Town City is a really strange place, and nobody seems to notice it but me. My whole life I've been ignored or brushed off whenever I point out something unexplained. It's like they all think "Oh, it's just Mitchell Clark the crazy kid, why won't he shut up?" When I'm an adult, I'll become a paranormal investigator and prove them all wrong with my evidence. Maybe I'll even have my own TV show. But for now, I'm stuck going to Town City High School, a place where I barely learn anything.

I didn't want to go back to school for many reasons. As a kid I thought schools would be obsolete in the 21st century, but it's 2006 now and I'm still forced to go there. And how am I going to earn enough money to buy a Wii when it comes out if I'm stuck in a classroom doing algebra? Paranormal investigators never need to do algebra. I also didn't get enough time to do what I wanted this summer because my sister Mila was monopolizing the TV by always keeping it on the Disney Channel (I hate *Hannah Montana.)*. She always claimed that she was there first and that I had to wait my turn. How can someone be so diabolical at only 12 years old? I missed 5 episodes of one of my favorite shows ever because of her and I didn't get to beat the games I rented. And this year is my junior year. Eleventh grade. People say that this is the year all the college admissions people look at. I don't like to think about college. However, I guess there was one thing I was kind of excited for: journalism class. Writing for the school paper would give me the perfect excuse to investigate all the unexplained events everyone ignores and prove to my classmates that I wasn't crazy. When I told my mom she kept going on about how it "would look GREAT on college applications!" She could be right, but if I went to college I wouldn't even know what to major in.

I waved goodbye to my mom as she drove home with Mila. The middle school was undergoing repairs after they found mold in the science room, so she got an extra week off. Lucky kids. I swear she was sticking her tongue out at me as the car exited the parking lot. Before I went in I saw two guys change "WE HEART OUR NEW STUDENTS" on the school sign to "WE EAT OUR NEW STUDENTS" while laughing like hyenas. I didn't know removing two letters could be that funny. Town City High School hadn't really changed much since last year. But I did notice that the hallway had a few new posters with "positive messages".

The first two class periods sucked. My new math teacher looks like he's 100 years old and called me "Michelle" during attendance. I told him that it was actually "Mitchell", but he just told me to sit down and pay attention, and he added some stupid remark about my hair being too long. And get this: his name is Mr. Oldman. My life is a joke.

Everyone thinks that just because I like computers and video games I must be good at math and I'm sick of it. But there was a light at the end of the tunnel— after second period came journalism. I was so excited. I was going to uncover so many secrets and maybe even have an excuse to leave school grounds!

I could barely sit still while I waited for the class to start. At long last, the teacher walked in and introduced herself as Mrs. Kelley. She started explaining what we would do in class, but then said something that destroyed my expectations of a great class: "For your first assignment, you will be working with a partner."

A partner! I HATED group projects. I always get paired up with slackers who don't do anything or miniature dictators who try to control every aspect. Last year, I got forced into a group with these girls who did nothing but post on MySpace the entire time we were supposed to be researching in the computer lab. They kept giggling over random guys on some website called Hot or Not, too. I was going to get stuck with one of the kids in this room for the entire year. So far, the worst options were the football player picking his nose, the kid with his clothes on backwards, or the girl not even trying to hide the fact that she was texting. I crossed my fingers as she started assigning partners in hopes that I would get someone decent.

Then, it happened. "Mitchell Clark, you'll be with… Ivy Green. That sounds like a crayon, how cute!" said Mrs. Kelley. We both turned to look at each other. If I were to describe Ivy with one word, it would be "cool". Today she was wearing a black tank top with an intricate design printed on it, and a pair of white low-rise jeans. I also noticed she had black Converse that she drew on with a marker. Her hair was bleached blonde, and I could tell that she had intentionally left the roots dark. It complimented her makeup perfectly. She also had a nose piercing! When I got ready for school today I just threw on my jeans, a T-shirt, and my glasses. Oh, and my watch, too. I'm not a mind-reader (They definitely exist, by the way), but I could tell that Ivy was looking at me and thinking something along the lines of "What an effing nerd." I bet she wanted another partner, preferably one who didn't spend most of his weekends playing GameCube and browsing online forums.

A voice snapped me out of my self-doubt. Ivy was trying to get my attention. “Hello? Are you okay?” she said. I said the first things my brain could think of: “Yes! Hi!”. Then I did something incredibly stupid: I stuck out my arm for a handshake. Normal kids don’t do that!

She returned the handshake. “You’re Mitchell, right? Cool shirt.” Ivy thought my shirt was “cool”. It was gray and had a UFO with the text “Earth Sucks” (I kind of have a collection of alien-related shirts). Maybe Ivy was also a believer. The teacher cut me off before I could reply. She said we were getting our first assignment on Friday and the days before then would be just going over what we needed to do. I couldn’t wait. My mind was racing with possibilities. I hoped that I would get a chance to investigate the student government. There’s no way the current class president has won every single election fair and square. I’m onto you, Jeff.

When we all left class, Ivy waved goodbye to me. I made sure to wave back. Was she just pretending to be nice to me? I hope she doesn’t ditch me on Friday and make us get a bad grade.

