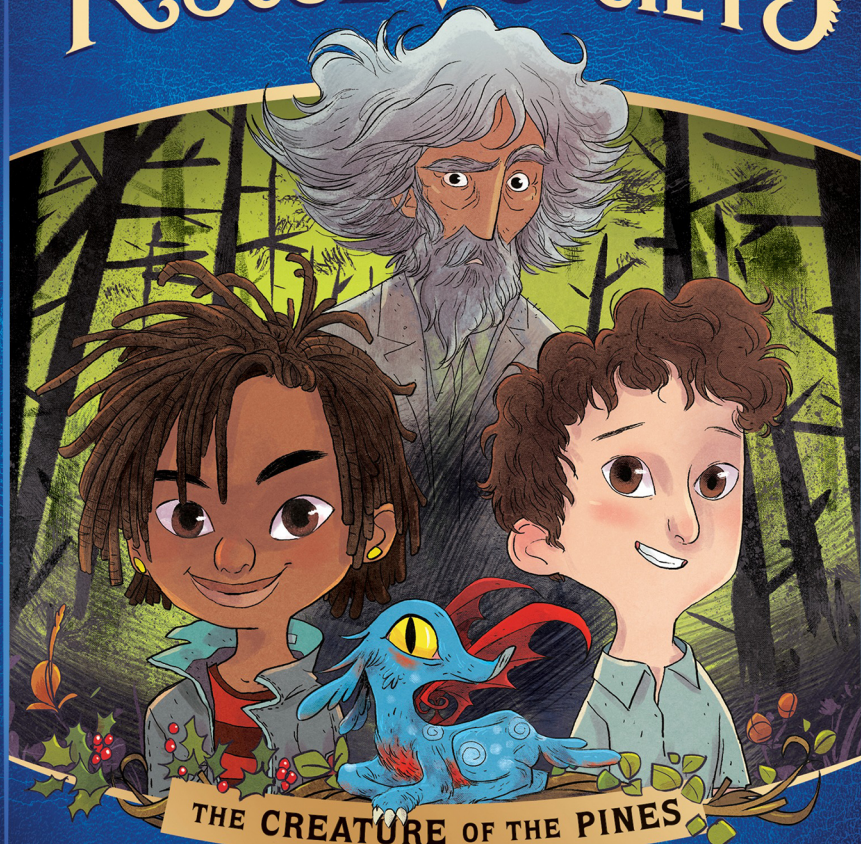


THE UNICORN RESCUE SOCIETY



NEWBERY HONOR-WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE INQUISITOR'S TALE*

ADAM GIDWITZ

ILLUSTRATED BY **HATEM ALY**

DUTTON CHILDREN'S BOOKS
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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

UNICORNS ARE REAL.

At least, I think they are.

Dragons are definitely real. I have seen them. Chupacabras exist, too. Also Sasquatch. And mermaids—though they are *not* what you think.

But back to unicorns. When I, Professor Mito Fauna, was a young man, I lived in the foothills of Peru. One day, there were rumors in my town of a unicorn in danger, far up in the mountains. At that instant I founded the Unicorn Rescue Society—I was the only member—and set off to save the unicorn. When I finally located it, though, I saw that it was *not* a unicorn, but rather a qarqacha, the legendary two-headed llama of the Andes. I was very slightly disappointed. I rescued it anyway. Of course.

Now, many years later, there are members of the Unicorn Rescue Society all around the world. We are sworn to protect all the creatures of myth and legend. Including unicorns! If we ever find them! Which I'm sure we will!

But our enemies are powerful and ruthless, and we are in desperate need of help. Help from someone brave and kind and curious, and brave. (Yes, I said “brave” twice. It's important.)

Will you help us? Will you risk your very *life* to protect the world's mythical creatures?

Will you join the Unicorn Rescue Society?

I hope so. The creatures need you.

Defende Fabulosa! Protege Mythica!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Prof. Mito Fauna". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping 'P' and 'F'.

