

*Middle Schools create a supportive environment to reach all adolescent learners. Students at Titusville Middle School celebrate learning achievements AND nurture their "inner authors" through...*

# MIDDLE MATTERS

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## The Merchant's Adventures

*By: Garen Earls*



Near the dense forest with gleaming red, golden yellow, and pumpkin orange leaves falling along the cobblestone trail, I continued my journey. As I strolled slowly, taking in the wilderness and smelling the air of the woods, I recalled how I got to this magnificent place.

I had acquired a job from my local aviary to carry cages of birds from Neverwinter to an area along the Sword Coast called Leilon. I was a man who loved birds so this was going to be a fun week. When I grabbed the contract from the hunched, snow-haired bird owner, he whispered to me, "You're taking them to one of the biggest aviaries in the world. I gave this job to you because it would give you an excuse to see it."

I asked the owner what the building looked like, and he described a beautiful castle that looked old and ruined. When I asked him why, he told me it was because when people walked into it they would be stunned by the interior with birds bustling around. He continued about the castle, adding that it had elegant spires and elaborate stained glass windows.

He noted that a beautiful cemetery laid next to the castle, with detailed gravestones and an ornate mausoleum. I smiled and thanked the man, and started my wagon off down the lonesome road.

During my travels along an icy stream, I noticed a crow. The crow was large with feathers black like a shadow, contrasted by a bright yellow beak. It cawed at me, almost with anger, then flew off. I wondered what it was doing, then shrugged it off. Finally I continued down the path. About ten minutes later, with an eerie feeling, I knew something was wrong.

I stopped my cart along the isolated path and turned around and inspected my cart. I counted the birds (each by type and size) then inspected cages. One of the cages was broken open like a fortune cookie. I recounted, and found the missing bird was a Golden Wood Owl. The bird

was so rare it was the only one captured, and I had released it. After panicking a little, I decided I would track down the owl and continue to my destination. With fingers of ice, I continued.

About thirty minutes into searching, I heard a shrill cry and looked up to see the owl cresting a once beautiful castle, now abandoned. I zoned out as I gaped at the castle, with adorned columns and jeweled mosaics. I noticed that the roof was gleaming with melting snow as well as a large fountain that looked like an angel.

I watched it perch in a tree, stare at me intently for a few seconds, then take off down the path I was riding. I set my horse to a gallop, chasing the bird, until it stopped in the middle of the road. I sprinted to it.

I carefully picked it up as not to damage it, then put it in a stronger cage than the original. "Thank goodness for spares," I said with relief. The cage groaned as I put the cawing owl into it, then squealed as I quickly shut the door. After dusk of that day, I headed out once again to Leilon, with a blustery breeze at my back and hope in my heart.

Later when Lea, the owl, and I neared Leilon, I led my horse down by the unmistakable lines of steel known as train tracks. It looked as if God had drawn on the ground with steel, expanding into the horizon.

I could almost smell the burning engine and hear the whoosh of the brakes releasing, sending the train forward. After forty-seven hours of traveling, I approached the seemingly old building and felt a wave of relief wash over me. I checked the birds in, brought them inside, and had the honor of letting them live freely in the colorful nature of the aviary.

I ended up staying in Leilon after collecting my pay, and started visiting Lea once a week. I always felt a sense of joy going over there, remembering how I felt when I lost the only Golden Wood Owl.

## THE TWISTED MINDS

*By: Dylan Hicks*

In the dense forest I was walking toward a broken down building. As I was walking along an icy stream, I saw a dark figure in the distance. With an eerie feeling I approached the dark figure as it stood motionlessly with the ground below its feet. As I got closer to the figure, I recognized what it was. It was a disturbing statue looking at me with an abnormal look. I went into the towering building to check if I was the only survivor. I asked for help but no one answered. So I continued to search for equipment and resources. I found a rusty crowbar that can be useful for many things. For example, you can use it for defense against an enemy or use it to break a lock that you can't open. It was as bone-chilling as the darkness around me.

I heard a scream echoing in the building. I've heard this familiar scream before. I checked in the basement to see if the screaming was down there. I saw my terrified friend, Simon, being attacked by weird unknown black creatures. I used my crowbar and whacked the creatures on the head so they were passed out.

"Simon to get to safety!" I yelled. He was already running away cowardly. I ran out with him and asked, "Do you know what was happening?"

Simon answered, "Before the world went to mayhem, there was a bomb that exploded in the area but I was in the basement helping with the laundry. Then out of nowhere I was being attacked by weird creatures!"

I said, "We have to see if there are other survivors," and so we left the abandoned building.

