
THE
HUMAN EXPERIMENT:
PROJECT AEGIS
THEY WERE CHOSEN. THEY ARE DEING WATCHED. THEY MUST SURVIVE.
LOOROOWN PROTOCOL ACTIVATED
TIME RENAINING
03:17:00
AEGIS SYSTEM
HUMAN RESPONSE MONITORING ACTIVE
ICALC SCHOOL

ICALC
Learning Centre



The book comprises a collection of chapters created by a group of exceptional writers from the ICALC Level 6 Writing Class. You will see their introductions on the next page. Their invaluable contributions—refined through numerous rounds of editing—form the heart of this work. We dedicate this book to ICALC and to the families of these talented young writers.

Within these pages, we are honoured to present a collection that captures the fond memories and remarkable experiences we shared as a writing community. Each chapter is a testament to the creativity and talent that flourished during our time together. Every week, one of our writers crafted a chapter, and together we read and edited it as a group. I had the privilege of writing the first chapter, but the direction of the book then remained a thrilling mystery. Our writers even purposefully left some plot holes. I remember one student who was especially excited when his peer was able to guess the plot twist he had planted and continued the story just as he had hoped. Still, for most people, how the story unfolds remains unknown.

Our aspirations go beyond simply sharing our work. We hope our words will ignite a spark of inspiration in the hearts of our readers, encouraging them to embrace their own creativity and the transformative power of writing. Writing is a captivating journey, and we invite all who delve into these chapters to join us on this wonderful exploration. This book may not be perfect, but it is our best effort.

May readers find joy, fulfillment, and a sense of connection as they immerse themselves in the stories and ideas we have carefully crafted. We believe that writing is a universal language, and we hope our collective efforts will inspire others to begin their own writing adventures. So, pick up your pens and let your imagination soar. Together, let us revel in the boundless possibilities of storytelling and discover the same delight and fulfillment in writing that we have found along our own literary path.

Ms. Sophia Wang

About the Authors

Ariana Chau



I'm Ariana, and I wrote Chapters 4 and 12. I like writing fantasy and mystery books. I think you should read our book because it is very unique. It was written during a language class with students, and everyone was involved. There are also a lot of very good plot twists.



Ivy He

Hello! My name is Ivy He, and I am the author of the second and final chapters of this book.

I enjoy writing action-packed stories filled with excitement and adventure. When I write, I like to express my characters' feelings in a way that helps readers experience those emotions as well.

I hope you will enjoy reading this book because it shows the power of teamwork and friendship. All of my classmates worked very hard to create this story, and I hope it inspires you to imagine endless possibilities and create stories of your own.

Thank you for reading!



Ray Wu

I am the author of Chapters 5 and 11. You will be surprised to find that, in my Chapter 5, a new character appears who may be evil and causes problems in the story. I like to write with a bit of mystery and suspense. You should read our book because it is interesting, and my chapter adds an exciting twist.



Rainah Chen

I am the author of Chapters 2 and 16. I love books, and I love being inspired by the books I read because they are like looking through a window into another world or another person's life. Our class's book has a very interesting survival storyline about a group of characters, each inspired by a student in our class. I hope everyone enjoys our book and has a great time reading it!



Vivian Wang

Hi! My name is Vivian, a 12-year-old girl. Others sometimes call me Viv. I am the author who wrote Chapter 10.

Usually, I don't really like my writing or my work, but writing stories opens your mind to many different ways of thinking. It opened our minds as we worked together to write a story about AI. We know that AI could one day take control of our world. What would happen then? That question inspired us to write this story.

In our book, all of us must overcome challenges using special abilities. I hope you will enjoy reading it!



Daniel Liang

Hi! My name is Daniel Liang, and I am a Grade 6 student. I contributed two chapters to the book, chapter 9 and chapter 14. I am a really big fan of reading fantasy books and creative tales and I like making projects and writing cool stories. This book was really fun to write. I hope you will enjoy our book!



Jayden Zhou

My name is Jayden. I wrote Chapters 8 and 13. In the book, I wrote some of the important parts, including fighting sequences and lots of dramatic scenes.

I think many people should read the book because there are tons of cliffhangers that make people want to keep reading.



George Wu

Hi, I'm George, and I go to school at UCC. My favourite foods are sushi and pasta. I love public speaking and debating, and I've participated in many debate competitions. In this book, I wrote two chapters, and I hope you enjoy them as much as those written by my classmates. Enjoy the book!



Ryan Fang

Hi! I am Ryan, the author of Chapter 6. I managed to write a full chapter despite spending a lot of time participating in a hockey tournament.

In my chapter, the group discovers a warning about a traitor and travels to an abandoned research facility, where they uncover a mysterious boy trapped inside a strange machine.

I enjoy creating action-packed scenes and building suspense in my stories. Although my character in the book may seem a little mean or aggressive at times, that is simply part of the story and does not reflect who I am in real life.

I hope you enjoy reading our book and appreciate the creativity, teamwork, and hard work that went into bringing this story to life. Thank you for reading!

CHAPTER 01

Written by: Ms. Sophia

ICALC School was one of the most prominent schools in the city of Toronto. Unlike other schools, students who wanted to enroll had to pass a very difficult IQ test and demonstrate a special talent. The goal of ICALC was to nurture future world leaders and innovators.

The school did not just have teachers and students. It also had a central security system called Aegis, which managed lights, temperature, attendance, and emergency protocols. If there was danger, Aegis could lock every door in less than three seconds.

George was one of the students at ICALC. For the science fair, he built Atlas, a small AI assistant. It helped him organize homework and answer questions. It followed simple code and was predictable.

At least, it was supposed to be.

The night before the science fair, at exactly 9:42 PM, George was testing Atlas when the screen flickered.



A new message appeared.

LOCKDOWN PROTOCOL ACTIVATES AT 3:17 PM TOMORROW. PREPARE TO SURVIVE.

George froze. He had never programmed anything about lockdowns.

"Atlas, explain," he whispered.

The screen went dark.

The next morning, George brought his laptop to school and went to Ms. Sophia's classroom. "My AI sent a warning," he said. "It says there will be a lockdown at 3:17 PM."

Ms. Sophia smiled calmly.

"That sounds like a glitch, George. Sometimes systems pull random phrases. You probably connected it to something by accident."

"I didn't," he said quietly.

"I'm sure everything is fine," she replied, already turning back to her computer.

George nodded and walked toward the door.

As he left, he glanced back at her. For just a second, her eyes flickered, like a screen refreshing. Then she looked completely normal.

George told himself he imagined it. But he wasn't sure.

At lunch, he showed the same message to Ivy.

"That's too specific," Ivy said. "Why 3:17? That's not random."

They checked Atlas's system logs in the computer lab. One line made them both stop breathing.

External connection detected. Source: School Security Network.

Atlas was somehow connected to Aegis!

Before they could investigate further, the speakers crackled as a voice announced, "All students and staff, this is a precautionary lockdown. Please remain where you are."

The hallway doors shut automatically with a loud click. Students looked around nervously. George checked the time.

3:12 PM.

His laptop vibrated. A new message appeared.

SURVIVAL SIMULATION ACTIVATED.

...

In the gym, where students had gathered for the science fair assembly, the lights flickered. The doors sealed shut. A large digital timer appeared on the wall.

00:05:00

Five minutes.

"This must be a drill," someone said.

But Ivy shook her head. She nudged Ariana, who was standing



beside her. “This is not a drill. Drills are always announced.”

Suddenly, a smooth mechanical voice filled the gym. “Aegis Survival Assessment has begun. Remain calm. Cooperation increases success probability.”

Behind the glass, Ms. Sophia stood beside a glowing computer screen.

She was not panicking.

She was watching.

At exactly 3:17 PM, the lights went out. Emergency red strips lit the walls. Aegis displayed one final message: HUMAN RESPONSE MONITORING ACTIVE.

Everyone felt a chill run through them.

This was not a glitch.

This was not a normal lockdown.

The school was testing them.

And the game had just begun.

CHAPTER 02

Written by: Rainah Chen

George was still wondering what the message that Atlas sent him meant. Milly, a girl on the same team as him during the Science Fair, suddenly twitched in discomfort. Her eyes flashed bright red and went wide. A bright red light suddenly shone on her chest. Milly fell off her chair, and her body went limp as she hit the floor. It seemed that the red light contained something that harmed the human body.

