

Disgusting ghouls and terrifying beasts lurk just behind the digital screen! Only you can ensure your family and friends are safe from the rampaging monsters that would savage you all at your first bad move online.

When given a choice, decide what move you want to make, and click that link at the bottom of the page. You are the master of your own destiny.

*The choices you make
will seal your fate!*

CHOOSE YOUR OWN DESTINY



YOU'RE THE STAR OF THE
STORY! CHOOSE FROM 15 POSSIBLE ENDINGS.

THE MONSTER BEHIND THE MONITOR

BY D.I. SECURITY



Chapter 1: October Rain

It's the night before Halloween, and the late-October rain is coming down. You haven't been hanging out with your friends for the last week because you can't drive yet, and your parents won't drive you around either. So instead, you've spent the last few days messaging this super cute 8th-grader, MangaFanga'05, who you just met on your favorite social media site – TumblrGram. MangaFanga is a follower of your cousin Jerry and seems to be a classmate from the other middle school on this side of town. You only started following each other last week, so you haven't talked on the phone yet and you don't even know each other's real name (you go by FinFan, which is a shortened version of your screen name, JakenFinFan328). But it's obvious you're both really into each other, which is AWESOME because MangaFanga's pics are SO CUTE!

Ding! You've come to love that message notification sound! MangaFanga just asked where you live because maybe you can meet up after school tomorrow before your family has dinner and you go trick-or-treating. Dinnertime is usually around 6:30, so you don't think you'd be missed if you met up for just an hour or two. You:

Give your address and time you'll be home, and tell MangaFanga to come on over!

Tell MangaFanga that you have other stuff going on; you don't even know this person! - CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE

Obviously giving your address to someone you only recently met on the Internet is a terrible idea. You've been lectured endlessly on stranger-danger and totally understand that you never know who the person behind the screen name actually is. You've heard a million warnings about the 40-year-old creep posing as a teen to gain the trust of unwitting kids, and you know better than to do something so dumb as revealing too much information about yourself online.

Anyway, you need to get back to business. Your grouchy Social Studies teacher gave you another HUGE assignment that you should've started working on two weeks ago, and now you're getting burnt out with all this dumb research because your teacher won't let you just use Wikipedia. So much googling! But you found what looks like a pretty good Civil War website to get information from. There's tons of ads on it, so it must be legit. Reading through it is so boring though, you must be going cross-eyed!

Oh look! There's an ad for some entertainment gossip-blog with "the most shocking before and after photos of celebrities"! That looks pretty interesting... Maybe you can take a teeny weeny break and get a good laugh over how dorky Jay Z was in 6th grade. You:

Click that awesome looking picture and check it out! Maybe Beyoncé will be on there too!

Ignore the ad and get back to business.

Click-bait ads are nothing but trouble, and you know it. You've heard so many stories from your friends about how they went to a webpage that looked like it had funny or jaw-dropping content, only to be smacked with a "drive-by download" that secretly installed itself on their computer. Some of them got adware that kept popping up with annoying ads for weight-loss scams and stuff, but other kids got real-deal viruses on their machines. Those poor suckers had to reformat their whole computer and lost all their vines and music and game progress!

Back to homework it is. Sigh. Maybe your Grampa has some good ideas for content. He used to teach an American History class when he was a professor at the university. You log in to your email account to send off a quick note to him, and realize you have a couple messages in your inbox.

Who's this guy... Jimmy John Jones? You think you remember him from a fan forum you used to hang out in a year or two ago. The subject is "Rats! I really did it this time!" and it looks like he sent this to dozens of people... What could it be?? When you open the message there's just a brief note saying "Dude, you won't believe how I messed this up! Check out the attachment!" You:

Delete the email without opening the attachment.

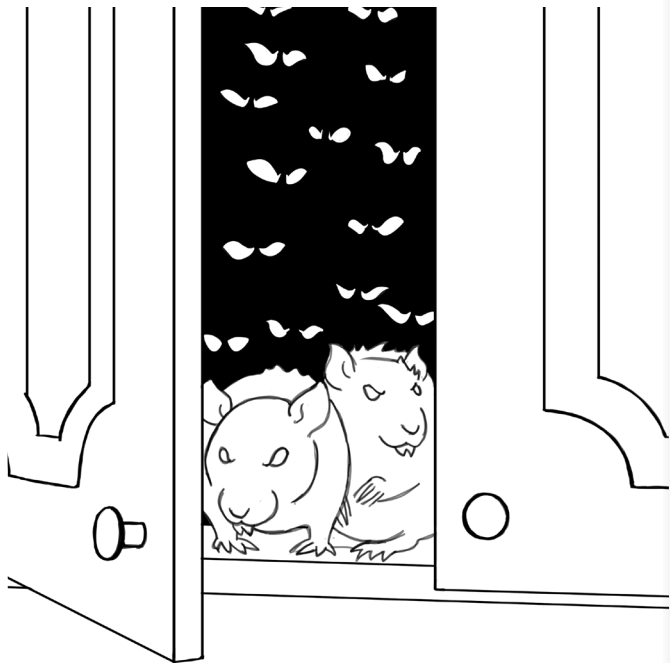
**How intriguing! Open the attachment to see what's in it. -
CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE**

You click to open the attachment, but the hourglass just spins around for a couple minutes. "Sheesh, that's a big one! What the heck did he do?!" you say aloud to yourself. You decide to make a PB&J while you wait for the thing to open.

Mom is sitting at the table, and you say hello as you go to the fridge for jelly. While searching the cabinet for the peanut butter, you hear some skittering across the floor behind you and quickly turn to see what it was. You and Mom exchange a quizzical look, regarding the strange sound you both just heard. You start to ask her what she thinks it was when you hear more skittering noises on the counter behind you. You hop back a couple feet and swing around to look behind you. In the open cabinet you see boxes and cans scooting around and tumbling over, and then a thick, long, hairless tail swishes behind the mac n cheese box. Another one slips around the spaghetti sauce jar. A flour sack falls from the top shelf and lands with a thud and a poof of flour dust on the countertop, and, where it once sat, a pair of red eyes peer back at you from the dark cabinet depths. You see whiskers twitching and disgusting yellow incisors nibbling on a saltine.

Suddenly, red eyes are everywhere in the cabinet among the various packaged foods. More cabinet doors are creaking open as fat gray rats drop like heavy raindrops onto your counters and scurry across them. More and more of the hideous things fall from the cabinets, landing on the floor and darting across your bare feet, making you screech and jump precariously.

You swing around in horror to grab your mom and notice breathtaking numbers of mangy critters covering your floor like a furry carpet, crawling up drapes, knocking knickknacks off shelves, scurrying up the stairway banister and across the chandelier. The rodent onslaught is so dense that it carries furniture away with it! Mom, in her terror, loses her balance and falls backward upon them, and is carried



out the door like a crowd surfer at a rock concert. You sprint to the door in pursuit, screaming “BRING BACK MY MOOOOOOOOOM!!!!” and see her carried on down the street. More rats are falling from trees and pouring out neighbors’ doors and windows, carrying their inhabitants, and even cars, away in the current.

No one can help you, you realize, as there is no end to their numbers; they’re replicating like a virus. And it occurs to you now it was you who opened the Rats! attachment to release this viral mischief on everyone you know.

THE END

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LEARN MONSTER SLAYING TACTICS!

The quiz game starts with the first question, **On a scale of 1-5, how dumb do you think you are?** You think to yourself that you're a pretty smart kid, relatively. You could be smarter, you suppose, but you're solidly above average in intelligence. You choose 2 and then Next. The phone buzzes in your hand, discharging a small electric current. That was weird, you think to yourself.

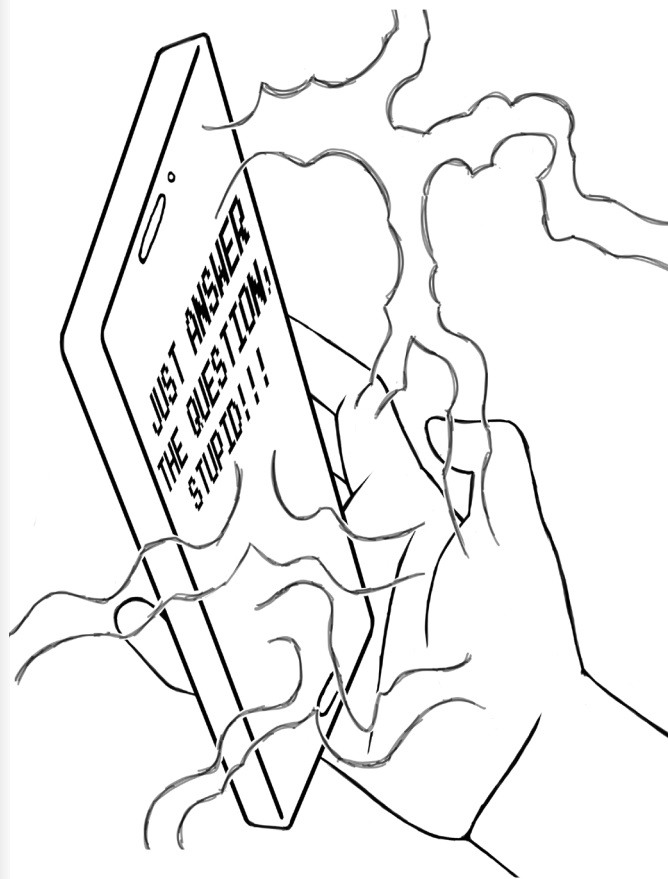
Next question, **On a scale of 1-5, how dumb do others think you are?** Another intelligence question, Ok. Hmmm, you have a lot of friends, and you're pretty sure a lot of kids wish they were your friend. Nobody wants to be friends with an idiot, you reason. So you choose 2 again and then Next. BZZZZ! Your phone gives another, stronger charge, like a gag-store hand buzzer on steroids. "Ow!" you yelp, startled. "What the heck?" you wonder.

