

The Specials

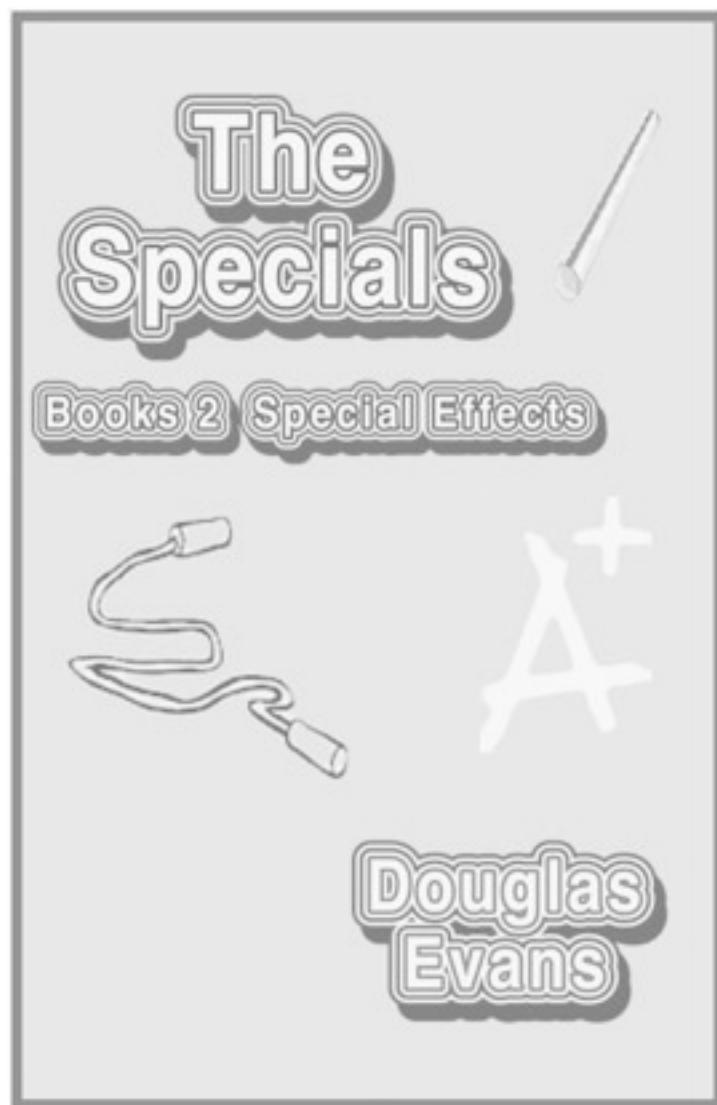


Books 2 Special Effects



Douglas
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He also wrote The Elevator Family, MVP: Magellan Voyage Project, and Classroom at the End of the Hall



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The Characters:



The Specials:

Jump Rope Student name: Jessamyn Robbins:

Expert at lassoing things with jump ropes

Ace+ Student name: Anthony Lane:

Math and science whiz

Spitball Student name: Sammy Newton

Excellent shot with spit wads

Noise Student name: Naomi Hornsby

Superb at imitating any sound

Gold Star Student name: Lisa Edwards

Can move things with mind

1. The Field Trip



Clomp! Clomp! Clomp!

Mrs. Jefferson's first-grade class climbed the school bus steps.

"Did everyone visit the restroom? Did everyone get a drink of water?" Mrs. Jefferson called out. "It's a long way to the Pumpkin Patch, and we won't be making any toilet or drink stops."

Peter Little sat in the second row of the bus. As a first-grade repeater, he had been to the Pumpkin Patch before.

"And they have Porta-Potties at the Pumpkin Patch that smell weird," he told his classmates.

Across from Peter sat Lisa Edwards, a freckled faced girl with frizzy red-hair. She wore a T-shirt spotted with ink smudges and splatters of paint. An orange juice mustache left from the morning's breakfast decorated her upper lip.

Click click. Click click went the pen in Lisa's hand. *Click click.* She kept pressing the button on top. *Click click click.* The pen's transmission switch was off, but now that Lisa was a SIT, a *Special-In-Training*, she wanted to practice the Special Code whenever she could.

"Mrs. Friendly said this code is impossible to break," she told herself. *Click click. Click click.* "But it's also impossible to learn."

The bus driver climbed onto the bus. He was a large man who wore gray overalls and a gray baseball cap. His belly pressed against the steering wheel as he sat in the driver's seat.

"Where to, teach?" he called to Mrs. Jefferson.

The teacher, who sat in the front seat by herself, replied, "We're going to the Pumpkin Patch on County Road Sixteen."

The driver pulled a handle to close the bus door. He turned the ignition key and revved up the engine.

Looking into the rearview mirror, he bellowed, "Listen up! I don't want to hear a sound from any of you. Not a peep! And keep your little seats in your seats. Got it? Good. Off we go."

The bus rolled out of the parking lot. Soon it was winding through the city streets. The first-graders sat still and silent in their plastic seats. No one dared to whisper or fidget.

From her seat in the second row, Lisa Edwards had a clear view of the bus driver. She studied the back of his head.

"How odd," she told herself. "The driver has black hair. But that's a strand of blond hair hanging from the back of his cap. He's wearing a wig."

After several more turns, the school bus stopped at an intersection. The driver turned right.

Peter Little raised his hand. "We turned wrong, Mr. Bus Driver!" he called out. "The Pumpkin Patch is the other way."

"Short cut, kid," the bus driver answered.

Lisa looked toward her teacher. Mrs. Jefferson sat motionless in the front seat. She was leaning against the window, snoring loudly.

"Something's wrong," Lisa told herself. "Something is terribly wrong about this field trip."

With a squeal of brakes, the bus made a sharp right turn. It tore down a narrow dirt road that cut through a cornfield. Out the window was a blur of tall cornstalks. The wheels kicked up huge clouds of dust that filled the bus. The first-graders coughed and slammed the windows closed.

"No, this isn't the way to the Pumpkin Patch," Peter said, shaking his head.

The bus driver gripped the steering wheel with both hands. His eyes remained fixed on the road.

In the rearview mirror, Lisa Edward could see his furrowed forehead and the sneer on his lips. She glanced at her teacher, then back to the driver. Slowly she drew her Special pen from a back pocket. With a shaking finger, she flipped the ON switch and placed her thumb on top.

"I gotta get the Special code right the first time," she told herself. "There's only enough power left to send one message."

2. Room Five



Back at Acorn Elementary School, the fifth-grade class was having math. That meant a long hour doing a long worksheet of long division problems.

The desks in Room Five stood in six groups of four. Jessamyn Robbins, Anthony Lane, Sammy Newton, and Naomi Hornsby sat in the group by the window. Miss Monroe, the teacher, called this Group One. The other fifth-graders called it Group Dumb. Everyone knew that Jessamyn, Anthony, Sammy, and Naomi went to Mrs. Friendly's special education class each afternoon.

Presently in Group One, Anthony Lane was filling in the final answer on his division sheet. When he finished, he erased each answer he had just written.

Jessamyn leaned forward. "So how long did it take you to finish today?" she whispered.

"New record," Anthony replied. "Twenty-three seconds."

"Isn't it hard pretending to be slow at math?" Jessamyn asked.

"No harder than how you and Sammy must act on the playground. How many times have kids laughed at you for tripping over a jump rope or at Sammy for missing a basketball shot by a mile."

"Zillions," replied Jessamyn.

"Googol times infinity," said Sammy.

"Shhh!" went Miss Monroe from the front of the room. "If Group One needs help please ask me."

Anthony, Jessamyn, Sammy, and Naomi, however, hadn't heard their teacher. They were listening to something else, a faint high-pitched sound coming from far off the school grounds.

Dit dit—dit dit dit—dit!

"Special code," whispered Anthony.

Dit dit—dit dit dit—dit!

"It's from L-Lisa Edwards," said Naomi, who had the best hearing. "Her message is full of m-mistakes. But, wait, sh-she's in trouble."

Dit dit—dit dit dit—dit! Dit dit—dit dit dit—dit!

"Her school bus was hijacked!"

Dit dit—dit dit dit—dit!

"It's on a dirt road, five miles south on County Road Sixteen."

"Time for Special action," said Sammy.

Jessamyn looked toward the teacher. "But how do we get out of this classroom?"

Naomi gave an "I'll handle this" nod and raised her hand. "C-can I sharpen my p-pencil, Miss Monroe," she called out.

A moment later, the girl stood at the pencil sharpener. Above her head was the classroom intercom. As she turned the sharpener handle, the voice of Mrs. Friendly called through the speaker.

"Miss Monroe, will you send Jessamyn, Anthony, Samuel, and Naomi to room 3C?"

"Why, yes, Mrs. Friendly," replied the teacher. "But isn't it early for their special ed class?"

"I need to do some...um...testing," said the voice. "Please have them bring their backpacks in case they're with me all afternoon."

Without waiting to be dismissed, the members of Group One grabbed their backpacks off their chairs and peeled out the classroom door.

"Great impression," said Jessamyn, racing down the hall.

"You've got Mrs. Friendly's voice down pat," said Anthony.

Jessamyn and Naomi ducked into the Girls' Room while Anthony and Nathan entered the Boys' Room. Seconds later, the quartet stood back in the hallway. No longer were they slow, clumsy, stuttering

fifth-graders, but the Specials—Jump Rope, Spitball, AcePlus, and Noise.

Jump Rope, formerly Jessamyn Robbins, wore the red dress of a cowgirl spangled with silver button. A red mask hid her eyes. She twirled a lasso above her red cowgirl hat. With a quick flick of her wrist, the rope shot forward and wrapped around a fire extinguisher on the wall.

Spitball, transformed from Sammy Newton, was dressed in a yellow basketball uniform, yellow headband, and yellow mask. He held a short tube made of titanium metal to his lips.

Two spit wads shot from the tube and struck the X in the exit sign at the far end of the hall.

“Spot marks the X,” he said.

AcePlus was Anthony Lane’s alias. He wore a blue mask, blue overalls, and a blue cap with **A+** on the front.

He held up his backpack. “I have all the equipment we’ll need in here,” he said.

Noise, a.k.a. Naomi Hornsby, joined the others dressed in a brown leotard top and bottom. A feathered headband and a brown mask completed her disguise.

“Ready, Specials?” she called out. “Let’s rescue the kidnapped kids.” When she opened her mouth next, out came a bugle cavalry charge.

“Charge!” the Specials cried as one, and they raced down the hallway and out of Acorn School.

3. Tic Tac Toe



The bus finally stopped. A metal gate blocked the dirt road ahead.

"No, this isn't the way to the Pumpkin Patch," Rodney Little insisted.

Beside the gate stood a tall, lanky man with a black bandana hiding his nose and mouth like a bank robber in the Wild West. He wore black jeans and the same T-shirt as the bus driver, black tee shirt with OX on front. A black derby hat sat on his head.

"So you made it, Tic," the bus driver called out the window. "Tac and Toe here yet?"

The tall man nodded. He walked to the gate and swung it open.

A mile farther on, the road ended in a small clearing. The bus parked in the shade of a large oak tree. Leaning against the tree trunk were two more men. Each wore a similar outfit as the first, black bandana masks, black derbies, and black tee shirts with OX on front.

As soon as the bus driver shut off the engine, he turned toward the first-graders.

"There'll be a slight delay in your pumpkin trip, kiddies," he said. "We'll wait here a while. Just remember to keep your seats; keep your hands inside the bus, and keep your traps shut."

