

LEVELED BOOK • V

# The Case of the Vanishing Anasazi



Written by David Meissner  
Illustrated by Maria Voris

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## Chapter 1: Another Mystery

Stanley DeCapers peered down into his black detective's bag. His skinny fingers shuffled past the magnifying glass, Sherlock Holmes hat, and detective's notebook. If those weren't enough, he also had the fake passport, stick-on mustache, and decoder ring. Stanley closed his bag and nodded confidently. He had enough for this job.

Mr. Rhodes's voice still blared from the bus's overhead speakers, ". . . that is the biggest mystery of the Anasazi people. Why did these **Native Americans** suddenly leave their homes? Was it war, or disease, or **drought**? Scientists still aren't sure. In 30 minutes, at Mesa Verde National Park, we'll have the chance to look around ourselves."

"After our tour of Cliff Palace, we'll visit the museum. I want you to behave like mature fourth graders. Please follow the park ranger's instructions."

“Cliff Palace,” murmured Stanley under his breath, “that’s got to be where the clues are.”

*Uh-oh, Ricky thought to himself. He’s going to try to solve another mystery.*

Ricky wondered how he could put this delicately. “Stanley,” he said at last, “you’ve solved twenty-two mysteries, including the case of the missing pencil sharpener. But you heard Mr. Rhodes. Scientists haven’t even figured it out! It’s been 700 years since the Anasazi vanished. That’s way before Christopher Columbus!”

Stanley gave his friend a **disapproving** look through his thick glasses. Then without saying a word, he turned and stared out the bus window. Stanley’s thoughts wandered with the passing Colorado landscape. These steep mountains, flat **mesas**, and pine trees were the same places the Anasazi knew.

“Stanley!” Ricky said, snapping his fingers in front of his friend’s face. “I know you got a good deal on your Super-Sleuth Kit: only \$19.95 for the mustache, magnifying glass, and decoder ring. But the kid in the commercial isn’t real. I mean, flying to Paris, finding the missing painting, and getting the reward . . . that’s not how it happens.”

Stanley looked his friend in the eye. "Ricky, this is important to me. Just cover me this time. That's all I'm asking."

"But remember what happened on the last field trip!" Ricky protested.

"I'll tell you the plan when we get there. And by the way, on the last field trip I solved the mystery."

"But we almost got caught," Ricky warned. "This time I might not be there to bail you out."

Stanley smiled his mysterious super-sleuth smile. Then he put on his decoder ring and stared out the window again. They were in Anasazi land.





## Chapter 2: Ancient Clues

Cliff Palace was more awesome than Stanley ever could have expected. The young detective stood speechless, looking at the ancient city built into the side of the cliff. Under a huge rock overhang were steps and walls and houses. Some rooms were even stacked up four stories high.

"How is everybody doing today?" asked a man who wore a gray park uniform and had a red mustache. "My name is Ranger John. I work for the National Park Service. Here at Mesa Verde we protect the Anasazi **ruins** so that you and people 100 years from now can visit them."

"But before we begin, you'll need to follow some rules. Don't touch the walls, don't carve your initials into the sandstone, and don't enter restricted areas. After a 30-minute tour of Cliff Palace, we'll head over to the museum."

Mr. Rhodes's fourth grade class followed Ranger John through the ruins. He explained how the Anasazi people grew corn, beans, and squash nearby. They also hunted animals and made pottery with black and red designs. The tour stopped at the edge of a big circular room that was sunken into the ground. The class looked down at the sandstone bricks and dirt floor with two holes in the ground.

"This is a **kiva**," Ranger John explained. "It's where the Anasazi used to tell stories, sing, pray for rain, and hold ceremonies. The big hole in the ground was their fire pit."

"What about the smaller hole?" Stanley asked.

"That's called a **sipapu**," Ranger John answered. "They believed it was the entrance to the spirit world."

At the end of the tour, Ranger John hinted at the mystery of the Anasazi. "So after farming this beautiful land for years, the Anasazi vanished. We don't know why. They left clothing on pegs

and pottery on the ground, as if they expected to return. At the museum, you can see pottery and baskets as well as photographs from the rest of the park."

On the way to the museum, Stanley jotted down clues in his Super-Sleuth notebook.