The rest of the day went by like normal. I ate lunch, filled my backpack with syllabi, and made my way home. Teachers love to tell everyone about how plagiarism is not allowed and that it will give you an automatic F. I’ve known that since sixth grade, but I guess there’s still people dumb enough to try it. At dinner that night my parents were asking all about school. I gave them classic one-word answers like “Fine”, “Good”, and “Okay”. Mila was going on and on about how she was forced to sit next to some kid named T.J. who apparently smells like gym socks. When I was lying in bed that night all I could think of was the first assignment. Friday couldn’t come any sooner.

The next few days were fine. I think I paid more attention to Ivy than the teacher. We still hadn’t said more than a few words to each other. Would I ever be able to carry a full conversation with someone like her? I’ve never been any good at talking to strangers, or girls, or girls that are strangers. On Wednesday she was listening to music on an MP3 player. I bet she knew bands that nobody in school had ever heard of. Maybe she was even in a band. I told my friend Jamie about her during lunch and he said that he saw Ivy in detention once. When I asked what she did he said he didn’t know and then stole some of my chips. I would have tried to get more information from him, but then this other guy Adrian came over and asked him to trade Pokemon cards. Now that I think about it, maybe Jamie wasn’t that much

of a reliable source. He believes almost any video game rumor out there. When we were kids, he freaked out because he couldn't find Mew under the truck. I guess Ivy would remain a mystery until the end of the week.

On Friday morning I was a bundle of nerves. I was going to be alone with Ivy for an entire class period. I always imagined myself as working solo and solving the world's greatest supernatural mysteries. What would it be like having to work so closely with someone else? My old fear of being ditched by her began to return. It was all I could think about during math, and I was practically shaking when I sat down at my desk in our classroom. She turned to face me and asked if I was ready for today. I barely managed to spit out a "Yeah" in response.

Then it began. Mrs. Kelley was announcing what she wanted us to write about. Everyone else's assignments were pretty underwhelming. Some kids were asked to survey people about their thoughts on going back to school and this other group had to make predictions for football season. She was probably saving the most interesting stuff for last. The girl I saw texting on the first day groaned because she was still stuck with the backwards-clothes kid as a partner. Every day I saw her asking the teacher to switch her to a different group. Then she got to me and Ivy. Everything seemed like it was in slow motion. "Ivy and Mitchell… You're going to write about our new vending machine in the cafeteria!" the teacher said. A vending machine. One of the most boring things in the world! Out of all the things to make us write about, she chose a VENDING MACHINE! Ivy looked like she thought it was a dumb idea too. Maybe this class was going to suck after all. I should have taken art class with Jamie. He's probably drawing Mario and getting an easy A for it.

Ivy and I were walking to the cafeteria in an awkward silence. I thought about saying something, but I couldn't come up with anything. Eventually we arrived at the school cafeteria in all its food-stained glory. I almost tripped over a milk carton someone left on the ground. The school's new vending machine stood and produced a low hum. I noticed that it was full of school district-approved "healthy snacks". Yuck. I started to open my notebook to write something down about it but Ivy called me over. She was sitting at an empty cafeteria table so I cautiously sat down next to her. "You think the assignment sucks, don't you?" she said. I agreed with her. "So… What if we wrote about something else?" Ivy said with a mischievous glint in her eye. I was intrigued.

“What were you thinking of?” I asked.

“Do you know Mr. Johansen?”

Of course I knew him. He was one of the coolest teachers in the entire school, and I had him for history last year.

“Yeah, I do. I was so upset I didn’t get him again this year!” I responded. Why did I have to add that last part? Now she’s going to think I’m a weirdo who goes off on stupid tangents!

“He’s been acting… off.” Ivy said. She seemed genuinely worried.

“What’s wrong with him?” Now I was getting worried too.

“It started on the first day. He didn’t seem happy to see us, he didn’t make any jokes, and he didn’t know who I was.” Ivy explained. Now this was a story I could get into. It could be more interesting than that time some freshman found a rock in his burrito! But then I remembered Mrs. Kelley. She might get really mad at us for not doing the assignment she wanted. We could be suspended, or worse, expelled!

“But won’t Mrs. Kelley get mad at us?”

Ivy laughed, but it didn’t seem like a mean laugh. “Don’t worry! She’s going to love it more than any lame-ass vending machine report.” she said reassuringly. “So are you in?”
I thought about it for a second, but then I told her “Yes.” We still had some time before the bell rang, so Ivy suggested that we try and get a look at Mr. Johansen’s class. I didn’t want to be caught and thrown into detention, but I also didn’t want Ivy to think I was a loser so I went along with her. We went to the hallway where his classroom was. The walls were plastered in that fraud Jeff’s campaign posters and the occasional club flyer. We were quickly able to spot Room B117. The door to his classroom used to feel welcoming, but today it felt different. I tried to get a look at the inside through the glass, and I saw him.