The driver pulled off his gray cap. His entire head of black hair came off as well. Long locks of blond hair spilled onto his broad

shoulders. The driver ripped off came a rubber mask as well, revealing the face of an attractive, young woman. When the overalls and fake stomach came off, the woman wore a black jumpsuit. Tattoos of rattlesnakes ran up her bare arm.

"Hugs and kisses, kiddies," the woman said. "Call me Madame Temper and I'm in charge here. As you can see, your teacher is taking a nap. Sleeping power dropped in her morning coffee did the trick."

Rodney raised his hand. "I gotta go to the bathroom, Miss Temper," he called out. "I gotta go bad."

"Well, little man," said the woman, pulling the handle that folded open the bus doors. "There are plenty of bushes around here for that purpose. Take your pick. But don't even think of running away. There's nothing but corn around us for miles and miles."

As Rodney bounded down the bus stairs, the three men in black climbed on.

"Tic, Tac, and Toe! Three in a row!" Madame Temper said. "Remember, boys, my husband wants none of these kiddies hurt."

"But what's the sense of kidnapping kids if we don't ask for no ransom," asked one man.

"Don't sweat, Tic. We're getting something more handsome than ransom," Madame Temper. "Now did you bring a snack for the little runts as I asked?"

Toe held up his basket full of corn. "Yeah, we just picked these."

Toe started down the bus aisle with the basket. He handed an ear of raw corn to each first-grader. When he came to Lisa Edwards, he stopped and pointed at the pen in her hand.

"Hey, cutie-pie, what d'ya got there?" he asked.

Lisa stuck out her tongue. "As your prisoner, I'll only state my name, rank and what cereal I had for breakfast," she snarled. "Lisa Edwards...First-grade student...Cheerios."

Toe dropped a cob of corn in the Lisa's lap. "Little whippersnapper," he muttered, moving down the aisle. "Never work with children, that's what I told Tic and Tac. Children mean trouble."

Lisa returned the pen to her pocket. "It's out of power anyway," she told herself. "I just hope my code reached the school."

4. A+FX



Each passing minute the shade slid farther off the school bus. While Tic, Tac, and Toe sat by the oak tree trunk, playing cards, the first-graders remained in the stuffy bus.

Occasionally, Toe strolled down the bus aisle with a squirt bottle. “Squirts for the squirts,” he said, squirting each student with warm water. “And there’s lots more corn if you get hungry.”

Meanwhile, Madame Temper sat in the driver’s seat wearing headphones. An overhead fan, aimed only at her, blew cool air.

“Wild thing! You make my heart sing!” she sang out. “Shake it! Shake it! Wild thing!”

Two rows back, Lisa Edwards remained slouched in her plastic seat. “This is boring,” she told herself. “And whenever I’m bored, Mrs. Friendly says to practice my especially special skill.”

Lisa leaned forward. Her eyes fixed the bus key still in the ignition switch. “Focus. Focus,” she said.

Slowly the key turned. The bus engine started with a roar.

“Tic, Tac, and Toe, get in here!” Madame Temper shrieked. “One of the kiddies is playing games.”

The trio of men in black charged toward the bus. As Tic reached the doorway, Lisa’s mind power pulled the steel door crank. The door slammed in Tic’s face.

“Get up here, you oxen!” Madame Temper screamed.

Tic yanked open the door, and the three men climbed the steps.

Toe pointed at Lisa Edwards. "I bet that freckled-faced pest caused the trouble," he said. "Let me go roll her in the poison oak over there."

"Leave her be," said Madame Temper. "It's time to make an important phone call."

The woman held a cell phone to her cheek. "Hello, 911" she said. "How are you today? Good. Now, listen, this is an extreme emergency. I just spotted a lost puppy at the end of McDonald's Farm Road. Please send someone from the dog pound to pick it up. Thank you."

Madame Temper lowered her phone and turned toward the first-graders. "Well, kiddies, it's been fun. The dogcatcher should find you and your teacher should wake up in about an hour. By that time, me and my boys will be far away. So long. Hugs and kisses."

As Madame Temper and her helpers started down the bus steps, the entire bus shook with an enormous blast. A moment later a thunderous--Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!—filled the air.

Lisa looked out the window. She rubbed her eyes with her knuckles and looked out again. Twenty monstrous army tanks surrounded the yellow school bus. Their long barrels pointed straight at her. Overhead, a twenty green helicopters swarmed around the sky.

"Cooooo!" Peter Little called out.

"Wow! Look at that! Awesome!" cried the other first-graders.

As Lisa watched, troops of soldiers in camouflaged combat gear appeared among the tanks. Each soldier crouched and aimed a rifle at the bus.

"This sure beats the Pumpkin Patch," said Peter.

Tic, Tac, and Toe stood frozen on the bus steps. Their jaws wagged up and down as they stared out the window.

Madame Temper took one look out the windshield and dropped into the driver's seat. "All this for a lost puppy?" she uttered. "And they got here so fast!"

One soldier with three stars on his helmet and many ribbons on his broad chest climbed onto the front of a tank. He held a bullhorn to his mouth.

"Attention bad guys on the bus," he called out. "This is General Motors of the United States Army. Don't try anything funny. You are surrounded by the entire battalion of the Special FX Force. Come out with your hands up and your thumbs in your ears."

Madame Temper threw her cell phone at Tic, Tac, and Toe. "Don't just stand there, you oxen. Get outside and put up a fight."

The three men gave the woman a look and raised their hands.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" cried Tic, climbing down the bus steps. "We give up! Uncle! Uncle!"

"No harm done!" said Tac, climbing down next. "We didn't mean it. It was an accident! That woman made us do it."

Toe followed the others, shaking his head. "I told you we should never mess with children. They only cause trouble."

At that moment, a thud came from the bus roof.

"Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!" a voice shouted. At the same moment, a lasso shot from the top of the bus. It wrapped around the three men.

The first-graders recognized this familiar voice. "Jump Rope!" they cried. "The Specials are here!"

Suddenly the army men, army tanks, and army helicopters vanished. In their place stood AcePlus, Spitball, and Noise. Jump Rope, pulling tighter the loop around Tic, Tac, and Toe, leaped off the bus roof and joined them.

"Specials! Specials! Specials!" the first-graders chanted.

"Greetings from the Special Force," Jump Rope said.

"Special effects supplied by AcePlus," Noise called out. "All done with a few pictures, lasers, mirrors."

"And Noise provided the sound effects," AcePlus added.

As he spoke, the back emergency door of the bus flew open. Out leaped Madame Temper.

"Hug and kisses, everyone!" she called, streaking into the cornfield. "Cat's Game for you, Tic, Tac, and Toe!"

Spitball held his tube to his lips and took aim. He fired once, but the woman had fled out of sight.

5. DR. TT



On a side street near Acorn Elementary School, another school bus was parked. From the outside, it appeared to be an ordinary bus, painted banana yellow, with a folding door in front, an emergency door in back, and Acorn School District stenciled on its sides. But one peek inside would prove that this bus was much different than the ones children ride to school each morning.

At the moment, a short man with thick white hair was giving his wife, Madame Temper, a tour of the bus's interior. On the breast pocket of his white polo shirt was stitched **Dr. TT**.

"Notice the rare Siberian tiger rug on the floor," Dr. TT said. "The sofa and chairs are covered in authentic rhinoceros leather. And those pillows? Yes, that's real panda fur."

Madame Temper, still sweating from her long run from the cornfield, followed her husband to the middle of the bus.

"Admire the overhead chandelier," Dr. TT went on. "Each crystal was cut by an authentic eight year-old boy, working a sweaty shop in India. The table below is carved from a rare tree found only in the Amazon rainforest. And that candy bowl? It's actually an actual sea turtle shell."

Madame Temper walked to the back of the bus. "A Jacuzzi!" she exclaimed. "And the faucets are made of ivory!"

"Bagged the elephants myself," Dr. TT told her.

"You thought of everything, my brilliant darling. But how did you afford all these wonderful rarities?"

Dr. TT sat on a footstool made from the foot of a mountain gorilla. "Remember when I was the principal of Acorn School, and you were my secretary?"

"Of course, top-dog darling."

"Remember the nasty Math-athons, Spell-athons, and Read-athons the students had to raise money for new library books?"

"You made me tally the pledges and count the money," Madame Temper reminded him.

"Well, when I left the school, all that *athon* money came with me," Dr. TT said. "Along with the Girl Scouts' cookie money, the school auction funds, and a good portion of the supply budget."

"Only fair," said Madame Temper. "Since it was so unfair when the school board gave you the boot."

Dr TT rose from his stool and pressed a button on the wall. A section of the wall slid aside, revealing an array of video monitors, TV's, and computer screens. One TV was on, showing dozens of reporters standing near a cornfield. They held microphones toward the chief-of-police and the four Specials. In the background, weeping parents hugged grinning children outside a school bus.

"Sensational!" Dr. TT said. "Just the type of news coverage I wanted. Step one of *Operation Who'll Rule School* was a success."

"Yet I still can't figure out how the Specials found the bus so quickly," said Madame Temper.

"I've a special plan to deal with the Specials later," Dr. TT said. "First, we'll proceed to step two of *Operation Who'll Rule School*."

On a desk beneath the screens sat a wooden block, a large version of a block a preschooler might play with. A, B, C, and D were painted on the sides. On the top and bottom were M and T.

"My Test-Taker's Block is ready," Dr. TT said. "Monday is the start of Test Week at Acorn School, and my bus will be in position."

"Oh, my scheming, dreaming darling. Tell me again how the TT Block works."

The man raised the cubic-foot cube above his head as if it were a trophy. "You've heard of writer's block?" he asked. "Students might

get writer's block during writer's workshop. They're thoughts get stuck, and they can't think of anything to write about. This cube effects the brain in the same way. When I aim it at the school during test-taking time, its rays will block the student's minds. No one will be able to answer one test question correctly."

"The test scores will be terrible!" said Madame Temper.

"And poor test scores along with your crime wave will convince parents that Acorn School District is not a good place to raise their children," said Dr. TT. "They'll move away, and I'll buy up their houses."

"And we'll only allow people to move in who'll demand that you are Acorn School principal again," said Madame Temper. She stared dreamily out the window. "You'll appoint me your secretary and we'll work side by side in our cozy little office once more."

Dr. TT admired his reflection in a whale-oil lamp. "*Operation Who'll Rule School* calls for a bigger goal," he said. "Why should I become principal? Why not the person who can fire the principal—the School Board President?"

"President Dr. Thomas Temper, that sounds exciting," said his wife. "To think, the present school board president fired such a fine principal as you. Just because you're a little moody a times?"

At this point Dr. TT looked toward the kitchen. "Go pour me a bowl of those little golden fish crackers you know I enjoy so much," he said.

Madam Temper checked the kitchen cupboards. She checked the shelves by the rhinoceros-skin sofa and the drawers by the Jacuzzi with the elephant-tusk faucet.

"I'm sorry, my gourmet darling, but all the goldfish crackers are gone."

Dr. TT remained silent a moment. Suddenly he banged his fists on his desk. "Gone! No more goldfish crackers! When Thomas Temper wants goldfish crackers he should have goldfish crackers!"

The woman stepped behind the sofa. "Breathe deeply, my sensitive darling. Remember what happens when you get all worked up."

Crash!

Dr. Temper had thrown the turtle shell bowl against the wall. His face was apple red. Foamy drool dripped from his lips. He shook his fists in the air and stomped his feet on the floor.

"No goldfish crackers?" he shrieked. "No goldfish crackers?"

"Temper! Watch your temper, my delicate darling," Madame Temper said, ducking low.

"Temper? What temper?" Dr. TT raged, kicking over a chair. "I want goldfish! Why don't I have goldfish?"

Crash! Bam!

The man stomped around the bus, smashing anything he could get his hands upon."