### Super-Sleuth Notes

**Detective:** Stanley DeCapers—Case #23

**Mystery:** Why did the Anasazi vanish?

**Clue #1:** Clothes on pegs

**Clue #2:** Pottery on ground

**Clue #3:** Hole in kiva goes into spirit world

**Special Notes:**

Ranger John has suspicious red mustache.

At the museum, Stanley's magnifying glass led him to some photographs of Anasazi **petroglyphs**. Animals, handprints, and human figures were carved into the rock walls.

"Hey, Ranger John, are these nearby?" Stanley asked as he pointed to the photograph.

"They're really amazing petroglyphs," said Ranger John as he walked over. "But your class won't have time to visit them. It's over a mile from here, on the trail to Petroglyph Point."

Stanley nodded his head. “Thanks. That’s all I needed to know.”

Stanley found Ricky near the pottery. He stood next to him and talked out of the corner of his mouth. “The clues are over near Petroglyph Point. But first I will need the blessings of the Anasazi gods. I’ll do that back at the Cliff Palace kiva.”

Ricky rolled his eyes. “Stanley,” he said in an irritated whisper, “I’m not going to cover for you again. Last time you promised that—”

“But this is the case of the vanishing Anasazi. It’s vital to understanding past civilizations. This could determine the future of the human race!”

Ricky laughed out loud. “Stanley, you’ve been watching way too much TV.”

“Okay, so here’s the plan,” Stanley continued. “I’m going to sneak off into the bushes. You stack my pillow up against the window and put my jacket over it. When Mr. Rhodes comes by for the head count, tell him I’m sleeping.”

“Stanley, that’s never going to work,” Ricky complained. “But I’ll try, since you’re going to do it anyway. If he catches us, it’s all your fault.”

“Great,” Stanley replied, as he rubbed his plastic decoder ring.



## Chapter 3: Cliff Palace at Night

From under the bushes, Stanley DeCapers watched the bus speed off into the Colorado dusk. He wasn't quite sure how he would catch up with his class, but it was a risk he had to take. "It's not every day you have the chance to do something great for humanity," Stanley murmured to himself.

When the bus was out of sight, Stanley pulled himself out of the dirt and removed the branches **camouflaging** his detective's hat. Moments later, the museum lights turned off. Stanley looked up at the fading blue sky and smiled.

According to his park map, Cliff Palace was down the road and on the other side of the canyon. Stanley estimated that Cliff Palace would be at least an hour away. Bright stars soon filled the night sky, and then heavy clouds began to blanket the western horizon.

Stanley's flashlight was dim by the time he reached the ancient ruins. Luckily the full moon had just risen above the clouds and bathed Cliff Palace in a soft, glowing light. The young detective stared again with his mouth wide open—until he heard the first coyote howl.

Stanley quickly scrambled into the ruins and hurried up a set of stairs. After taking a deep breath, he began to explore the sandstone walls in the courtyard. He shined his flashlight through the magnifying glass and looked for clues. He could make out grains of sand that must have been hand-packed hundreds of years earlier.

Before his batteries died, Stanley found the place he had come to see: the sunken kiva. He climbed down into the room and circled around the perimeter for good luck. Then he sat down in front of the smaller of the two holes. To help **summon** ancient Anasazi spirits, Stanley dropped his decoder ring down the sipapu as a sacrifice.



Then, in a low, vibrating voice, in a tone that made Stanley himself raise his eyebrows, he began to chant,