On a normal day in Mr. Johansen’s class, he would be talking with everyone or finding ways to make the material more interesting. Sometimes he even played music in class! He was

nothing like that today. I saw him sitting at his desk, completely stone-faced. All the students were silently filling out worksheets. It couldn't be the same guy! My mind began to swirl with theories. I went back to where Ivy was and told her what I saw.

"That's exactly what he was doing when I was in class!" she said. Then she turned to me and added "This is going to sound crazy, but what if he has, like, an identical twin or something who took his place?"

I told her that it was a good theory and that I would write it down. She looked like she was about to tell me something else, but then the bell rang and we had to go our separate ways. I stayed up most of that night making notes and theories about the story and wondered if Ivy would ever read them. There was still so much I didn't know about her. Maybe, just maybe, we could actually be friends. But cool girls like her don't usually hang out with kids like me unless they want help with their homework. I fell asleep thinking of ways to impress her.

The rest of the weekend was pretty normal. Mila saw me writing in my journalism notebook and grabbed it out of my hands.

"You think your teacher's been replaced by a clone?" my sister laughed. "He's probably just sad because his job sucks!"
Mila never believes anything I tell her. I once got in trouble for trying to inform her about some boy band she liked being industry plants.

"You and your dumb conspiracies. This is just like that time you thought our new neighbor was a serial killer!" she said while skimming through the notebook. "Who's Ivy?"

"He had his knife and gun collection on display, and that's none of your business!" I said, snatching the notebook back from her. She's so annoying sometimes!

On Monday, I saw Ivy writing a note while the teacher was on the classroom phone. (I don't think Mrs. Kelley was talking about school stuff. I heard her mention a "hot date"...) Right when the bell rang, the note landed on my desk. I started reading it on the way to my next class.

The note read “Meet me at the food court. Something big happened.”. She had signed it with her name and even drew a little star next to it. I couldn’t believe my luck. The coolest person I know just invited me to hang out outside of school! But how was I going to get a ride? I didn’t want Mom to take me because she would insist on getting to meet my “new friend” and Ivy would think that I was a big dork. And what if Mom thought it was a date just because Ivy is a girl my age and tried to give me a “talk”? Mila would probably demand to go to the mall as well so she could spend her entire allowance on cheap plastic earrings from Claire’s or other junk that kids like. And *she* would want to meet Ivy too. What could I do?

It was still on my mind when I went to lunch. But as Jamie waved me over to our usual spot, I had a realization. Jamie had a car! Sure, I’d have to listen to him share completely false information about the Wii for the whole trip, but he wouldn’t bother us. Knowing Jamie, he’d probably go straight to GameStop and stay there the whole time. After I sat down, I filled him in on my situation.

“So you need a ride to meet up with your new *girlfriend*?” he teased.

“We’re just friends, seriously.” I said. “And yes, please give me a ride.”

“Sure!” Jamie said. Then he narrowed his eyes at my lunch and told me “But it will cost you one pudding.”

I started to hand over my chocolate pudding, but then he laughed and said he was just kidding. We liked to play tricks on each other sometimes.

As the bell rang, Jamie called out “See you after school!” and then I said “See you then!”. I tried to pay attention to the rest of my classes, but my mind kept wandering back to Ivy’s note. What could she have seen?

After several mind-numbing classes, school was over, and I was sitting in the front seat of Jamie’s car. I was glad we weren’t in any hurry, because when Jamie gets stressed out he drives like a rejected Mario Kart character. I tried to look out the window to distract myself from thoughts of doing something stupid and messing up the investigation, but he kept going on about the latest BS video game rumor he heard about.

“Dude, I just saw the craziest thing online. So this guy, he has a cousin who works for Nintendo, and his cousin said that there’s a secret way to unlock Toad in Melee! You just have to –” Jamie rambled.

“Oh, come on! That’s the fakest thing I’ve ever heard, and Toad is a stupid choice for a fighter anyway.” I replied. I liked Jamie, I really did. But sometimes he was stupid. All he ever watches is *G4* and he copies what he sees on TV all the time. I think his mom is still mad about him breaking their computer by trying to modify the boot screen.

“You’ll believe me one day, I swear.” He said, shaking his head. Actually, I did believe him once. We were kids and were playing on the new Nintendo 64 my mom got for her birthday that year (She’s liked video games since way before me and Mila were even born!). Jamie swore up and down that there was a way to unlock Luigi in *Mario 64.* I think some big kid on the playground told him. I liked Luigi. Even as a kid I thought it was unfair how he was always sidelined in favor of his brother. I wanted it to be real so bad. We stayed up so late that night trying (and failing at) every method he heard of. When none of them worked, I gave up and asked if we could go to bed. He always makes fun of me for believing in aliens but not the random weirdos he spoke to in some video game chatroom. I can never explain that there’s a difference!

We pulled into the parking lot of the mall.

“I’m going into GameStop. Have fun with your *date*!” he said, making kissy noises after “date”.