Mito Fauna, DVM, PhD, EdD, etc.



CHAPTER ONE

Elliot Eisner stood at the front of the bus, looking down the long aisle. Every seat was full. The other children scowled at him.

At least, Elliot was pretty sure they were scowling at him. He was the new kid, starting school three weeks into the new school year. *Who starts a new school three weeks into the year?* he thought. *Three weeks! It's far too late to make friends. The year is practically over!* Elliot considered turning around and walking back to his new house, where his

mom and grandma were unpacking boxes. But that would just make things worse. Tomorrow, when he was forced to come back to school, he would be the kid who'd flipped out and run away on his first day. Not a good first impression.

Worst of all, his class was going on a field trip. On his very first day at school. Things just weren't supposed to work like that. He wasn't *prepared*.

Elliot sighed and began to walk slowly down the length of the bus. Maybe there were a couple of empty seats in the back. The kids stared at him. He slouched past. *They think I'm a weirdo.*

This made no sense. Elliot was not a weirdo. He was a normal kid. A little pale, kinda skinny, lots of curly brown hair. Pretty normal. But Elliot did not feel normal. Not on his first day at a new school, on a field trip he was not prepared for, surrounded by kids he did not know.

There *were* some empty seats in the back.

One was next to a big boy with a shaved head,



who smiled at him and then farted. Elliot would not be sitting there.

There was a seat next to a girl who was digging in her nose like she'd lost something. Then, she found it. Elliot would not be sitting there, either.

Finally, he saw a seat in the very last row, next to a girl who looked like the lead singer in a punk rock band. She wore a gray jean jacket and gray jeans and red high-tops, and her hair was an explosion of black twists. The girl was rocking back and forth like she was listening to music. But there were no earphones in her ears.

Punk rock Beethoven, Elliot thought. *This one thinks she's a punk rock Beethoven. But at least she's not finding buried treasure up her nose or playing the tuba through her butt.*

He sat down next to her. She stopped rocking. "Hi," she said. "I'm Uchenna."

"I'm Elliot. I'm new here." *Obvious!* Elliot silently shouted at himself. *Don't say things that are obvious!* "This is my first day." *Everybody knows that!* "Even though school started three weeks ago." *Why are you stating facts that everyone knows?!?!*

Uchenna said, "I was new last year. I didn't start school till after Christmas."

You see, she knew—Wait, what?

Then Elliot said, "I thought I was the only person so horrendously unlucky to be forced to start a new school in the middle of the year."

Uchenna threw her head back and laughed. "No," she said. "There's two of us."

And that is how Elliot Eisner and Uchenna Devereaux became friends.





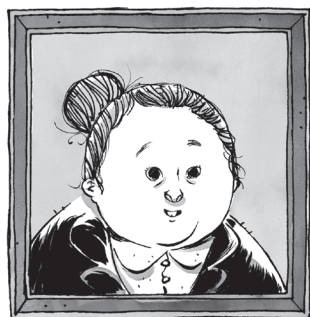
CHAPTER TWO

The class's teacher was Miss Vole.

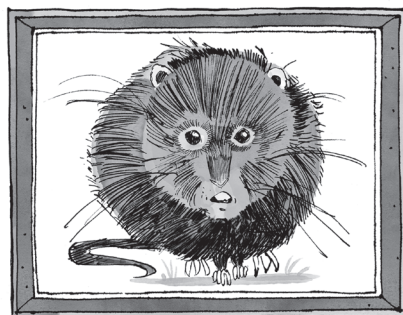
Elliot liked to memorize books about animals—it was one of his hobbies—so he knew that voles are kind of like mice, but even smaller, with tiny eyes and plump little bodies. As Miss Vole stood up from her seat at the front of the bus, Elliot leaned over to Uchenna and whispered, *“Isn’t it weird that she looks just like her name?”*

Uchenna smiled. “I think about that all the time.”

