

INTO THE WOODS . . .

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“Power shot!” Sam Graves shouted as he kicked the soccer ball across the playground.

It was recess. Sam and his best friends, Antonio and Lucy, were passing a ball back and forth.

Antonio stopped the soccer ball with his foot just before it rolled beneath the swing set. He kicked it back to Sam.

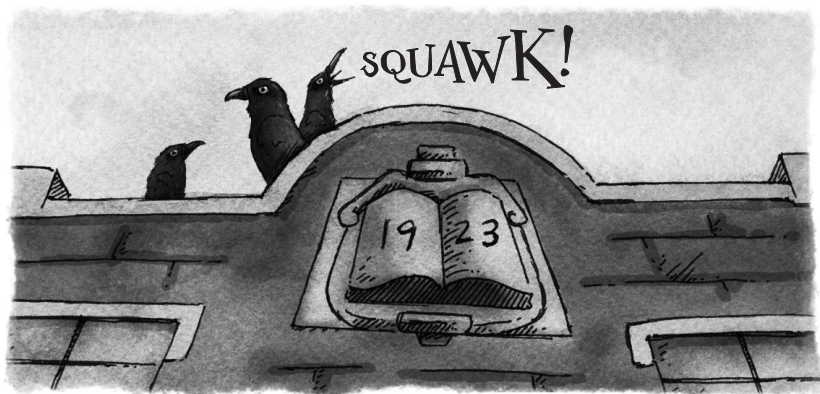
“Pass to me!” Lucy shouted.

Sam kicked the ball to Lucy and then raced ahead. Mr. Nekobi, the old man who took care of Eerie Elementary, was raking leaves nearby. Sam waved at him as he darted past.



It was Mr. Nekobi who chose Sam to be the school’s hall monitor. It was Mr. Nekobi who showed Sam what Eerie Elementary really was: a living, breathing thing that *fed* on students. The school was alive! And Sam Graves, the hall monitor, was now the protector of the school.

Just a month ago the school stage had tried to swallow Lucy and Antonio during the school play! Then, only days later, Sam and Antonio rescued Lucy after she was swallowed by her locker! Lucy and Antonio now knew the terrible truth about Eerie Elementary. And Mr. Nekobi had made them assistant hall monitors — so they could help Sam keep the other students safe.



Sam's thoughts were interrupted by the squawk of a crow. Big, black crows sat on the roof of the school. They usually gave Sam the willies. But not today. Sam ignored the birds and raced forward.

“Sam, incoming!” Lucy called out. The soccer ball soared through the air. Sam caught the ball with his foot and kicked it around the corner of the school.

Eerie Elementary looked like a castle made of crumbling, red bricks. The playground equipment was old and worn.



Sam dribbled the soccer ball around the huge wooden jungle gym. The jungle gym was full of tire swings and rope ladders and poles. It had a climbing net and a bright-red slide, too.

Sam was coming to the edge of the playground, where the soccer goal sat. A rusty fence surrounded the school. It stood just beyond the goal, covered in vines.