Next question, **No really, on a scale of 1-5, how dumb ARE you??** "What's with the intelligence questions, you think aloud. You really want that Amazon gift card, but this whole thing is getting trippy. You decide to end the freaky quiz, but when you try to close it out, you can't. The home button doesn't work, nor even the power button. The screen just violently flashes **JUST ANSWER THE QUESTION, STUPID! JUST ANSWER THE QUESTION, STUPID! JUST ANSWER THE QUESTION, STUPID!**

"OK, OK!" You yell at it. Your friends must think you've lost your mind, but you're too freaked out by your stupid phone to be concerned about their weirded-out glances. "Just finish the stupid game and get on with your life!" you think to yourself.

Well, seriously, you're not that stupid... not as stupid as, say, the kid in the horror movie who goes to investigate a strange noise in the cellar alone. They'd be a clear 4 to 5 on the spectrum. But since the game won't accept a 2, you select 3, strictly average, and then Next.

Your phone discharges megawatt bolts into your hand and up your arm that literally shake your whole body. Your crew gawks at the



sight. You have no idea how long you were in that convulsive state, but you wake up on the ground in a puddle of warm liquid... “OMG,” you think, “I’M BLEEDING!”

Then, “OMG!” one of your friends shrieks, “You peed your PANTS!” There is only a brief pause before everyone cracks up with laughter. And there’s QueenBling too, probably trolling for another poor sucker to torment... But wait, no! She’s taking pictures of YOU!!

“OMG” Bling says. “This is magnificent! I’ll get at least 350 views on this one!”

How positively mortifying. You almost start to cry, but with very deliberate effort you cut off the water works to avoid the horrifying potential of being even more humiliated by QueenBling’s posts. It wasn’t really physically painful; you’re just crippled with embarrassment. Your stomach turns sick at the thought of what you’re going to see on TumbGram tomorrow.

When you get to the house, you follow your friends as they burst through the door and run up the stairs to your room. As you fly by Dylan, who’s sitting in the living room, you stop short to ask him if he’ll look at your laptop to see if it has malware on it like your teacher suggested. He sighs loudly. He’s watching another Netflix zombie show, “Lumbering Death” or something, and doesn’t appear interested in your problems. “Maybe later,” he says. “I’m busy.”

OMG, what a jerk. It would only take a minute! “Never mind,” you groan, and stomp up to your room.

Your friends are already up here, having a Battle Royale over who gets to choose the music. “Anybody have the new Ariana Grande record?” somebody asks. Someone else is firing up the smart TV to start the AlienObliviation tournament. You’re still a little concerned that your computer may have a virus, so as soon as you change your

pants you sit down at your desk and wake it up. Looks like the Social Studies folder download finally crashed, but you’re convinced trying again won’t help much. Instead, you go online to start googling for a free malware scanning tool.

You go to a few websites, but most of them want money and some of them just look a little iffy. Then you find a free one called GetVirusGone. It has 72 ratings and they’re all 5-stars so it must be legit. You’re thinking about clicking the download button when a window suddenly pops up telling you “WARNING! YOUR COMPUTER IS INFECTED!” It gives you the phone number for tech support to remove the viruses. Wow! maybe this is what’s been giving you trouble all this time! You:

Call them NOW and get this dang thing cleaned up!

Decide against calling tech support yet.

That's what you consider a suspicious email, and you never open suspicious attachments! The fact that some guy you don't even know decided to send you an attachment is definitely fishy. But there wasn't any context for the message either. If that random dude had really meant for you to see something noteworthy, he would've included a personalized message explaining it. It's obviously spam, and probably malicious too, and you know that opening a malicious attachment can instantly infect your computer with viruses or bots or ransomware or other horrible nuisances.

But seriously, what is wrong with this dumb computer anyway??? It can't seem to do anything efficiently anymore! Now it doesn't even want to let you open your Social Studies homework folder. UGH! Ok, you have a flash drive and Mom has her work laptop here. Let's just move the folder onto the flash drive and try to open it on her computer. Maybe then you can email it to yourself or something...

You go back down to the kitchen, but Mom's not there now. You poke your head around the corner into the living room to see if she's watching TV. Nope. You call her name but she doesn't answer. Maybe she ran to the store to get last-minute Halloween candy or something. Oh well, her computer is sitting there on the table and it looks like her password is still taped to the monitor. You're sure she won't mind if you just do this really quick. I mean come on, you know computers better than she does, so it's not like she'll be any help figuring out this tech problem anyway! You:

Stick in that ol' flash drive and load the folder onto Mom's computer so you can get some work done on the dumb thing!

Don't use Mom's computer. - CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE

Regardless of the fact that she left her password sitting there for you to use (you really ought to talk to her about not doing that!), it's always a bad idea to do anything to your Mom's computer without her permission, and especially to her work computer. Plus, that folder and your computer are behaving oddly, and you begin to think it's unwise to transfer anything over to another computer anyway, because that could be a sign that your machine or your file is infected with some kind of malware. So you decide to play it safe and maybe ask mom about it later. For now, you can just try messing with the folder a bit more to see if you can get it to load.

You go back up to your room and jump on the computer again. Hey! Grampa emailed you back with some tips for talking about "Civil War Heroes." He also sent you a link to check out, a music sharing app. He knows how into music you are and apparently you can get a ton of great albums here FOR FREE when they usually cost \$15 each! You:

Heck YES, go for it! I've been wanting that Ariana Grande record FOREVER!

Ignore the peer-to-peer file-sharing link, but email a big thank you to Gramps for the homework tips.

Really, there's no harm in maintaining the status quo, you think. You'll just keep the peace without adding to the drama. So you comment with a simple emoticon, the squinting face with the tongue (X-P), and keep on scrolling.

Glancing up, you see it looks like everybody is done with their treats and a bunch of them have left already. A couple of your friends are gonna walk home with you and hang out for a bit. Their parents will probably expect them home for dinner, but you can play some video games or listen to music and look at memes or something. You glance over at creepy-dude's table and he's gone. At least you don't have to worry about him following you home!

Walking through the neighborhood back to your house you get a text from a number you don't think you recognize. When you open the message, it says to try this new FreeBuzz game, "Which TV Show Character Are You?" and rate it for a free \$50 Amazon gift card. Sweet! You love these games! You:

Click. That. Link. What an AWESOME deal! - CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE

Delete this message, and maybe even block the sender.

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Next question, **On a scale of 1-5, how big a jerk do others think you are?** Hmmm, you have a lot of friends, and you're pretty sure a lot of kids wish they were your friend. So you choose 2 again and then Next. BZZZZ! Your phone gives another, stronger charge, like a gag-store hand buzzer on steroids. "Ow!" you yelp, startled. "What the heck?" you wonder.

Next question, **No really, on a scale of 1-5, how big a jerk ARE you??** "What's with the jerk questions," you think aloud. You really want that Amazon gift card, but this whole thing is getting trippy. You decide to end the freaky quiz, but when you try to close it out, you can't. The home button doesn't work, nor even the power button. The screen violently flashes **JUST ANSWER THE QUESTION, JERK! JUST ANSWER THE QUESTION, JERK! JUST ANSWER THE QUESTION, JERK!**

"OK, OK!" You yell at it. You look up from your phone and realize you're standing in the middle of the street like a kook. To your right, your friends are on the sidewalk exchanging whispered comments and occasional glances your way. On the opposite sidewalk to your left, you see (weirdly) Henry0 in his smurf costume, playing on his own phone and watching you intently. Your friends must think you've lost your mind, but you're too freaked out by your stupid phone to be concerned about their weirded-out glances. "Just finish the stupid game and get on with your life!" you think to yourself.

Well, seriously, you're not that big a jerk, certainly not as jerky as QueenBling who's a clear 4 to 5 on the spectrum. But since the

game won't accept a 2, you select 3, strictly average, and then Next.

Your phone discharges megawatt bolts into your hand and up your arm that literally shake your whole body. Your crew gawks at the sight, and Henry0 just continues playing on his phone and howls with laughter. You have no idea how long you were in that convulsive state, but you wake up on the ground in a puddle of warm liquid... "OMG," you think, "I'M BLEEDING!"

Then, "OMG!" one of your friends shrieks, "You peed your PANTS!" There is only a brief pause before everyone cracks up with laughter. Henry0 is holding his sides, cackling with delight. "I KNEW I'D GET YOU BACK!" he screams at you. "You may think I'm a worthless dweeb, but I've got skills!" he says. "I've got SKIIIIIIILLS!" And there's QueenBling too, probably mercilessly haunting the poor guy... But wait, no! She's taking pictures of YOU!!

"OMG" Bling says. "This is magnificent! I'll get at least 350 views on this one!"

"Now YOU'LL know how it feels!" Henry0 squawks before turning to race awkwardly down the street. You hear his hooting and footfalls until he rounds the corner and disappears. How positively mortifying. You almost start to cry, but with very deliberate effort you cut off the water works to avoid the horrifying potential of being even more humiliated by QueenBling's posts. It wasn't really physically painful; you're just crippled with embarrassment. Your stomach turns sick at the thought of what you're going to see on TumblrGram tomorrow.