"Ahhhhhhhhh!" he screamed and the hair on his head, actually a toupee made of chimpanzee hair, flipped completely around.

Crash! Crack! Clatter! Clang!

Outside the bus, school children were walking along the sidewalk on their way home from school. They stared at the school bus parked along the street. Through the fake windows, they could see empty seats and the sun shining through the opposite side.

Crash! Crack! Clatter! Clang!

No one could have guess that inside the bus a forty-two year old man was throwing a temper tantrum worse than a two year old.

6. *Special Ed Class*



Each afternoon, the Specials spent the first ten minutes of their Special Education class doing warm-up drills.

Today Mrs. Friendly, the Special Ed teacher, sat at the jellybean-shaped table in the center of the narrow room. She held a radar speed gun, aimed at a target hanging on the back wall.

“Try your fast spitball,” she said to Spitball, who stood in the front of the room. “Let’s go for a new speed record.”

Having already put his titanium tube between his lips, the boy in the yellow basketball outfit could only nod.

Phoot! Phoot!

Two spitball wads shot from the tube and smack the target dead center.

Mrs. Friendly put on her black, rectangular-rimmed glasses and checked the radar gun. “Two hundred and ten miles-per-hour. Not bad. Now try your curve spitball.”

Meanwhile, Jump Rope stood in the corner twirling a lasso over her head. She twirled it faster, faster, and faster, until—Boom!—a low rumble shook the room.

“I did it,” the girl in red exclaimed. “My rope spun faster than the speed of sound. It broke the sound barrier and produced a sonic boom!”

"Quiet!" Noise demanded. "I can't concentrate with all that noise."

The girl in brown sat at the table with her fingers pressed against her temples. Ever since becoming an expert at making noises, Noise had trained to be an expert listener as well. Her hearing had become so sensitive, she was trying to hear the thoughts of people.

"I'll begin with AcePlus's brain, since so many thoughts are whirling around in there," she said. "AcePlus, you're thinking about your newest Special effect. I think."

A voice came from the air nearby. "Right you are!"

The boy in blue suddenly appeared in the chair next to Noise. "Using a few mirrors and lens, I can become invisible!" he said.

"All right, Specials," Mrs. Friendly called out. "That's enough training. Gather around the table. We have important matters to discuss."

When the four Specials were sitting around the jellybean-shaped table, the Special Ed teacher shuffled some papers in front of her.

"I've read Lisa's report about the incident this morning in the cornfield," she said. "Any of you have anything to add?"

"Fortunately, no one was hurt," said Jump Rope. "Unfortunately, the woman escaped."

"Ace Plus's Special Army effects were spectacular," said Spitball.

"Odd, though, the kidnappers made no demands," AcePlus added. "What was their purpose of highjacking a school bus?"

"I've done research on Madame Temper," said Noise. "She was a former secretary at this school. She left the school when Dr. Thomas Temper, the principal, was fired. Soon afterward they married."

Mrs. Friendly removed her eyeglasses. She rubbed the space between her eyes and nodded. "Thomas Temper was principal here before Mr. Whitherby. He was a doozy. Have you ever heard of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? That's how you could describe Dr. TT. Often, he was as gentle as an infant. But other times he would flip his lid. His temper tantrums shook the entire office. Students were afraid to go near him. If Madame Temper was involved in the highjacking, Thomas Temper was also. Keep on the lookout for both of them."

At that moment, a short kindergartner with an untucked shirt and dusty brown hair entered Room 3C. He stopped in the doorway and stared at the four Specials. His jaw bobbed up and down as if he wanted to say something but couldn't.

"Hello, Marcos," said Mrs. Friendly. "Come in. I want to introduce you to the Specials—AcePlus, Spitball, Noise, and Jump Rope. Marcos is one of my new morning Special Ed students. Since Lisa Edward has become a SIT, I've asked Marcos to be our new Special Messenger. From now on whenever Mr. Whitherby needs to contact you four, he'll tell Marcos.

The kindergartner remained standing in the doorway. His eyes were as wide as nickels.

The teacher smiled. "And Marcos, if you're going to be our messenger, you'll need to over your shyness. Now why are you here?"

Marcos let out a small squeak of nervousness. "Mr. Whitherby told me..." he began.

The Specials turned in their chairs, ready to spring for the door.

"Mr. Whitherby wants to talk to the Specials," Marcos continued.

Jump Rope grabbed her rope and Spitball jammed his titanium tube into the waistband of his shorts.

Marcos swallowed and added, "On Monday morning."

7. Trashing



Sunday night at midnight, four figures with flashlights crept onto the Acorn School playground. The moon was full and the asphalt glistened in the silvery light.

Madame Temper, who wore a black cape with a black hood covering her head, was in the lead. The others wore black tee shirts with an OX2 on the front. Only their eyes were visible between the black derbies and black bandanas that covered their noses and mouths. They each lugged a loaded, black trash bag over his shoulder.

When Madame Temper reached the swing set, she turned and help up a hand to halt the men behind her.

"Tic 2, Tac 2 and Toe 2, pay attention," she said in a low voice. "Your mission tonight is to make a mess of these school grounds. You have all the supplies you'll need in your bags, toilet paper, black markers, eggs, rotten tomatoes, and a few other goodies. By dawn, I want this school looking like the inside of a Dumpster."

Tic2 swung his plastic bag off his shoulder. "Oh, goodie," he exclaimed. "I've always wanted to trash a school."

"Me, too," said Tac2. "Ever since I dropped out in eighth grade."

"But if Dr Temper wants to become the School Board President, why would he want to destroy one of the schools?" Toe2 asked.

"Because first the public needs to learn how badly they need a new School Board President," Madame Temper replied. "Now no more questions and get to work!"

The trio opened their bags and pulled out rolls of toilet paper. They wrapped them around the swings climbing structure. They tossed more rolls over the trees. They poured bags of fish guts across the asphalt. They drew tic-tac-toe games on all the doors with the markers and tossed tomatoes at the windows. Afterwards they climbed onto the school roof and tossed eggs at everything that wasn't already covered with garbage.

During this time, Madame Temper swung on a swing and watched the men work. As the morning sun peeked above the eastern horizon, she inspected the school grounds. Nodding with satisfaction she pulled out her cell phone pushed some button.

"911?" she said. "I was just jogging past Acorn Elementary School and spotted some vandals turning the place into a dump."

Five minutes later, she spotted a police car cruising toward the school parking lot. Quickly, she threw off her hood and cape. Underneath she wore a blue jogging outfit. Her hair was light brown and tied back with a ribbon. She jogged up to the police car as if she were in the middle of a morning run.

"I'm the Officer," said the uniformed man in the car. "What seems to be the problem here?"

"Look at what those men are doing to the school?" Madame Temper said, pointing to the foursquare court where Tic2, Tac2, and Tac2 were in the middle of an egg fight. "What a horrible thing to do to a public building."

"I take care of this right away, ma'am," said the policeman.

"Thank you, sir," Madame Temper, jogging off down the street. "Hugs and kisses."

Soon Tic2, Tac2, and Toe2 were locked up inside the police car wondering where was the woman who had hired them. Officer Jones sat in the front seat looking over the trashed school grounds.

"What sort of scumball would do something like that?" he called to the three men in back.

"I don't know," said Tic2, shrugging.

"A lady told us to, said Tac2.

"She made us do it," Toe2 added.

"I suppose you think you've ruined school for the students today," the policeman said. "But there's a Special Force who take care of problems scumballs like you create."

Here the policeman press a button on his dashboard labeled SOS (Special Official Signal)

Ten minutes later, Jump Rope, AcePlus, Spitball, and Noise were running up the street in front of the school.

"I'm sorry to have called you to school early," Officer Jones said. "But the first bus arrives in one-half hour and you were the only crew I could think of that could cleanup this mess in time."

"No problem," said AcePlus.

"We'll get to work right away," said Jump Rope.

"I'll first take care of the fish guts," said Spitball.

He opened up a case he held that contained an assortment of tubes. He pulled out one Y-shaped tube. One branch of the Y, he attached to the playground drinking fountain and the other branch he blew into. Out the other end of the tube squirted a steady stream of water. With this giant squirt gun, he began hosing down the asphalt.

Meanwhile, Jump Rope pulled one of her special ropes out of a canvas bag. Attached to the end was a long bottlebrush bent into a circle to form a lasso. When she twirled this brush lasso at a blazing speed, she began scrubbing the felt marker graffiti off the school walls.

AcePlus's task was to take care of the toilet paper strung around the swings and trees. He quickly ran into the school to retrieve a new device he'd just invented from his laboratory. This was a sucking machine, originally meant for sucking fall leaves off leaves before that fell, so Nolan wouldn't have to spend hours raking them off the soccer field. Now AcePlus used it to suck up the toilet paper. Within minutes, it had sucked all the paper off the playground equipment and trees, diced it into small bits and stuffed it into a plastic sack.

"School bus is coming," announced Noise who had been transmitting ultrasonic sounds to clean off the school windows.

"But I need more time," Jump Rope called from the side of the school.

"And I do too," said Spitball, who was spraying egg yolk off the slide.

"What a terrible way to start to Test Week it would be if the student saw this mess," AcePlus said. "I think I have a Special solution."

The boy in blue sprang back into the school. He returned carrying some photographs, a projector, and a desk of mirrors. In a flash, he had set up the mirror around the school. By the time the school bus was pulling into the school parking lot, he was ready. He flipped on the projector and stood back.

"Keep working, Specials," AcePlus called out. "The kids on that bus are in for a Special surprise. As soon as you have the mess cleaned up I'll change everything to normal"

The school bus pulled into the parking lot. At once, every window in the bus dropped open.

"Where's the school?" a fourth-grader called out.

"It's gone! It disappeared!" cried a third-grader.

"Our school must be on vacation," a kindergartner said.

"Cooooool!" said Rodney Little. "No school today. And that's for real--no school."

The line of student faces peered out the bus windows. When they had climbed on the bus Friday afternoon, Acorn Elementary School had stood in that space. Today they saw only a large grove of oak trees filled with acorns.

8. Special Meeting



At 8:00 that morning, the four Specials sat in the office with Mr. Whitherby. The principal placed both palms of his desktop. One by one, he looked Jump Rope, AcePlus, Spitball, and Noise in the eye.

"A disappearing school?" were his first words. "Which one of you can explain this? Quite frankly, that's all the children were talking about when I arrived at school."

"A simple Special effect, sir," AcePlus explained. "We didn't want any student to watch us finish our work."

"And what were you four doing at the school so early?" Mr. Whitherby asked.

"We received a Special signal from the police," said Jump Rope. "Some men were messing up the school grounds."

The principal ran a hand over his bald head. "Right, I've forgotten the police call the Special Force before notifying me that the school had a problem," he said, trying to hide his jealousy."

"We believe there's a connection between the high jacking on Friday and the vandalism last night," said AcePlus. "

"They both involved three men dressed in black," said Spitball.

"And the woman who reported the vandalism was the same one the first-graders saw on the bus," said Jump Rope. "Thelma Lilli"

"Thelma Lilli?" the principal exclaimed. "Wasn't she...? Didn't she...?"

"Yes, she now calls herself Madame Temper," said Noise.

At this point, the present school secretary, a thin-lipped, all-business woman named Mrs. Freeze, entered the room. "Mr. Whitherby, a dozen news reporters are waiting outside," she said. "They all want to know about this morning's vandalism."

"The Specials and I will be out in a moment," the principal replied.

After the secretary left, Mr. Whitherby looked toward the Specials again. "Well, here's the main reason I wanted to meet with you this morning," he said. "As you four know, this week is Test Week at our school."