I would bet most of my allowance that he was going to bother the cashier and ask if they got a Wii early. They probably have a dartboard in the back with his face on it. But enough about him, I needed to think about what Ivy needed to tell me. It could be anything! I walked past the kids’ play area and went up an escalator to meet her at the food court. I wondered if anyone else could hear how loud my heart was beating. After looking inside a few places, I found her sitting at a table near the back of this pretzel place next to Little Caligula’s Pizza. She looked extra cool today. I noticed that she had her nails painted with black and red spirals.

I sat down, and she handed me a pretzel inside its paper bag. I guess she had bought two before I showed up. “What happened?” I asked her. She looked around to make sure nobody was listening, and began to tell me all about it.

“It was the weirdest thing! So we were all writing in our notebooks, but then this girl decided to open her water bottle and she accidentally spilled it all over the desk. Johansen was walking around the classroom but when he saw the water he got really mad. He was practically screaming at her even though she said she would clean it up. I swear she started crying. The weird part is that he was actively trying not to touch the water, you’d think it was poison or some shit!” she explained. The teacher I knew never raised his voice at students like that. The part about him being afraid of water was reminding me of something. She was going to think that I was completely insane. Before I knew it, the words tumbled awkwardly out of my mouth.

“Remember when you said that it was like he had an identical twin?”

She nodded yes.

“What if, um, what if he’s an alien?”

She just stared at me. Oh god, I blew it.

“It’s just– I read a lot about them, and it turns out a lot of them have a fear of water, or maybe just Earth water…”

To my greatest surprise, Ivy was actually listening. She said something nobody has ever really said to me when I talk about the paranormal: “Tell me more.”

I took my notebook out of my backpack and began to show her some of the stuff I wrote about our case. I also told her the names of some of the websites I learned stuff about aliens from. (My dad once tried to block them because he didn’t want my “head filled with conspiracies”. It’s a good thing that he barely understands how to work the computer.)

“This actually kind of makes sense. We just need to find some way to prove it.” Ivy told me.

“You could keep a closer eye on him when you’re in class?” I suggested. But then Ivy got a better idea.

“What if we went to his place? My dad has it in his address book and I’ve got a car, I can drive us.” she asked. Getting a look inside his house would answer so many questions. But then I remembered that it's called breaking and entering and it’s a crime. I don’t want to go to jail if he catches us!

Ivy seemed to notice that I was worried. “It’s okay. I’m really good at hiding, and you’ll just need to follow me.” We had only known each other for a couple of weeks, but I trusted her.

Our plan was pretty good. Tomorrow after school we were going to go near his classroom and wait for him to leave. There was a big meeting for all the teachers after school that day, so he likely wouldn’t be there. We would check for any spare keys hidden on the porch, and if we didn’t find any we would have to settle for looking in the window… or maybe Ivy could pick the lock. If anyone at our school could pull off something like that, it would be her.

Then she asked me a question.

“So, when did you start believing in aliens?”

I had only mentioned this story on a few UFO websites before, but I guess now was my time to tell a real person.

“It happened when I was in kindergarten.” I said. “My sister and I had this babysitter, and one night she let me stay up late and watch a movie with her. I forgot the name, but I do remember that it was how I learned what an alien was. After that, I couldn’t stop thinking about them. Then I saw it. We were driving home from a restaurant at night and I saw these strange lights in the sky. They were flashing on and off and I remember them being weird colors.”

“Then what did you do?” Ivy questioned.

“I tried to tell my parents about it, but they told me that it was ‘probably just a helicopter’ and that I almost woke up my sister. But I knew better. When we got a computer, I would look up UFOs when no one was around. People had seen the same things as me. I remember finding the blog of some paranormal investigator and knowing that that was what I wanted to be when I grew up.”

“That sounds like a cool job.” Ivy said. “It always sucks when your parents don’t believe you.” She looked a little sad when she told me that. Part of me wanted to ask what had happened, but the part of me that doesn’t want to be a complete social reject decided not to pry.

When we finished our pretzels, Ivy asked me if I had a cell phone. I did, but it was really old compared to all the fancy new models I saw on TV. It’s also kind of boring compared to the ones people at school have. I own a Nokia, but I’ve seen people with cell phones that look like they came straight from a sci-fi movie. I handed my plain old phone over to her and she put her number into my contacts. Ivy has a really sleek-looking flip phone.

“In case you need to call me.” she informed me as she gave me my phone back. As we parted ways, I felt a little more confident that we could have a real friendship. Jamie met up with me at the mall entrance. I resisted rolling my eyes when he started telling me about how he gave the cashier the “secret message” that was supposed to grant him access to a Wii hidden in the back but instead she threatened to ban him from the store. He dropped me off at my house. When my mom asked me where I went, I didn’t mention Ivy. I told her that Jamie and I went to the mall after school, which wasn’t a total lie. She seemed pleased with that information.

Today was the day. If this was a movie, or even a video game, I would be wearing something really cool for this. But this was real life, and I was getting behind on my laundry so I had to wear a Mario Kart shirt and a pair of gray shorts. At least they were cargo shorts so I had pockets to put stuff in. I “borrowed” Mom’s camcorder in case I needed to film evidence. If she asks me where it was, I’ll say that Mila was using it to make music videos with her friends again. She tried to rope me into one once. I don’t want to talk about it.

