

The next morning, before school started, I met up with my best friends, Mateo and Charlotte. We were at our usual table in the courtyard. I showed them the note I'd found.

"Aliens are trying to create an interstellar wormhole they will use to invade the Earth," Charlotte read aloud. "Wow."

"That's hysterical. And spooky," said Mateo.

"I know!" I said. "I can't decide whether it's funny or terrifying. I keep going back and forth."

"Then he says *you must help me stop them*," said Charlotte. "You, being person from the future, I guess. You said you found this in a book?"

"Yes, I have it right here," I said.

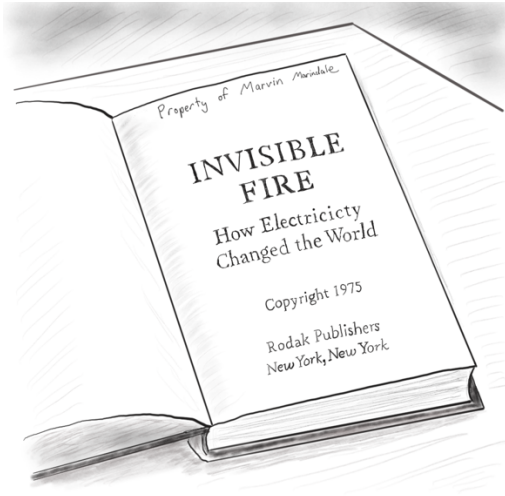
I pulled *Invisible Fire* from my backpack and handed it to her.

"This was my grandpa's book, but he said it used to belong to someone named Marvin Marindale."

"Yes, there's his name right here on the title page," said Charlotte.

She pointed at the top of the title page, to a handwritten note I hadn't seen yet, because I always skip right over the title page.

The note said, *Property of Marvin Marindale*.



I wonder what other secrets were hidden on the title pages of books I've read, secrets I've never seen?

I wonder if there are any secrets hidden on the title page of this book you're reading now.

(go in and insert some kind of killer secret on the title page)

"Marvin Marindale...why do I feel like I've heard that name before?" said Mateo.

"Because it's everywhere in Brimley Forge!" I said. "Grandpa told me he was one of the richest people in town. I looked him up last night and it turns out he funded the science museum, he built Rainier Park, and his foundation still pays for the Atlas Library."

"That's it!" said Mateo. "That's where I've heard the name. There's a metal plaque in the Atlas Library. It's in the lobby. Marvin Marindale."

"You think some rich guy left this note in the book?" said Charlotte. "It has to be a joke, right?"

"Well...here's where it gets spooky," I said. "Grandpa told me that Marvin Marindale was into weird outer space stuff and something he called 'quantum entanglement.'"

“Like in *Ant-man*?” said Mateo.

“I don’t even know,” I said. “I tried reading about quantum entanglement last night and couldn’t make sense of it. But it sounds like the kind of thing you’d be into if you were worried about aliens opening an interstellar wormhole.”

“Let’s just say, for fun, that this guy was serious and left you this note because he wants your help stopping an alien invasion,” said Charlotte. “What does he want you to do about it?”

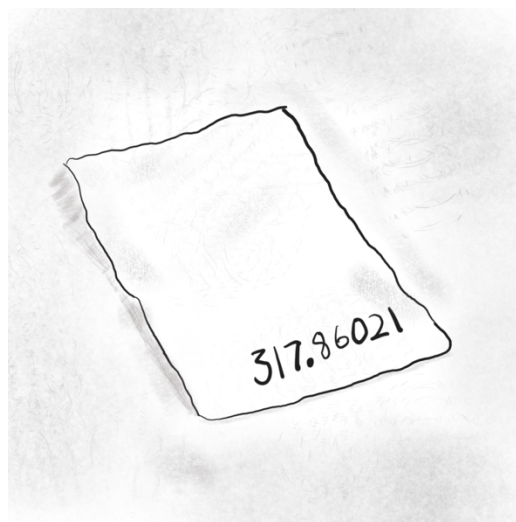
“Turn the note over,” I said.

Charlotte flipped the paper, then, looking confused, held it up for us to see.

“What’s this number?” she said.

And now I must press pause on this scene because I’m realizing I haven’t told you about the number yet, have I?

It was on the back of the note I found in *Invisible Fire*. The front of the note had the weird message about aliens, and the back had this mysterious number written in the same messy handwriting.



At first the number meant nothing to me, and I assumed it was just nonsense, something someone had written down on a piece of scratch paper. For all I knew, the number could have been the answer to some obscure math problem, or some obscure constant from quantum physics, or the Wi-Fi password at a weird old coffee shop that only served soup, or the serial number of Darth Vader's washing machine.

But then I figured out...well, here, I'm about to explain it to Charlotte and Mateo. You'll see.

"Three-hundred-seventeen point eight six oh two one," Charlotte said, reading the number aloud. "I don't get it."

"I didn't get it either," I said. "At first I thought it meant nothing."