The Specials nodded as one.

"And you four also know the number one goal of this school."

"Excellent education?" guessed Jump Rope.

"Happy, challenged students?" suggested Spitball.

"Top test scores," said Mr. Whitherby. "Quite frankly, nowadays test scores are the number one indicator of how well the teachers are teaching and how well the principal is running the school."

Jump Rope began spinning a tiny lasso to her side. Spitball twirled one of his tubes like a baton.

"The entire public reads the test results in the newspaper," the principal went on. "An important reason parents move into the Acorn School District is because of the excellent test scores our students attain."

"So if good test results make the teachers and principal and parents happy, what's in it for the students who must take the tests?" asked Jump Rope.

Mr. Whitherby drummed his fingers on his desktop. "School pride of course," he said. "That's why we had the Test Week Pep rally last week. Good test scores will make the students proud. Won't they?"

Noise began humming to herself, sounding like an entire symphony, while AcePlus doodled on a sheet of paper.

"So, as you see, Specials, I don't want to put unnecessary pressure on our student this test-taking week, but, quite frankly, there's a lot at stake," the principal went on. "I want you to make sure that there are

no more disruptions at Acorn school this week. Patrol the halls whenever possible. The school should be quiet and calm at all times, especially during test-taking hours. The highjacking and vandalism have brought enough bad press to this school. Good test results our top priority! Now we better get outside and deal with the reporters."

AcePlus leaned over and whispered to the other Specials. "Maybe I'll give the press a Special effect demonstration and make Mr. Whitherby disappear."

9. Back On the Bus



Dr. TT sat at a table inside his bus. He wore a colorful suit woven by underpaid women in Bangladesh.

Madame Temper placed a plate of scrambled eggs and sticky buns.

"Rare peregrine falcon eggs for your breakfast, my gourmet darling?" she said.

Dr. TT ignored his wife. He was busy watching the morning news on the TV.

"Last night a gang totally trashed the local school," the reporter said. "We have with us Mr. Whitherby, the school principal. Mr. Whitherby, why would anybody want to do this to your school?"

When Mr. Whitherby appeared on the TV, Dr TT grunted, threw a sticky bun at the screen.

"It really was only a tiny mess," the principal said. "I'm sure it was some out-of-town hoodlums who were responsible. But, of course, our school is lucky to have the Special Force to clean up small problems like this one."

Next, the camera turned on the four Specials. Jump Rope immediately began twirling a golden lasso over her head. Spitball twirled a titanium tube in each hand.

"Here are the student super-heroes known as the Specials," the interviewer said. "It seems this community owes you a big thank you for the clean-up services you provided this morning."

"Oh, those horrible Specials," said Madame Temper, pouring Dr. TT a cup of coffee. "As soon as you're School Board president you must get rid of them."

Dr. TT shoveled a fork full of eggs into his mouth. "I plan to take care of those four long before that," he said with his mouth full.

"It's widely known that you are students at Acorn School, yet you still won't reveal your true identities," the reporter continued on the TV. "Can't you at least divulge what grade you are in?"

AcePlus stepped forward. "I'm sorry, but the Specials took an oath never to tell who we really are in school. But we can tell the public that when we're not in these Special uniforms, we are ordinary students who must take the Standardized Tests this week like all the other students."

"And we'll try our best like all the other students," said Noise. "Because it makes our parents, and teachers, and principal happy."

"Well, I hear the school bell ringing, and that means these four students, whoever they are, must get to their classrooms wherever they are. This is Ronald Rappaport reporting from Acorn Elementary School."

"So Test Week has begun," said Dr. TT, pressing a remote control button to turn off the TV. "Did you get the test schedule?"

"Yes, my doubting darling," Madame Temper answered. "Hacking into the school computers is a cinch. They haven't changed the passwords since I was the secretary there. The first test will be given at a nine o'clock this morning."

Dr. TT dabbed some egg yolk off his lips with his linen napkin. He stood and stepped to his desk where the Test-Taker's Block still lay.

"Time to drive the bus into position," he said, running a hand over the cube as if it were a pet cat.

Madame Temper walked to the front of the bus and sat in the driver's seat. When she turned the ignition key, a soft purr came from beneath the hood.

"Sounds like you have a excellent engine in this super bus," she called back.

"It has super speed, super acceleration, super four-wheel drive," Dr. TT replied. "And it still gets an excellent two miles per gallon. Now if you don't start driving, I'll get super mad."

Madame Temper drove the bus two blocks, turned right and drove two more blocks to Acorn School. She parked in the street as any yellow school bus might park, waiting to pick up students.

Dr. Temper checked his watch. "One minute to TT time," he said and picked up the Test-Taker's Block. He held it to the window and placed one hand on the M and the other on the T.

"All right students of Acorn Elementary School." He squeezed the cube. A low hum came from inside. "Time for your minds to go empty."

10. Test Day



Mrs. Monroe stood in front of the fifth-grade class. “Does everyone have a number two pencil?” she asked. “Remember to fill in each bubble completely. Fill in the bubble next to either A, B, C, or if you don’t know the answer fill in the DK next to D.”

“But that would be stupid to mark DK,” Reed called out from the third row. “If you don’t know the answer you might as well guess at the A, B, or C.”

“Please don’t interrupt, Reed,” said the teacher. “We have a lot of testing to do today.”

Mrs. Monroe checked the clock. “OK, Test number one is about reading comprehension. Follow along as I read the instructions.”

While Mrs. Monroe began to read, Anthony Lane slumped in his seat. Who listens to the instructions anyway? he wondered. They’re the same year after year.

Anthony looked out the window. He noticed something suspicious. A school bus was parked along the street. But why? Being Test Week no class would be going on a field trip. Plus, since school just started, no bus would be needed to pick up students for six hours. When a car passed behind the bus, Anthony pulled out his code pen.

Dit-dit Dit-dit-dit-dit Dit-dit Dit-dit-dit-dit

Across from him, Naomi, Jessica, and Sammy sat up in their seats.

Dit-dit Dit-dit-dit-dit Dit-dit Dit-dit-dit-dit.

Check out the bus in the street his message began. It has false windows. You can't see anything through them. What's going on inside that bus?

"Do your best on this test," the teacher called out. "We only have twelve more to take this week. When you finish, go back and check your answers. Begin."

The four members of Group One had to forget about the bus for the moment. They each picked up a #2 pencil and began taking the test.

Twenty-minutes later Mrs. Monroe announced, "Time's up! Pencils down!"

The fifth-graders groaned and slammed their pencil on their desktops.

"We'll do one more test before taking a break," said the teacher. "Follow along while I read the instructions for the Spelling Test."

Dit-dit Dit-dit-dit-dit Dit-dit Dit-dit-dit-dit.

This time Naomi was sending the Special code.

That test seemed extremely hard. Anthony, were you faking it again, or did that really take you twenty minutes to complete.

Anthony shook his head then nodded.

Dit-dit Dit-dit-dit-dit Dit-dit Dit-dit-dit-dit.

Something strange is in the air he replied in code.

Anthony looked out the window. The mysterious school bus was still there. A tall truck passed behind it, and again he couldn't see it through the false windows.

"You have fifteen minutes to finish the spelling test," Mrs. Monroe said. "Begin."

AcePlus found that the spelling part of the test was even harder than the first part. "I can't remember how to spell the simplest word," he told himself. "Something is clouding his brain. Something is keeping me from thinking straight. Every time I think of a word, I see a big toy block inside my head."

"Pencils down," said Mrs. Monroe after fifteen minutes. "Let's take a short recess before continuing with the testing."

Dit-dit Dit-dit-dit-dit Dit-dit Dit-dit-dit-dit.

Specials suit up, Anthony coded. We need to check out that school bus. I'm not pretending to be absent-minded on these tests. My mind really is absent.

11. Nothing Special



“Here come our little heroes now,” Dr. TT said to his wife.

“Just as you said they would, my prophetic darling,” Madame Temper replied.

The man and women sat on the rhinoceros-skin sofa looking out the bus windows. They had an excellent view of Jump Rope, AcePlus, Spitball, and Noise bounding down the school steps. With the one-way windows, they were invisible to the Specials.

“Look how eager and brave the noble Specials sprint to their doom,” Thomas Temper said. “This is going to be fun.”

A cheer rose from the students on the playground, as the Specials raced across the parking lot. While Noise made the sound of charging elephants, Jump Rope swirled two lassos above her head. Spitball twirled a titanium tube in his hand and AcePlus grabbed the flagpole and whirled around it like a helicopter blade. When the foursome reached the bus, they stood on the sidewalk elbow to elbow before the closed door.

“Attention, whoever is in this bus,” AcePlus called out. “You are parked illegally. Please move the bus away from the school grounds at once.”

Almost immediately, the bus doors folded open. Jump Rope started her lasso twirling again. Spitball chewed pieces of paper towel for fresh ammunition.

"We'll count to four and then we're coming in after you," said AcePlus. "One."

"Two," said Noise.

"Three," said Spitball.

"And four," said Jump Rope. "Ready or not, here we come."

The girl in red led the others onto the bus the first Special into the bus. At the top of the stairs they froze, amazed at the bus's luxurious interior.

Dr. and Madame Temper still sat on the sofa. The man had the Test-Taker's Block in his lap. The woman held a digital camera.

"Greetings, Specials. What a Special surprise," Dr. TT said. "I've heard so much about your heroic deed at Acorn School. Let me introduce myself."

"You're Thomas Temper," said AcePlus. "Former principal of our school."

Spitball pointed his tube at Madame Temper. "And you're the former Thelma Lolli, the former secretary," he said.

"Excellent. You've done your homework," Dr. Temper said. "And I suppose you're wondering why I've parked this bus outside my old school."

The four Specials nodded.

Dr. Temper patted the cube in his lap. "Because I need to aim my Test-Taker's Block at you students while you're taking the Standardized Tests. It will cause you all to get terrible test scores."

Noise screwed up her face. "What's the point of that?" she asked.

"It's all a part of Dr. TT's incredible *Who'll Rule the School Plan*," said Madame Temper. "First I high jacked the first grade and then I trashed the school and then you all get low test scores and then I go around the neighborhood causing more trouble until families move out of the school district, and then we buy the houses, and then my husband gets elected School Board President."

"And then I order Acorn School to be bulldozed to the ground to make way for a used-car lot," Dr. TT added.

AcePlus stepped forward. "So why are you telling your entire plan to us?" he asked.

"Because, my dear boy," said Dr. Temper. "In three seconds you won't remember a word I told you. One, two, three."

At this point, Dr. TT pressed the M and T on the top and bottom of the block. A low hum filled the bus.

"No, Specials, after you leave this bus you'll have no memory whatsoever of what you've seen or heard inside it," he said, continuing to hold out the block toward the four. "At the moment you don't even know why you have on those silly costumes. Do you, Specials?"

"No," said Jump Rope. "I can't even remember my name."

"All I can see is a toy block in my mind," said Noise.

"And we would love to see your faces, so we can tell who you are," Madame Temper said. "Why don't you take off your masks?"

Without hesitation, AcePlus pulled off his blue mask, Jump Rope her red one, Spitball his yellow one, and Noise her green one."

"Excellent," said Dr TT. "So it seems there is nothing special about a Special after all. I can see that you're just plain fifth-graders, Jessica Robbins, Anthony Lane, Sammy Newton, and Naomi Hornsby."

Madame Temper held her digital camera to her eye. "Smile, Specials," she said. "Say loser."

As the bus filled with a bright flash, the recess bell rang outside the bus.

Dr. TT lowered the cube. "Well, you better replace those masks and get back to Room Five," said Dr. TT. "Thanks for your visit, Jessica, Anthony, Sammy, and Naomi. Good luck on your tests this week."