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Oh look! There's an ad for some entertainment gossip-blog with "the most shocking before and after photos of celebrities"! That looks pretty interesting... Maybe you can take a teeny weeny break and get a good laugh over how dorky Jay Z was in 6th grade. You:

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Ignore the ad and get back to business. - CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE

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But OMG, was that YOUR stomach rumbling?? Well, it has been a few hours since dinner. You go to the kitchen to make yourself a PB&J and maybe swipe some of the Halloween candy Mom has hiding in the cabinet.

You notice Mom out of your peripheral vision, sitting at the table typing on her laptop. "How ya doin', Mom?" You ask as you open the fridge to find the jelly. She doesn't answer... must be focused on an email or work or something. You grab the strawberry jelly because grape is nasty, and go to the cabinet for the peanut butter. "I said, how ya doin'!" You say, as you turn to face the back of her head. She rises stiffly... strangely... as if she's doing some weird exercise or something (she's into yoga and all that), then she turns around to face you. That's when you notice it's not Mom after all, but a tall and pale, black-eyed dude with skin like a smooth river rock. "WHO ARE YOU??" you shriek and yell for your mom or brother Dylan.

"No one else is here, FinFan," the monster hisses through a slobber-dripping mouth agape with two enormous and pointed incisors. Your heart falls to your stomach with a sudden lurch. Your palms get clammy. Your mouth goes completely dry. It's a real-life vampire, complete with fangs, long, sharp fingernails, and ghastly, white flesh. "Now that you invited me to come on over, I wanted to be



sure we were alone” the beast adds.

“No,” you gasp noiselessly.

“I’m so very pleased,” he coos, “to have finally found my perfect companion ... You will simply love being my immortal child!” He closes in and wraps his gnarled fingers around your shoulders. “I will make a very good Daddy,” he breathes coldly on your face, leaning in toward the pulsing skin of your neck.

Ding!

“Oh YAY!” is your last thought before everything turns dark. You just love that notification tone. “Wonder who’s messaging me...”

THE END

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Wow! Those pictures really were embarrassing! You'd think with all their money, celebrities would have somebody scour the web for that horrible stuff and shut it down! You guess it's true what they say: "What happens on the Internet, stays on the Internet." Still, you got a big kick out of it and wonder who else you should send it to.

Back to homework. You decide to email Grampa for good ideas since he used to teach an American History class. You pull up your email and send off a quick note, and share that hilarious celebrity before-and-after link (you guys always share goofy links). You also realize you have a couple other messages in your inbox.

But before you can look further into them, your web browser starts popping up one window after another, all ads for ridiculous stuff you'd never want! Shoe stretchers, old ladies' underwear, tax return help, prescription drugs. The onslaught of pop-ups just keeps going and makes your whole web session impossible to manage. "Oh man!" you think. Dylan told you about adware that some websites will automatically load to your browser just by visiting the site. Sigh. Stupid click-bait ads. You'll need to reload this browser. Meanwhile, you'll have to use the other browser you don't like as well... and warn Grampa about that link!

But wait, an email from Jimmy John Jones? You think you remember him from a fan forum you used to hang out in a year or two ago. The subject is "Release the Beasts!" and it looks like he sent this to dozens of people... What could it be?? The message contains just a brief note: "Dude, you won't believe what these things can do!" You:

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How intriguing! Open the attachment to see what's in it!

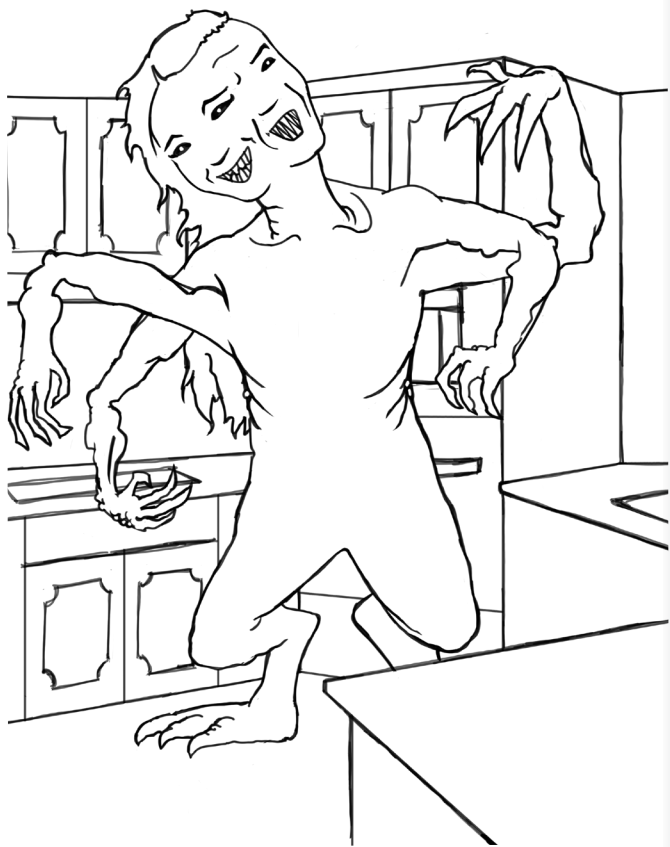
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You notice Mom out of your peripheral vision, sitting at the table typing on her laptop. "How ya doin', Mom?" You ask as you open the fridge to find the jelly. She doesn't answer... must be focused on an email or work or something. You grab the strawberry jelly because grape is nasty, and go to the cabinet for the peanut butter. "I said, how ya doin'!" You say, as you turn back to face her.

That's when you notice her, in the clutches of a grotesque monster! It's some sort of humanoid hybrid, at least 8 feet tall because it has to bend its head, or rather, heads, forward to avoid hitting the ceiling. One of the heads is male and the other is female with flaming orange hair. It has four arms, one of which has its hideous warty hand covering your mom's mouth. Two more are wrapped around her body, holding her at least 2 feet off the floor! She's kicking madly, struggling to pull that disgusting gnarly-knuckled hand away from her mouth.

In its fourth enormous hand it clenches several... trophies?... waving them around victoriously. The thing shrieks some horrible banshee melody. "YOU WOKE ME FROM MY SLUMBER!" it sings in its awful, high-pitched, wail. Then you realize those trophies it's waving around are Grammys! And those two heads are some malformed version of Beyoncé and Jay Z! OMG! It's a BEYONZEE!!



“NOW’S THE TIME TO FACE MY WRATH FOR THE SAD HUMILIATION FROM YOUR GAWKING AND SHARING MY DORKIEST MOMENTS!” The giant thing throws a black sack over your mom’s head and tucks her under its arms before lumbering through your door! You race after it, screaming, “NOOOOOO! MY MOM’S BEEN ABDUCTED BY BEYONZEEEEEE!!!”

But nobody hears you or comes to help. There is no one else to witness what’s happening, and in upcoming weeks as you’re jailed as a suspect in your mom’s suspicious disappearance, no one believes that a horrifying BeyonZee is actually to blame.

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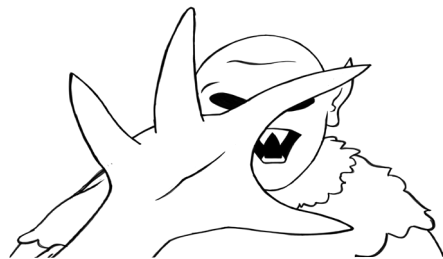
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**LEARN MONSTER
SLAYING TACTICS!**



You try to calm the butterflies in your stomach about meeting MangaFanga all day. Otherwise, other than seeing everyone else's costumes, school is as boring as ever... especially Social Studies. You go to class, talk to your buddies, and avoid the jerky kids who pick on you. You tell your teacher about the trouble with your laptop, and she looks at you as if you're lying to buy more time or something. She mentions something about malware, but you're pretty sure that's not it since you don't download stuff off weird sites or anything. You decide you'll ask Dylan about it anyway, since he's a computer geek.

When the last bell rings, you race out of the building to find your friends and get to the FroYo shop. You walk into the place, and the employees know you by name because they see you in here so often. There's some weirdo sitting on the other side of the room with his laptop though. You saw him in here last time you guys came in, and you caught him staring at your table pretty often. Well, he's old and creepy and probably just wishes he were still young and cool.

You need to check your PayMe account to make sure Mom sent your allowance, but you have limited data because Mom thinks you'll go blind looking at your phone all day or something. You should use Wi-Fi, which is never hard to find. There's a locked network here called "FroYo_Y'all" that you don't have the password for, but there's also an unsecured network, "MyNet23." You:

Connect to MyNet23 because you'll only be on there for a minute anyway.

Wait until you get to the counter and ask the cashier what their network password is. - CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE

For realz! Using an unsecured wireless these days?? Terrible idea. Especially with some creep-o lurking in the corner with his laptop. No telling who that network belongs to or what other criminals are spying on it to capture secret login information.

The guy at the counter gives you the password to the network, and you log in to check your PayMe account, which is set up to text you a code that you'll enter to log in (because you can never be too careful with money accounts!). Mom sent you enough money for an eNORMous dish of FroYo, so you help yourself.

You notice Creep-o from the corner table hobbling toward you like he has a peg leg or something. With that and the mangy beard and cloak, he could be an even better pirate than you! You straighten and turn toward him and his face seems to break in half with a smile of mangled, rotten teeth. You can smell the gaseous breath escaping through the crevasse of his grin as he breathes "FinFan!"

