

# THE UNICORN RESCUE SOCIETY

THE BASQUE DRAGON



**BY Adam Gidwitz & Jesse Casey**

**ILLUSTRATED BY Hatem Aly**

**CREATED BY Jesse Casey, Adam Gidwitz,  
and Chris Lenox Smith**

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.

*To Zachary: you're the Uchenna to my Elliot . . .  
(either that, or my personal Professor Fauna)*

—A.G.

*To Sarah*

—J.C.

*To my wife, Michelle, who crossed the ocean  
back and forth for us to be together*

—H.A.

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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, prominent 'P' and 'F'.

Mito Fauna, DVM, PhD, EdD, etc.

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## CHAPTER ONE

**E**lliot Eisner was lying, facedown, on the pavement in front of his new house, in his new town, in New Jersey.

The morning was clear and fine. Kids were walking past on their way to school, kicking red and yellow leaves. It smelled of fall.

Why was Elliot lying facedown on the pavement?

He wasn't sure. He had opened his front door, stepped on something, and then gone



toppling headfirst down the steps. Elliot pushed himself up and turned around to see what he had tripped on.

On his front step was a small package, wrapped in brown paper. He got to his feet and walked over to the package. No address. No stamps. Just a name, scrawled in brown ink. Weird. He examined the name on the package.

It was his name.



Elliot had had a *strange* day yesterday. It had been his first day at his new school. He'd made a friend, Uchenna Devereaux. She was odd. She kinda dressed like a punk rocker, she made up random songs about nothing at all, and she had a strong desire to put herself, and Elliot, in mortal danger. All that said, she was funny and she was brave and Elliot liked her. They had rescued a young Jersey Devil—which was supposed to be an imaginary creature, but definitely was *not* imaginary. It seemed to have adopted them. Finally, a terrifying teacher at their school, named Professor Fauna, had invited them to join a secret organization: the Unicorn Rescue Society. Its mission was to save mythical creatures from danger.

So yeah, it had been a strange day.

Now Elliot was staring at a mysterious package that had been left on his doorstep.

For him.

He tore open the paper. A book stared up at him. *The Country of Basque*.

“What?” Elliot said out loud, to no one.

Why had someone left him a book? On his doorstep? And who had left it? And couldn't he just have a normal, not-at-all dangerous second day at South Pines Elementary? Please?

He sighed, tucked the book under his arm, threw his backpack over his shoulder, and started off to school.





## CHAPTER TWO

Uchenna Devereaux normally left her house with one shoe untied, half her homework still under the bed upstairs, playing air guitar, and singing a song she'd made up that morning in the shower.

But not today.

She opened her front door and looked down her street in both directions before slipping out into the cool autumn morning. She put her backpack over her shoulders, pulled the straps tight,

and began walking, warily, to school. Yesterday had been a weird day.

She had made a new friend named Elliot. He wasn't exactly *cool*—he got nervous easily, he memorized entire books about things that could kill him, and he was definitely *not* rock-and-roll. But he was smart and funny, and Uchenna liked him. Also, they'd met a Jersey Devil and been invited by the school's weirdest teacher to join a secret society. This secret society had very rich and very powerful enemies: the Schmoke brothers, two billionaires who owned businesses all over the world, and half their little town.

Also, Uchenna and Elliot and that weird teacher *may* have broken into the Schmoke brothers' mansion.

Okay, they definitely did.

Which was why Uchenna was being so vigilant this morning on her walk to school. As she turned the corner from her block onto the main street, she glanced over her shoulder. A few blocks away

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lay the wealthiest neighborhood in town—where the Schmoke brothers' mansion was. Beyond that, in the distance, she could just make out the towering smokestacks of the Schmoke Industries power plant, billowing black plumes into the air. She—*FTHUMP!*

Uchenna sat down hard on her rear end. A small, thin boy with curly brown hair was lying on his back on the sidewalk, staring up into space. An open book lay on the sidewalk behind him.



“Elliot!” Uchenna exclaimed.

“Ow,” said Elliot.

“I didn’t see you there!”

“That’s good. The alternative would have been that you *did* see me there and ambushed me on purpose.”

Uchenna laughed and got to her feet. “Come on. Let’s get to school.”

Elliot lay unmoving on the ground. “I don’t think so. Today’s been pretty messed up already. School’s only going to make it worse.”

Uchenna grabbed Elliot by the wrist and pulled him to his feet. She scooped up *The Country of Basque* and handed it to him. “Let’s go. However messed up today’s going to be, it’ll be better if we face it together.”

As Elliot brushed off his khaki pants, he squinted at Uchenna. “Your positivity disgusts me.”

Uchenna grinned, threw her arm around Elliot’s shoulders, and dragged him toward school.