overwhelmed by all the explanations. He turns on his radio and tunes it to the local news station to hear more about what happened. They are talking about the earthquake with some expert from San Francisco.

According to the guy on the news, Shasta City and the surrounding areas at the base of Mount Shasta are in a Condition Yellow alert. This means there is some chance of an eruption and that it will be big enough to cause damage and endanger lives. Kyle hopes there isn't an eruption, fearing that these earthquakes are a little more serious than he had thought.

Kyle feels a little worried that something bad might happen, but the excitement is starting to wear off and he's tired. He can worry about it in the morning. "Good night, guys," he says, then turns out the light.



Chapter Four

Because of the Condition Yellow alert, school is canceled today, so Kyle plays video games with his sister, Janet.

Later in the day, Justin comes over and they talk about how cool it would be if their school was buried by lava. Then they play video games.

In the video game they play, each person must capture many Samurai, then save a princess from an evil king. Meanwhile, an erupting volcano creates hazards to make their tasks more difficult. This is called **irony**.



Chapter Five

It is 1:00 on Sunday afternoon, three days after the last earthquake. Kyle is sitting on the couch watching a soccer game on television. Oz is curled up at his feet. Raven is on his perch in the kitchen, looking kind of nervous.

Suddenly, the ground begins to shake and rumble. Mount Shasta is erupting. The explosion rocks the house, and it sounds like the whole world is being blown to bits. Kyle races to the window to look at the mountain, and what he sees sends chills through his whole body.

Above the mountain is an enormous, gray cloud of dust and ash **spewing** from the top of Mount Shasta. A humongous cloud is billowing upward like a giant mushroom. The ground is shaking, and the shaking gets worse with each passing second.

Kyle's legs feel weak and his knees are like rubber. His parents run into the room with Janet in his dad's arms. His mom is calm and **composed**,

and she seems to be more in control of what needs to be done. Kyle looks to her for instructions.

“Get your jacket—we have to leave, now. We don’t have long.” Her voice is firm and strong, but Kyle can still feel a hint of fear in it. As they gather their belongings, there is a pounding on the roof of the house. Small rocks and pieces of **pumice** are beginning to fall out of the exploding cloud of dust and ash.

Kyle’s father herds everyone out the door. A rain of ash and dust is beginning to fall. Kyle’s father works for the Forest Service, and he knows this is a bad sign. The situation is about to get very ugly. There is little time to waste.

Just then, Kyle looks for Raven and Oz and doesn’t see them. “Where’s Raven? Where’s Oz? We can’t leave without them.” Kyle is near tears.

“Come on, Kyle, we can’t wait for the animals. They’ll be okay.” His dad doesn’t think anything left behind is going to be okay, but they have to leave right now. There is no time to look for the dog or the bird.

“I’m not leaving without Oz and Raven.” Kyle struggles free from his mother’s hand and runs toward the house.

Chapter Six

The eruption continues. The cloud of dust and gas has grown so large that it blocks the sun and leaves the whole area with the shadowy feeling of a nightmare. A bright red glow appears around the top of the mountain from the lava pouring out of the throat of the volcano. The heat is melting the glacier that keeps Shasta crowned in ice year round. An **avalanche** of water and mud is flowing down the mountain, headed for several towns at the base of the mountain.



Oz and Raven are Kyle's best friends in the world. He can't imagine living without them. Oz was born in the same month as Kyle, and they have grown up together. And Kyle thinks of Raven as almost human. The thought of leaving him to **fend** for himself in the thick cloud of dust and ash is unthinkable.