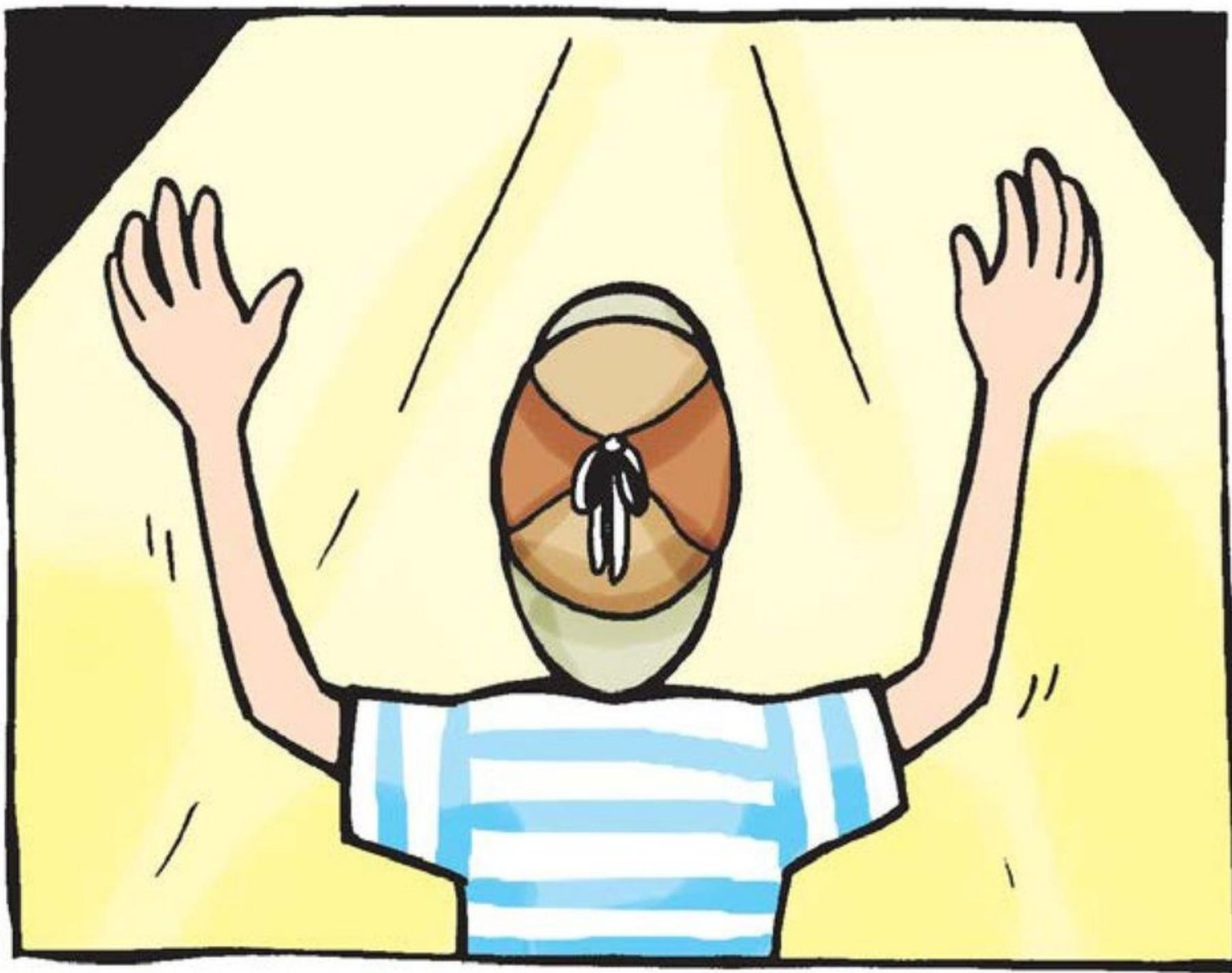
“Oh, Anasazi, where are you?  
Why did you leave, where are you?  
Oh Anasazi, you left your home  
in such a rush  
please come back  
and tell me why!”

As Stanley chanted his invitation over and over, clouds rolled in front of the moonlight and rain softened the ground outside of the rocky overhang. The louder the rain poured, the louder Stanley chanted. His voice echoed throughout the kiva. Then Stanley danced around the holes, flapping his arms like a chicken to ward off any evil spirits. Finally out of breath, he sat down again near the small hole and crossed his legs.

Stanley closed his eyes and squeezed his brain with all of his forehead muscles. His glasses seemed to burrow down into his nose. A sound from outside of him began in the distance and grew louder and louder. Its hum sounded like the return of an Anasazi god.

Through his eyelids, Stanley could sense a light growing closer and closer. It shone upon him so brightly that his eyes almost hurt. That's when he heard a voice.





## Chapter 4: Protected Ground

“What are you doing here?” asked the voice in an accusatory tone.

“I, Detective DeCapers, have come to help your people. It is safe to return. We will bring back your pots from the museum, and you can live as before. We want to learn from you.”

“Stand up,” ordered the voice. “Enough playing around.”

Stanley slowly stood up and raised his arms to the light. “Let’s indeed stop playing. Your clues have led me here. Now, for the sake of humanity, tell me why you disappeared.”

"Hey little boy," said the voice, "stop talking nonsense and open your eyes. You're not allowed to be here when the park is closed."