Miss Vole cleared her voice. “Now, children,” she said. She spoke like they were in kindergarten. She made her eyes very large, and if her voice got any higher, only dogs would be able to hear her. “Children, I expect you to be on your *very best* behavior.” *Very best* was just about in dogs-only territory. “We have a *special* guest with us today for our *field trip*.”



MISS VOLE



VOLE

Uchenna put her fingers in her ears so her eardrums wouldn’t explode. Elliot snickered and did the same.

Miss Vole went on, “His name is Professor Fauna.” It sounded like *Fow-na*. “Can you say *Professor Fauna*?”

“Why wouldn’t we be able to say that?” Elliot whispered. Uchenna laughed and then shoved her fist into her mouth to stifle the sound.

“Professor Fauna,” the children chanted.

And then, the professor stepped onto the bus, and it was as if a shadow had fallen over the whole class. Uchenna stopped laughing at once. Elliot gripped the green vinyl of the seat.



The professor was tall, with a thick beard that was half black, half gray. His hair stood up from his scalp like he was in the habit of kissing electric eels. He wore a threadbare tweed suit and leather shoes that looked like they had been really fancy once, long ago.

“Buenos días, mis amigos,” he said. His voice sounded like someone had put rocks in a blender.

Uchenna leaned over to Elliot. She wasn’t smiling anymore. “He’s a social studies teacher here. Everyone’s terrified of him. They say he’s totally unhinged from reality.”

“Is he dangerous?” Elliot asked. He didn’t like things that were dangerous unless they were animals, and he only liked dangerous animals if he was memorizing facts about them from a book.

Uchenna shrugged. “Maybe.”

“Good morning,” said Professor Fauna, and he rolled his *Rs* so much, *morning* had four syllables. “I am Mito Fauna. You may call me Professor Fauna, Doctor Fauna, or Doctor Doctor

Fauna, since I am both a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, with a specialty in large and rare species, and a Doctor of Philosophy, with a specialty in global mythology. In Germany, they call me Herr Doktor Doktor Professor, but you do not need to do that, because it takes too long, and it sounds silly. Also, I am not German, but Peruvian. Do you understand?”

Every child said “No,” at exactly the same time.

“Excellent,” the professor replied, evidently not hearing them. “Miss Vole has asked me to be your guide today on this field trip to the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. You will listen to me.”

All the children nodded.

“You will do what I say.”

They still nodded.

“If not, you will *DIE*!”

The children sat straight up in their seats.

“Not that I will kill you,” Professor Fauna

added. "But there are many dangerous things in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey! So be careful, and do *exactly* as I tell you."

No one on the bus said a word. But silently, every child decided that, yes, they better do whatever this terrifying teacher said.



CHAPTER THREE

The bus drove from their school down the highway. They passed a big building with a maze of pipes and tanks and vats attached to it. Hundreds of chimneys spewed smoke high into the air. Across one of the big white vats ran the words: SCHMOKE INDUSTRIES, MAKING THE WORLD THE WAY WE WANT IT TO BE.

Elliot reached below his seat and dug through his backpack. He pulled out a bar wrapped in shiny foil.

“What’s that?” Uchenna asked.

“It’s a snack bar.” Elliot held it out to her. It looked like nuts glued together with honey. “My mom and grandma make them for me. This is from my mom, because it doesn’t have raisins. My grandma always puts raisins in the bars she makes.”

“Interesting.”

Elliot eyed Uchenna skeptically. “Do you really think that’s interesting? Or are you being sarcastic?”



“No, I think it’s interesting. Grandmas are wrinkly, usually. Raisins are wrinkly, always. Coincidence? Of course not.”

“No, I definitely think it’s a coincidence.”