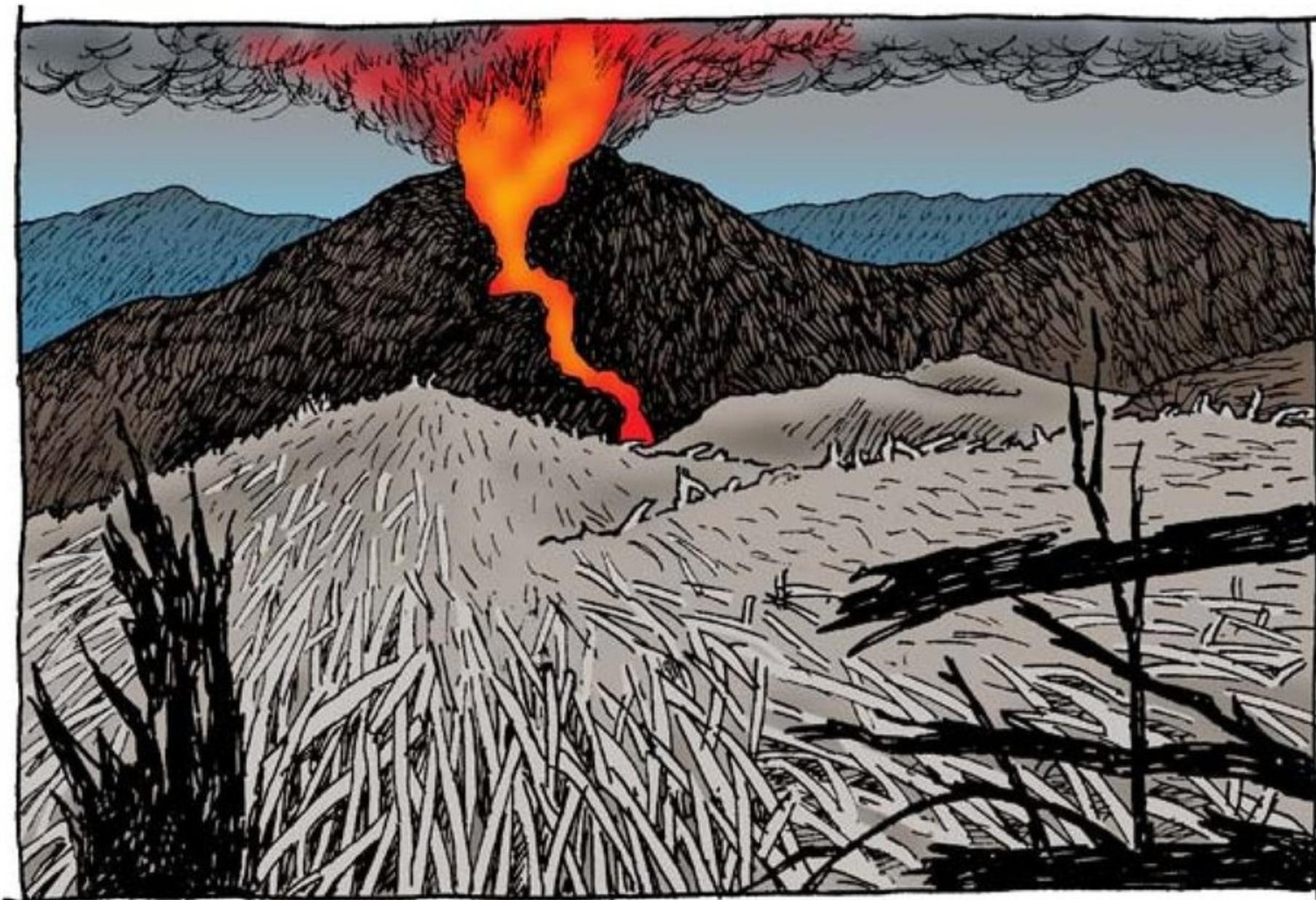
Pieces of pumice are bouncing off of Kyle's head as he runs toward the house, but they are light. They sting as they hit, but they don't hurt all that much. Kyle can hear his parents **imploring** him to turn around, but he refuses to leave without Oz and Raven.

Kyle hears Raven cawing off to his side, flying alongside him as he runs. "Find Oz, Raven—find Oz." The crow flies higher into the sky, risking his own injuries from falling rocks. After a moment, he swoops back down and flies beneath the tree line, as though he wants Kyle to follow him.

Kyle follows Raven down the street, and after a few moments Kyle realizes they are heading toward an old barn where Kyle and Justin have a clubhouse. They hang out there all the time with Oz and Raven. In the confusion, Oz must have run to the old hangout, a place where he always felt safe. Kyle realizes that Oz must be **disoriented** and just as afraid as he is.

The rain of dust and ash is getting thicker, with almost six inches of gray stuff on the ground. Kyle keeps running, trying to stay beneath the trees as much as possible. Raven circles back and waits for him, then continues to lead the way.

When they reach the clubhouse, Oz is clawing at the front door, trying to get inside. As he scratches at the door, he is barking and whining. Kyle sees him and is relieved that his friend is okay. "Come here, Oz, come to me." Recognizing a familiar voice, Oz comes running, still barking and whimpering. "For a big German shepherd, you sure are a coward. Come on, boy, let's get out of here."



Chapter Seven

Larger chunks of pumice are now raining down on Shasta City. The eruption is still getting more violent, with more lava spewing from the crater. An avalanche of mud and ice is racing down the western slope of the mountain, leveling everything in its path. The hot wind **generated** by the volcano's intense heat has flattened a whole section of forest. Trees topple like dominoes.

The size of the cloud over the land far from the mountain has reached a critical mass, and it can no longer continue to expand. The collapse that follows will wipe out everything in its path. There will be no survivors; everything will be buried in ash exactly as it is.

Raven leads them back toward Kyle's house, where his parents are frantically awaiting his safe return. Janet is curled up in the back seat of the car, **oblivious** to what is going on.

Kyle runs for his life, while large pieces of pumice rain down all around him. Oz is at his heels, and Raven is dodging chunks of pumice as his wings flap wildly. Another earthquake strikes. The quaking ground makes it impossible for Kyle to stay on his feet and he crashes to the ground. He falls hard and is stunned. As he lies there,



a small tree collapses under the weight of the ash that has **accumulated** on its leaves and branches. The tree falls and partly covers Kyle in ash and broken branches, leaving him trapped and unable to pull himself loose.