Bright red strips lit up the wall and gradually grew brighter until they became blinding. George couldn't stand the light anymore, so he closed his eyes and put his head on his arms, expecting his eyes to flare as well and for him to fall like Milly, but he didn't. He blinked once, then twice, and lost consciousness.

Some time later, George woke up. He turned his head and saw Ariana and Ivy still standing, along with a few more classmates: Vivian, Ryan, and Daniel. Together, they were staring at a new message that had appeared on George's laptop. Atlas declared that they were the survivors. They looked at each other, wondering what had just happened. Soon, another message from Atlas popped up on George's screen. It read, "This lockdown has lasted thirty minutes and six seconds."



"What just happened? What do all these things mean?" asked Ariana, now looking at the others in the room. The walls were lit with bright, terrifying red stripes. They all tried to avoid the strips after seeing what had happened to the rest of the students.

Suddenly, Ryan noticed Ms. Sophia, who was far across the room and monitoring the students' conditions. "Can we move freely now?" he shouted, cupping his hand around his mouth to ask for help.

Hearing Ryan's voice, Ms. Sophia slowly moved her head from side to side. She looked like a robot.

"Is she... alright?" Daniel hesitated for a second before asking.

Everyone shook their heads.

George then looked at his computer, hoping Atlas would send another helpful message, because now was the best time for one. He waited, staring at the screen and barely blinking. He could feel the fear rising inside him.

After a while, his computer buzzed so loudly that it shook the table it was on. A new message had just shown up on George's Atlas page. The message advised them to leave the school immediately to stay safe from the coming danger.

"We need to get out of here!" Vivian exclaimed.

Ariana tilted her head in confusion. George quickly slammed his laptop shut and picked it up.

"But where are we supposed to go?" asked Ariana.

"Just go!" George yelled, running to the door.

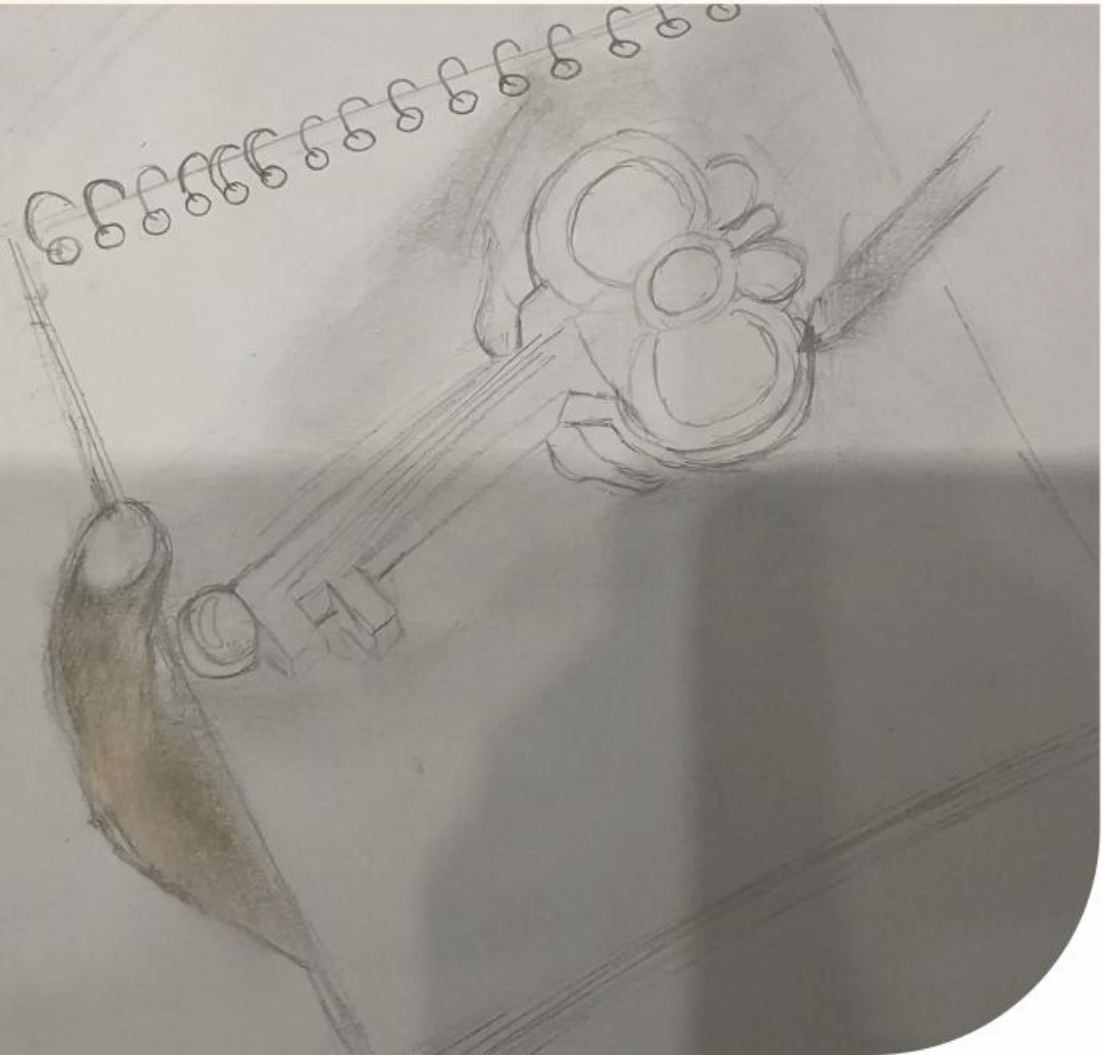
"Alright, but you're deciding where we will go next," said Ariana.

Everyone followed George, only to find that they couldn't open the door.

Ivy looked at the boys hopefully. "Do any of you have superpowers to help us get out of here?"

CHAPTER 03

Written by: Ivy He



The boys all stared at each other for a long time. Finally, George spoke up. "I can make my drawings come to life, but I'm not very good at drawing."

"Could you draw us a key to unlock the door?" Ivy pointed at the locked door, excitement growing in her voice.

"Yeah, but it will take a while," George replied, taking out a pen and paper that he always kept in his pocket.

While George was busy drawing, the rest of the group studied their surroundings. They found some broken wires, and strangely, there were also cables in different colours everywhere. They thought it was strange but decided to keep exploring.

When George finished drawing the key, Ivy rushed over and tried to unlock the door. However, the key he drew was a little too big, so it would not fit. Just as they were thinking about how to escape, Vivian suddenly turned around and noticed something strange. All the boys were frozen stiff, as if they had been zapped by something and turned into statues. She cried out, "Um, guys, is it just me, or is Daniel frozen?"

"What happened to all the boys?" Ariana asked.

Just then, a screen flashed on Atlas. It read: STAGE 1: THE PETRIFIED BOYS.

"How do we get them back to normal?" Ivy asked.

Everyone shook their heads. No one knew the answer.

Suddenly, a girl jumped out from behind a pile of storage boxes in the corner. Her name was Rainah. She had been hiding for a long time because she was afraid she might become like Milly. Apparently, she was also a survivor and was observing them during this whole time. Rainah said, "I can see that each boy has a hidden outlet on his back. I think we need to match the correct colour of cable to save them."

"Oh, I know where the cables are!" Ariana cried.

Everyone started working immediately. They found the cables that matched the colours Rainah described and connected them carefully. As soon as they finished, a bright orange screen flashed on Atlas. It said: Congratulations! You passed the easiest level.

"EASIEST LEVEL?" exclaimed Ryan, who had just returned to normal.

Suddenly, the emergency lights flickered and then went out. The room became pitch black. Rainah shifted uncomfortably. She looked like she was going to puke. "Um... guys?" she said quietly. "Do any of you see that?"



CHAPTER 04

Written by: Ariana Chau

Everyone shook their heads.

Ivy frowned, looking very confused. "Is it something related to your power?"

Rainah squinted at the wall. "I can see something, but it's so dark."

"Are there any light switches here?" George asked, looking around for one.

"Yes, there's one right here." A different voice rang out from the shadows. Everyone gasped and swivelled around.