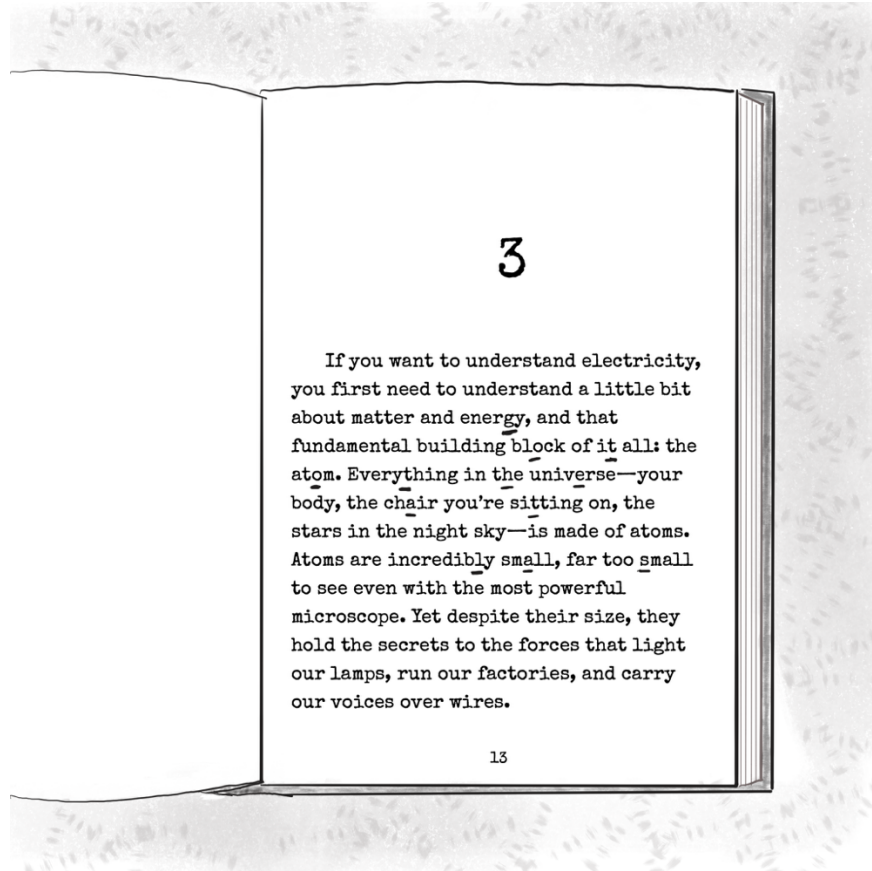
"It's gotta mean something," said Mateo, as if he was some kind of expert on mysterious notes stuffed in old books.

"Yeah, it does," I said. "At least, I think it does."

"But what?" said Charlotte. "It's just a number."

"So I found this note in Chapter 2 of Invisible Fire. Then, last night, before I went to bed, I read Chapter 3."

The book was still sitting open on the table. I flipped to the first page of Chapter 3.



“Look at how some of the letters are underlined,” I said.

“No way!” said Mateo. “Is there a secret message in those underlined letters?”

I nodded as I pulled the Dragon Notebook from my backpack and flipped it open.

“I wrote all the underlined letters down. Look.”



“The Atlas!” said Mateo. “It keeps coming up!”

“What are you supposed to do at the Atlas?” asked Charlotte.

I pointed at the number on the back of the note she was still holding. **317.86021**

A beat of silence passed between us. Then Mateo and Charlotte both gasped, their eyes opening wide at the same time.

“It’s a Dewey Decimal code!” Charlotte said.

I nodded. “That’s what I think too. He hid a message in *Invisible Fire*, so maybe he hid another message in a book at the library.”

“So when are we going to the Atlas to check this out?” said Mateo.

“I can’t go today,” said Charlotte. “I have auditions after school.”

Charlotte was an actress who starred in every school play. This year's play was *A Wrinkle in Time*, which also happened to be one of her favorite books, and she had been rehearsing for the audition since summer.

"But I could go tomorrow," she added.

"I have basketball practice tomorrow," said Mateo.

"I could just see if my mom could take me today and then tell you--"

"No!" Mateo and Charlotte both said at once.

"We want to be there," said Charlotte.

"This is too good," said Mateo. "You can't go without us.

"Friday," said Charlotte. "Can we all go on Friday?"

"I guess we could," I said. "I'm just nervous that--"

"That what?" said Mateo. "That this secret message that's been hidden in the library for years will suddenly up and disappear?"

We all laughed. Because that was exactly what I was nervous about.

But Mateo was right. According to Grandpa, Marvin Marindale had died some 15 years ago.

Whatever might await us at the Atlas Library could wait for a few more days.

(end chapter)

"So we're going after school, right?" said Mateo.

“I already asked my mom this morning,” I said. “She can take us. Just text your parents and ask if you can come with me.”

“What if my dad asks why I’m going to the library?” said Charlotte. “Should I tell him you got a secret note from the past about an alien wormhole? Because I’m kind of creeped out just saying it. You don’t think this could be for real, do you?”

“I think Marvin Marindale was a total eccentric oddball,” I said. “But that doesn’t mean this won’t be fun. I **have** to know what that number leads to. I’ve been thinking about it all morning!”

The bell rang, ending our conversation. As we headed to our first block classes, Charlotte and Mateo pulled out their phones to text their parents. We made a plan to check in with each other at lunch.