“Oz, come here, boy. Go home, get Dad.” Kyle tries to push Oz away and send him for help, but his friend is loyal and stays by his side. “Please, Oz, go get help. I’m stuck and I can’t get out, and I think my leg is broken. Go get Dad.”

Raven lands at Kyle’s side and caws a couple of times. This is his chance, an opportunity for Raven to live up to his name. If he gets Kyle’s dad, he will be able to prove his worth as a simple crow. Maybe he won’t need therapy after all. Raven takes off and flies to get Kyle’s dad.

Oz licks Kyle’s face and barks, but there is no one left to hear him. Oz won’t leave Kyle here alone, so he begins to pull some of the tree limbs off Kyle. But the large limbs are too difficult for Oz to move, and Kyle remains trapped.

Kyle is suddenly very afraid, and his whole body shakes. He tries to stop, but he is crying now, sobbing with fear. He doesn’t want to die—not here, not so young. Oz licks his face and whines, feeling Kyle’s fear **intermingled** with his own.



Chapter Eight

Raven soon finds Kyle's family, and he caws for them to follow him. He takes off, then circles back to see if they are following. Suddenly, Kyle's mother figures out that Raven wants them to follow him. They head off in the direction that Raven is flying. In only a couple of minutes, they are at Kyle's side. Kyle's dad lifts the large branch from his legs. Kyle gets up and limps to the car with his dad's help.

Just as they reach the car, Kyle looks up as he hears an incredibly loud, thunderous crack and sees the ash cloud begin to collapse. Millions and millions of tons of ash, dust, and pumice stone rain back down. Kyle's dad understands immediately what is happening and hurries everyone into the car.

"Come on, we have to get out of here. Everybody in the car—hurry." He is frantically trying to get everyone in the car and settled before the **surge cloud** can gather too much speed. Oz curls up between Kyle and Janet on the back seat, and Raven perches in the back of the SUV.

Kyle watches out the rear window as a massive cloud of ash and dust races down the valley toward the city. There is enough ash in the cloud to bury the entire city, and it seems to be moving faster than their car. Kyle's father tells everyone to make sure they are buckled in and says to hold on tight. He takes off like a race car driver as he tries to outrun the **descending** cloud of dust and ash.





Chapter Nine

Fallen trees, abandoned cars, and very large stones litter the road. The surge cloud is gaining on them. Kyle's dad heads straight for the freeway, driving over lawns and through fields.

Raven is in the back, wishing he had flown on his own. He can make much better time than any car. The cloud behind them looks closer. Still, Kyle's dad drives like crazy, racing toward the freeway. As they reach the outer edge of Shasta City, the surge cloud is gaining on them and about to overtake them. A few large rocks hit the roof of the SUV, and it sounds like someone is pounding on it with a sledgehammer.

Looking out of the windows, they see a gray cloud of dust and ash where they used to live. Lava is flooding down the side of the mountain and may soon reach the city. They have escaped and they are relieved—but sad, knowing their home is buried beneath mud and ash.

As stories of **heroism** emerge, Kyle is recognized for his bravery in saving his dog. Raven is also recognized for his role in the rescue mission. Kyle's wish to see himself on TV comes true. Camera crews and reporters gather around, eager to hear his story. The next day everyone reads about Kyle, Oz, and Raven, and they see them on TV. Kyle becomes worried that all the attention may go to Raven's head. Raven may begin to think he is as smart as a raven, instead of the crow he is. It could take years of therapy to get him back to his normal self.



Glossary

accumulated	built up or collected over a period of time (p. 18)
aspired	hoped to become (p. 5)
avalanche	a mass of loosened snow, earth, or rock suddenly sliding down a mountain (p. 14)
composed	appeared to have one's emotions under control (p. 12)
descending	moving downward (p. 20)
disoriented	lost or confused (p. 15)
fend	to survive alone without anyone's help (p. 14)
generated	produced or created (p. 16)
heroism	the qualities and actions of being a hero (p. 22)
imploring	pleading or begging desperately and honestly (p. 14)
intermingled	mixed together (p. 18)

irony	a series of strangely similar or connected events with an unexpected twist that is either funny or tragic (p. 11)
oblivious	completely unaware (p. 17)
obnoxious	unpleasant and irritating (p. 7)
pumice	a light, porous volcanic rock (p. 13)
spewing	spitting out vast quantities (p. 12)
surge cloud	a giant, deadly cloud of hot ash, dust, rock particles, and gases that falls to Earth after an explosive eruption (p. 20)
therapy	the treatment of physical or mental problems; in the context of this story, the treatment of mental problems through talking with a counselor (p. 10)
unconvincingly	stated with doubt (p. 8)

The Eruption of Mount Shasta
Level X Leveled Book
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