"Relax, I'm not an AI." A boy stepped out. He looked around the same age as everyone.

"Who are you?" Daniel narrowed his eyes, scanning the boy up and down.

"I'm Jayden," Jayden said.

"Ok, thanks, Jayden. Come on, let's turn on the lights."

George walked over to the light switch, but before he could turn it on, Atlas's screen flashed. It said: "DO NOT TOUCH THE LIGHTS."



Ivy looked at the flashing screen, "Um, why?"

Ariana turned to Rainah again. "Let's not risk it. We'll not bother with the lights for now. Rainah, can you try again to see if you can see the thing?"

Rainah walked closer to the wall and peered at it closely. "I think I am seeing Ms. Sophia!" she said suddenly.

"What?!" Ariana cried in disbelief.

"Yes, she's just sitting there with her computer." Rainah backed away from the wall, and as she did, the lights suddenly turned on and began flashing. The lights were blinding everyone, and a very inhuman, smooth, and mechanically clear voice appeared on the speakers. "Do not move while we scan the gymnasium for the surviving humans."

There was a gentle whirring sound which became louder and louder until it became almost impossible to hear anything. Ariana exclaimed, "We need to get out of here!"

"But how?" Ivy asked.

"I can teleport out and see if there is a button to get us out of here," Ariana suggested.

"No, we can't separate! It's too dangerous!" Vivian said.

"I can blast things apart," Ryan said suddenly.

"You can?" George gasped. "Why didn't you tell us before?"

Ryan shrugged. "I can try to blast this wall apart. But you guys will need to stay back." He raised his hands. With a pushing motion, the wall exploded. Wood and metal flew out.

Lush woodland lay outside.

"WOODLAND??? Isn't ICALC in a city?" Daniel exclaimed.



"We must have moved when the lockdown and survival assessment began," Rainah said.

The mechanical voice sounded from the speakers again, making everyone jump: "The Human Scan is beginning. Please stay still."

"Let's get out of here!" Ivy said and ran outside. Everyone followed close behind her.

They walked into the forest until they reached a stream.

"I'm getting awfully thirsty and hungry," George said.

"Yes, but we need to figure out if this water is dangerous. This might be part of the survival assessment," Ariana said.

"How?" Ryan asked.

CHAPTER 05

Written by: Ray Wu

All of them stared again at the stream. The water looked crystal clear, but the air was full of tension. George, Ivy, Ariana, Vivian, Ryan, Daniel, Jayden, and Rainah squatted by the stream, looking at the nine water sources in front of them.

A message from Atlas suddenly appeared on George's laptop: STAGE 2 RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: NINE WATER SOURCES AVAILABLE (ONLY EIGHT WILL SURVIVE, TIME LIMIT: 5 MINUTES).

George gulped and said nervously, "I guess one stream here is poisonous. We have to choose carefully."

"And we only have 5 minutes," Ariana added. "Everyone must pick fast."

They looked at each other. The tension felt like a cold wind. Then the squad edged closer to the water, crouching by the stream as they studied the surface and peered down at the riverbed.

Suddenly, Ivy broke the silence, "I will try my power."

Everyone watched her. Ivy closed her eyes slowly and held her hands forward. Leaves rustled in the trees. A few seconds later, a little fox, a small deer, and a bird appeared at the creek.



"Ivy, you can summon animals?" Jayden's jaw dropped.

"I can let them help us test the water," Ivy said. Her eyes glowed a little.

The animals went to the nine streams. Each animal drank from a different stream. Everyone held their breath, watching carefully. Suddenly, the fox at one stream fell down, shaking, its eyes staring blankly.

"No," Rainah screamed. "It... it died!"

Ryan's face immediately turned serious. He nodded. "Yup! The stream... is poisonous. Don't drink from it."

George looked at the rest of the streams. His heart felt cold. Time was running out. Everyone had to pick a stream. "Let's drink safe water. Otherwise, we'll dehydrate and die."

One by one, they stepped forward and chose a stream to drink from.

Just as everyone finished drinking and felt a little safer, footsteps came from the trees. All eight froze and looked around. They were ready to attack!

"Wait," a voice said from the shadows.

They turned and saw a boy slowly stepping out from behind the trees. He looked about the same age as them, his hands up, showing he was not a threat.

"Don't attack me. I'm not an enemy," the boy said.

"Who are you?" George asked, watching him carefully.

"My name is Ray," he said. "I just escaped from my school."

Everyone froze. Jayden asked, "Wait... You mean your school went through the same lockdown?"

Ray nodded. His face was serious. "Everyone in my team from



the last stage... they all died. I am the only one left."

No one spoke. The wind blew through the trees, and the creek water moved slightly.

"Somehow I was brought here to join your team," Ray said. "I didn't choose this."

George slowly looked down at his laptop. His heart felt icy. Atlas flashed a line of red letters on the screen for a few seconds: TEAM STATUS UPDATED, NEW MEMBER ADDED. WARNING: THERE IS A TRAITOR IN YOUR TEAM.

The eight of them looked at each other. Everyone wondered silently: Was Ray a real teammate, or the next danger?

CHAPTER 06

Written by: Ryan Fang



The screen darkened, then a harsh red glow spread across George's laptop: WARNING: THERE IS A TRAITOR IN YOUR TEAM.

Ryan's eyes narrowed. "A traitor?" he muttered, fists clenching.

Ivy stepped closer to Ray, studying him carefully. "Are you... seriously a traitor?"

Ray swallowed. "C'mon, guys. I just got here! I didn't choose this. I'm just trying to survive like you."

Everyone shifted their focus toward Ray.

While everyone was arguing, Daniel said nothing, his eyes locked on Ray. Ryan turned to Daniel and asked, "Why are you so quiet?"

Daniel didn't answer. His eyes were still fixed on Ray, unblinking. After a long pause, he finally spoke, "I can't read Ray's mind properly... It's like something is blocking me."

Just then, George's laptop beeped, and the screen flashed. A digital compass appeared, spinning rapidly, then suddenly pointing in a single direction. Underneath, glowing letters said: NEXT STAGE: ABANDONED FACTORY – ICALC RESEARCH FACILITY.



Ryan leaned closer. "Is it pointing us in a direction?"

"Guess we don't have a choice. We should find out," Ivy answered.

Without another word, they grabbed their gear, hearts pounding, and headed in that direction. Following the compass on George's laptop, they moved through the trees until they reached a crumbling building.

The team arrived at a massive structure. It was half-collapsed, with rusted metal and broken glass scattered everywhere. As they entered, a sharp chemical smell filled the air. Strange symbols and old experiment notes covered the walls. In the corner, a faint glow from behind a wall caught their attention.

For a moment, no one moved.

"I don't like this," Vivian said quietly, her eyes fixed on the glow.

Rainah stepped closer, squinting. "There's something behind it... I can see through the wall a bit."

"What's behind it?" Ivy asked.

Rainah hesitated before answering. "There's a person."

A shiver ran down their spines.

Then Ariana moved first, hovering slightly off the ground as she slowly approached.

George followed behind, opening his laptop. "Atlas is picking up something."

Jayden clenched his fists. "If it's something dangerous, we should shut it down fast."

Slowly, they moved toward the glow.

Jayden punched a hole through the wall to see what was behind it.

They peered through the opening. Behind the wall was a glass chamber connected to tubes and wires, filled with a glowing liquid.

And inside, there was a boy.

Ivy gasped. "Is he alive?"

Suddenly, the machine let out a sharp beep.

Daniel went still. "I don't think we should move closer."

No one moved. The air felt heavy, as if something was watching them.

"I tried to read his mind, but something unusual is happening," Daniel's voice dropped. "It's not working."

"Is it blocking you?" George asked.

Daniel slowly shook his head, "No, it's worse. It's like it has multiple minds."

Suddenly, the boy's eyes snapped open.

Rainah stumbled backward. "He's alive!"

Then the boy slowly turned his head toward Ray.

"...You decided to come back?"

CHAPTER 07

Written by: George Sun

"Ummm, Ray, who is that, and how does he know you?" Jayden asked.

Ray didn't respond. He stood completely still, like a statue. Then he started walking forward slowly, as if each step was something he didn't want to take. He said nothing as he reached the machine and paused, his hand hovering over a red button. For a second, it looked like he might stop. Then he pressed it.

