

The Intruders

Five teenagers from the Bronx, along with the younger sister of one, set out to explore a cave in a wooded section of their neighborhood. The cave exploration is a washout. A section of the cave floor collapsed - and that was the major event of the trip! Disappointed, hungry and tired, the six start the return trip home, only to find that "home" has vanished.

They are still in the Bronx, but they have time-traveled two or three centuries into the future. Here, the Bronx is a heavily-wooded forest, unexplored by the tribe of people living there. After saving the life of one member of the tribe, the Bronx teenagers are accepted and slip easily into village life. Within weeks however, they find themselves in the middle of a fight for survival.

Another tribe living in Manhattan is bent on wiping out the tribe in the Bronx!

These teenagers have a unique advantage in this war. They know the land. Neither tribe is aware that there were and still are, train tunnels running under the river from the Bronx to Manhattan. Neither knew that the old train tracks ran North/South so are excellent travel guides. The tribe in the Bronx is even unaware of the wealth of treasure - metals, jewelry, etc. - buried in the rubble of what were once busy shopping strips in the Bronx. For the six, this becomes a true adventure. They are able to help their friends, and outsmart the enemy.

However, all too soon their adventure becomes very real. First their dog dies, and then one teenager gets wounded. Now both friends and enemies are getting killed. This was no longer fun! This was a fight for survival!

Also by Olive Peart Linked

One was black and the other was white and they had switched!

After witnessing a violent quarrel between his parents, Greg feels confused, resentful and angry. His father accused his mother of having an affair fifteen years ago, and if the details of the affair are true, then the man that Greg had always called father is not his real father. Even worse is the fact that after striking his mother, Greg's "father" walks out. Meanwhile, Greg has only his mother's word that his father is really his father.

Into this mix comes the **link**.

Steve hates his stepfather. He has struggled for years to find out why his mother would choose to remain with a man who physically abuses her. Steve's secret fear is that his stepfather is actually his real father. Frustrated and angry, Steve goes for his stepfather's gun.

And then there is the **link**.

Neither boy is able to deal with his family's problems; each needs help. And suddenly, help is available! They switched! Greg is now faced with Steve's family's problems and Steve has Greg's. But that's not all. Suddenly, family matters are no longer the biggest problem. Because Greg is black and Steve is white, each boy now faces the question of race from a different perspective. Fearful that no one will believe the switch-- and even more fearful of becoming experimental subjects-- they struggle on their own to survive. They are forced to share information, communicate and--even worse in their eyes--get along with each other.

The Intruders
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The Intruders

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Chapter 1

Hamid and Derrick were sitting on Hamid's stoop trying to concentrate on another dreary game of cards when Lenny rode up.

"Hi," he said as he carefully leaned his new bike on the low fence that surrounded Hamid's home. "What say we go explore that cave today?"

Derrick's eyes brightened. "Great idea! We'd need flashlights and stuff like that but I could easily run home and get some."

Hamid hesitated and glanced toward his house. He wasn't supposed to leave the house. That's why he and Derrick were out here on the stoop. His parents were at work and they had left strict instructions—don't leave Lente by herself. Lente was his thirteen-year-old sister. She was inside watching TV.

"I can't leave," he reminded Derrick.

"Dog!" Derrick snapped a finger.

Club, Hamid's German Shepherd, was sleeping on the lower step. He lifted one eye and gave Derrick a lazy inquiring look.

"Not you Club." Derrick absently patted the dog's head, and turned to Hamid. "I forgot you told me you got to baby-sit."

Lenny wasn't giving up his idea just yet. "I could get Ginny and her friend Angela to come over."

Derrick grinned and turned to Hamid. "He just said that to let us know he and Ginny are talking to each other again."

Hamid joined in the teasing. "We ought to time how long this hot spell lasts."

Lenny scowled. "Go on, keep that up and I'll take back my offer."

Hamid held up his hands in surrender. "Okay, okay," he said as he and Derrick laughed.

"So, who is Angela?" Hamid finally stopped laughing and asked.

"Angela Yap. She's a friend of Ginny. Lives next door to her."

Hamid frowned, "Do we know her?"

"I don't think so. She doesn't come to our high school. She goes to the Catholic High. I'll go get them. I just left Ginny's house and Angela was with her." Lenny was already on his bike. "I'll be back in less than half-hour."

"Hold on a second Lenny." Hamid stood up hurriedly.

"What's the problem?" Lenny asked impatiently. "If Ginny and Angela stay with Lente, she's not alone. That's what your parents wanted isn't it?"

He was right... technically. Although Hamid was sure that was not how his parents would interpret things. "Alright," he finally agreed, "but if we go we can't stay long." Hopefully they would get back before his parents got home.

"Hurry. You have to go to the next block while I just live two houses down." Derrick started packing the cards.

"I'll go in and tell Lente," Hamid said. "We'll meet here in a half-hour, okay?"

A half-hour later they were gathered outside Hamid's home.

"I still don't see why I can't come," Lente insisted.

"Listen, Lente. One good reason is that *I* don't want you coming." It was years since Hamid had used tact with his sister. He didn't want her along and he wasn't going to try to pretty up his feelings.