"Hugs and kisses," said Madame Temper.

12. PTA Meeting



A few weeks later, the newspapers announced the Standardized Test results. They listed the scores of every elementary school in the state, the highest one on top. Acorn School appeared at the bottom of the page. In fact, Acorn School student's scores were the worst in the state.

The parents were outraged. At the next P.T.A. meeting, they filled the rows of folding chairs set up in the gym. Dozens more moms and dads stood in back.

The crowd faced a podium set up upon the stage. They muttered angry oaths among themselves while waiting for the meeting to begin. When Mr. Whitherby stepped out from behind the curtain, the room grew dead silent.

As the principal stepped up to the podium, a father called out, "What's the deal with the test scores, Whitherby? Why isn't my son getting an education?"

"We're the worst school in the state!" shouted a mom in the front row. "How shameful!"

"The teachers are to blame!" called another mother.

"The principal is to blame!" called the first father.

"The superintendent is to blame!" called another father.

"The school board is to blame!" called a woman who was standing in the back. She wore sunglasses and a black silk scarf over

her head. As soon as she sat down, she pulled a cell phone from her pocket and dialed a number.

"Hello, my non-P or T darling," she said. "The meeting has just started...yes, yes, the room is packed, and the parents are hopping mad. I've already heard one couple say they're moving from the neighborhood...yes, yes, I got their names so you can buy their house as soon as it goes on sale. I must go now, my crafty darling, the principal is about to introduce the Specials. Bye."

Upon the gym stage, Mr. Whitherby mopped his bald head with a handkerchief. "I think it's time to bring our school super-heroes, our little Special agents if you will, onto the stage," he said. "I'm sure they can answer your questions. Let's have a big applause for the Specials!"

Jump Rope, AcePlus, Spitball, and Noise stepped out from behind the curtain. The audience greeted them with hisses and angry stares. The Specials stood beside the principal. Jump Rope held a lasso in her hand. She was going to do a fancy rope trick, but decided this was not a good time.

Mr. Whitherby cleared his throat. "As you all know, the Special Force is one of the extra-curricular activities at Acorn School," he said. "For the past several years they have made this school a safe place for education."

"What about the kidnapping?" shouted a mom.

"What about the vandalism?" shouted a father.

"What about our lousy School Board President?" shouted the woman in back.

AcePlus stepped to the microphone. "We know there have been a series of unfortunate events at the school," he said. "Rest assured the Special Force is close to solving these crimes."

"As for the foul test results, we also expect foul play," said Jump Rope. "While taking the test we spotted a school bus parked illegally outside the school."

"How can you blame a school bus for the poor education at this school?" yelled a father.

"Next you'll blame the mini-van that I use for carpooling?" yelled a mother.

"What was in the naughty school bus?" yelled the woman in back.

Jump Rope stared blankly at the crowd. She turned and looked at the other Specials, who shrugged and shook their heads.

"In the school bus?" she sputtered. "Well, I don't remember."

The crowd howled.

"What sort of super-heroes are you?" cried a father.

"Super-zeroes is more like it!" cried a mother.

"I'm taking my children out of this school and moving to a better school district," cried the woman.

"So are we! Us too! We're right behind you!" other mothers and fathers said.

The P.T.A. meeting was out of control. Mr. Whitherby ducked as parents pelted the podium with wads of paper and pencils.

In the back row, Madame Temper smiled. She dialed her cell phone again and held it in the air. "Can you hear all this, my daring darling," she said. "It's time to go house shopping."

13. Photos



The following morning recess, Jessamyn Robbins stood in the far corner of the playground. She held the end of her jump rope. Again and again, she tried twirling the rope over her head, only to have it smack her in the back of the neck.

Nearby two fourth-grade girls twirled two jump ropes between them while a third girls jumped Double-Dutch.

"Jessamyn, the spaz!" one girl called out. "Whoever heard of a fifth-grader who can't skip rope?"

"Don't get rope burns on your neck, Jessie," called the other.

As the girls continued to taunt, Anthony Lane strode past.

"Your shoes are untied, Anthony," one called out.

"Your fly is open," said another

"Special Ed kids are such retards," said the girl in the middle.

Zippering up his zipper, Anthony walked up to Jessamyn. She was surprised. When not disguised, the Specials rarely mingled together on the playground.

"A school bus just drove up and parked in the street," Anthony whispered. "I can see it, but every time I think about it a toy block appears in my mind."

Jessamyn stopped her attempts at skipping rope. She turned toward the yellow bus parked less than fifty yards away. "That's looks

like a regular yellow bus," she said. "But it's happening to me too. I see a colorful cube when I think about it."

At that moment, Naomi Hornsby walked up to the pair, followed by Sammy Newton.

The expression on their faces told that the same thing was happening in their minds.

"When I was playing soccer, I kept kicking the ball straight by mistake," said Sammy. "It's hard to concentrate on playing poorly with that bus parked over there."

"Something about that bus is messing up our memories," said Anthony. "We need someone outside the Special Force to investigate it for us."

"That c-could mean only one p-person," said Noise.

"The SIT," said Sammy.

"Trying not to draw attention to themselves, the Specials scanned the playground. Lisa Edward was playing in the sandbox. Anthony placed a hand behind his head and left it there until Lisa saw this secret Special signal. She trotted over to their huddle.

"What's going on?" she said in a low voice. "You guys never meet during recess."

"Look in the street, Lisa," said Anthony. "What do you see?"

The redheaded first-grader turned. "Just a plain-old school bus," she said.

The Specials nodded to one another.

"We're sending you on your first Special mission," said Jessamyn. "Check out that bus. See what's inside."

"But b-be careful," said Naomi. "Try not to b-be seen."

"Report back to us at lunch recess," Sammy added.

Without a word, Lisa looked to where Mrs. Mayday, the playground lady, stood. Seeing her back turned, she ducked behind a picnic table. The four Specials watched her slip through the playground gate and across the school parking lot.

At that moment, Marcos Martin ran up to them. Without a word, the new Special messenger stopped three feet from their huddle.

"What is it, Marcos?" asked Anthony. "Does Mr. Whitherby need the Specials?"

"He's supposed to tell you if it's a Code Gold, Silver or Bronze emergency."

The kindergartner shifted from foot to foot. "But the principal didn't tell me to get the Specials," he said. "He said to fetch Jessamyn Robbins, Anthony Lane, Sammy Newton, and Naomi Hornsby."

Two minutes later, the four fifth-graders sat before the principal's desk in the office. They felt strange. They had never sat in the office before without their Special disguises.

Mr. Whitherby studied the two girls and two boys and shook his head. "This is not possible," he muttered to himself. "You four can't be the Specials."

Anthony laughed. "What did you say, Mr. Whitherby?" he asked. "Are the Specials coming to this meeting?"

"That would be neat," said Sammy. "I think the Specials are awesome."

The principal stared at his desktop. "For years I've been trying to figure out the Special's identity," he said. "To tell you the truth my guesses were all wrong. But now I know who they are."

"Who?" asked Jessamyn.

"T-tell us," Naomi stuttered.

"Well, if you four want to continue playing this game, I must show my proof," Mr. Whitherby said. "I don't know who took this picture or why you let them take it, but it was sent via e-mail to me and every classroom in the school."

The principal reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a photograph. The fifth-grader stared at it in silence. It showed all four Specials standing together in the front of a school bus. They wore their Special outfits minus one thing. None of them wore a mask.

The four fifth-graders leaned back in their chairs wondering the same thing. Who *did* take that picture?

14. *Special Mission*



Lisa Edwards crouched beside a white van. The van was parked in the street behind the target of her mission, the mysterious school bus. Raising her head, she peered through the bus's back window. She saw rows of plastic seats, all empty.

"Just a plain-old school bus," she said, shaking her head. "It's like the one we took on our field trip."

Duck-style, the first-grader crept along the side of the van. She knelt under the bus's back bumper. The recess bell would ring soon, so she had to act fast.

"Stop When Red Light Flashes," she read off the rear emergency door. She reached up and pulled the door handle. But it was locked.

"Good thing locks are metal," she told herself. "And good thing I've practiced picking locks Special Ed class."

Staring at the door handle, Lisa thought hard. Her brain rumbled and her forehead began to sweat. Deep inside her body, she felt the parts of the door lock move. Then—*click!*— it unlocked.

Again, Lisa reached up and pulled the handle. This time the door opened. She rose onto her haunches, and peered inside the bus. A wall of white marble blocked her view. She reached over the top of the wall, and felt warm water. It took a moment for her to register what it was.

"A Jacuzzi?" she said under her breath.

Stepping onto the back bumper, the girl could see the entire length of the bus's interior. Spying no people, she climbed over the tub of warm water, stepped past the rhinoceros-skin sofa, ran her hand over the bank of video screens, and looked out the windows at Acorn School.

"Trick windows," she told herself.

Next Lisa turned her attention to the desk below the video monitors. On the desktop sat a large wooden block.

"I've seen that cube before," she told herself. She stood still trying to remember. "Yes, it appeared in my mind's eye when I was taking the Standardized tests."

Beside the desk, Lisa spotted a stacks of signs nailed to wooden stakes. The signs read:

THOMAS TEMPER FOR SCHOOL BOARD PRES.

"Thomas Temper must own this bus," she concluded. "Madame Temper was involved in the bus high jacking. It's all connected."

Right then, the front door of the bus folded open. Lisa heard voices at the bottom of the steps. In one swift motion she grabbed the large toy block, sped to the back of the bus, climbed over the Jacuzzi, and leaped out the back door. She was locking the door with her mind power when the bus engine revved. She crouched, coughing on the exhaust coming from the exhaust pipe. With her arms wrapped around the wooden block, she remained there, until the bus drove away and disappeared down the street.

15. Real Estate



The school bus rumbled down the street. White houses with green front yards stood beyond the strips of straight sidewalks. FOR SALE signs pierced many of the front yards. Many of the FOR SALE signs had a SOLD sticker plastered across them.

Madame Temper drove the bus. Dr. Temper lay on the rhinoceros-skin sofa, sipping a glass of mint lemonade.

"Our real estate purchases have been brisk, my capitalist darling," Madame Temper called back. "We now own this entire block and half the next one."

"I'll not be happy until I'm the owner of this entire neighborhood," Dr. TT replied. "Some of these inhabitants, some of these families need extra encouragement to move away from here."

"I've made sure only extra creepy couples have moved into your houses," said Madame Temper. "Only ones with barking dogs, smelly barbeques, and blaring stereos. None of them have children, and all of them have promised to vote for Thomas Temper for School Board President."

The ex-principal raised his glass of mint lemonade in the air. "And that reminds me, I think it's time to start my President for School Board campaign," he said. "The election is in two weeks. So far the present president, whose name I refuse to pronounce, believes she'll coast to an easy reelection."

Madame Temper slammed on the bus brakes. "But she's in for a big surprise my detectable, electable darling."

Grabbing several of the THOMAS TEMPER FOR SCHOOL BOARD PRES. signs in back, she pulled open the door and leaped from the left bus.

Moment's later Madame Temper stood at a street corner where someone had planted a sign saying REELECT DOLORES DIXON, SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT in the dirt. She yanked the sign out of the ground and replaced it with one she had brought from the bus.

"This will make an excellent dart board target," she said, carrying the old sign back onto the bus.

Dr. TT pounded his fist on his knee his fist. "'I'll not have that woman's picture in this bus," he snapped. "She's the corrupt public official who took Acorn School away from me."