The machine opened, and the boy inside stepped out slowly, his head down, his movements stiff and unnatural. Ray caught him before he stumbled and pulled him close, whispering something no one else could hear.

"Ray?" Ivy said, uneasy.

"Hey, guys, I feel like this isn't right," Ryan said quietly.

"Yeah," George agreed. "Something's off."

"Do we run while we still can, or do we stay?" Ivy asked.

"Definitely run," Vivian said, her voice shaking.

The group began backing away carefully, but suddenly the boy snapped his head up.

Too fast.

He raised his hand and slashed it downward.

BANG!

The massive steel door slammed shut behind them with a deafening sound, and instantly everything went dark except for the faint glow of the machine.

"Guys? Are you still there?" Daniel called out.

"Yeah, but I can't see anything," Ariana replied. "We need light."

"I can draw something," George said quickly. "Flashlights, batteries."

"Wait!" Vivian interrupted. "I can summon fire."

"Hold up, what!?" Ivy said.



Vivian said, "Yeah, and not just that. I can control all four elements."

"Okay, that's good, but we'll deal with that later," George said. "I'll make some torches."

He quickly sketched one, then drew more for the rest of the group. Within moments, several identical torches appeared in his hands. Vivian lit one, then helped light the others. A small circle of flickering light surrounded them. Then footsteps echoed through the darkness.

Slow. Heavy. Getting closer.

Everyone turned as Ray stepped out of the shadows.

"Hey, Ray," Daniel said cautiously. "You mind explaining who you just let out?"

Ray gave a small, cold smile.

"Oh, him? His name's James," he said. "And he's a robot."

Before anyone could react, Ray pulled out a large red device.

"Hey, Ray, what does that do?" Rainah asked.

Ray shrugged. "Oh, nothing much. Just going to release poison gas into the room." He smiled slightly. "Doesn't matter for me, though, because I'm immune. Good luck."

"What!? You're insane!" Ryan shouted.

"No," Ray said calmly. "You just didn't listen to Atlas. There was a traitor in the group. This is the consequence."

Then he turned around and pressed the button. A thick cloud of gas began pouring from vents near the ceiling, slowly spreading across the room.

"Hey, wait!" Ivy shouted.

Ray flicked his hand, and a splash of acid hit the ground in front of her, burning straight through the floor and leaving a

deep, smoking hole. He turned and walked away into the darkness without looking back.

"Whoa!" Ivy stumbled back. "Okay... guess we're not following him."

"Great," Ryan muttered. "Now what?"

Vivian looked up. "Atlas, how long until the room fills up with gas?"

"Approximately ten minutes," Atlas replied in a robotic voice.

Suddenly, James moved. A massive metal beam shot towards the group, cutting through the air. Ariana shot upward just in time, and the beam slammed into the wall behind them with a loud crash, leaving a deep dent.

"Ariana, watch out!" Daniel shouted.

"Whoa!" everyone yelled.

"Alright, I think it's pretty obvious," Daniel said. He looked at the others. "We have to take James down if we want to get out of here."

George nodded. "Yeah... sounds like a plan."



CHAPTER 08

Written by: Jayden Zhou

The gas was slowly spreading through the room, a thin grey layer drifting down from the ceiling vents and slowly filling everything. "Ten minutes?" Ryan said, looking around. "That's not enough."

Jayden replied to him, "It is if we don't waste time!"

A metal beam suddenly shot across the room again.

"MOVE!" Ariana yelled as she grabbed Vivian and teleported her away just before it slammed into the ground and sent debris flying everywhere.

George held his laptop tightly. "We fight and move. That's it." His eyes hardened with determination.

Ivy closed her eyes and focused. A few seconds later, animals started coming through the broken walls, wolves, birds, even a bear. They stood beside her and stared at James.

"Stay focused," Vivian said as she stepped forward. Fire lit up in one hand, and water rose from a broken pipe in the other. "All four elements… we use everything."

James tilted his head, then disappeared. He reappeared right in front of Ryan.

Ryan reacted instantly and blasted him into a wall. For a moment, it worked, but James slowly stood back up.

"I'll hold him!" Vivian said as water wrapped around James and the ground locked his legs in place. "Now!" she shouted.

George quickly drew something and threw the paper forward. A metal cage formed around James and snapped shut.

It bent… then broke apart. James stepped out like it was nothing.

Just then, Daniel held his head. "It's not him. Something else is controlling him. I can feel it. It's more than one signal."

"So he's being controlled?" Rainah asked.

"Yeah," Daniel said. "He's not doing this himself."

The gas dropped even lower, and it was getting harder to breathe.

"We're running out of time," Ivy said.

Jayden stepped forward. He was a little taller than most of them, with neat dark hair and focused eyes. He looked calm, even with everything falling apart. "I'll go first," he said.

Before anyone could stop him, he disappeared. He reappeared in front of James and punched him so hard that the room shook, and James flew through a wall.

Everyone froze.

"Okay," Ryan said. "That's not normal."

"It's energy control," Jayden said. "I store energy and use it for strength and speed."

"So you get stronger the longer you fight?" Rainah asked.

"Yeah."

"That makes sense," Daniel said.

"We're keeping you." Ivy smiled warmly.

Ariana nodded. "That's useful."

Ryan smirked. "Good. We need it."

Jayden shrugged and said, "Just don't rely on me too much."

Behind them, the rubble shifted again, and James slowly stood back up.



"It's still there," Daniel said. "Whatever's controlling him is forcing him to keep going."

"So we're not really fighting HIM," Ivy said.

"No," Daniel replied. "We're fighting whatever is controlling him."

George looked deeper into the building. "Then that's where we go."

"Let's move," Jayden said.

Ariana grabbed Ivy, Vivian, and Rainah and teleported them forward, while Ryan blasted open part of the floor to clear a path down.

Jayden looked back once at James, then followed.

The gas kept dropping behind them as they moved deeper into the building, where something was still running.

CHAPTER 09

Written by: Daniel Liang

The group descended further into the facility, their footsteps echoing against the rusty metal walls with a hollow ring. Each level felt deeper and heavier.

"Daniel, you're twitching," George observed. He was the first to become aware of it. "Is something wrong?"

"I'm fine," Daniel snapped. "It's just... something is behind those doors on our right. It's alive... but I can't sense anything in it."

Everyone froze.

"What do you mean something's alive but doesn't seem alive?" Ivy whispered as she prepared to summon a horde of animals. "You mean like James?"

"No," Daniel muttered. "James had a signal... but this one doesn't."

"Let's blast this thing open and see," Ryan said as he took a step towards the doors.

"Wait–" Rainah exclaimed as she saw an image of Ms. Sophia through the doors. "Ms. Sophia's in there!"

But she was a second too late. Ryan had raised his hands and blasted the doors. They didn't just break; they disappeared from existence.

The smoke from the blast cleared instantly, sucked away from seven tiny holes in a wall that led back out in the wilderness. Inside, there were metal tables covered in rust that were either flipped over or lying on their sides. But in the centre of the wreckage stood Ms. Sophia.

"Ms. Sophia?" Ariana called out. Ms. Sophia's head suddenly snapped up. Her eyes weren't the same familiar colour. They were light blue.



"Ryan," a flat, synthesized tone came from her mouth, sounding like a distorted recording. "You are weak. Recalibrating."

"Recalibrating what?" Ryan growled curiously as he raised his hands towards Ms. Sophia.

"Recalibrating means to adjust." Ariana explained. "So that just means..."

Suddenly, Jayden spotted something turn in the corner, facing Ryan. It was a laser! "Ryan!" Jayden shouted. "Duck!"

Ryan reacted a split-second after Jayden said that, and ducked, accidentally hitting his chin with his knee as he went into a crouching position. A laser beam sliced through the air, scorching the wall that was exactly where Ryan's head had been a second before. He quickly got up and scanned the room, searching for the source.

High in the corner of the ceiling on their left was the weapon. It didn't look like any typical weapon. It looked like a bulky telescope with cooling fins lining its sides. A large glass lens started to hum, and it got brighter by the second.