Stanley opened his eyes and saw a park security guard standing at the edge of the kiva, shining a flashlight down on him. The man had brown skin and long black hair. He studied Stanley's eyes with a quizzical look on his face. Stanley looked down and blushed.

"You know the park's closed," continued the man. "And it's the law that you can't just climb in here. This land is protected."

"I just wanted to solve the mystery of the vanishing Anasazi," replied the young detective, holding up his magnifying glass. "They left pottery on the ground like they were coming back."

The security guard realized that this boy was serious. "There's even more pottery still buried underground," he responded. "And this park is here to protect it." Then the man slowly pointed his unusually long thumb toward the sky and said, "There are some mysteries that the sky will never reveal."

"So what's your name?" Stanley finally asked.

"You can call me Jake the Security Guard."

"Well it's nice to meet you, Jake. My name is DeCapers, Stanley DeCapers."

A break in the clouds allowed the moon to shine down on the ruins. Shadows from ancient walls spread across half of the kiva. Jake's face was half shadow, half moonlight. "We need to go," he said in a flat tone. "I'll take you back to the museum."



Stanley nodded his head, realizing that this adventure was over. "Just give me one second and I'll go with you," he said, before running over to the sipapu. Stanley quickly knelt down and fished his decoder ring out of the hole.

When he slipped the ring back on his finger, the codes were no longer the same. Anasazi symbols, like the petroglyphs he had seen in the photograph, were now on his decoder ring! A chill ran down Stanley's spine. "Wait for me, Jake!" he yelled and raced toward the truck.

Jake's old pickup truck rumbled along the road toward the museum. Stanley tried to explain the magical transformation of his decoder ring, but Jake didn't seem to care. "You just need to get some sleep, that's all. You can rest near the museum. It'll be light in a few hours."

Stanley stared at his ring and rotated the dial. There were symbols of people, animals, and handprints. "I've got it!" the detective suddenly exclaimed. "Petroglyph Point! That's where we need to go. That's where the clues are."

"You just need to get some sleep," Jake repeated, while studying Stanley's earnest face. "Some mysteries are better left unsolved."

"But this is more than just a mystery to me," Stanley pleaded. "We can learn from what happened to the Anasazi. I think it will help future civilizations."

The two drove in silence for a few minutes. Then Jake jerked the truck onto a side road and parked under a pine tree. When the engine was still and only faded moonlight entered the cab, Jake looked over at Stanley. "Grab your flashlight, my friend. This is the trail to the petroglyphs." Stanley smiled and followed this unusual security guard down the dimly lit path.



## Chapter 5: Anasazi Blood

"Those are them," Jake said as he shined his light on the rock face next to the trail. "It's the Anasazi art you're looking for." Jake handed his bright flashlight to Stanley and stepped back into the shadows.

Stanley's jaw dropped again as his beam of light slowly traced over the petroglyphs. Spiraling circles, large creatures, a big-horned sheep, and handprints decorated the rock. A person had carved these over 700 years ago! Stanley tried to picture this Anasazi artist, chiseling away one spring afternoon.

The spiraling circle on the decoder ring corresponded to the letter *e*. The large creature was a decoded *k*. And the big-horned sheep became an *a*. When Stanley turned the dial to decode the handprint, his ring got stuck. Stanley took a deep breath and tried to force the dial with all his might. The mystery was at his fingertips.

"You're probably trying too hard," Jake said.

Stanley stopped forcing the ring and stared at the handprint, his final clue. The hand's four fingers stretched up smoothly to the right. To the left, an unusually large thumb extended out, longer than any fingers. A bead of sweat formed on Stanley's brow, just like it always did when he was about to solve a mystery. Stanley gently pressed the dial, and it spun to the letter *J*.

"I knew it," Stanley said as he slowly turned around. "You have the same long thumb. J – A – K – E. So what kind of security guard are you?"

Jake's face bowed down before the beam from his flashlight. Then his brown eyes looked up as if they wanted to talk. "All right," he finally said. "You are a greater detective than I thought. You are one who cares to know, and I will tell you."

"My blood is Anasazi blood. My thumb is an Anasazi thumb. Many years ago, my people

left this place. They followed the river to the south and the east. They left these cliff dwellings behind and began a new life. Today they are in land that you call New Mexico. My people are the Pueblo people, **descendants** of the Anasazi."