Madame Temper flung the sign out the door and continued driving down the street. As she past next house with a FOR SALE sign in front, she called out, "You should be able to buy this house for a song, my wheeling-dealing darling. Each night I've been leaving garbage on the front lawn and hate mail in the mailbox."

Dr. TT pulled a small strongbox off a shelf. Inside was a stack of one hundred dollar bills that he began to count. "There's enough dough to buy one more house," he muttered. "Tonight you must make a trip to the Acorn School office. The kiddies just had their Read-a-thon fund raiser, so the school safe should be loaded."

"And of course the safe combination is the same since you were in charge," Madame Temper remarked. "This will be an easy heist."

"And you won't have any more trouble with the Specials or their Special effects," said Dr. TT. "I sent the photos this morning. By the end of this school day, the Special Force will be finished, kaput, a extinct species."

A this moment Madame Temper spotted another REELECT DOLORES DIXON, SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT and she slammed on the brakes. As she stepped to the back of the bus to collect more THOMAS TEMPER FOR SCHOOL BOARD PRES, she noticed the empty desktop.

"What have you done with the Test-Taker Block, my handsome darling?" she said.

"What?" said Dr TT, who was recounting his money.

"The cube is not here. Where did you put it?"

Thomas Temper rose from his leather seat. "What are you talking about?" he snapped. He inspected the desk and the floor beneath. "I've not touched the block since zapping the Specials."

"Calm, calm, my sensitive darling," Madame Temper urged. "Don't get all worked up. I'm sure it's around here somewhere."

The man slammed his fist on the desktop. He stomped to the back of the bus then stomped to the front of the bus. His face was apple red.

"Where is my cube? I want my cube!" he screamed. His toupee shot straight upwards and smacked the roof. Foamy drool dribbled down from the sides of his mouth.

"Temper. Temper, darling" said his wife. She ducked behind the sofa.

Crash! Slam! Crash!

Dishes and vases went flying across the bus.

"I WANT MY CUBE BACK!" the man ranted. "WHO TOOK MY BLOCK?"

The ex-principal slammed his fist into the front of refrigerator, leaving a large dent. Then he dropped onto the tiger-skin carpet, kicking and screaming.

"MY CUUUUUUUUBE! I WANT MY CUUUUUUUUUUUUBE!"

16. Special Exhibition



After lunch, Room Five had Free Time. Group One was reading quietly at their desks when Courtney called from the computer table. "No way! This has to be a joke! No way!"

Mrs. Monroe looked up from her desk and went "Shh!"

"But you won't believe this," Courtney called out. "No one will believe it! There's a picture of the Specials on the screen."

The members of Group One pretended to show no interest in what Courtney said. But the rest of the fifth-graders were looking toward the computer

"What's so special about a picture of the Specials," Nathan called. "Their picture is in the newspaper all the time."

"Not like this," Courtney answered. "In this picture the Specials aren't wearing masks." She looked toward Group One and laughed. "You won't believe it!"

A dozen fifth-graders sprang to the computer. With one look at the screen, they all burst into laughter.

"No way!" said one.

"You gotta be kidding!" said a second.

"It's the entire Dumb Group!" said a third.

"Look Mrs. Monroe," Courtney called out. "You can tell who the Specials are. You won't believe it."

The teacher strolled back to the computer. "What is all the fuss about?" she asked. When she saw the photo on the screen she gasped. "How could that be?" She turned toward Group One. "Jessamyn? Anthony? Sammy? Naomi? Are you the Specials?"

The four students stared at their desktops. Their classmates continued to laugh and jeer. They were used to "being made fun of" and "being laughed at", but this was different. Once their Special identity was known, their confidence was broken. Their "especially special" powers were useless.

"There's nothing special about them," said Nathan.

"Except that they go to Special Ed," said Courtney.

"So all this time we thought the Specials were super-heroes and they were just those four?" said Reed.

"Now, now, class, let's not be rude," said Mrs. Monroe. "But I must admit, they fooled me as well. Group One I'm sure your intention were good, but pretending to be super heroes was a poor practical joke."

Courtney walked up to Jessamyn's chair and yanked off the backpack. Before Jessamyn could stop her, she had zipped it and pulled out the red cowgirl's hat.

"Look at this," Courtney announced, waving the red hat in the air. "Yippee-ha-ha-ha!"

The class roared with laughter.

The girl pulled a rope out of the backpack. "Come on, Jessamyn, I mean, Jump Rope, show us some rope tricks."

"Come on show us," Reed called out.

"Hey, AcePlus, what's seven times seven," asked Nathan.

"Make a n-noise, Naomi," said Courtney. "Sh-show us how you do it."

"Show us! Show us! Show us!" the others chanted.

Mrs. Monroe rang the bell on her desk. "That will be enough, class." She checked the clock. "Group One it's time for your Special Ed class. I'll talk to Mrs. Friendly later about this Special nonsense."

Jessamyn, Anthony, Sammy, and Naomi grabbed their backpacks and raced out the door. In the hallway, they heard laughter coming

from the other classroom. Apparently, every classroom computer has received the picture of the maskless Specials.

Once inside Room 3C the Specials strode straight to the jellybean-shaped table and sat down.

Jessamyn hid face in her hands and burst into tears. "This is so embarrassing," she said to Mrs. Friendly.

"The Specials are the l-laughing stock of the entire s-school," said Naomi.

"I could never wear that Spitball outfit again," said Sammy.

"Strange thing is, we can't remember how that picture ever got taken," said Anthony.

Mrs. Friendly pulled a tissue from a box and handed it to Jessamyn. "Did you four forget that you sent our SIT on a mission?" she said. "Look what Lisa brought me a short time ago. She said she found it on the bus."

The teacher placed the wood block on the table. The four Special leaned forward to inspect the letters on the side.

"That's it," said Anthony. "That's the toy block I see in my head each time I think of that school bus."

"Me too," Jessamyn and Naomi said together.

"And that's what I saw while taking the Standardized tests," said Sammy.

Anthony raced to the computer in the back of the room and booted it up. The picture of the Specials without mask appeared on the screen. "It all fits," he said. "That picture was taken on a school bus. That block must have something to do with blocking our memories that we were ever there. I've got to analyze that cube"

Sammy carried the wooden block back to where Anthony sat. Anthony pulled a book entitled THE SPECIAL CHILD from the bookshelf. The shelf slid sideways, revealing his laboratory that included every imaginable tool and chemical. Without another word, he picked up a screwdriver and began taking the block apart. He soon had the top removed and was tinkering with it's insides.

"I've s-suddenly started to h-hate school again," said Naomi.

"And we still have to sit through that Read-a-thon assembly after this," said Jessamyn. "That will be unbearable." "No way am I

putting on that Spitball outfit," Sammy repeated. "I don't think I have enough lung power any more to blow a ping-pong ball."

"Children's laughter can be cruel," said Mrs. Friendly. "Some people enjoy seeing heroes fall."

17. The Heist



A flashlight shone through the office window. The door lock clicked and Madame Temper entered the room.

"How clever of me to have made a copy of the school keys before I left this place," she said. "Get on in here, boys, and get to work."

Three men wearing black derbies and black T-shirts with OX3 on their black T-shirts tiptoed into the office. They each held a pillowcase

"Shouldn't one of us stay outside and be on the lookout for those Special children," Tic 3 asked.

"Those kids in the funny uniforms have put lots of our buddies in the county jail," said Tac3.

"They have a way of knowing when there's trouble around this school," said Toe3.

Madame Temper knelt before the office safe. "We'll have no more trouble with the Specials," said Madame Temper. "Especially after the Read-a-thon assembly this afternoon. I heard the other students laughing at them all the way out in the bus."

Madame Temper spun the dial on the safe's lock. "And I doubt the present pitiful principal of this school changed the combination on this safe since I was here?" she said. The safe door opened. "Eureka! Here's all the Read-a-thon money along with today's lunch money.

And look, there's even some money the Girl's Scout collected from their cookie drive. Well, you oxen, start unloading the safe and haul it to the bus."

As Tic3 Tac3 and Toe3 emptied the safe, Madame Temper stepped into Mr. Whitherby's office. She sat in the principal's chair and put her feet up on the desktop. "Yes, this is where I first met, my darling darling," she said. "What wonderful times we had in here, the times I took memos from him, the times I brought him coffee, and the times I would shine his shoes if they got scuffed. Ooooo, then they unfairly fired him. Just because he has a slight temper. But just wait, me and my dimpled darling will soon be sharing an office again."

Five minutes later, Madame Temper and her three helpers, who lugged their loaded pillowcases, were crossing the playground toward the school bus. As the burglars passed the slide, a tremendous roar shook the air.

Tic3, Tac3, and Toe3 stopped in their tracks.

"Keep moving," Madame Temper cried. "Some teenager has his car stereo up too loud."

"But that sounded like a like a lion," said Tic3.

"Or even something worse," said Tac3. "That could be the Special Noise sounding like a lion."

"Nonsense," Madame Temper said. "The only lion around here is mounted on the wall in the bus. And the Specials are goners."

Toe3 pointed to the top of the slide with a shaky finger. "Then if the Specials can't be here," he said, "that can't be one of their Special Effects."

On the slide crouched a large male lion ready to spring. He roared again.

Madame Temper bolted toward the bus. "Hugs and kisses, boys," she called out. "I think it's a Cat's Game!"

At that moment, a circle of rope flew out of the darkness. Jump Rope stoop on top of the jungle gym.

"Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!" she shouted.

Her lasso fell around Tic3 and tightened.

In the next instant two softballs smacked Tac3 and Toe3 in the stomach and knocked them flat. Shortly afterward Spitball stood over

them, holding his double-barreled bazooka tube to his lips, prepared to fire again.

A squeal of tires came from the street. Flames shot from the exhaust pipes as the yellow bus, with Madame Temper at the wheel, zoomed away.

The four Specials stood around their captives.

"Don't hurt us!" Tic3 said, holding out his pillowcase full of Read-a-thon money.

"We thought you were finished," Tac3 said. "this entire city thinks you're just four nerdy fifth-graders."

"How did you make it through the assembly?" asked Toe3.

AcePlus held up the Test-Taker's Block that he had tucked under his arm. "With this," he said. "All the students and teachers at the assembly received a blast of this, which erased any memory of who we are under these masks." He placed his hands on top and bottom of the block. "And now it's your turn."

"The Specials are special again," said Jump Rope.

"And you'll have plenty of time to read books in the county jail if you want to contribute to our school Read-a-thon," said Spitball.

And Noise let out the roar of a lion that shook the playground one more time.

18. Special Session



Mrs. Friendly folded her hands on the top of the jellybean-shaped table. Having completed their warm-up drills, the four Specials joined her. The time was ten o'clock, an unusual hour for the Specials to meet.

"I've called a Special session this morning because there are many school issues we need to discuss," said the Special Ed teacher.

At this moment, a knock came on the door.

"Enter," Mrs. Friendly called out.

Lisa Edwards stepped into the room. Her shoes were untied and the tail of her shirt was untucked. A glob of glue hung from a curl of her red hair. Without a word, the first-grader hung the backpack she carried on the back of a chair and sat down next to Jump Rope.

"During this hour, I usually meet with several first graders, but I only asked Lisa to come today," the teacher explained. "First, Ace, explain what happened at the Read-a-thon assembly yesterday."

"It was simple," AcePlus explained. "Once I figured out what the wooden block was used for and how to adjust it, I brought it with me into the gym."

"Before Anthony turned used the block, the assembly was terrible for us," said Jump Rope. "Even Mr. Whitherby made jokes about the Specials."

"Then Anthony turned on the block and everything changed, everyone grew quiet," said Noise. "The four of us snuck out of the gym and put on our Special outfits. When we returned the students and teachers cheered."