School went by like normal, even though I was about to have the biggest moment of my paranormal investigating career. I think I read somewhere that some aliens can read minds. . .

I hope Mr. Johansen, or whoever was impersonating him, hadn't heard of our plan somehow. I tried to pay attention in class, but worst-case scenarios kept flashing through my head. He could shoot us dead with a ray gun, or abduct us and use us as test subjects, or something even more twisted!

When the last bell rang, I could feel my stomach churn. It was now or never. What if I never saw my family again? I was so caught up in my thoughts that I almost bumped into a few kids. Ivy was waiting for me near his classroom.

"I brought a camcorder so we can get video evidence." I informed her quietly. It had been weighing down my backpack all day.

She told me it was a good idea, and then her head turned towards the classroom.

"He's leaving, act natural!" she whispered to me. I caught a glimpse of him when his back was turned. He walked in a different way than our real teacher. Mr. Johansen walked with a spring in his step, and he would often go out of his way to greet students. This guy, whoever he was, ignored everyone and moved in a very stiff manner. Would the other teachers at the meeting notice any difference? A lot of them don't think very highly of the real guy. Mr. Vasquez, who teaches economics, once referred to him as "a manchild". I tried to distract myself by looking around the car.

Ivy had a lot of different CDs, mostly of bands I never knew existed. The first one I noticed had a picture of these kids I'd seen around school on the cover and the label said Tonic-Clonic. I thought that was a seizure, not a band. I wanted to go through the rest of the CDs, but she probably wouldn't want me to make a big mess. It still felt weird to be in a car driven by someone my own age. Eventually Ivy parked in front of some random house with a For Sale sign. We had found where he lived. Now we had to deal with the hard part.

We both got out of Ivy's car, and she grabbed my arm so I wouldn't fall behind while we ran to his house. He lived next door to a house with a bunch of kids' toys littered all around a dirty playhouse in the front yard. I don't know what I expected Mr. Johansen's house to look like, but I definitely wasn't expecting him to have a group of pink flamingos on his lawn. While I

wondered if there was a hidden camera inside a member of the plastic flock, Ivy looked for a spare key.

“I found it!” she called out to me, and I walked over to her. “He keeps it under the mat. It’s like he wants to get robbed or something.”

She put the key in the lock, and we cracked open the door. Ivy was brave enough to take the first look inside. “The coast is clear. Come on, let’s go in.” she said encouragingly.

The inside of Mr. Johansen’s house looked like your typical bachelor pad. He had a TV with a Nintendo 64 hooked up to it, which was pretty cool. I hope whoever replaced him didn’t wipe any of his save files. His coffee table was full of old magazines and had stains on it. There were some gross old beer cans too. Maybe he was drinking them before he got abducted. People may call me immature, but at least I’m not in my thirties and still reading *Nintendo Power*. He even bookmarked some pages with sticky notes! I haven’t done that since I was twelve.

Then, we heard voices coming from the basement.

I got the camcorder out and almost dropped it when I tried to turn it on as fast as I could. This could be my only chance to catch an alien on camera! We quietly opened the basement door and couldn’t believe what we saw.

It looked like something out of a movie. There were all these screens and keyboards and actual holograms slowly rotating. The largest screen showed exactly what I was looking for. An older-looking alien was on screen, speaking really angrily. From what I could see, he looked really tall, with pale mint green skin and long silvery hair. He had large black eyes and a really small nose, and was wearing some kind of uniform with lots of strange badges on it. Could that be the leader? Their language was really unsettling, full of sounds I didn’t think human vocal cords could make. He was clearly upset with the guy. The screen turned off as he ended the call. Ivy and I made a break for it before he could come back upstairs.

We were both out of breath when we got back to the car. I was still in shock when we drove away. There was footage of living, breathing aliens in my hand!

“I can’t believe we saw all that. . .” Ivy said in awe.

“Me too. Um, where are you taking me?”

“My dad’s not home, so I thought we could go to my house and talk about everything. I’ve got a computer, so we could put your video on a flash drive.”

I told her it was okay with me, but inside I was flipping out. I hadn’t been to a girl’s house since Susie Allen’s birthday party in sixth grade, and that was only because her parents made her invite the whole class. I wonder what Ivy lived like. She probably has a really awesome room with a stereo system and tons of music. My room would look like a little kid’s room compared to that.

Ivy lived on a street with lots of trees. Some of them were already starting to change color. Her house was small, but it was nice. She went to her room to get her laptop and I was left sitting awkwardly on the couch in her living room. I was right about the stereo system, by the way. It was next to a big shelf of music, but I wasn’t sure which ones belonged to Ivy and which ones belonged to her dad. The table had guitar magazines and a hand-painted coffee mug that said “WORLD’S BEST DAD 1996” on it. I noticed a picture of Ivy and her dad on the TV cabinet that looked like it was taken at a concert. She looked about Mila’s age and her hair was longer and all black. Her dad had brown hair, glasses, and a neatly trimmed mustache.

