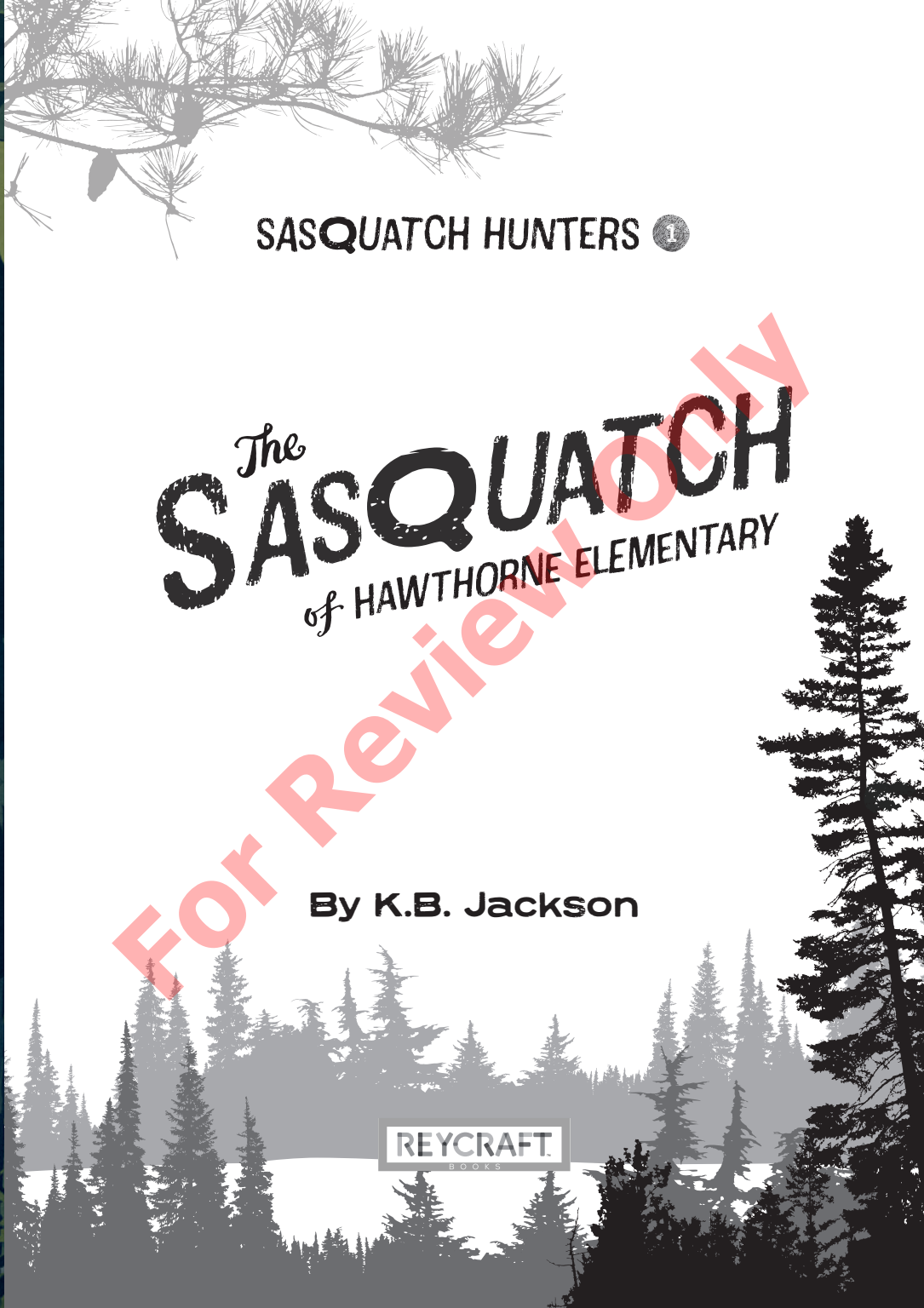
SASQUATCH HUNTERS 1

The SASQUATCH of HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY

For Review Only

By K.B. Jackson



REYCRAFT BOOKS

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Off on the Wrong (Big)Foot

I stood lurking around the tetherball pole when she approached me.

"Hey."

"Hey." I attempted to appear casual by shoving my hands in the front pockets of my jeans. It was difficult to be nonchalant with fidgety fingers.

"Word on the street is you're the one I should see about…" She glanced around and lowered her voice. "Something I saw."

I scanned the playground to see if anyone was within

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earshot. They weren't. Redirecting my gaze back to the girl, I was surprised to see that she looked as nervous as I felt.

I'd had many conversations just like this one, but never with anyone quite so pretty. Her blue eyes sparkled with intrigue but were slanted with concern. Experience had taught me to be cautious in my response. These requests weren't always as they appeared.