"I set the block to erase only memory of the photo," AcePlus explained. "After I zapped those office-robbers last night, I smashed the cube to pieces on the playground. Having a mind-blocking machine around a school is not a good idea."

Mrs. Friendly nodded in approval. "Mr. Whitherby is happy to have the money back, but he's still concerned about all the problems the school has been having."

"Dr. Temper appears to be behind the disasters," said Noise. "But there's not enough proof to report him to the police."

"And Dr. TT looks like a shoe-in to be elected School Board President in next week's election," AcePlus added.

"That's why I believe the Special Force needs a reinforcement," Mrs. Friendly said. "I've informed Mr. Whitherby that I want to add a fifth Special, and he approved the funding."

The teacher smiled at Lisa. The first-grader grabbed her backpack and stepped behind the file cabinet.

"You've seen Lisa use her 'especially special' talent, her ability to move metal object with her mind," Mrs. Friendly went on. "So we've been working hard to develop a Special identity for her that would go with that specialty."

"Ready," Lisa called from behind the cabinet.

"And now Specials," said the teacher. "I'd like to introduce the new member to your Specials Force. Heeeeere's Gold Star!"

The first-grader stepped up to the table. She wore a shiny golden body suit with a hood, not unlike the outfit an Olympic speed skater might wear. She carried a shield in the shape of large gold star. A sparkling golden mask hid her eyes and three metallic gold stars hung from her belt.

"Mrs. Friendly, can I give a demonstration?" Lisa asked.

"Yes, dear," the teacher answered. "But be careful what you aim at."

Lisa pulled one of the metal stars off her belt. She held it behind her head and flung it toward the far wall. With a buzzing sound, it shot toward a CD case standing upright on AcePlus's lab shelf. It split the plastic case in two lengthwise.

"Beside my mental metal power, I've been practicing with my shooting stars," she explained.

"So ladies and gentlemen," said Mrs. Friendly. "It's time for the Special swearing in ceremony."

Jump Rope, AcePlus, Spitball, and Noise rose from the table. They stood side-by-side behind Lisa Edwards.

Lisa raised her right hand and repeated the four points of the Special oath that Mrs. Friendly recited:

- 1. A Special must never reveal his or her student identity**
- 2. A Special must use his or her powers only for positive purposes**
- 3. A Special must come when summoned by the messenger. That is, as soon as it's safe to leave the classroom.**
- 4. A Special must kept up his or her grades and hand in homework on time**

When she was through, the Special Ed teacher gave her a hug. "Be careful, Gold Star," she said. "You've worked hard for this moment. But presently, there's great danger at Acorn School. Your job, as you've just sworn to do, is to stop that danger and make the school a safe place for learning."

19. School Board Emperor



Monday morning a yellow school with a bullhorn mounted on the roof, drove slowly through the neighborhood surrounding Acorn Elementary School.

The voice blaring from the bullhorn belonged to Dr. Thomas Temper.

"Attention citizens of Acorn School District. Tomorrow is Election Day. Tomorrow you have a choice of what to do about all the pesky children who go to school in Acorn School District. Are you tired of the chatter children make as they walk to school each morning? Are you annoyed with the loud racket that comes from the school playground? Do you feel the best land is covered with a soccer field on which children play only during recesses? Are you tired of paying taxes for school when you have no children of your own in those schools? Then vote tomorrow for Dr. Thomas Temper for School Board President. He'll end the waste of city money spent on children. This is public education, and you are the public. Thomas Temper will make children public enemy number."

On Election Day, the library at Acorn Elementary School became one of the city's polling places. Voting booths were set up around the room and all day long grownups filed in to vote.

The four member of Group One in Room Five watched glumly as the voters entered the school. So many news residence were voting,

all childless couples who had moved in to Dr. TT's houses, the Specials knew Dolorous Dixon has no chance of winning the election. They became even glummer when they passed the library where the voting booths were set up. The men greeting the voter wore black derbies and had OX4 stenciled on their black T-shirts.

The following morning the election results were announced in the newspaper:

FORMER PRINCIPAL THOMAS TEMPER
WINS SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT ELECTION BY LANDSLIDE

At noon that day, a yellow school bus pulled into the school parking lot. The door folded open and a long red carpet unrolled down the steps. It continued to unroll down the sidewalk until it struck the school's front door. A moment later Dr. TT himself stepped down from the bus. He walked along the carpet with Madame Temper one step behind him. Mr. Whitherby stood outside the front door to greet him.

"Welcome back to Acorn Elementary School, Dr. Temper," the principal spouted out. "Congratulations on being elected School Board Presidents. I'd be happy to give you a tour of our school."

"Clam up, Whitherby," Dr. TT snapped. "I know this school better than you do. I'm here to see what I can salvage. With fewer children in this School District, Acorn School is no longer needed, and I plan to level it and turn this space into a used-car lot. I want all your students and teachers divided up and transferred to other schools by the end of the week. My secretary here will arrange all the paperwork."

Mr. Whitherby stood speechless. Dr. and Madame Temper turned on their heels and strutted back to the bus.

That evening Dr. TT held his first school board meeting in the gym at Acorn Elementary School. The eight members of the school board sat on folding chairs on the stage. Before them, the new School Board President sat on a stuffed covered with giraffe hide. Over his shoulders was a robe made of sea otter fur and on his head sat a golden crown studded with diamonds mined by ten-year old boys in Africa.

"The first order of business at this meeting will be my first appointment," Dr. Temper announced. "From this day on I will no longer be School Board President. I hereby appoint myself School Board Emperor. All the citizens Acorn School District shall call me Emperor Temper. Any objections?"

Since this School Board meeting was unannounced, no one came, so no one was there to object.

Only Madame Temper sat in the audience. She called out, "Bravo! Bravo! Long live Emperor Temper."

Dr. TT held up his hands. "Thank you. Thank you. And as emperor of this school district, I hereby proclaim that on Saturday morning at eight AM, Acorn Elementary School shall be raised. By noon on Saturday I want nothing remaining here but a pile of rubble."

"Hear! Hear!" shouted Madame Temper. "Hail Emperor Temper!"

"My second proclamation as School Board Emperor is to raise school taxes," Dr. TT went on. "All this extra money will go into my personal Treasure Chest. Meeting adjourned."

"Three cheers for Emperor Temper!" Madame Temper cried. "Hip-hip! Hurrah! Hip-hip! Hurrah! Hip-hip! Hurrah!"

20. Sad School Days



The next day stuff began to disappear from Acorn Elementary School. The computers vanished from the classrooms. Paper, pens, pencils, and paint vanished from the supply room, and Nolan, the custodian, removed the balls from the playground. The books in the library were carted away and finally classroom desks vanished as well.

During these sad days, the five Specials often roamed through the hallway, talking with the students.

"Are they really going to bulldoze our school, Specials?" a second grader asked them. "Can't you stop them?"

"We're working on a plan to save this place," replied Spitball. "Don't give up hope."

"There are no books left in our school, Specials," said a fourth-grader. "How are we supposed to learn?"

"Many schools in the world go without books or paper or pencils," said Jump Rope. "We'll try to learn any way we can."

Once the Special Force passed Rodney Little, who was crying outside his classroom.

"You Specials are no good," the first-grader said. "I gotta go to another school. I gotta leave all my friends and teacher."

The Specials wanted to offer Rodney some encouraging words, but they remained silent. So far, not one of them had any idea how they would save the school.

Near the office, they spotted Mr. Whitherby. His head was hung, and his hands were in his pants pockets.

"I've been transferred to the School District Office," he said glumly. "The emperor has appointed me his Court Jester. I must wear a checkered clown's outfit and a funny hat. I must sit at Emperor Temper's feet all day long and tell him jokes whenever he asks."

That afternoon Specials entered Room 3C. They were surprised to find Mrs. Friendly sitting at the jellybean-shaped table looking cheery.

"All the other teachers are packing up their classrooms, Mrs. Friendly," said Gold Star, waving her golden shield. "Why aren't you?"

"Why should I?" asked the teacher.

"Because in two day this school will be dust," said Spitball.

"No more Room 3C," said Noise. "Naomi Hornsby is being transferred to the elementary school on the far side of town."

Mrs. Friendly removed her rectangular eyeglasses. "Is this how I trained you?" she asked. "To give up hope so easily. Especially when the school needs you the most."

"But Dr. TT rules the school board, who rules the school board, who rules the superintendent, who rules the principal who rules the students," said Jump Rope. "And if his Royal Lowness says the Special Force is finished, we're finished."

"But the School Board President is an elected official," said the teacher. "And anyone elected by the public can also be removed by the public. You just need to find a way to prove that Thomas Temper is a liar and thief."

"Not to say a child-hater," said Gold Star.

"But how?" asked Gold Star.

"Excuse me just a minute, Specials," said Mrs. Friendly, and she rose from the table and walked out the door.

The five Specials exchanged looks. Then Noise smiled and opened her mouth. Out came the voice of Mrs. Friendly. Everyone at the table could hear her clearly say, "Nothing is more specials than a Special, especially you five Specials."

“Big deal, Noise,” said Jump Rope. “We know you can imitate other people.”

“But Noise isn’t imitating me,” Mrs. Friendly said. “She’s broadcasting me.”

Noise nodded and closed her mouth. “It’s a new skill Mrs. Friendly help me develop,” she said. “After I’ve learned to hear things far away, I learned that I could make the sound go in my ears and up my throat.”

AcePlus stood and paced the room. “Mrs. Friendly put words through Nose’s head and an idea through mine,” he said. And by the time Mrs. Friendly returned to the room, the five Specials were devising a plan to save Acorn Elementary School.

21. Special Hearing



At seven-thirty, Saturday morning, twelve bulldozers drove up to Acorn Elementary School. They parked on the playground, one next to the other. Their curved iron blades faced the side of the school.

A short time later, three TV vans arrived followed by Officer Jones in his squad car. Mrs. Monroe and the rest of the teachers showed up as well, as did Mr. Whitherby. The principal wore his checkered jester's outfit and hat.

By ten to eight, the streets and sidewalks leading to the school were also filled with students and students. They all wanted to say goodbye to their former school and be with it during its final moments.

At one minute to eight, a yellow school bus pulled into the parking lot. The door folded open and three men holding sledgehammers piled. They each wore a black derby and a T-shirt with OX4 in front. They ran up to the front of the school and held their big hammers over their heads.

At eight o'clock sharp, Dr. TT's voice blared from the bullhorn on top of the bus, "Greetings to my public subjects. This is your School Board Emperor speaking. I'm glad you all turned out for this special occasion, the demolition of Acorn School. Isn't it more fun to see schools razed than raised in a community?"

At that moment, Rodney Little broke away from the crowd. Tears streamed down his face as he ran toward the bus.

"Don't hurt my school, Emperor, sir," he wailed. "I want my desk back. I miss my friends"

"Security!" Dr. TT shouted.

At once one of the men with a sledgehammer grabbed Rodney by the waist and carried him outside the playground fence.

"OK, enough of this," Dr TT called out. "Bulldozers, start your engines! Advance and don't stop until you've plowed through that school and come out the other side!"

The air filled with a thunderous roar of diesel engines. Together the twelve bulldozers started rolling across the playground. They had not gone far, however, when a bright glaring object appeared in their path. The people in the crowd shaded their eyes and squinted to make out what it was.

"It's-it's a little girl dressed in some sort of gold uniform," one dad called out.

"That must be the new Special my daughter told me about," said someone else. "I think her name's Gold Star."

"You better get out of the way, honey or you'll get hurt," called a mom.

Gold Star indeed stood on the playground. In one hand, she held her shield that reflected the sun's rays. In the other, she held a large wooden block with painted letters on its side.