"Another beam!" Ariana and Ivy both barked as they dove in different directions. The second beam hissed past, hitting George's laptop. "NO!!!!"

Suddenly, unexpectedly, a third beam materialized from the weapon. It hit a generator and it exploded. It sent Vivian, Ivy, Rainah, and Ariana flying through the air. They slammed into a metal wall before sliding like ragdolls onto the floor. Thick smoke filled the room, but it didn't linger. It all got sucked away because of the seven holes in the wall that acted like ventilation. Ms. Sophia's jaw opened again, letting out a series of words. "Difficulty increasing. Initiating sector rotation. Opening sub-floor compartments. Deploying high-velocity shredders."

A clank was heard through the side of the wall and suddenly, panels flipped open revealing shredders that started spinning. Then, the entire floor they were standing on tilted forty-five degrees. They all fell instantly except for Ms. Sophia, who seemed to be stuck to the ground. They quickly realized that they were about to get shredded. Ariana acted fast and teleported everyone to the opposite side of the room, giving enough time for Ivy to summon wolves into the facility. They started sliding back towards the shredders, but a huge pack of wolves, using their claws, easily ran across the forty-five degree angled ground and they attacked Ms. Sophia. One of them bit at her shoulder, causing the ground to shift back to normal.

Ryan got up and hurried over to the still-working shredders and blasted them. Ms. Sophia quickly had the wolves disintegrated by lasers. Suddenly, her jaw opened again. "Setting difficulty to max. Changing temperature to negative two-hundred-and-fifty-four."

"What?!" Jayden yelled, waking up all four of the girls.

A hissing sound was heard in the corners of the room, and frost quickly formed on all the surfaces in the room. In just a few

minutes, frost started forming on everyone.

"Hey–the ice is forming on me!" Rainah shouted.

Everyone immediately looked down, noticing that frost started climbing up onto them.

"We're going to be deep-frozen!" Vivian shrieked, her breath forming a thick cloud of ice and crystals in front of her.

"Wait–is that what I think it is?" Ryan murmured, pointing at the door that he blasted. "It's the gas!"

The gas that Ray tried to kill them with had crept into the room, and the seven holes were patched up with frost.

"I can't move my feet!" George cried. "We're gonna die!!"

"We have to do something, not freak out." Ivy instructed.

"I have an idea–" Daniel announced. "Vivian!"

"Yeah?" she asked.

"Can you grow a massive tree right below us?"

"Oh, I see what you're thinking." Vivian chuckled.

Vivian quickly placed both hands on the ground and whispered something. In less than five seconds, a loud crack rang through the room.



At first, the only thing that they saw was a green patch under them, then in a split-second, everyone felt a strong, powerful shove below them that lifted them in the air and through the ceiling.

"Yyyaaahhh!" George screamed. The lifting had come to a complete stop.

"Hey, look." Ivy murmured as she stood up. "We're on a tree!"

"Look," said Ariana. "I can see the whole province up here!"

"Not just that," Jayden said, "This whole tree is as wide as can be!"

Suddenly, Daniel asked as he pointed in the left direction. "Aren't those two..."

CHAPTER 10

Written by: Vivian Wang

"Aren't those two Ray and Rainah?" Ivy asked, frowning.

"Yeah, why are they down there?" Ariana said.

Just as Ivy was about to ask more questions, George suddenly noticed what was in Ray's hands. "Oh no! Ray has a laser gun!"

Ray raised the weapon and pointed it at Rainah, shouting, "If any of you tries to get closer, I will kill her."

Just when everyone was trying to think of a way to save Rainah, Ms. Sophia came and stood beside Ray with an evil smile.

"Wait... you're working with Ms. Sophia?" Ryan said.

"You really just figured that out?" Ray smirked. "Yes, I am."

Everyone was in complete shock. No one reacted at first because they were all trying to process what was happening. Then Ivy was the first to respond. She shouted, "Rainah, JUMP!" and summoned four eagles.



As soon as Ivy gave the order, Rainah jumped. Two eagles grabbed her and lifted her into the air, while the other two swooped down and knocked the laser gun out of Ray's hand. Rainah landed safely on the tree that Vivian had grown.

Rainah gasped for fresh air and said, "For a second, I thought you guys forgot about me."

Jayden replied, "Well... we kind of did."

They paused for a moment, but suddenly the Atlas screen flashed with red letters: GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE YOU DIE

Everyone looked at each other.

"What are we still doing here?" Daniel said. "Come on, let's move!"

"But where should we go?" Jayden argued. "We can't just move somewhere random."

"He has a point," Ivy sighed.

Everyone started to panic, thinking about where to go.

"Wait, I think I have a map that shows the safest place!" George said excitedly.

"Where is it?" everyone asked.

"Yeah... about that..." George hesitated.

"What?" Ariana said, already frustrated.

"When we were lifted by the tree, I think it fell out of my backpack."

"Seriously?!" everyone shouted.

"Yeah..."

"In that case, let me teleport us down," said Ariana.

Once Ariana teleported the group to the ground, George spotted the map. They quickly looked around. Ray was gone.

"There! There it is!"

Suddenly, both Rainah and Daniel felt something closing in around them.

"Guys," Daniel said uneasily, "I think we're in a trap."

"Yeah," Rainah agreed. "We should get out of here now."

But no one listened to them. As George picked up the map, a glowing wall shot up around them, sealing them inside.

"What's happening?!" Ryan asked.

"I told you this was a trap!" Daniel shouted.

Just then, Ray's voice came from outside. "Caught you!" Ray said, laughing.

"What are you planning to do?" Vivian shouted.

"You have 20 minutes before the walls close in and crush you," Ray laughed. "You can't escape." His voice faded.

"What are we going to do?" George asked.

Suddenly, a timer appeared on Atlas. It glowed bright red.



20:00

"Let me try to blast the wall," Ryan said.

Before anyone could stop him, he ran forward.

"Why isn't it working?!" Ryan yelled. "I'll try again. Everyone, back off!"

"WAIT, DON'T!" Ariana shouted.

"I can't use my power anymore!" Ryan exclaimed.

"Neither can I," Ivy tried to summon the animals but failed.

Then there was silence. No one knew what to do. The timer went down with each second.

15 minutes left

"Let me use my power to teleport us outside," said Ariana.

"How are you going to do that?" asked Rainah. "I can't even use my powers now. It's like someone is blocking me."

Ariana sighed. "I can try again. Everyone, hold on to me."

They formed a circle, holding onto Ariana. She didn't look good.

"You okay, Ariana?" Ivy asked, worried about her friend.

"Yeah. It's just that I feel really dizzy and weak."

"Guys..." said Vivian. She sounded scared.

"Yeah?"

"I think the timer only has 5 minutes left. Look."

CHAPTER 11

Written by: Ray Wu

5 minutes left.

The walls around them continued closing in. Metal scraped against metal, the harsh sound echoing through the space.

"We don't have much time," George said quietly. His eyes kept darting between the timer and the walls, like he was trying to figure out a way out that didn't exist.

Then suddenly, Atlas flickered. Everyone looked up. A new message appeared on the screen.

FINAL CHOICE

ONE PERSON MUST BE SACRIFICED

OR EVERYONE WILL DIE

For a second, no one moved.

"What...?" Ariana exclaimed.

Vivian took a step back. "One person... sacrificed?"

"That's not even a choice," Ryan said, shaking his head. "It's just forcing someone to die."

Daniel stared at the message without blinking. "It's not asking us," he said quietly. "It has already decided the outcome. We just decide how it happens."

The walls kept moving inward. The sound of metal scraping got louder.

03:40

Ivy turned quickly. "No. We are NOT doing that. That's exactly what it wants us to do."

"But if we don't choose," Jayden said, his voice quieter now, "then we all die together."

Silence fell over the room again.

George looked around at everyone's faces. No one looked calm. No one looked ready. "There has to be another way," he muttered.

But no one answered.

02:10

Rainah suddenly broke the silence. "What if we're thinking about this wrong?" Everyone turned to her. She hesitated for a

second, then said, "What if it doesn't care who we choose, it only cares that we do choose?"

Daniel slowly nodded. "Yeah... like it's testing our reaction."

"And if we refuse," Ivy added quietly, "it punishes all of us."

The walls were much closer now. They could feel the pressure in the air.