"Hello?" Her tone was clipped and impatient. Her mouth, slathered in sticky lip gloss, twisted into a nervous scowl.

"Who told you to come talk to me?" I felt suspicious of her motives but wanted to believe it wasn't a setup.

She scrunched her Tinker Bell nose and narrowed her eyes. "If you're gonna be such a pain, maybe you aren't the one I should be asking for help."

With that, she turned on her heel. TOMS, it said.

"Wait."

She turned just enough to glance over her shoulder.

"Tell me what you think you saw."

Her face grew flushed and her expression went from annoyed to angry in an instant. She came at me quickly until we were standing nose to forehead.

For clarification: her nose, my forehead.

"Listen, you little twerp. I don't *think* I saw something. I *know* I saw something."

Her warm Fruity Pebbles-scented breath blew onto my face. Fruity Pebbles were my favorite. I stepped back, trying not to smile. It was hard to take an angry person seriously when they smelled like sugared berries.

"Okay, tell me what you saw."

She glanced around again. "Not here. Can you meet me at the park across the street after school?"

"Yeah, I'll be at the climbing rock."

She nodded and turned again to walk away.

I called after her. "Wait. What's your name?"

"Jasmine." She flounced her long, wavy strawberry blonde hair over her shoulder and did a half-skip, half-jog back to a group of girls watching an intense game of wall ball.

I observed the game from a distance, as I did most recesses. Michael Blackwell and his right-hand thug Charlie Jones appeared to be retaining their titles as the kings of wall ball against two fifth-grade boys.

Michael's dad was a county sheriff's deputy,

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a fact I'd learned on my first day at Hawthorne Elementary School.

Allow me to back up a moment. My name is Jake Q. Nelson. Don't bother asking what the Q stands for, because I'll never tell. I turned twelve last August, two days before my mom and I relocated from Orlando to Hawthorne, Washington.

Leaving my life in Florida, saying goodbye to my best friend Chase, and moving to the farthest reaches of the United States—aka the Pacific Northwest—was hard enough. Starting the first day of sixth grade with no friends was harder. Getting on the bad side of the most intimidating kid in my grade within two minutes of setting foot off the bus simply sucked. Big time.

I confess, I hadn't been watching where I was going. Michael couldn't have been looking, either, or the collision wouldn't have happened, but he'd never admit it.

I'd felt the bump before I saw him, as I'd been looking at my book, *Tristan Nance Has a Secret* by Alfred Higbee.

I'd read all of Mr. Higbee's other books, my favorite being *Did Jed Wooden Just Locate the Lost City of Atlantis*? However, as amazing as Jed Wooden was,

Tristan Nance was a character I could relate to. He'd experienced some bad luck and some loss, and had to rely on himself to survive. That's how I'd lived my life since arriving in Washington—in survival mode.

In the book, Tristan's world is changed forever when he finds his mother's diary, which reveals his father was the god Apollo. I dreamed of the day when I might meet my father, hoping he wasn't some jerk who'd abandoned my mom and me but someone I'd be proud to call Dad. I had no illusions he'd be a superhero, but someone who'd take me to a baseball game or teach me how to shave was better than nothing.

I was sure he had a good reason for not being in my life. I just didn't know what it was yet.

The only thing I knew about my father? My mom once told me he was "a big man, in more ways than one." I'd found that difficult to believe, considering I was nearly a head shorter than every other kid in my class. I figured maybe she meant he was fat. I didn't have an ounce of fat on me, so I must have inherited all my mother's genes.

Anyway, back to my fateful run-in with Michael Blackwell. I'd been reading the Tristan Nance book when suddenly my face was surrounded by what I later realized was the bulk of Michael's expensive ski jacket.

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He'd made some sort of squawking sound, and then something hit the ground. I didn't even have to unbury my face from his jacket to know what that noise meant. Something had broken, and it sounded expensive.

"Hey!" he'd screamed, pushing me away.

I stared at the shattered remains of a smartphone.

"You broke my phone! I just got it for my birthday!"

"I…I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to. It was an accident." I took a step backward.

"I don't care if it was an accident! You broke my phone, and now you have to buy me a new one."

I didn't have a cell phone and had no idea how much a fancy new one cost, but I did know it was more than I had in my safe. Forty-six dollars and eighty-seven cents, to be exact. I looked around. A crowd had begun to gather. The hairs on my neck raised, and my Spidey-senses told me I was in danger of getting punched in the mouth. His face had turned the color of the icky stewed-tomato casserole my mother makes. Not good—his mood nor the casserole.

"My father works in the county sheriff's office! If you don't pay for me to get a new phone, I'm gonna have him arrest you." He practically jumped up and

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