A little bell jingled near my feet, and I looked down to see a calico cat rubbing against my leg. I started to pet her just as Ivy walked in with a laptop. “That’s Lucretia. She loves everyone.” Ivy said as the cat jumped onto her lap.

“Your house is nice.” I said, and she thanked me.

“It’s a good thing my dad isn’t here, or we’d have to talk over one of his favorite albums.” she laughed. I could tell they were really close.

Ivy logged in to her laptop. Her background was set to a photo of a band I didn't recognize. "I almost left it at my mom's place last week. It's a good thing I put a password on here because I just know she'd try to go through it." she said.

"Your mom sounds mean." I replied.

"Trust me, she is."

Ivy's mom, whatever her name was, had just been added to my mental list of people I never wanted to meet. After getting everything plugged in, we were able to watch what I recorded. It was shaky, and the quality wasn't the best, but I could see all the weird devices and hear the argument.

"What do you think they were talking about?" Ivy asked me.

"I think that old guy on the screen is his boss. Maybe he was being lectured about something." I told her.

"Maybe he knows about the terrible job he's doing of impersonating Johansen."

An idea popped into my head. "We need to get him fired!" I exclaimed. "We can blow his cover in front of the class, then he'll have to leave!"

Ivy thought it was a great plan. I had English class when Ivy was in history, so I would have to get a bathroom pass to leave the classroom. Then I'd send her an SMS to let her know I was ready. Instead of my mom's camcorder, I'd bring a camera so I could take more pictures for our article. We'd use those along with some video stills. When I got to the classroom, Ivy and I would confront him and throw water in his face. If everything worked and he went back to his planet, we would go to his house again and search the basement. The real Mr. Johansen had to be hidden away somewhere. I really hope they didn't kill him.

It was almost 5:30 when Ivy dropped me off at my house. Mom and Dad were probably making dinner. But what if they somehow found out what I had been doing all day? I'd be a dead man! I can practically see the disappointment in their faces. The last time they were

angry with me, I was banned from going online for two weeks. I didn't *mean* to spend all afternoon downloading music instead of doing my homework, LimeWire just takes forever.

To my surprise, I wasn't forced into a family meeting/interrogation the moment I opened the door. Mila was feeding her Neopets and Dad was watching the news (and complaining about it) while Mom cooked spaghetti. Our dog was eating kibble from his dish. The coast was clear.

That night, I was really grateful to have a younger sister. She kept our parents distracted by talking about how she wanted to audition for the school play. I bet she got that idea after watching *High School Musical* for the fifth time. I often wish our parents never let her have the soundtrack CD.

Mom kept saying that if Mila got a part we would all be buying tickets, even if she was just an extra with no lines. If I get abducted tomorrow, I won't have to watch a bunch of kids singing and dancing off-key for 2 hours. I guess the poster on the wall of my English classroom is right— every cloud does have a silver lining.

I thought about watching some TV after dinner to take my mind off things but the only good thing on was some *X-Files* reruns, and I just couldn't stomach anything with aliens right now, so I just went upstairs and played on my Game Boy. Things would be so much easier if I were a video game character. I could just grab a mushroom or a star and punch that alien impostor in the face. Maybe Mr. Johansen is in another castle.

I woke up at two A.M. in a cold sweat because of the stupidest nightmare ever. All I remember of it is aliens in silly hats trying to do surgery on me. I like it better when my dreams are stupid stuff like video games or TV episodes that don't really exist. I even occasionally dream in N64 graphics. Sometimes, when I have something on my mind that really bothers me, I pace around the house. I really wanted to do that, but I didn't want to wake everyone up and have them think I was even crazier than I already am. So I just tried to go back to sleep.

Why am I even so scared of all of this? It's been my lifelong dream to be a paranormal investigator, I can't just chicken out and let aliens take over TCHS. Even though *some* people

deserve it, the entire student body having their energy drained by aliens would be awful. If I don't do anything to stop this faker, we could all be their prisoners.

At breakfast, I had an epiphany. In *Luigi's Mansion*, he was scared of all those ghosts popping out at him, but he pushed on so he could save Mario. If a grown man who still wears matching outfits with his brother can face danger, then so can I. But then Mila snapped me out of my thoughts by screaming in my face.

"Hey! Mom's about to start the car, stop daydreaming or you'll make us both late!" my sister shouted.

She startled me so much I dropped my spoon into the empty bowl of cereal in front of me.

"Okay, I'll get going!" I said, frustrated. I wish the school buses hadn't been vandalized so I didn't have to get dropped off like a huge dork. The local newspaper said it was "juvenile delinquents" who did it, but I think I know the real culprits: the Grays. There's an entire board on one of my favorite forums for sightings of them. I'm not afraid of gray aliens because they are kind of dumb. All they do is wreak havoc like little kids after too much fruit punch. They're smaller than little kids, too.

I wish I was up against gray aliens instead of whatever this green species is. It would be so easy to stop them.

I tried to pay attention in my first few classes instead of daydreaming like I usually do. To calm myself down, I started reciting a mantra inside my head: I am a regular student. I do not have to expose an alien during the fifth period. I can understand the functions of X and Y or whatever it is we're learning about in math class. I don't think it works very well.