Stanley nodded his head in understanding. "So the Anasazi didn't just disappear into thin air. Some people left to start a new life. And you've come back to watch over your **ancestors'** lands."

"You could say that," Jake said in a way that didn't reveal any more information.

Stanley knew he had to try his final question. "So why did you, or, why did they leave? Were there attackers? Or did the rain not fall?"

Jake looked up at the sky as clouds swept across the moon. "The sun will be rising soon. It's better if we leave, like my people did. There are some mysteries that the sky will never reveal. And sometimes you don't need a logical reason to start a new life."

Stanley handed back Jake's flashlight and followed him along the dark trail. Jake's truck dropped Stanley off at the museum entrance and continued out through the park's exit.

Stanley felt a tap on his shoulder hours later.

"Hey, aren't you part of that fourth grade class from Arizona?" he heard a familiar voice asking.

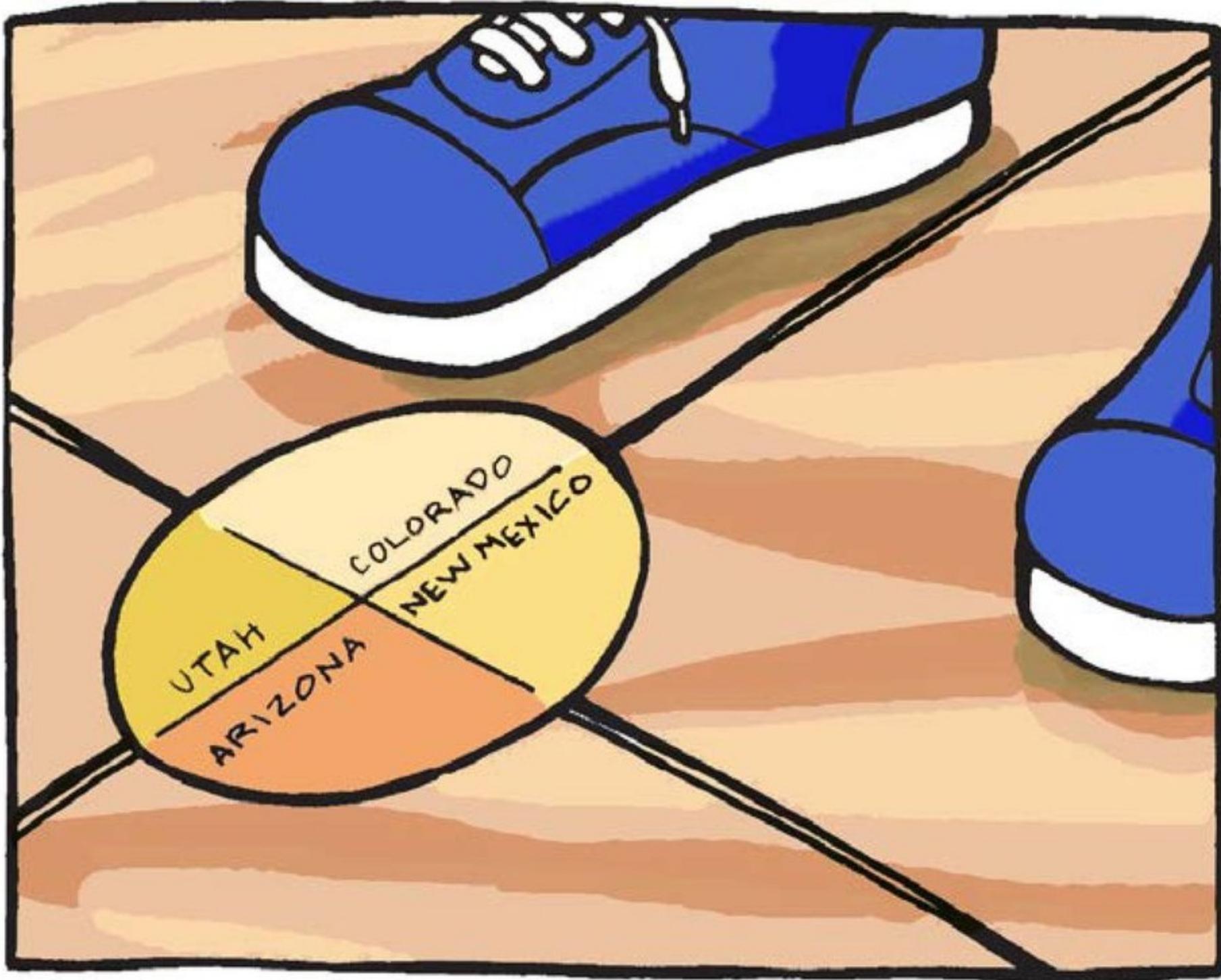
Stanley rubbed his groggy eyes and slid on his thick glasses. "Hey! Ranger John! What are you doing here?"