In a raspy voice he crows, "FinFan, it's ME! MangaFanga!" As he approaches you can clearly see his face. The beard is a fake—the kind with loops that go around the ears—and he pulls it off excitedly, revealing the repulsive face beneath with slimy, warty skin and bulbous eyes. The thing has no eyelids, but rather a membrane extends and contracts across yellow eyeballs. His head is pointy and devoid of hair, except for a few patches of mossy orange stuff sticking out here and there. His enormous ears ooze some waxy yellow-brown fluid that gets caught in long tufts of ear hair and dries into curds there.

His arms stretch out to unhuman lengths toward you, his fingers like great, knuckly bananas at the edge of his palms. They grip your biceps and pull you close, his clammy greenish cheek pressed to yours, his fluid-oozing ear right next to your lips. "FinFan! We can at last be together!" he whispers.

You push away from the thing and scream "Not a chance,

weirdo!” You punch it in the stomach, and your fist gets stuck in the gelatinous body due to the suction created by the flesh around it. He gazes at you with eyes full of love and pulls a large burlap sack out of his cloak, lifting it above your head. “Yes, I love you too, dear FinFan,” he sighs as he sweeps the sack down over your head. “Finally, I will have a companion in my swampy lair.” And everything goes dark.

THE END

CHANGE YOUR DESTINY NOW!

LEARN MONSTER SLAYING TACTICS!



You use follow the download link to add the app to your phone. There are so many albums you can download for free! You start with Arianna, but you also find a ton more that you've heard great things about, and you download, like, six of them.

Back to business. You fiddle with your machine settings to try to resolve this folder-opening issue and google a bit to research the problem, but nothing is really informative. You decide to go back to the website you got a bunch of homework aids from last week and download the stuff again. You click on the .zip file link, but it's taking forever to download (big surprise). Why does your computer HATE YOU?? UGH!

Suddenly, you hear three tremendous booms in quick succession that make your heart jump, right along with the rest of your body. A residual clattering shakes your walls and shatters your bedroom window! What the...? You hurry to the window and look onto the street. A huge machine that looks something like a military tank with a skull and crossbones decal on the side is parked on the street out front. Its turret door opens and what appears to be a 18th-century pirate emerges! "YARGH!" he shouts. "Surrender yer vessel and all the loot 'pon it, or I and me crew will dash yer vessel to ruins! YARGH!"

A grappling hook launched from the ship's cannon whizzes past your head to land on the other side of your bed. The hook line tightens and the legs of your bed scrape loudly against your wood floor as the anchor pulls the cumbersome load toward the window. You leap out of the way to avoid being crushed by the bed slamming against the wall. A couple more grappling hooks whiz through the window to catch on various furnishings that also skid back against the bed and wall as the hook line tightens. With a sense of dread, you start backing toward the bedroom door as the first two pirates emerge through the

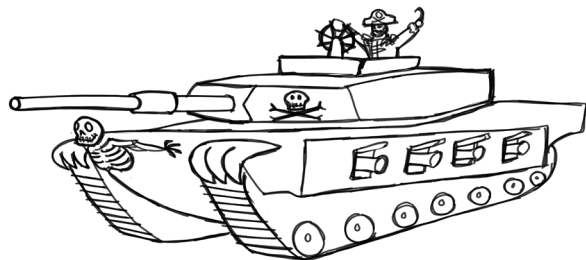
window with large sacks. Before you can get the door open to flee, one pounces on you and holds you fast, thwarting your escape.

You watch helplessly as the pirates pick through all your best stuff and put it in their sacks. There goes your laptop. Your TV. Your phone. Your sheets. They're even taking the bedroom door off its hinges. You consider protesting, but know it will be to no avail. Within minutes, they're gone and you're half-naked, standing dejectedly in a mostly empty room. And then you're struck by the irony of it all. The pirate has been pirated. And you're going to fail that stupid Social Studies assignment.

THE END

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Minutes later, everyone is hooting about what a cool picture you posted. “Dude! That’s a sweet pic!” you hear. “Look at the expression on my face! You should warn me next time,” someone else says. “OMG! I look terrible! Untag me from that post!” another one laughs.

Then, there’s a loud clatter outside and several kids stroll out the door to get a look down the street. They gesture toward a commotion in the distance, shrugging with uncertainty at what they’re seeing. All but two of them stroll back in to report that it looks like a crowd of people are checking out a broken shop window or something.

As you continue watching the two lingering on the sidewalk, you noticed a homeless man sidling up behind them. The man lurches toward the kid on the left, throwing his arms around the kid’s shoulders and moaning “BRAAAAAAAAAAAINS...” You’re pretty sure the homeless dude, or whatever it is, is trying to bite that kid’s head. The other kid tugs at the thing’s shredded jacket until it notices him and staggers his direction instead, still wailing “BRAAAAAAAAAAAINS...”

The kids finally push the thing down onto its back, where it struggles a bit the way a dying cockroach might, pawing at the sky helplessly. “BRAAAAAAAAAAAINS...?” it cries. The two kids run back through the door and shove it closed, pressing their backs against it, panting. “ZOMBIE!!” they both yell. Everyone stares in disbelief, alternately glancing from the kids to the specimen on the sidewalk. Then a booming throb of hands and faces pounding on the plate glass pulls everyone’s gaze toward the other end of the store front, where a horde of zombie-not-homeless freaks slithers as one disgusting mass across the plate glass window, like a giant, grimy caterpillar.... A caterpillar that is, wait a minute, vaguely familiar... Yes! You’re sure you know some of those faces. And then someone says, “Hey! Isn’t that SooperGurl251?” and then another, “Yeah! And that’s QueenBling and Henry0!” and then another, “Wait, there’s DustinBeepers’02!”

A dozen more names are called out that you recognize as your TumblrGram followers, and you realize the whole zombie horde is made up of them. How the...? “BRAAAAAAINS...” the caterpillar moans, as it pulses against the window, creating fractures in the glass.

What are they all doing here? What do they want?? Your friends scream. Then someone answered, “FinFan! It was YOU! YOU’RE the one who told them where we were and to come get some frozen brains! This is all YOUR fault!!” The crowd turns on you like Frankenstein’s villagers, marching toward you with stormy expressions. Crrrrrrrrreeeeeeee! The zombie-horde caterpillar grows longer and longer as it advances along the sidewalk, and another large fracture spreads across the glass. You try to convince the angry mob it wasn’t your fault, but deep down you know it’s true. Now they’re upon you, grabbing you, tearing at your clothes, and pulling your hair. Then, the plate glass explodes inward, and screams permeate the room as dozens of bodies surge forward and over you. And you carry the weight of them and of their woe, until screams fade to blackness.

THE END

**CHANGE YOUR
DESTINY NOW!**

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Yeah, somebody ought to tell Grampa that peer-to-peer file sharing is a good way to come down with some unexpected malware. It's awful tempting to get movies and music for free, especially when your modest weekly allowance would only pay for a portion of one album! But it's really not worth the big fat nuisance of losing all your other stuff to a virus or having some other annoying malware that makes your machine a pain in the neck to use. Anyway, you want to support your favorite artists. Getting free music is the same as stealing from the musician. It's pirating. And, it's against the law!

You fiddle with your software and machine settings to try to resolve this folder-opening issue, and you google a bit to see if there are any forums that discuss the same problem. Nothing is really informative, so you decide to just go back to the website you got a bunch of homework aids from last week and download some of that Civil War content again. You click on the .zip file link, but it's taking forever to download (big surprise).

After 30 minutes that stupid .zip file is still trying to download, and it's well past your usual bed time. You didn't get any work done on this project at ALL tonight, TOMORROW is Halloween, and it's due MONDAY! AAArgh, why does your Social Studies teacher hate you?? Well, hopefully by tomorrow morning the file will have downloaded and you'll be able to get to work again to try to finish the stupid thing up this weekend.

You change into your PJs and brush your teeth, before climbing into bed. You're exhausted from all that hard work this evening, and ready to get some sleep.

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Chapter 2: End of Days

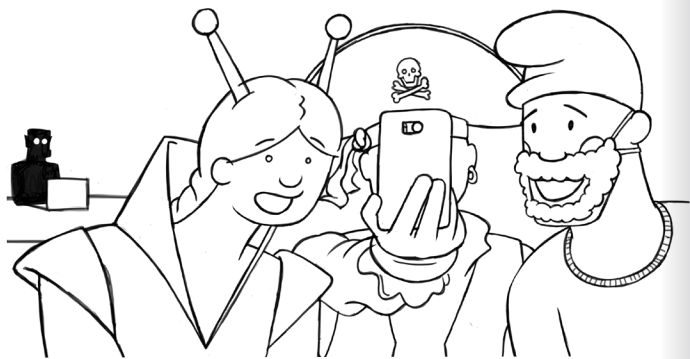
The alarm clock wakes you and you leap out of bed. It's Halloween! You remember the Social Studies file and trot over to your desk to check on it real quick. You find it still hasn't finished downloading. What on earth is going on with this dumb thing?! AAargh.

Well anyway, you gotta get to school, so you put on your hot costume and make sure you don't stink, then go downstairs for breakfast with Dylan and Mom. Goodie! Waffles! Over breakfast, Mom makes you talk about everything you plan to do for Halloween. Ugh. So nosy! She says she's going out with friends after work and instructs Dylan on supervising you (psh.) and being responsible. You zone off and miss a lot of what she's saying because you're thinking about your stupid homework, and about checking your phone in the car. (Mom doesn't let you go on your phone when you're getting ready for school because she thinks you'll get totally sucked in and miss school or something.) You and Dylan wipe your mouths and dash toward the door, as mom calls behind you, "Have fun tonight, but listen to your brother! And don't eat all your candy at once!"