Uchenna pondered for a moment. “Nah. No way. Conspiracy.” She started drumming on the back of the big green seat in front of them. Her hands picked up speed, thumping with her left and tapping with her right. And then, to Elliot’s great surprise, she started to sing. Quietly and melodically:



*“Old ladies are like raisins,
Not just because they’re sweet tastin’.*



Some are brown,

Some are golden,



All of them are wrinkly,

And most of all . . . they’re amazin’!”



Uchenna stopped singing.

“Old ladies are ‘sweet tasting’?” said Elliot.

“Yeah, that part needs some work,” Uchenna muttered.

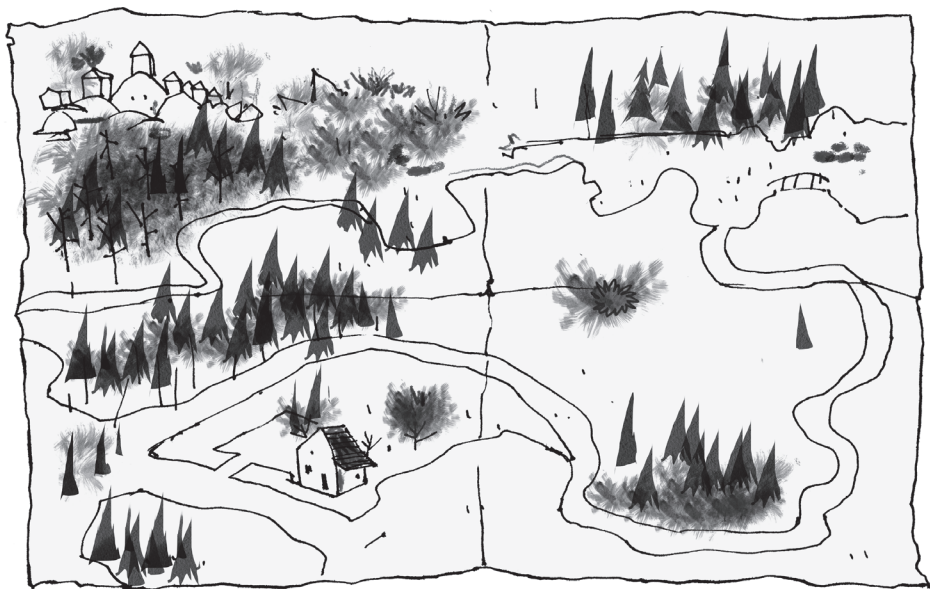
The big yellow bus pulled into a dirt parking lot. There were no other cars or buses there. The children filed off and stood in a clump.

Pine trees, tall and crooked and scraggly, stood in a line around the edge of the parking area. The wind blew dust into their faces.

“Children!” Miss Vole said, and somewhere a dog woke up. “It’s time to follow Professor Fauna!”

The professor led the group to the beginning of a trail. An old map, tattered, yellowed, and torn straight through the middle, was pinned to a crumbling plywood bulletin board. Elliot stopped and squinted up at the map.

“What are you doing?” Uchenna asked.



“I like to memorize maps when I go somewhere new, so I’ll know how to make an escape,” Elliot replied.

“Why would you need to make an escape?” said Uchenna.

“You never know.”

“How true,” said a deep voice behind them. They spun around. The professor was peering down from under his weed-like eyebrows. “You may indeed need to make an escape from the Pine Barrens, for as I have said, they can be deadly. But don’t bother trying to memorize that map.

Between the many forkings of the roads, and the fire cuts that *look* like roads but are *not*, it is almost impossible to find your way out. It is almost like . . . *a trap*.” Professor Fauna smiled at them broadly, and then suddenly turned away.

Elliot and Uchenna watched the professor start for the woods. “Why would he say that?” Elliot asked. “Teachers are supposed to be reassuring. That was the opposite of reassuring.”

Uchenna just stared after the professor, shaking her head. “They say his office is a torture chamber, under the school. No one’s allowed in it. Even the janitors.”

“Whoa.”

“Also,” she added, “I heard he believes in unicorns.”