"The museum opens in one hour. You'd better have a good story for why you slept outside this door last night."

Stanley looked over at the early morning sky. The clouds were gone. "Do you know Jake the Security Guard?" Stanley asked Ranger John.

John furrowed his brow. "No. We don't have any security guards named Jake."





## Chapter 6: The Four Corners

It was mid-morning as Mr. Rhodes's class took pictures at the Four Corners monument. Students hopped across state lines and took pictures while standing in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah all at once.

Ricky laid down over the lines and flapped his arms like a snow angel. Jimmy Evans laughed while he took pictures. When Ricky got up and brushed himself off, he almost fell over again. Due east, straddling the Colorado-New Mexico border, was Stanley DeCapers.

"Stanley! What are you doing here?"

Stanley took Ricky by the arm and walked into New Mexico. “Shhhh! I’m part of your class, remember? So did Mr. Rhodes find out?”

“Nope, he thought you were sleeping both times. How’d you get back?”

“Ranger John gave me a lift.”

“And did you find out what happened to the Anasazi?” Ricky asked with a smile.

Stanley thought about it for a moment and replied, “No, not really. There are some mysteries that the sky will never reveal.” Stanley pointed south, further into New Mexico. “Some of them did move and settle in other areas, like the Pueblo people. So in a way, the Anasazi haven’t vanished. They still live on.”

Back on the bus Mr. Rhodes passed by Stanley’s and Ricky’s seat for the head count. “Good morning, Mr. DeCapers,” Mr. Rhodes said with a smile. “Did you have a nice rest?”

“I’m still a little sleepy. I’ve been catching up on lost time.”

“Well, sleep fast, because later today we’ll be at Meteor Crater. That’s where a huge meteorite hit the Earth 50,000 years ago.”



"Will we get to see the actual meteorite?"  
Stanley asked, looking down at his decoder ring.

"No, not exactly," answered Mr. Rhodes.  
"Nobody has really seen the meteorite itself.  
They believe that it **disintegrated** upon impact."

Stanley smiled when he saw that his decoder ring had turned back to normal. For the rest of the way he looked out the window at the blue sky. On three separate occasions Stanley was sure he had seen falling meteorites. But each time Ricky pointed out that they were only birds.

## Glossary

<b>ancestors</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	family members from long ago (p. 21)
<b>camouflaging</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	disguising to blend in with surroundings (p. 11)
<b>descendants</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the offspring and children of a particular person or group (p. 21)
<b>disapproving</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	not accepting; not in agreement with (p. 5)
<b>disintegrated</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	broke up into very small pieces (p. 25)
<b>drought</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a long period of time with little or no rainfall (p. 4)
<b>kiva</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an underground room used by the Anasazi for ceremonies (p. 8)
<b>mesas</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	flat-topped hills with steep sides (p. 5)
<b>Native Americans</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who lived in the Americas before Europeans arrived (p. 4)
<b>petroglyphs</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	rock carvings (p. 9)
<b>ruins</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the remains of old buildings (p. 7)
<b>sipapu</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a sacred hole connecting to the spirit world (p. 8)
<b>summon</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to call someone to you (p. 12)

### **Note on terminology:**

The National Park Service and many archaeologists today no longer use the term "Anasazi" to refer to the ancient Colorado cliff-dwellers. "Anasazi" translates as "ancestral enemy" in Navajo, and many Southwestern tribes descended from the Anasazi prefer to call their ancestors by their own tribal name and in their own language. The Park Service has settled on the more general term "Ancestral Puebloans."

Many historians retain the term "Anasazi" for the sake of familiarity and specificity, as "Ancestral Puebloan" may refer to any of the Pueblo people's ancestors. For the same reasons, along with the wish to preserve the author's intentions, we at Reading A-Z have also chosen to keep the term "Anasazi" in our Leveled Books. Our sincerest apologies to those who prefer another name; we welcome your feedback.

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Level V Leveled Book

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