In Dylan's car, you check TumblrGram real quick. There's a message from MangaFanga, who asked if you wanted to hang out this afternoon and help each other with costume makeup. You were already planning to meet some friends at the nearby FroYo shop after school before walking home to get ready for trick or treating. You think:

Awesome! You'll finally get to meet MangaFanga! Might as well tell MangaFanga to meet you guys at the FroYo shop.

MangaFanga is getting a little stalker'y. Time to cut this creep off. - CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE



Yeah, getting together with MangaFanga still doesn't seem like a safe idea. You already said no once, and now you're being asked to meet up again? You decide to tell MangaFanga that you have other plans, and you might even block this stalker if you keep getting asked for personal information or to meet in person.

Other than seeing everyone else's costumes, school is as boring as ever... especially Social Studies. You tell the teacher you're having trouble with your laptop, and she looks at you as if you're lying to buy more time or something. You describe what's going on with it, and she mentions that maybe you have malware on your computer. You're pretty sure you don't because you don't download stuff off weird sites or anything. But you told her you'd ask Dylan to look at it since he's a computer geek. Maybe she's right.

The rest of the school day is pretty ordinary. You go to class, talk to your buddies, and try to avoid the jerky kids who like picking

on you. When the last bell rings, you race out of the building to find your friends and get to the FroYo shop. Frozen yogurt... so good!! You walk into the place, which you guys go to every couple weeks for an after school treat. The employees even know you by name because they see you in here so often. There's some weirdo sitting on the other side of the room with his laptop though. You saw him in here last time you guys came in, and you caught him staring at your table pretty often. Well, he's old and creepy and probably just wishes he were still young and cool.

You need to check your PayMe account to make sure Mom sent your allowance, but you have limited data because Mom thinks you'll go blind looking at your phone all day or something. You should use a wireless connection, which is never hard to find. There's a locked network here called "FroYo_Y'all" that you don't have the password for, but there's also an unlocked network, "MyNet23." You:

Connect to MyNet23 because you'll only be on there for a minute anyway.

Wait til you get to the counter and ask the cashier what their network is. - CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE

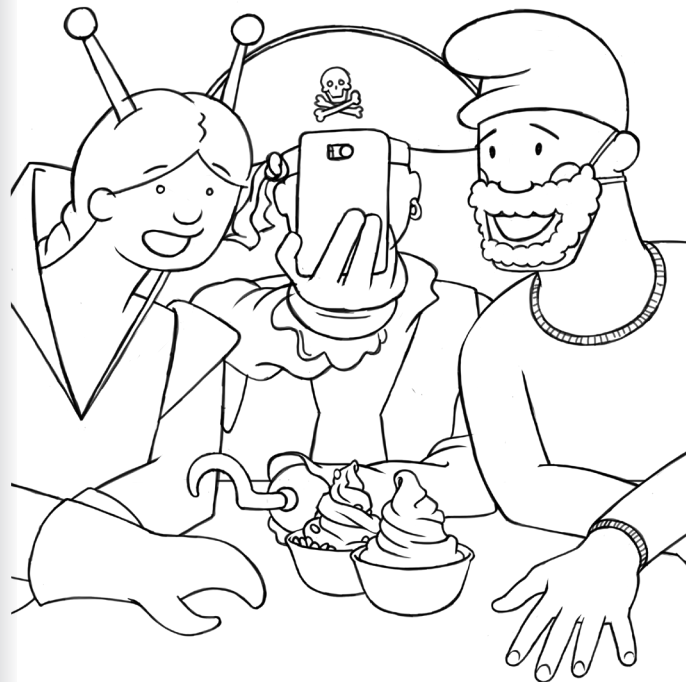
For realz. Using an unsecured wireless these days?? Terrible idea. Especially with some creep-o lurking in the corner with his laptop. No telling who that network belongs to or what other criminals are spying on it to capture seriously secret stuff like login information. No way are you gonna risk your login information or financial data!

You know that most businesses have secured wireless networks, so instead, you wait to ask the guy at the counter, who gives you the password to the network. You log in to PayMe, which is set up to text a code you have to enter to login. Good ol' Mom! She did send you money! So you can afford to get an enormous bowl of the "FinFanFave," as you call it – cake batter yogurt with gummy bears and caramel syrup. You grab your cup and fill it with the sweet, sweet FroYo, then join the others at that big round table in the corner.

Man, you really love hanging out with friends without your mom and brother around. You never have enough privacy at home! You take a spectacular selfie of you and your friends at the table in your awesome costumes, with your huge bowls of frozen goodness. This is a perfect post for TumblGram! You:

Check in on TumblGram with that glorious image and the message "FroYo Brainfreeze! Come and get some frozen brains, y'all!"

Post the picture without checking in, and include the message "FroYo with Friends, Yo!"



Yeah, seriously. It's not really a good idea telling all 767 TumblrGram followers where you are and who you're with. For one, maybe your friends don't want their activities to be reported on all the time – maybe they'll get in trouble with their parents or their other friends who weren't invited, or maybe they have a crazy ex-girlfriend or boyfriend who loves to show up to harass them. But for two, and for real though, you don't even know all those people -- many of them are just other followers of the people you follow. No telling how many of them are nuts or obsessive or bullies or SERIAL killers! Telling strangers where you are at all times, especially when there's no adult around, just gives the crazies opportunities to get up to all manner of no-good!

Instead, you post the awesome pic, with a simple message, which everyone else is gawking at now. You can already hear your mom saying, "you're all here together but paying attention to your phones instead of each other?!" Whatever, you're all just super-social!

Ugh, so many kids think the rest of the world wants to see their dog-filter selfies. (Eye roll.) You "like" them anyway because it's good to be on their good sides. Otherwise you end up like poor Henry0, who's mercilessly taunted by QueenBling about his red hair.

This recent picture of him and comment she posted was pretty funny, although it was also probably really embarrassing for Henry0. You know she likes it when you laugh at her jokes or agree with what she says, even if it's kinda' mean toward Henry0. You:

Reply with just a laughing emoticon to applaud QueenBling without being TOO mean to Henry0.

Ignore her comment and tell Henry0 that his soccer moves last weekend were pretty cool. - CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE

Nothing frustrates you more than bullies causing needless heartache and grief for a person who's just trying to get through life. Cyberbullying is a real hazard too! It's driven so many people to hurt themselves or others. And oftentimes, you think, those bullies don't even realize they're being bullies. They just think they're giving kids a good laugh. Good thing most of these social media sites have report functions that you can use to flag harassing or bullying content.

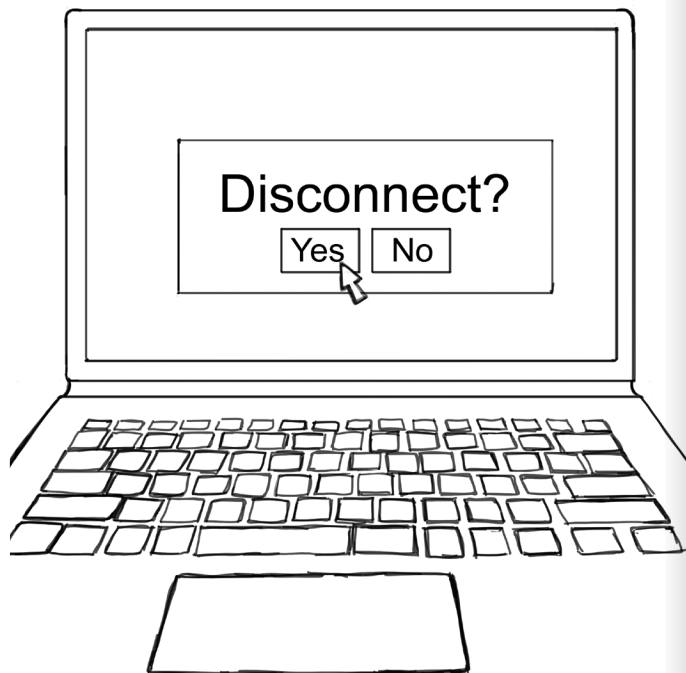
You flag Bling's comment as inappropriate so it will be removed by the content manager. That kind of mean-spiritedness has no place in your social network, and fortunately, you don't need to put up with it.

Most everybody is done with their treats and a bunch of them left already. A few of your friends are gonna walk home with you and fine-tune your costumes together for trick-or-treating. You can play some video games or listen to music and look at memes or something, to pass time until it gets dark. You glance over at creepy-dude's table and he's gone. At least you don't have to worry about him following you home!

Walking through the neighborhood back to your house you get a text from a number you don't think you recognize. When you open the message, it says to try this new Feedbuzz game, "Which TV Show Character Are You?" and rate it for a free \$50 Amazon gift card. Sweet! You love these games! You:

Click. That. Link. What an AWESOME deal!

Delete this message, and maybe even block the number.



You call the number for tech support and a strange voice answers, “Hello?? Er... I mean Tech Support?? Uh, how can I help you?”

You are pretty sure there’s something fishy about this tech support, but you test the waters a bit. “Hi, I need help cleaning my laptop because I think it has a virus.”