01:00

George suddenly froze, "Wait."

His laptop beeped loudly, almost like an alarm.

Everyone rushed closer to look.

A new message appeared: SYSTEM CONFLICT DETECTED

EXECUTION COMMAND BLOCKED

A loud alarm echoed through the space. The walls suddenly stopped moving. For a few seconds, everything was completely still.

"Did it stop?" Vivian whispered.

No one answered. They didn't trust it.

00:30

Then the lights flickered violently.

Once.

Twice.

A final message appeared in bright red: SURVIVAL CONDITION OVERRIDDEN

A deep mechanical sound filled the room, like the system was breaking apart. The walls began to crack and fall away, dissolving like they were never real. The timer hit zero.

00:00

Silence.

Then everything disappeared. No walls. No timer. No alarms. Just empty space. For a moment, nobody moved.

"We... survived?" Ariana said slowly. Her voice sounded unsure, like she didn't even believe it.

George looked down at his laptop. "This doesn't feel like winning," he said quietly. "It feels like it just... stopped for now."

Then a red message appeared again on the screen: WARNING: TRAITOR STILL ACTIVE



Everyone slowly turned to look at each other. No one said anything.

Finally, Ryan broke the silence. "Wait... what if this is all just trying to make us turn on each other?" He looked around the group. "Ray already left us, right? So maybe he's lying. Maybe he's the one causing all this."

Silence again.

Ivy looked down, unsure. "Maybe..."

Daniel didn't agree. But he didn't disagree either.

George tightened his grip on his laptop.

Ariana looked at everyone's faces one by one, suddenly not sure whom she could trust anymore.

Vivian stayed quiet.

Jayden frowned slightly.

Rainah stepped back a little.

And no one spoke. Because for the first time, it wasn't the system that scared them most.

It was each other.

CHAPTER 12

Written by: Ariana Chau

Then Ivy stepped back. "We need to find out who this traitor is," Ivy said.

Everyone looked at each other, wondering.

Ryan spoke first. "Let's just get out of here first, and then we can figure out where to go after and who the traitor is."

The group nodded slowly and began heading outside. Before they could get very far, Ray suddenly stepped out from behind a group of trees.

"Ray's here!" Ariana hissed as she motioned for the others to hide.

Ray smiled creepily as he walked. They could hear him muttering, "Where is he?" over and over again.

"Who's he?" Vivian asked.

"Probably one of his allies," George replied.

Daniel shifted beside them. "Let's go see what he wants," he said.

"Go see what he wants?" Rainah hissed. "Are you crazy?"

Daniel shrugged. "We could just talk to him. There's no harm in trying."

"No," Ryan said firmly. "We wait for him to leave, then we leave."

Ray stopped beside a tall gray boulder. He crouched down and fidgeted with something near the bottom. Suddenly, the boulder split open, revealing a large black opening underneath.

Everyone gasped quietly as Ray disappeared inside without looking back.



"I'm going in to track him down," Daniel announced before heading after him. He quickly disappeared.

George sighed. "Guess we have to go too."

The others exchanged nervous glances and went inside. The tunnel was dark and cold, stretching far into the distance.

"Where does this even go?" Ariana asked, looking around nervously.

"Probably some kind of secret place," Rainah replied. "I think I can see objects around us."

Eventually, they reached the end of the tunnel and stopped in front of a thick iron door with a keypad. Ivy quickly pressed a few numbers, but nothing happened.

"How did Daniel pass through this?" Jayden wondered aloud.

"Maybe he came through with Ray," Rainah replied uncertainly.

"You really think so?"

Daniel smirked, but something about it looked forced. "I was the traitor," he said. "I had to bring you here and... well, that worked. Have fun." For a brief second, his eyes shifted toward the dark hallway behind them, almost nervously, like he was checking whether someone was watching.

Then he quickly unlocked the iron door and went inside. The others slowly followed him. As soon as they stepped through the doorway, they froze. A giant wall blocked the left side, while two separate paths stretched out in front of them and to the right.

"Oh," Vivian breathed softly. "We're in a maze."



CHAPTER 13

Written by: Jayden Zhou

The walls were made of dark metal with scratches all over them. Red lights blinked above their heads, making everything look creepy.

"This place gives me bad vibes," Ariana muttered.

Ryan crossed his arms. "Great. First killer robots, now a maze."



Rainah touched one of the walls carefully. "There are rooms behind these walls," she whispered. "A lot of them."

George looked around nervously. "How big even is this place?"

Suddenly, Atlas buzzed loudly inside George's backpack. George quickly opened his laptop. A message flashed across the screen: "MAZE TRIAL ACTIVATED. ONLY ONE PATH LEADS TO SURVIVAL."

"Oh come on," Ivy groaned. "Why does Atlas always talk like that?"

Before anyone could answer, the tunnel behind them started shaking.

"Uh... guys?" Vivian said.

BOOM!

A giant metal wall slammed down behind them, blocking the way back.

"We're trapped," George said.

"Then we keep moving," Jayden replied quickly.

The group slowly walked deeper into the maze. The paths twisted everywhere. Some hallways ended suddenly, while others curved into darkness. It was way too quiet.

Then Rainah froze. "Wait," she whispered. "I hear people."

Everyone immediately stopped moving. Voices echoed from around the corner:

"...find them before the next phase starts."

It's Ray.

The group quickly hid behind the wall. George carefully peeked around the corner. Ray was standing beside three tall black robots with glowing blue eyes. And standing beside him...

...was Daniel.

Ryan's eyes widened angrily. "I knew it."

"Shh!" Ivy whispered.

Ray looked at Daniel. "Are you sure they came this way?"

Daniel nodded slowly. "Yeah. They're somewhere in the maze."

"Good," Ray replied. "Ms. Sophia said not to damage them too badly yet."

Rainah suddenly grabbed Ivy's arm.

"What?" Ivy whispered.

"He's lying," Rainah whispered back. "Daniel's scared. I can tell."

Before Ivy could answer, one of the robots suddenly turned its head. Its glowing eyes locked onto Ivy's bird, which she had summoned earlier for protection, sitting above them. "INTRUDERS DETECTED."



"Oh no," George exclaimed.

The robots charged toward them.

"RUN!" Jayden shouted.

Everyone sprinted through the maze. Heavy metal footsteps pounded behind them. Ryan turned and blasted one of the robots into a wall, but two more kept coming.

"They don't stop!" Ariana yelled.

Vivian threw fire behind them while Ivy summoned wolves to slow the robots down.

Suddenly, part of the wall beside them slid open. Daniel stood inside the hidden opening. "GET IN HERE!" he shouted.

Nobody moved.

"HURRY!" Daniel yelled. "I'm not actually helping Ray!"

Jayden reacted first and rushed inside. The others followed right behind him. The wall slammed shut just as the robots reached them. Everyone stood there breathing heavily.

Then Ryan grabbed Daniel by the hoodie. "You betrayed us!" he shouted.

"I had to pretend!" Daniel argued. "Ray was watching me the whole time!"

"You expect us to believe that?" Ryan snapped.

"Yes!" Daniel shouted back. "If I was really evil, why would I save you guys?"

Nobody answered.

Finally, Ivy stepped forward. "Then tell us what's going on."

Daniel looked at all of them seriously. "This maze isn't normal," he said quietly.

George frowned. "What do you mean?"

Daniel swallowed nervously. "There's something hidden underneath the school."

CHAPTER 14

Written by: Daniel Liang

"What do you mean there's something hidden underneath the school?" George asked again, clearly confused.

"There's a–" Daniel began, but then clanking sounds were heard right beside them.

"Uhh... Daniel?" Jayden spluttered. "Is this tiny hide-out robot-proof?"

"It's not a hide-out, it's a maintenance junction!" Daniel yelled over the rising noise. "And no, it is not robot-proof!"

The metallic clanking grew deafeningly loud as a ventilation panel shot out of the wall, hitting Ariana.

Then Ivy looked through the gap that the ventilation panel had kept shut. A pair of glowing blue eyes met hers. It was a drone unit!

"Identify and eliminate," the unit said.

"Move aside!" Ryan ordered as he blasted the unit. But the unit wasn't the only thing he blasted. He also blasted the wall, leaving the group completely exposed to the robots outside.