We continued on the isolated path until we saw a gigantic building. We went into the castle and looked around. We saw nothing except an enormous owl flying high above us. After a shrill cry, it perched majestically on someone's shoulder. I questioned "What's your name stranger?" and she answered "My name is Jenna Schneider."

She exclaimed, "I was writing in my journal at the top of the building. When the bomb went off, I was passed out for a while, and when I woke up an owl was on my lap. I named the owl Sylvia and we became best friends."

We were starting to leave the building and discovered the building wasn't a castle; it was a huge monster. The monster was a mountain. We were running for our lives, but the monster we called "The Great Mulas" was still chasing us.

As we were running, we saw a bunker in the

distance. We were trying to get to safety before Mulas caught us. Simon thought it would have been cool to sacrifice himself and as he was running towards Mulas, he screamed, "Wakanda Forever!" Well there was a good and bad part in the end. The good thing was that he distracted the monster. Simon's body made it slip, fall and injure its leg and it couldn't find Jenna and I, but the bad thing was that Simon died in the process and Mulas, was still alive and searching for us. Jenna and I were in a bunker-like building. There was much food, water, and resources. We stayed there for awhile until we knew what to do next.

I explained to Jenna, "We need to find out who made the bomb." We packed the food and water that we didn't drink or eat and went on our journey again. We were walking in the forest until we saw a train track stretching wide across the land. As we were walking along the ominous black tracks, we saw a train moving straight towards us. We moved aside and let the train continue on its way and on the side of the train it said, "Wacky World-Wide Web." The train doors threw wide open and random strangers seized us.



Jenna and I saw three men towering over us. They all said in a low voice, "We were the ones who created the disaster bomb."

One man got up from his seat and said, "My name is Dr. Wolfenstein." Dr. Wolf said, "It is an experiment we call The Survivor Bomb. We drop the bomb to see who would survive the bomb. We will send search parties to find people that survive and take them and experiment on them."

Jenna and I were shaking in terror, thinking about what he was going to do to us. He positively said, "I will give you two a trillion dollars if I can take a little sample of your blood. Your blood could save the next generation of mankind."

We were thinking that he was going to do something horrible to us, but he actually gave us a trillion dollars. Dr. Wolfenstein delivered Jenna and I to a safe destination. Jenna and I had a huge mansion and we were rich together. Everything was back to normal...

for now...

## The Bad Luck Trail

*By: Lauryn Irwin*

On a dark night, I was sitting in my living room of my medium-sized house alone watching Law and Order: Special Victims Unit. Where I live, there is no cell phone service and very little people. I started to get a different feeling in my body, so I decided to take a stroll through my woods. With an eerie feeling, I headed out the door. Near the dense forest behind my barns, I heard nothing. No birds. No leaves dancing in the wind. No cows mooing in happiness. Nothing at all. I looked around as the wind was blowing and I got a tingling sensation from my throat to my feet. From that moment, I knew something was very different!

I slowly crept into the woods. The silence was deafening. There were two paths. One took you to my tree stands where

my family and I hunt and the other, as my family tells me, should never be discovered. My dad, Aj, told me once that if you go down that path, bad, bad things happen. I tried to tell myself that I should be safe and go down the trail that I know well, but it was as if the Bad Luck Trail was calling my name!

Slowly I strolled down the isolated path when I heard a shrill cry. "Turn around! Turn around now! You are unwanted!" came a strange noise coming from an old willow tree.

As terrified I was, I couldn't turn around and go home. "Who is there?" I cried. I looked around gingerly. To my surprise I saw an owl that look as old as the age of stone. He glared at me with his nightmarish brown eyes. It was as if we were having a staring contest. I

plummeted to the cold hard ground in shock!

When I fell, I must have startled the old owl and he flew off into the distance. I got back up and looked around. I heard his horrendous caw; I got goosebumps from it. As shaken up as I was, I knew I had to go on. Walking along the Bad Luck Trail, I started to notice something. Along the sides of the trail there were a bunch of headstones just lying on the ground. I wanted to get a better look, so I got a little closer. Then the sight I saw was breathtaking!

The graves had been dug up! I walked up the path a little further and I saw something breathtaking! There was an abandoned church that I could tell holds generations of secrets are sealed in boards and shingles. I finally understood why there were



graves along the sides; it was a cemetery!

Against the gusty wind, I had to go on. Now I knew for a fact something was up. With a blustery breeze on my back, I came upon some ghoulish railroad tracks. They were surrounded by leafless trees and a mossy brick wall. There was a superficial breeze in the air. I looked around and I saw the coarse, crude church sitting up on the hill. I heard the most horrifying outcry ever. I was very startled and turned around to see it. My life has flashed before my eyes. There it was. Staring me in the eyes...