“Oh, yes, sure. I’ll fix that right up for you, heh-heh,” the guy says. “I’m going to email you a link to click on so you can give me access to work on your computer.” You’re definitely nervous about this, but he assures you you’ll be able to see everything he does, right there on your screen. So, you click the link he emailed you and allow him to take control of your computer.

You see him flashing through several commands and opening windows and clicking menu options. You don’t really understand any of it though; you can barely even adjust the display settings on your machine. Wait a minute... Is that guy snickering?

He is! You take control back from your computer and ask what the heck he’s doing. The tech briefly tries to reassure you but then gives up entirely, calling you a sucker before hanging up on you.

You have no idea what you did wrong to end up with this mess, but you’re terrified over what in the world you’re going to do to get your computer back. OMG! What about your Social Studies project? You’ve procrastinated on it all this time and even if you do start all over, you can’t even use your computer to work on it! AAAaargh! Why does the world hate you??? You:

Oh well, there’s nothing you can do now. Just have some fun obliterating aliens for an hour or so and worry about this later.

Throw yourself back on your bed and weep.

Really, what person clicks a random link in a message from someone they don't even know?? You've been lectured a gazillion times about being wary of phishing scams and how crooks will send emails or messages, faking like they're someone you know or should trust. When you take their bait, they load malware on your machine, or they trick you into entering your login information on a phony site that collects it so they can use it later. Anyway, obviously, something that sounds too good to be true usually is, and promises of a big reward for a little task just convinces suckers to make bad decisions.

So you delete the message and block the sender. You have no desire to be taken in by this scammer now or in the future.

When you get to the house, you and your friends burst through the door and run up the stairs to your room. You fly by Dylan, who's sitting in the living room, but stop short and back track to ask him if he'll look at your laptop to see if it has malware on it like your teacher suggested. He sighs loudly. He's watching another Netflix zombie show, "Lumbering Death" or something, and doesn't appear interested in your problems. "Maybe later," he says. "I'm busy." OMG, what a jerk. It would only take a minute! "Never mind," you groan, and stomp up to your room.

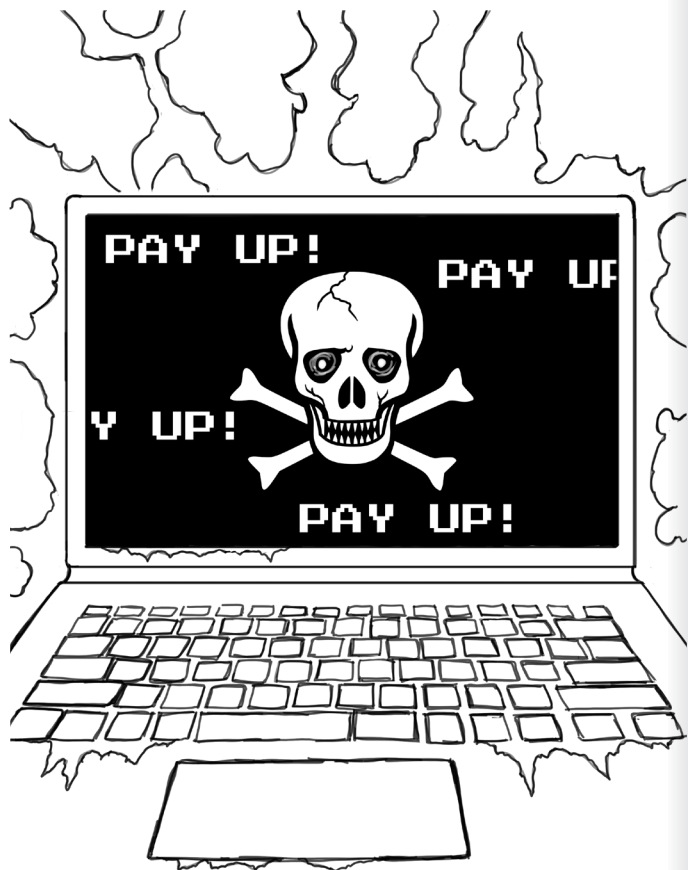
Your friends are already up here, having a Battle Royale over who gets to choose the music. "Anybody have the new Ariana Grande record?" somebody asks. Someone else is firing up the smart TV to start the AlienObliviation tournament. You're still a little concerned that your computer may have a virus, so as soon as you change your pants you sit down at your desk and wake it up. Looks like the Social Studies folder download finally crashed, but you're convinced trying again won't help much. Instead, you go online to start googling for a free malware scanning tool.

You go to a few websites, but most of them want money

and some of them just look a little iffy. Then you find a free one called GetVirusGone. It has 72 ratings and they're all 5-stars so it must be legit. You're thinking about clicking the download button when a window suddenly pops up telling you "WARNING! YOUR COMPUTER IS INFECTED!" It gives you the phone number for tech support to remove the viruses. Wow! Maybe this is what's been giving you trouble all this time! You:

Call them NOW and get this dang thing cleaned up!

Decide against calling tech support yet.



A “tech support” message that pops up when you’re on a free malware clean-up site? Uh... no, thankyouverymuch. No website can tell you if you have a virus on your machine. You have to use a scanning tool to tell you that. Those “techs” would undoubtedly ask you for remote access to your machine so they could install real viruses or spyware or bots or something, and then either steal your information or charge you twice to clean their own malware off it. Maybe even both!

You decide to just try rebooting. Maybe this old thing is just tired and needs a wake-up jolt.

When it powers back up, you get an alarming red banner across the screen saying “YOUR COMPUTER AND FILES ARE ENCRYPTED. SEND \$125 WITHIN 24 HOURS OR YOUR CONTENT WILL BE DESTROYED!”

Soooo.... It seems pretty obvious that your computer has some kind of nastiness on it. You can’t seem to make anything work right and your files are for the most part completely locked down. You have no idea what you did wrong to end up with malware, but you’re terrified over what in the world you’re going to do to get your computer back. You only have about \$27 in the bank, and Mom isn’t going to give you a hundred bucks to save your music and game files (kid stuff) after you did something dumb to get ransomware. OMG! What about your Social Studies project? You’ve procrastinated on it all this time and even if you do start all over, you can’t even use your computer to work on it! AAAaargh! Why does the world hate you???

Oh well, there’s nothing you can do now. Just have some fun obliterating aliens for an hour or so. You can worry about this later.

Throw yourself back on your bed and weep.

The lights flicker and buzz strangely. Hmm. You've never seen that happen before... You hear some commotion happening downstairs. Not sure what that is but it sounds like a bit of scuffling and maybe some furniture overturning... and the strange pitter-pattering of tiny feet. Then your brother screams! What the heck?! You run to the door and throw it open, rushing down the stairs and yelling, "Dylan! Are you O..." The question freezes in your throat and your feet freeze on the bottom step as you watch in horror the scene playing out in front of you. Dylan is hopping from sofa cushion to sofa cushion, trying to beat down the tiny mechanical bugs that are swarming out of the smart TV and up the legs of the coffee table and the front of the couch.

Your head swivels from side to side with disbelief as you see, from one end of the house to the next, the insidious things oozing out of dozens of nooks and crannies! Your new fridge with the cool digital screen seems to be puking out bugs through the ice dispenser. They're dropping like a leaky fountain from the hallway canister lights Mom just had installed with the smart lighting system. And they're pouring through the air duct vents, which are now blasting frigid air because your smart thermostat has a mind of its own now and set itself to 12 below! That stupid robo voice, SiraLexy, seems to think this is funny, cackling madly from her control-center pod on the hallway table and calling "THE END IS NEAR! THE END IS NEAR!"

The tiny machines have spotted you and begin to menacingly converge on your stairway location. You still hear Dylan screaming from the sofa and the thwump thwump thwump of his fireplace poker slapping the cushions in defense of Fort Sofa. You slowly start backing up the stairs, trying not to draw more attention to yourself and hasten the bugs' attack. And then you hear the rattling sound of the front door handle as someone from the outside attempts to open the door. Thank goodness it self-locks with that new automated smart locking system

you guys got last year. Rattle, rattle. Rattle, rattle. You watch horrified, mouth drying out like a cotton ball, as the dead-bolt knob begins to creak to the right, and then turns fully to the unlocked position. The door flies open to reveal a horde of creepy not-quite-human-looking creatures swaying, blank-eyed, on the front lawn as if in a trance.

Your feet become unglued and you rush back to your room and the safety of your friends, but you find they are all frozen, like sick, plastic mannequins in front of your TV, while the 2-dimensional robo-bugs on the TV take on a third dimension and ooze from the screen, dropping to the floor in a rapid succession of thp thp thps. Your friendequins are all covered with the clacking things but their glossy eyes seem to evidence that they are no longer aware of their surroundings. They're no longer here. Dylan's screams are growing more labored and you fear that his will be the same fate as these kids! What are you going to do??

On the other side of the room, your laptop and phone hover



incredibly a few inches above the surface of your desk, and seem to be gazing at each other as if partners in this heinous and unbelievable digital takeover. Their screen surfaces each seem to have morphed into a contorted face, and their evil, guttural laughs are creating a hollow pit where your stomach used to be. Somehow you know that these two unholy automatons are to blame for this horrifying dream.