Ignoring it isn't any good. I need to remember all the video game characters and action heroes I've seen during my life. I don't want to be a loser anymore, I want to be a cool guy who kicks evil aliens in the crotch and saves innocent high schoolers from impending doom.

Journalism class was fine. Mrs. Kelley gave a presentation about how to write articles on the computer because we'll be doing that soon. Everyone loves a trip to the computer lab.

Ivy passed me a note: “Today’s the day. You ready?”

I wrote back “Yes”.

Lunch actually kind of took my mind off of things. I’ve been sitting with the same group since freshman year. Jamie is there, obviously, but these guys Adrian, Travis, and Dylan sit with us too. There’s also a couple of girls who are a little younger, but they mainly talk to each other. One of them has dark curly hair, glances at me a lot, and giggles to her friend about it. I think her name is Meagan and she’s only started doing that recently. Jamie is convinced that she *likes* me. A girl would never do that!

I ate my square pizza and drank from a little chocolate milk carton while everyone talked about games, TV shows, and weird new stuff they saw online. Apparently there’s a new Flash game where you brutally maim Barney and the Teletubbies. Mila used to watch those and I hated it. I’ll have to log on and check it out when I go home, or *if* I make it home. . .
Eventually, the bell rang and I had to go back to reality.

I tried to psych myself up all the way to fifth period English. After attendance, it was go time. I know I can do this, it’s what I’ve always dreamed of. And I can’t let Ivy down.

My English teacher, Miss McFarland, began to take attendance. I could feel the many Beanie Babies on her desk watching me.

“Mitchell Clark?” she asked.

“Here.” I said. I wasn’t the kind of kid who showed off by saying “present.”
I raised my hand just after she told everyone to open their books.

“Yes, Mitchell?” she said.

“May I use the bathroom?” I asked.

She said I was excused and gave me a hall pass. When I went to grab it, I heard this really dumb guy named Andrew snicker to his equally stupid friends.

“Heh, he’s gonna use the bathroom!” I heard him say while his friends laughed. Joke’s on you, Andrew. I’m not even going near the bathroom.

I hid in a stairwell even though the halls were empty and dug my phone out of my pants pocket. My fingers found Ivy’s contact number and typed out “I’m ready” as fast as I could with the T9 keyboard.

Ivy replied quickly: “come over asap.”

I found her standing outside the door. She still had her backpack on, so she probably didn’t go inside when the bell rang.

“I have some things I want to say to him.” Ivy said while showing me the water bottle she brought to throw in the alien’s face.

With no time to spare, we opened the classroom door and everyone turned to look at us. The alien impostor glared at Ivy.

“Student Number Five-Fifteen! Where have you been? What were you doing?” he shouted.

“I could say the same thing about you, ‘Mr. Johansen.’” Ivy said as she walked closer to him.

“That boy is not in the database.” the alien said with his head facing me.

“This is my friend Mitchell, and we’re here to find out who you *really* are.”

She called me her friend!

“Everyone here knows that you’re acting really, really strange. One could say it’s like you’re a. . . different person.” Ivy said with purpose, and some of her classmates agreed.

“I do not know what you are talking about. My designation is Frank Johansen and I am your teacher at this facility.”

“You didn’t act like this last year!” a girl wearing four tank tops layered over each other exclaimed, and her desk group murmured in agreement.

Ivy slammed the water bottle on the alien’s desk. He visibly cringed.

“Tell us what’s *really* going on, or I will drench you.” she said with a dark tone.

The alien stood up.

“Get back in your seat, Five-Fifteen, or I will go to your leader, the principal, and have this whole class expelled!” he shouted, causing me to almost drop my camera.

Before I knew it, I was yelling for Ivy to splash him.

It was a sight that no one in the classroom would ever forget.

As soon as the water hit him, our teacher’s face melted away to reveal green skin. One of his contacts popped out to reveal an eye the color of ink. I snapped a picture just as the classroom erupted into chaos.

“AN ALIEN! AN ALIEN!” screamed a kid wearing a hat indoors.

“Get the alien!” shouted some student athletes, who grabbed their fancy water bottles from the sporting goods store. Us students had him backed into a corner.

I’m pretty sure he started to curse at us in the aliens’ language. It was probably the angriest I’ve ever seen someone get.

“Fine! I took the place of the Frank Johansen! Are you satisfied, you disgusting little humans?!” he yelled.

One of the athletes said ‘NO!’ and dumped blue Gatorade all over the alien’s face. The alien grabbed him and tried to pin him down, but then a strange beeping came from the teacher’s desk.

He dropped the kid and cursed under his breath. The beeping was coming from this little silver device he kept under some papers. He pushed a button and a hologram-like screen popped up. It was the alien I saw him talking to at Mr. Johansen’s house!

He was clearly taken aback when he saw all of us, but still maintained composure.

“Zev Grobix. It seems like I have chosen the most opportune time to check in on your mission.” he said calmly.