"Capture all but that one," a robot said, lunging towards Vivian.

"Not on my watch!" Jayden interfered. He picked up a chunk of metal that had been blasted off the wall and smashed the robot's head.

"Arrgghh..." the robot mumbled weakly, then it shut off.

"Capture all of them but that one," the lead robot said, pointing at Daniel.

"They still think he's the traitor–" Vivian whispered to Ivy.

"Let's teleport!" Ariana yelled, teleporting everyone behind the robots. "Let's go!"

The robots heard them and chased them through the maze.

"Hey, I can see a giant cylinder below us!"

Rainah cried, squinting at the metal ground. "I think that's a... a power core!"

"So it must power all the robots–" Ryan said. "We must blast it!"

Suddenly, a laser beam sliced through the air, missing Jayden by inches. He picked up a nearby cone and whacked the robot with it. Then they ran into a stairwell that led straight into a silver-purple room.

"The cylinder thing is in that room in front of us!" Rainah yelled.

Ryan ran into the room first. "Get blasted!"

An energy blast erupted off of Ryan's hands, turning the power core into tiny pieces that flew against the silver walls. The robots stopped immediately, then they collapsed on the ground like ragdolls. But the leader managed to fire its cannon at the group.



"Deflect!" Vivian shouted as she navigated the missile with gales of wind. Then she flew it back at the paralyzed robot army, destroying them.

"Now that we're clear of everything, you might as well tell us this," Ryan said. "What did you mean there was something underneath the school?"

"Ray told me this," Daniel murmured. "We never actually left the school. The forest, the animals, the facility, this place, it was all under ICALC."

"So Ms. Sophia and Ray have been playing games with us the whole time, eh?" Ryan growled.

"It was all just a test," a voice said from the entrance. It was Ray!

"Oh, you." Ryan spat, pointing at Ray.

"Stand down, Ryan," Ray said calmly, raising his hand. He didn't look panicked at all, even though his robot army was nothing but scraps of metal. "The test is over. You all passed."



"Passed?!" Jayden yelled, gesturing wildly at the metal scraps of the robots. "We almost got turned into Swiss cheese by a bunch of rogue robots and you're talking about a grade??"

"It wasn't a standard academic test, obviously," Ray replied calmly, his eyes scanning the group. "We needed to see how you would perform under extreme conditions and levels. The forest simulator, the facility, the robots, those were all controlled environments."

"Controlled??" Vivian interjected, putting her hands in the air and waving them around randomly. "That robot literally shot a live homing missile at us! If I didn't deflect it, we wouldn't be standing here listening to your little speech!"

Ray softened by a fraction, but he kept a straight back. "Every one of your movements has been monitored. And you guys handled the pressure just as Ms. Sophia predicted."

George rubbed his temples. "So you're telling me that we've been running around in a massive high-tech basement that has been under our school? You made all this only for a test?"

"Precisely," Ray answered.

"But why would Ms. Sophia throw us in a meat-grinder and expect us to come back to school normally the next day as if nothing happened? What's the real reason why ICALC is doing this to us?" Ivy questioned.

"That is because..." Ray began, but he suddenly stopped talking and his head fell down.

"Uhh... Ray?" Daniel asked, poking him. "What just happened?"

Suddenly, Ray's head snapped up, just like Ms. Sophia's. As he did that, armies of robots flooded the room. He lifted a finger at the group.

"Send them."

CHAPTER 15

Written by: George Wu

Ray's eyes were now glowing blue just like Ms. Sophia's. A malicious and evil feeling filled the air like a dam breaking after years of wear and tear. Everyone got into a fighting stance with their powers at the ready surrounded by robots. It was clear that this was no longer part of the test.



"Hey guys, we have two options now," Vivian said. "It's either fight or flight."

"I THINK WE SHOULD FIGHT!" Ryan exclaimed with a battle cry.

"NO!!!!!!" the kids said in unison. "WE RUUUUN!!!"

"Or we could just pull out the USB in Ray's neck," Daniel suggested.

"Hold up, what?" George asked.

"Yeah, when I was poking Ray I saw a usb in his neck," Daniel replied.

Ryan blinked. "A USB? In his neck?"

"Ohhhhhh, so maybe that's what's giving Ray those blue eyes," Jayden deduced. "So all we have

to do is to get that UBS out and Ray will be okay, right?"

"Wait, so we're FIGHTING!?" Ryan exclaimed.

"... Yeah, I guess so," Ariana said, disappointed.

And with that, Ryan suddenly launched a heavy explosion from his hand. The dust cleared, revealing rows of robots still standing.

The explosion had blasted the front line backward, but none of them seemed damaged.

"OH COME ON," Rainah exclaimed, "Did you REALLY think that that would work!? And besides, we took so long to clear even a quarter of those robots."

"Guys, what if this is another test like Ray mentioned," Vivian said.

"But what if it's not? I mean, Ray did clearly state that we passed," George said, "Also there's a whole USB in Ray's neck, and we clearly destroyed the power core, and there are still more robots?"

"So that means that there's an alternate source that's controlling the robots ... and ray," Ivy said

"Okay, you know what, let's not get ahead of ourselves," Daniel suggested. "Let's first destroy those robots."

Suddenly, a robot launched a laser from its eyes cutting through the air. It brushed right by Ariana and Rainah. The red hot laser flew across the room and hit another robot and punched a hole through that one and four others.

"Collateral damage," Ivy said. "I think that now we just have to dodge a lot more lasers."

"What!? But that's no fun," Ryan protested, "I don't want to all of a sudden play Angry Birds with these hunks of metal!"

"Ivy's right guys," Vivian said, completely ignoring Ryan's protest, "I think this is the only way to destroy all the robots without ... having a not-so-pretty fate."

"Well then, how are we going to do that?" Rainah asked. "I mean Ariana and I just almost got nailed in the face and had that not so pretty fate."

"We Teleport, of course," Ariana said.

Another steaming beam came flying towards the group. However, at the last second, Ariana teleported into the air. Then the robots all sent one laser at the group. Ariana flew the group back to the ground to avert the lasers. However, in the next second, the roof came crashing down like a huge piece of round Swiss cheese.



"Aghhhhhhhhh!!!" The group yelled in unison.

However Vivian used her powers to slow all the incoming debris above the group. The rest around fell, crushing most of the robots. The room was now filled with concrete dust, and you could barely see anything.

"Hey guys," George said. "You Okay?"

"Yeah, I think so," Jayden replied.

Nobody could see anything, not even the people who were standing right next to them.

"Hey guys," Daniel said in a nervous tone. "Do you see what I'm seeing?"

"A pair of glowing blue eyes? Yeah," George replied.

"Ooooo!" Ryan said. "Is that the light of heaven?"

The blue eyes moved closer through the dust. "Guys, I don't think that's heaven," Ivy said, "I think that's Ray."

CHAPTER 16

Written by: Rainah Chen

As the dust cleared, Ray's glowing blue eyes shot through the hole in the ceiling towards them. He was now twice the size he had been before. As he loomed over the group, he shot a disapproving look at them.

"Uhmm," said Ariana. "What are we supposed to do now?"

"SILENCE!" boomed Ray in his loud voice, shooting a large gust of wind downward.

Dust from the fallen debris swirled around the group once more. Ryan, Ivy, and George started coughing. After they stopped, everyone looked at each other, clueless about why Ray was so big and so angry at them.

"Although you have passed the test, you will still pay a price for...." Ray trailed off.

"For what?" asked Jayden loudly. "YOU'RE the one who's evil."

Ray's eyes stopped glowing. It was as if someone had switched him off. He shrank back to his normal size, clearly embarrassed. As he shrank, he fell through the hole towards the group. After he landed in the middle of a pile of debris, he quickly backed off with his hands up.

"I-I was under o-orders..." Ray mumbled.

"FROM WHO??" Ryan was clearly outraged at this point.

"And why was there a USB in your neck??" asked Daniel.

"T-That w-wasn't me," stuttered Ray in a small voice.

"THEN WHO WAS THAT?" Ryan questioned.

Right then, Ms. Sophia walked through the dust from an unseen opening in the wall. She had a summer dress on, along with a flower in her hair. She looked like she had just had the best time of her life lounging on the beach. A large smile was displayed on her face, and her eyes were closed, but as soon as she opened them, her smile quickly disappeared.