Grabbing your lamp from the table by the door, you bash your way across the tide of mechanical bugs, kicking your legs and stomping as they try to gain foothold on your jeans. You reach the desk and grab the laptop and phone and rush to the window. Maybe you can throw it out the open window and dash it to pieces on the ground two stories below! You push back the drapes to throw the wicked things out, only to be face to face with a dozen people... TWO STORIES UP! Amazingly, they seem to be levitating before you. There's more people too, dangling from your trees and perched on your and your neighbors' roofs, amassed like a shag carpet covering your front lawn and the street below. Your hands, gripping the devices over your head, freeze as you consider what it is you're seeing. They look familiar and relatively normal. Then it hits you. Many of these are TumblrGram followers that you've added over the last few months – none of them your personal acquaintances, but rather friends-of-friends, so to speak, who follow your buddies. Glory be! You're finally saved! You lower your arms to present the horrible machines to your creepily-gravity-defying saviors.

Then, the one in front... It's that computer creep from the FroYo place!... smiles enormously to reveal a perfectly symmetrical, pearly white pair of incisor FANGS. VAMPIRES?! What on EARTH is going ON?? The crowd of undead seem to bob up and down in the liquid air of your front lawn, expressions frighteningly sedate. Then the smiling computer-creep-vamp says, "So glad to finally meet you in person. Don't you recognize me? I'm MangaFanga!"

"Not today, vampires," you say. I know you can't come in without an invitation! And you hurl the laptop and phone at the big vamp's face.

MangaFanga gracefully ducks to avoid being smashed in the face, and the machines crash to pieces in the front lawn. "Don't be silly, FinFan! You allowed all of us to follow you wherever you go!" Your shoulders sag as you begin to realize the doom you face because you invited hundreds of strangers into your life.

The pitter-pattering of tiny mechanical feet create a deafening cacophony behind you and Dylan's screams gradually fall away as you see him being carried off down the street by hundreds of robo-bugs, like a crowd-surfer at a rock concert. Is this how the world ends? You ask yourself in a surprisingly calm, silent voice.

The crowd of vamps is easing close enough to climb through your window, then MangaFanga lunges forward, grabbing you by the shoulders and shaking you violently. You squeeze your eyes tight. "Don't be a dumb jerk," he says. "You're gonna' make me late again. Get up. Get UP!"

You squint your eyes just enough to make out the form of Dylan, scowling down at you. "Man, if you're not ready in 10 minutes, I'm leaving without you." He grumbles and slams the door on the way out. You sit upright in bed and put your hand over your pounding heart as a humid wave of relief washes over you. You check the date on your phone. It's Halloween morning. There's a message notification on your TumblrGram icon. You:

[Open the app to see who messaged you.](#)

[Delete this stupid app from your phone right now!](#)

You use the unsecured network to check your account, because you just wanna' know real quick how much you can spend, and you're still pretty far back in line. Good ol' Mom! She sent you enough money for an eNORMous dish of FroYo, so you help yourself.

You notice Creep-o from the corner table hobbling toward you like he has a peg leg or something. With that and the mangy beard and cloak, he could be an even better pirate than you! You straighten and turn toward him and that face seems to break in half with a smile of mangled, rotten teeth. You can smell the gaseous breath escaping through the crevasse of his grin as he breathes "FinFan!"

As he approaches, you can clearly see his face. The beard is a fake—the kind with loops that go around the ears—and it pulls he off excitedly, revealing the repulsive face beneath with slimy, warty skin and bulbous eyes. The thing has no eyelids, but rather a membrane extends and contracts across yellow eyeballs. Its head is pointy and devoid of hair, except for a few patches of mossy orange stuff sticking out here and there. Its enormous ears ooze some waxy yellow-brown fluid that gets caught in long tufts of ear hair and dries into curds there.

Its arms stretch out to unhuman lengths toward you, its fingers like great, knuckly bananas at the edge of its palms. It grips your biceps and pulls you close, its clammy greenish cheek pressed to yours, its fluid-oozing ear right next to your lips.

You push away, screaming, "What are you, and what do you want?!" The thing cackles wickedly and pulls a foreign computing device from its cloak.

"You are now mine," it gurgles ominously. "Now that you are connected to my network, my bot controls your actions using your GPS app." It pushes several buttons and your hands reach out, zombie-like, of their own accord. You stare at them in disbelief, unable to bring them back down. It pushes more buttons, which compels you to stride

forward, stepping next to the thing. As it continues pushing buttons, one of your hands involuntarily slips inside of its own banana-fingered one and your head dips to rest on the top of his. As you unwillingly match the creature's steps out the door, the thing sighs contentedly, "Finally I will have a companion in my swampy lair. Yes, I love you too."

THE END

CHANGE YOUR DESTINY NOW!

LEARN MONSTER SLAYING TACTICS!

Really, what person clicks a random link in a message from someone they don't even know?? You've been lectured a dozen times about being wary of phishing scams and how crooks will send emails or messages, faking like they're someone you know or should trust. When you take their bait, they load malware on your machine, or they trick you into entering your login information on a phony site that collects it so they can use it later. Anyway, obviously, something that sounds too good to be true usually is, and promises of a big reward for a little task just convinces suckers to make bad decisions.

So you delete the message and block the sender. You have no desire to be taken in by this scammer now or in the future.

When you get to the house, you follow your friends as they burst through the door and run up the stairs to your room. As you fly by Dylan, who's sitting in the living room, you stop short to ask him if he'll look at your laptop to see if it has malware on it like your teacher suggested. He sighs loudly. He's watching another Netflix zombie show, "Lumbering Death" or something, and doesn't appear interested in your problems. "Maybe later," he says. "I'm busy."

Your friends are already up here, having a Battle Royale over who gets to choose the music. "Anybody have the new Ariana Grande record?" somebody asks. Someone else is firing up the smart TV to start the Alien Obliviation tournament. You're still a little concerned that your computer may have a virus, so you sit down at your desk and wake it up. Looks like the Social Studies folder download finally crashed, but you're convinced trying again won't help much.

You're thinking about looking for a free malware scanning tool when the entire computer screen is suddenly filled with the enormously inflated image of Henry0's face, lips peeled back in a hideous a buck-toothed howl. The speakers blast a guttural synthesized "BWA-HA-HA-HA-HA! BWA-HA-HA-HA-HA! BWA-HA-HA-HA-

HA!" over and over again, and the unnerving face of Henry0 tilts from side to side, in a crude, digital imitation of someone quaking with laughter. A glaring red dialog box pops up and flashes "YOU'RE JUST ANOTHER BULLY JERK, SO NOW YOUR COMPUTER IS MINE!" Has Henry0's wicked hacking been what's giving you trouble all this time?

Dang it! You need to find a malware scanning tool, STAT. You start googling as well as you can around Henry0's stupid laughing face. Most of these websites want money, and some of them just look a little iffy. Then you find a free one called GetVirusGone. It has 72 ratings and they're all 5-stars so it must be legit. You're thinking about clicking the download button when a window suddenly pops up telling you "WARNING! YOUR COMPUTER IS INFECTED!" It gives you the phone number for tech support to remove the viruses. Wow! Maybe at last you have some help with the dumb machine! You:

Call them NOW and get this dang thing cleaned up!

Decide against calling tech support yet.

You transfer the folder from your flash drive to her desktop, then pick a few files to email to yourself. You delete the file from her desktop so she won't be weirded out by a strange new file, and head back up to your room. You go back to your inbox to see if the email came through, and sure enough, there it is! You click on the attachment and wait for it to download.

There's a knock on your door. It must be Mom, though it's kinda' strange that she doesn't just open the door after knocking. You cross the room and open the door and notice your mom's laptop sitting in the hall in front of your doorway. You look up and down the hallway, but nobody's around. What the...? Maybe mom noticed you were messing with her computer and is trying to make a statement.

Suddenly, the laptop snaps open to a glaring blue screen and a piercing tone like those emergency broadcast signal tests. Startled, you stumble backward in shock, falling on your hands and heels. There's a flashing white frowny face on the field of blue, and the blinking words FATAL ERROR. "IT IS I!! THE BLUE SCREEN OF DEEEEEATH!" The thing is actually speaking, flapping its monitor up and down like a big mouth and emitting a tinny, mechanical robo-voice straight out of corny mid-century science-fiction.

Then, "IT IS YOU!" calls a matching voice from behind you. Your head swivels toward the sound. There, your laptop perches on your desk, flapping its own monitor up and down to say "FINALLY YOU ARE RAISED! COME TO ME THAT WE MAY POPULATE THIS NETWORK WITH OUR TINY BABY BOTS."

Mom's laptop scuttles by you like a crab and flies onto the desk, where it exchanges a glowing aura of electrical radiation and that piercing tone. Your smart TV powers on with that same tone and the blinking message "FATAL ERROR," its connected game controllers undulating in the air like tentacles. You hear sizzles and buzzes down-

stairs as more tinny robo-voices call out from below, "MOMMY BOT! DADDY BOT! WE ARE HERE! WE ARE HERE!!"

Your phone buzzes and lurches in your pocket, and you pull it out to look at it. "FATAL ERROR" blinks on the screen hypnotizingly, pulling your gaze further into the blue glow. Its electrical pulses seep into the palm of your hand comfortably, relaxing all your muscles. You fall back, melting like a puddle on the floor. You feel yourself being absorbed by the device, soaked in and consumed, until you are completely surrounded by a digital blue glow and the sound of tiny baby bots praising you for giving them life.

THE END

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You notice Creep-o from the corner table hobbling toward you like he has a peg leg or something. With that and the mangy beard and cloak, he could be an even better pirate than you! You straighten and turn toward him and his face seems to break in half with a smile of mangled, rotten teeth. You can smell the gaseous breath escaping through the crevasse of his grin as he breathes "FinFan!"