"Attention, Emperor Temper," she called out. "I want to return something to you."

The door of the bus folded open. With the bulldozers a mere fifty yards from the school, Gold Star mounted the stairs.

Dr. and Mrs. Temper sat in the rhinoceros-skin sofa. The couple wore party hats and balloons lay around the tiger-hide rug. It appeared as if they'd been partying all night long.

"Well, if it's not Mrs. Friendly's new little specialist," Dr. TT said. "Tell me what you want and make it snappy. I've waited years to see that school destroyed and I don't want to miss it.

Gold Star peered out the windshield of the bus. Noise now stood before the crowd of students and parents. She had her mouth wide

open. Jump Rope, AcePlus, and Spitball also stood on the playground, but the bulldozers were less than twenty yards from impact with the school.

The Special set the cube on Dr. TT's desk. "I'm returning your block to you, Emperor Temper" she said. "Only a genius such as yourself could have created such a devise."

"I thought you Specials might have taken that things," Dr. TT said. "But you were too late. I had already blocked every student's brain. Why do you think the test results were so terrible?"

"You certainly outsmarted all the Specials," said Gold Star. "How ever did you manage it?"

"High jacking the first-graders and vandalizing the school was easy," said Dr. Temper. "As long as we sure those OX helpers were captured by the police three, no one suspected Madame Temper and I were behind the whole plot."

Outside the bus, something was happening. The spectators were no longer watching the bulldozers. They had turned toward the bus and were slowly walking toward it.

"And although you Specials stopped me from robbing this school, I was able to rob the other elementary schools in the district, the middle school and the high school," Dr TT went on. "I had plenty of dough to buy up the vacant houses in this community. Half the people who moved in weren't even registrar voters, but I paid people to work at each polling station. The whole election was rigged."

"But you don't even like children," said Gold Star. "Why did you want to become School Board President?"

"Simple, my dear," said Dr. TT. "To hurt this district as much as they hurt me. And now that I have power, I can get rid of all those nasty kids. First this school will go, then the others. By the end of the school year there won't be one pesky, noisy student left in this school district."

Again Gold Star looked out the bus windows. She saw that by now the crowd of students and parent surrounded the bus.

"Thank you. Dr. Temper," she said. "I think the public heard your confession loud and clear. You see, Noise, has been broadcasting to them every word you just said."

At that moment, the bus started to rock left and right, left and right. Gold Star grabbed the bus steering wheel to keep from tumbling over. But Dr. Temper fell onto the floor and Madame Temper fell on top of him. He water sloshed out of the Jacuzzi and crystal chandelier overhead shattered to bits.

Outside, students were lined up on both sides of the bus, pushing it back and forth. They banged the sides with their fists and threw rocks at the windows.

"Don't wreck our school! Don't wreck our school!" they chanted.

Dr. Temper crawled to his desk. He picked up the bullhorn microphone.

"Sorry, you little brats," he called out. "Look how close my bulldozers are to turning your dismal school to dust. And as soon as they plow down the walls, Tic4, Tac4 and Toe4 will move in with their sledgehammers and knock down every blackboard and book shelf in every classroom."

The crowd grew silent. Everyone faced the school. The bulldozers were five yards from the school. Four yards! Three yards. Then a miracle. The bulldozers disappeared.

A gasp rose from the crowd followed by a cheer. Gold Star leaped off the bus.

"Another of AcePlus's Specials effects," she announced to the amazed crowd.

The other Specials ran up to the bus. Jump rope had already lassoed Tic4, Tac4, and Toe 4 and pulled the bundle of men behind her.

"We convinced the real bulldozers not to show up today," said AcePlus.

"We needed a way to tell you what criminals Dr Thomas Temper and his wife are," said Noise.

"Now we can have our school back," said Mr. Whitherby.

"Hurrah!" shouted all the children on the playground. "Our school is saved. Hurrah for the Specials!"

22. Temper Tantrum



As the Specials locked Tic4, Tac4 and Toe4 the back of Officer Jones's squad car, the front door of the school opened. Out walked Mrs. Friendly. The Special Ed teacher took one look around and placed her hands on her hips.

"What are all you children standing around for?" she called out. "It's a beautiful Saturday morning. If you're going to be on that playground, you should be playing."

The children let out another cheer. But as they started playing the engine of the school bus revved. The horn honked and smoke spit from its exhaust pipe.

"Move aside, Mrs. Friendly," Dr. Temper's voice boomed from the bullhorn. "I'm still in charge here. And I'm about to show your Specials some effects that will have some real effect."

Mrs. Friendly, the five Specials, Officer Jones, and every student and parent on the playground looked through the bus's windshield. Madame Temper gripped the steering wheel with white knuckles and a sneer on her face. Dr. TT sat beside her, banging his fists on the dashboard. Their intentions were obvious. They were going to ram the school bus into the front of the school.

The crowd gasped, as Madame Temper revved the engine again. She pulled the gearshift, and the bus started forward.

"Move, Mrs. Friendly! Get out of the way!" students called.

The Specials Ed teacher, however, didn't budge. She remained standing before the school's front door with her arms folded across her chest.

"Time to your special stuff, Specials," she hollered. "Teach that ex-principal some principles."

In a flash--Phoot! Phoot!--Spitball shot two "pigeon dropping" spitballs at the bus windshield. They splattered on the glass, blocking the driver's view. At the same moment, Gold Star pulled four gold stars off her belt and flung them at the bus tires. The rubber flew apart with four loud pops.

Yet the bus, riding on its wheel rims that sprayed sparks across the asphalt, still sped forward. Still Mrs. Friendly refused to move.

"Yippee-ay-ee-I-owe-you!" shouted Jump Rope, and she tossed a super-size, super-strength lasso around the entire bus. Taking a Tug-of-War game stance, the cowgirl gripped the rope with both hands. The rope went taut and stretched. Jump Rope slid five yards before the bus finally stopped. The front bumper was inches from inches from the Special Ed teacher.

"Hurrah, for Mrs. Friendly," the students and parents shouted. "Hurrah for the Specials!"

The bus door folded open

Dr. Thomas Temper leaped out cussing and shouting. He held the Test Taker's Block.

"So you've all heard my *Who'll Rule the School* scheme," he snarled. "Well, now I will block your memory of every work I said."

Dr. Temper held the Test Taker's Block toward the crowd. With a snarl on his lips, he pressed the M and T. As he did so, a thin stream of water shot out of the block from the side facing him and squirted the man in the nose.

The students parents roared with laughter.

"You didn't think I'd return the real cube to you, did you Dr. TT?" said Gold Star.

Thomas Temper flung the fake block onto the asphalt. He shook with rage. He shook his fists in the air and his face turned apple red.

"The Specials! The Specials!" he stormed. "I hate the Specials!"

The ex-principal's shaking grew worse. He stomped around in front of the bus as if trying to put out a fire.

"The Specials! The Specials!" he continued to rant. He shook so much there appeared to be two of him.

"Dr. Temper is beside himself," Mrs. Friendly said.

"This is the worst temper tantrum I've ever seen," said Mr. Whitherby.

Dr. TT continued to shout, stomp, spit and shake his fists. His toupee shot upward and disappeared in the clear, blue sky. He gnashed his teeth as thick foam like bubble bath suds streamed from between his lips. His face turned from dark red to deep purple.

Finally the man stopped. "THE SPEEEEEEEEEEEEEEECILAS!" he shrieked.

"THE
SPEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
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EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
EEEEEEECILAS!"

Then it happened. A sickening expression crossed Dr. Temper's face, before the entire top of his head blew off. With a great roar, a cloud of smoke and ash blew upward.

"He's blown his top!" shouted Mr. Whitherby.

"Cooooool!" went Rodney Little.

When the smoke cleared, Dr TT was gone. His entire self had erupted and turned to ash.

23. Special Assembly



One afternoon in mid-June, the gym at Acorn Elementary School filled up with students, teachers, and parents. The fifth-grade class sat on folding chairs on the stage.

Mr. Whitherby stood at a microphone before the fifth-graders. "Welcome boys and girls, teachers, mothers and fathers," he said. "Welcome to the fifth-grade graduation."

The audience applauded politely.

"This has been quite a challenging year here at Acorn Elementary School," said the principal. "Many families moved away from the school district. But as soon as our young super-heroes, the Specials, took care of some minor difficulties, the families moved back. As a result the entire fifth-grade sits on stage today for graduation."

Again the audience clapped.

Mrs. Friendly sat in the audience halfway back. Lisa Edwards sat to her right and Marcos Martinez sat on her left. The trio stared at Jessamyn Robbins, Nathan Lane, Anthony Newton, and Naomi Hornsby, who sat among the fifth grade class.

They were surprised when the principal said, "We're honored to have the Specials with us on stage today. They will help present the diplomas."

As Jump Rope, Spitball, AcePlus, Noise, and Gold Star walked onto the stage, the audience erupted into a thunderous applause.

Mr. Whitherby inspected the Specials who stood beside him. "The Specials have had me fooled for years," he quipped. "I could have sworn at least one of them was in fifth-grade. It's still a mystery who they are, but how lucky we are to have them at our school."

"How could this be?" Lisa whispered to Mrs. Friendly. "Gold Star is standing up there, and I'm sitting here."

Mrs. Friendly looked around the gym. High up the back room was a small window that let to the projection room. She noticed five beams of colored lights beaming from that room toward the stage.

"Holograms," the teacher answered. "One of Ace's Special effects. The Specials on stage are projected laser beams images. Clever."

Jump Rope stepped to the mike. She held out a loop of rope and twirled it above her head. She turned toward a nearby table on which laid the fifth-grade diplomas rolled into a tube. With a flick of her wrist, she whipped the rope toward the table, lassoed a diploma, and jerked it back to her hand.

"This first diploma goes to Jessamyn Robbins," Jump Rope announced. "Congratulations."

Again the crowd clapped and Mrs. Friendly clapped the loudest. Her eyes filled with tears as Jessamyn accepted her diploma.

"My first Special to graduated from Acorn Elementary School," she told Lisa and Marcos.

After Jump rope presented several more diplomas, Spitball took over. He began by shooting two ping-pong ball-size spitwads into the center of the gym. They burst into large clouds of silver glitter that sprinkled down upon the audience.

"The next diploma goes to Sammy Newton," he said. "Congratulations, Sammy."

Sammy rose from his chair. He tripped over the microphone wire on the way to the podium. While the other fifth-graders snickered, he rose to his feet to accept a diploma from his hologram self.

"I'll miss those Special students," Mrs. Friendly said, clapping.

"But after they graduate on gold Star will be left," said Marcos.

"In my other Special Ed classes I have some students ready to join the force," the teacher replied. "And by next fall, Marcos, you'll be ready to become a SIT."

"Me?" Marcos said, swinging his small legs under the folding chair. "But I don't have any 'especially special' powers."

"Marcos, what's under Naomi's chair on the stage," Mrs. Friendly asked.

Squinting, the kindergartner looked forward. "Only three grains of sand from the playground sandbox," he replied.

Lisa and Mrs. Friendly smiled together.

Upon the stage, AcePlus was handing out diplomas. After he stepped aside, Noise came to the microphone. "I'd like to present a diploma to one of the most brilliant fifth-graders of all, Naomi Hornsby," she said.

"Mrs. Friendly are you sure the Specials are the holograms?" Lisa asked

"Right," said Marcos. "How do you know which people are the real, the Special Ed students or the Special?"

Mrs. Friendly touched Lisa on the shoulder. "Good point," she said. "I'm not sure which is the real Jessamyn, Anthony, Sammy, and Naomi. We'll have to wait and see."