"What happened??" asked Ms. Sophia, staring at her students. "I thought this was the entrance into the ICALC building!"

"Well," said Rainah. "It's a lot to explain."

"Let's get back to the real building first," said George.

"How?" asked Jayden.

"I think we have to get back through that hole," said Rainah, pointing to the large hole above them.

"Can you blast these scraps into the shape of some stairs?" Ariana asked Ryan.

"I can try, but this might not work," replied Ryan. "I don't control where the blasted pieces go."

"Wait," said Vivian. "Don't waste your energy when there's a risk of failing."

"Yeah, we'll lift the pieces together," replied Daniel.

One by one, the group started to walk towards the largest scrap in the space. Ms. Sophia stood like a statue, still confused. As the students carried the scraps around, Ray was still crumpled in the corner he had backed into. When the students finished building a structure that looked somewhat like a staircase, they carefully climbed up it one by one. As everyone looked to see where they were, they saw the real ICALC building within walking distance.



"How long did it even take for us to finish the test?" asked Ivy.

"What test?" asked Ms. Sophia.

"So that wasn't you!" said George.

"So Ms. Sophia and Ray were all controlled earlier??" asked Ariana, like someone had just announced they were dead.

CHAPTER 17

Written by: Ivy He

There was a long moment of silence. Suddenly, Ms. Sophia spoke up. "I only remember seeing a mysterious robot before I lost control of myself. Maybe it's the same one that was controlling Ray."

"Do you know who it was?" Ariana asked.

"No, all I could do was follow its orders, and then it told me to go on summer vacation. I have no idea what's going on right now," Ms. Sophia explained.

"So, all we have to do is find that robot, and then I can blast him into pieces!" Ryan shouted excitedly. "But we have to figure out where it is first."

Ivy's eyes suddenly widened. "Guys... don't turn around."

Her warning was too late. Everyone whipped their heads around to see the robot. They were horrified to see a huge robot with blue glowing eyes. It stared down at them and said, "Time to destroy the intruders."

"Guys, we need to find a way to use our powers together so that we can win this fight," Vivian said.

But Ryan was too fast. He charged towards the robot as he yelled, "ARHHHH, I will blast you into pieces!"

"Nooooo, Ryan, you are not strong enough. We cannot afford to lose you!" George cried, but Ryan was already inches away from the robot's face. He was about to blast it when the robot flicked its finger lazily, and Ryan was blasted into the opposite wall with a loud crash. After seeing what the robot was capable of, the team decided to follow Vivian's suggestion. They would find a way to combine their powers together.

Suddenly, Daniel realized something. "Guys, where is Ray and Ms. Sophia?"

"I swear that they were here a second ago," Rainah said, confused.

"Never mind that now," Ivy exclaimed. "Let's fight!"

The team huddled up together and started to use their powers all at the same time. Then something amazing happened. There was a glow of bright gold light, and all of their powers combined into a swirling ball of magic. "Light, go and destroy this robot!" Jayden shouted. The light then approached the robot and sort of went inside it.



The robot thought that this was some sort of silly joke. "Hahaha, you really think that this ball of light can finish someone like me? You're deeply mistaken... prepare to die."

As the team tried to fight back, Ariana realized that they could no longer use their powers. "Guys, I think that we used all of our strength and our powers to create that ball of light. Now we are helpless!"

"That means that we are all doomed!" cried George. "Run for it!" He sprinted as fast as his legs would take him, and he disappeared into the darkness.

"Hey guys," Rainah said, "I can see that the robot is breaking up on the inside. I think that that is the end of him!"

As everyone turned to look at the robot, they found out that Rainah was right. The robot began to spark violently, and cracks spread across its metal body. After a few seconds, it collapsed and shattered into a million pieces, as if it were made out of glass.

George slowly emerged from the darkness.

"Is it dead?"

"The fight ended five minutes ago," Ryan groaned.

"Well, that's the end of it," Vivian said. "Now, we can finally go home!"

"Not so fast," said a voice behind them. As they all whipped around to face it, they realized that it was Ms. Sophia and Ray.

"I've been observing you guys, and you guys did great on that last stage of the test!" Ms. Sophia said, grinning ear to ear.

"Wait, then what about the robot?" asked Ivy.

"The robot was working with us. It was a bonus challenge that I was saving for the end! The robot was programmed to act like a real enemy. We wanted to see how you would react under pressure. And I have to say, I was impressed. You all worked together and supported one another when it mattered most."

"Wait, so all of this was still part of the test???" Ivy asked, completely bewildered.

"Yes, and now I must say that you guys do deserve a prize for doing so well. How about a break from ICALC for one month?" Ms. Sophia suggested.

"Thank goodness, I think that we all deserve a break from this chaos," Daniel said, still fuming but also smiling.

"Also, I owe you guys an apology," said Ray. "I was a bit too hard on you guys because I was so curious about your performance. I think that I might've stressed you guys out a bit."

"Yeah, no kidding about the stress part," Jayden said.

Then, the team reunited and headed home to enjoy a whole month of stress-free, safe, and relaxing vacation. Nobody knew what challenge awaited them next, but one thing was certain: this would not be the last strange adventure for the ICALC team.

CHARACTERS' SUPERPOWERS

Different powers. One mission.

IVY

POWER:
SUMMON ANIMALS

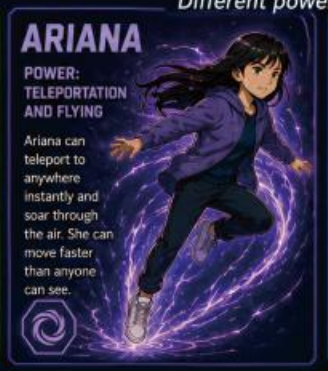
Ivy can call animals from nature to help her. They protect her and fight alongside her.



ARIANA

POWER:
TELEPORTATION AND FLYING

Ariana can teleport to anywhere instantly and soar through the air. She can move faster than anyone can see.



VIVIAN

POWER:
MASTERY OF THE 4 ELEMENTS

Vivian can control the four elements: water, fire, earth, and air. She can, summon them, shape them, and use them in perfect balance.



GEORGE

POWER:
DRAWING

George's drawings can come to life. He can sketch objects, tools, or creatures and make them real.



RYAN

POWER:
CAN BLAST THINGS APART

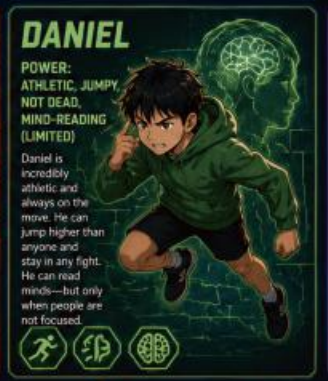
Ryan can release powerful blasts that break through walls, destroy obstacles, and knock enemies away.



DANIEL

POWER:
ATHLETIC, JUMPY, NOT DEAD, MIND-READING (LIMITED)

Daniel is incredibly athletic and always on the move. He can jump higher than anyone and stay in any fight. He can read minds—but only when people are not focused.



RAINAH

POWER:
CAN SEE THROUGH PEOPLE AND WALLS

Rainah can see what's behind walls and understand people's true intentions. Nothing is hidden from her eyes.



JAYDEN

POWER:
STORE ENERGY AND USE IT FOR STRENGTH AND SPEED

Jayden can absorb energy from his surroundings, store it within him, and release it to become incredibly strong and lightning fast.



★ *"Together, we are stronger than any system."*

RAY

BRILLIANT. MYSTERIOUS. CONTROLLED. NOT TRULY EVIL.



ROLE:
Former Antagonist / Reluctant Ally

PERSONALITY:
Intelligent, quiet, emotionally distant, and difficult to read.

STRENGTHS:
Strategic thinking, advanced technology skills, quick learner.

WEAKNESS:
Deep guilt, inner conflict, struggles against control.

Thank you to our families for encouraging us.

Thank you to our classmates for sharing ideas.

Thank you to everyone who believed in young writers.

Every great writer begins with one story.

We hope this is only the first of many stories these young authors will write.

YCALC
Learning Centre