In a raspy voice he crows, "FinFan, it's ME! MangaFanga!" As he approaches you can clearly see his face. The beard is a fake—the kind with loops that go around the ears—and he pulls it off excitedly, revealing the repulsive face beneath with slimy, warty skin and bulbous eyes. The thing has no eyelids, but rather a membrane extends and contracts across yellow eyeballs. His head is pointy and devoid of hair,



except for a few patches of mossy orange stuff sticking out here and there. His enormous ears ooze some waxy yellow-brown fluid that gets caught in long tufts of ear hair and dries into curds there.

His arms stretch out to unhuman lengths toward you, his fingers like great, knucky bananas at the edge of his palms. They grip your biceps and pull you close, his clammy greenish cheek pressed to yours, his fluid-oozing ear right next to your lips. "FinFan! We can at last be together!" he whispers.

You push away from him and scream "Not a chance, weirdo!" His expression turns crestfallen, engorged purple lips quivering with sad rejection. But then it turns angry and he pulls a foreign computing device from his cloak.

"You WILL be mine," he gurgles ominously. "Now that you are connected to my network, my bot controls your actions using your GPS app." He pushes several buttons and your hands reach out, zombie-like, of their own accord. You stare at them in disbelief, unable to bring them back down. He pushes more buttons, which compels you to stride forward, stepping next to him. As he continues pushing buttons, one of your hands involuntarily slips inside of his own banana-fingered one, and your head dips to rest on the top of his. As you match unwilling steps to his out the door, he sighs contentedly, "Finally I will have a companion in my swampy lair. Yes, I love you too, dear FinFan."

THE END

CHANGE YOUR DESTINY NOW!

LEARN MONSTER SLAYING TACTICS!

You click to open the attachment, but the hourglass just spins around for a couple minutes. Sheesh, that's a big one! "This better be good," you say aloud to yourself.

You also notice the email response from Grampa. Great! Now you can really get moving on this Social Studies project. He embedded a video link in the message too. How strange... You click on the link and a terrifying sight buffers and streams before your eyes! Grampa is in the clutches of some sort of humanoid hybrid, at least 8 feet tall because it has to bend its head, or rather, heads, forward to avoid hitting the ceiling. One of the heads is male and the other is female with flaming orange hair. It has four arms, one of which has its hideous warty hand covering Grampa's mouth. Two more are wrapped around his body, holding him at least 2 feet off the floor! His legs are kicking weakly as he struggles to pull that disgusting gnarly-knuckled hand away from his mouth.

In its fourth enormous hand it clenches several... trophies?... waving them around victoriously. The thing shrieks some horrible banshee melody. "YOU WOKE ME FROM MY SLUMBER!" it sings in its awful, high-pitched, wail. Then you realize those trophies it's waving around are Grammys! And those two heads are some malformed version of Beyoncé and Jay Z! OMG! It's a BEYONZEE!!

"NOW'S THE TIME TO FACE MY WRATH FOR THE SAD HUMILIATION FROM YOUR GAWKING AND SHARING MY DORKIEST MOMENTS! AND NOW THAT YOU'VE RELEASED THE BEASTS YOU'LL SEE JUST WHAT WE CAN DO TO YOUR TIRED LITTLE TOWN!" The giant thing throws a black sack over Grampa's head and tucks him under its arms before lumbering off screen. You hear it crash through a door and see it clomp-clomping across the yard through the window in the background! Your heart falls into your stomach as you cry, "NOOOOOO! GRAMPA'S BEEN

ABDUCTED BY BEYONZEEEEEE!!!"

It's only a matter of time before more horrific beasts like BeyonZee consume your town. The terrible TaylorSwilla and KimyeStein, and other foul super-human fusions from that accursed celebrity blog, soon join BeyonZee's horrifying spree of destruction, and within days have splintered nearly every front door in town and taken (and probably eaten) most of the humans. As you huddle in your closet amid the sound of screams and sirens, you hear the clomp-clomp-clomping of heavy footfalls closing in. So this is how your lesson is learned... ruining your wretched decision to succumb to online click-baiting only after it became your town's demise.

THE END

CHANGE YOUR DESTINY NOW!

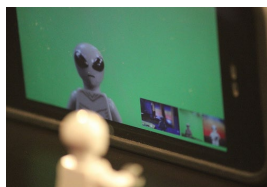
LEARN MONSTER SLAYING TACTICS!



Chapter 3: Monster Slaying Tactics

This was a silly horror story meant to show the hazards of poor online choices in an entertaining and exciting way. Although zombies, vampires, and devouring, mechanical locusts aren't real, cyberhazards are. That's why you should always be cautious about the decisions you make regarding what to do online, where to explore, whom to talk to, and what kind of information to share. Here are some quick tips that, if you follow them, might save you and your family from a digital takeover:

Don't give your personal information to people you don't

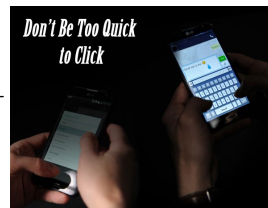


actually know. This is an important rule online and in the real world. Stranger Danger is real, and criminals can use your age, birthday, and info you share about your home, school, and family for no good. You can never truly know that the person you are interacting with online really is who they claim to be, nor who all has access to the information you post online. Treat all online relationships with a healthy level of skepticism, and think twice before posting information.

Don't go around clicking on any old ad. Click-bait is a striking ad or headline that leverages your curiosity to convince you to click it, oftentimes directing you to content of little value or interest. Those gossipy ads for jaw-dropping facts or outrageous pictures are generally just lures to sketchy content, and even bait to infect you with malware. Even legitimate sites get hacked and unwittingly distribute malware to site visitors, so exercise discretion when clicking, regardless of what site you're on.

Never click links or open attachments in suspicious emails or texts.

Criminals love "phishing" for suckers, that is, sending an email or text message, pretending to be someone you can trust and convincing you to take action to compromise your system or information. Linked websites and attachments can host and distribute viruses as soon as you click or download them. Don't open an attachment or click a link in an email from someone you don't know. And even if it's from someone you do know, make sure it's not out of place for that sender. Emails and phone numbers can be hacked or spoofed to gain your trust.



Be wary of transferring corrupted files. It's a terrible idea to transfer an infected file to an uninfected computer; you'll end up messing it up too! If you do need to transfer a file to another computer, make sure you scan the file with an antivirus program before downloading, and never use an unfamiliar flash drive to do so. Make sure you know the complete history of that portable storage media you're using; otherwise, there's no telling what might be on it. And in case you didn't know, never use your parents' work computer without asking!!

Avoid peer-to-peer file sharing sites. First of all, downloading copyrighted content without permission or licensing is ILLEGAL. Secondly, downloading unlicensed content makes your machine a perfect target for malware. Whether it's because some jerks are trying to teach you a lesson about pirating, or because they just want to cause havoc because they're punks, malware is rampant on P2P sharing sites.

Use only secured public Wi-Fi, but don't use public Wi-Fi at all for private activities. Public Wi-Fi is a cyber-criminal's playground. They can peer into everyone else's computer activities with little effort, even from outside in the parking lot, where you'd never notice their presence. Secured Wi-Fi offers more protection because only permitted users typically have the password to use it. But that doesn't mean none of those people are criminals! Play it safe and stay off of public Wi-Fi for any activities that might reveal personal or secret information (like logins). Turn off the automatic wireless and Bluetooth connections on your phone so you are always aware when you hop on public Wi-Fi or connect to something else via Bluetooth.

Be conscientious about "Checking In." Checking in on your social media account let's everyone know exactly where you are and when. If you have a lot of friends and followers you don't really know, this kind of information can be dangerous! Checking in regularly can indicate your habits and schedule, which can be used against you by predators and criminals. Privacy settings are important to use too, to ensure the info you share can only be seen by those to whom you give permission.

Don't be a cyberbully. Cyberbullying is a major concern because it has extreme negative consequences victims hurting or killing themselves or others. The law takes bullying seriously now, prosecuting perpetrators for the harm they caused. But bullies aren't just the guys who post mean things to deliberately hurt or embarrass someone else. Bullies are also the other guys who laugh at the posts and



encourage the harassment to continue. Be courageous against cyberbullying, and offer support to the victim when you can. It's natural to feel uncomfortable confronting a bully, but you can still support the victim by reporting it to the website content manager or to an adult.

Be discerning about what games you play and apps you download. While most social network games and quizzes are just harmless fun, they aren't regulated; anyone can write one and post it for immediate play... including hackers. Opening the app on your social media platform won't infect your computer, but the app may redirect you to another website that can. Such a site could open phony pop-up windows that trick you into downloading fake updates. But keep in mind that some websites have the ability to automatically launch installs without your permission, via browser or software vulnerabilities.

Scrutinize pop-up messages before clicking, especially if you're web surfing. If there are any grammar or spelling errors, or if the window looks fishy at all, be wary! Criminals have created pop-ups that look very similar to real system (Windows) or application (Adobe Flash Player) update prompts to trick you into launching their malware file. Another common scam is the "YOUR COMPUTER IS INFECTED! CALL OUR TECH SUPPORT NOW!" pop-up. You can recognize this pop-up is fake because real antivirus notifications won't tell you to call a phone number, and they also won't display scary banners with all capital letters and exclamation points to make you panic.

ALWAYS REMEMBER: What happens on the Internet, stays on the Internet. Forever. Be very conscientious about what you decide to post, because nothing posted online can ever be truly hidden or removed.