“This is not what it looks like! I was perfectly assuming the role of the human teacher when the children attacked me out of nowhere!” the impostor (Zev Grobix?) pleaded.

“Zev Grobix, I know that you are not speaking the truth. Given your previous track record with Human Observation missions and your current incompetence, I am afraid that you will be sent back to your quarters on Xerenia effective immediately. You will be dealt with there.” his commander stated.
Zev Grobix was distraught. “You cannot do this to me!” he pleaded.

“Yes I can. The human will be released and returned to his position. We shall have no further words about this, Zev Grobix.” the commander replied.

We couldn’t believe what we saw next. The other alien pushed a button and Zev Grobix was teleported away like something out of *Star Trek*! I wish that I could have filmed it. It was all blue sparkles and lights as he faded into nothing.

The alien then addressed us in an extremely serious tone, like the principal at one of those anti-drug assemblies.

“Human children. You cannot tell anyone about what you have seen in this room. If you do, my operatives will give you our procedure. You do not want to know what that entails.” he told the class as most of them stared with wide eyes.

He could have just been using scare tactics to keep us in line, but I didn’t want to risk his wrath if I told anyone. I wonder if I could still tell the UFO forums about what I saw. I’m starting to get sick of the same gray alien stories over and over again.

The alien closed out of the screen after giving us a final warning, and the device vanished just like Zev Grobix. Just then, the bell rang. We all had to go to our next classes, but everyone who has Mr. Johansen for sixth or seventh period gets free time. I hope they’re grateful.

One Week Later

Things were slowly getting back to normal at school. Or I guess as normal as things could be. Rumors spread through school like wildfire, and some of them got really crazy. I heard someone in gym class talking about how apparently Ivy punched an entire group of aliens who were trying to escape in a big flying saucer. His friend said that he heard that aliens were trying to dissect humans in one of the science rooms and that Ivy and her classmates heroically saved the day. I never got a single wacky rumor about myself.

On Friday “class president” Jeff gave this big speech about how invaders are NOT tolerated at TCHS and that he will call the FBI, the CIA, *and* the local police. That guy is so deluded I’m surprised he didn’t say he would install snipers on the roof to shoot down any UFOs. I never voted for him even though he had his campaign team give out grocery store Lofthouse cookies.

Ivy and I finished our article by writing a paragraph each. When we showed it to Mrs. Kelley we expected her to yell at us in the computer lab for not doing the assignment correctly. Instead it went like this:

Ivy raised her hand to tell Mrs. Kelley that we were done and she came over to the computer we were using to look at it. She was greeted by my picture of Zev Grobix's disgusting melted human disguise. That camera was good. You could really see his green skin shine!

Her glasses almost jumped off her face.

"Oh, that's disgusting! How did you even get that picture?" she exclaimed.

We both thought we were in big trouble. Hello, in-school suspension.

"Everyone will read the paper if that's on the cover! Great job, kids." she said.

I was dumbfounded. Ivy simply told me "Shock sells."

Our article ended up looking like this. It made the front page!

The TCHS Tattler

Issue #55, September 2006

Alien Identity Thief Exposed!

By Mitchell Clark and Ivy Green, 11th Grade

This year, many students were looking forward to having popular teacher Mr. Frank Johansen for U.S. History, but they didn't get who they expected. They quickly noticed that their teacher's personality had completely changed over the summer.

"It was really odd. He refused to call anyone by their names and just referred to everyone by their class period and position on the attendance sheet. I was starting to feel like my real name was Two-Twelve!" said TCHS junior Rin Suzuki.

Things hit a turning point when he began to lash out at students for not behaving appropriately. When student Jenna Gonzalez accidentally spilled her water bottle near him, he acted like she had done something horrible and drove her to tears.

Mitchell and I began to take matters into our own hands and investigate. His fear of water was the key. If it touched him, his disguise would dissolve and expose his true form.

Our suspicions were correct. It wasn't Mr. Johansen at all, but an alien named Zev Grobix! His disguise melting off is pictured on the right. He was supposedly part of some kind of "Human Observation" mission, but we don't know what that entails.

The next school day after the incident, the real Mr. Johansen resumed his position in the classroom, claiming to have been taking care of a sick relative in Miami. We really hope TCHS doesn't receive any more strange visitors!

People seemed to really like that issue. Even my friends at lunch read it. Meagan kept talking about how brave it was for me to "risk my life for the school." I didn't want to admit how freaked out I was so I just went along with it.

When Jamie and I walked to class after that lunch period, he kept going on about how Meagan has the hots for me and that I should go for it.

"She believed every word of your fake alien article! It's a perfect match!" he said. Like any girl would ever have an actual crush on me.

Jamie was one of many skeptics. Apparently people will ignore evidence of extraterrestrial life even if it stares them in the face. Most people think that the article was fabricated to bring attention to the school newspaper and my picture was special effects makeup and/or Photoshop. The teachers all believe the "sick relative" story those aliens programmed into Mr. Johansen's mind too. I wonder if I'll ever convince people to believe.

At least Ivy and I will always know what really happened, no matter how much the truth gets distorted. I think this school year might not be so bad after all.