"But she is right." Ginny suddenly joined in. "I don't see why we can't all go. Where is this cave anyway?"

Lenny pointed up the block.

Theirs was a block of detached single-family homes. The road ended in a wooded area, which was about a four-block square. Most people avoided the woods, especially since the area was unkept and often foul smelling. Once, when the smell got really bad, the people in the area called the police. After a search, the police found a dead body. This only convinced everyone around that the area was to be avoided.

"You went into those woods?" Angela's eyes widened.

Hamid nodded. "Last week. We wanted to cross to the other side. Do you know there is a stream in there? Just before you get to the road, it forms a little lake."

"It's the lake that smells. I guess it's used as a dump," Derrick continued.

"Is the cave far in?" Lente asked.

"That's the funny thing." Derrick voice rose with excitement. "We followed the stream, trying to find the source. But in the middle of the woods, there is just a sort of mountain of rocks. The water just sort of comes out of the rocks. So we were trying to figure out exactly where the water was coming from when we found the cave. Well... it may not even be a cave. It looked like a narrow passage behind some rocks. We didn't have any flashlights so we couldn't explore it."

"The passage is hard to get to." Hamid was still trying to discourage the girls from coming. "We had to climb up the mountain and the cave looked narrow and dark and there could be bats in there for all we know."

Ginny scoffed. "You won't scare me, Hamid Morgan. I still want to come."

"You make it sound like a real mountain." Lenny was equally mocking. "It was just a pile of rocks. There's no reason they can't come. The passage wasn't even that far up the rocks."

"They aren't even dressed to go cave exploring."

"What's wrong with jeans and T-shirt?" Lente asked. They were all wearing jeans and T-shirts.

"What about supplies?" Hamid asked.

“Come on, Hamid,” Lenny said. “What supplies do they need? Besides, you always go overboard. I’ll bet you have at least four flashlights in that backpack of yours.”

“Okay, fine,” Hamid was annoyed. It was true that he tended to bring more than was necessary on trips. He was the only person carrying a backpack. Lenny carried only a flashlight, and Derrick had his flashlight in a small bag belted to his waist. “But I’m going to laugh my head off when you girls start screaming.”

For a minute Angela looked hesitant, but Ginny took her hand. “Don’t let him scare you. It’s probably not much of a cave anyway.”

Hamid snorted. “It’s getting late. Let’s go if we’re going.”

“What about our bikes?” Lenny was looking for a place to put his bike. He, Ginny and Angela had ridden.

“Leave your bikes behind the house,” Hamid suggested.

It was the middle of a hot summer day. If not at summer camp or forced to stay indoors most of the school kids hung out at the park which had a pool, so the street was deserted as the six made their way up the block and into the woods. They followed one of the many paths that led to the lake. Even before they saw the lake, the smell greeted them. And when they finally got there, no one wanted to linger. The lake was about the size of six bathtubs placed three in a row. As they got close, they all held their noses and circled what could easily be mistaken for a garbage dump.

“Just look at this junk.” Derrick kicked at a torn garbage bag.

“Don’t kick it,” Angela warned. “Something may come out.”

“Oh my God!” Lente’s voice sounded muffled because she had both hands covering her nose and mouth. “I hope it doesn’t smell like this the entire way.”

“Here by the lake smells the worst,” Lenny said. “It’s not so bad further up. Come, let’s hurry.”

Hamid led the way with Club immediately behind. It wasn’t much of a wood. Since the trees were not densely packed, the sun was their unrelenting company. All too soon, they were hot, sticky and irritable. Worse, beyond the lake there were no paths. They had to stay close to the stream, sometimes walking in the slushy soil along the banks. The only other way would have been to try trampling through the shrubs and bushes that covered the ground wherever a tree wasn’t.

“These sneakers are ruined,” Angela said. She was directly behind Club, so Hamid turned and glanced down at her sneakers. They were covered with thick black muck—the stuff that lined the stream’s bank. Hamid said nothing, but his facial expression said it all. Angela glared at him. “I know. We weren’t really prepared for hiking. Don’t even bother saying anything.”

Hamid shrugged and continued walking. He wore hiking boots, so did Lenny and Derrick. All the girls wore sneakers.

After trudging along for a few more minutes they came to a bend.

Ginny called out. “How much further?”

Since Hamid didn’t answer, Lenny replied. “That’s the mountain we are looking at now. We just need to get closer.”

Hamid looked at their mountain. As Lenny said, it really wasn’t much of a mountain. First, it was all rock and not much else—no trees, not much plant life. Then it was small—maybe as tall as a two-story building. About halfway up the water just seemed to pour out of the rocks—rocks that were wet, slimy, and green with some kind of a fungus.

“Yeah, this is it.” Hamid walked up to and leaned against a dry area of the rocks.

Club took the opportunity to explore the water’s edge as Hamid unslung his backpack and took out a water bottle. The others watched enviously as he tipped his head back and took a few quick gulps. He didn’t offer them any. This was payback time!

Derrick wiped the sweat off his brow with the back of his hand as he came up beside Hamid. “Do you think the stream water is safe to drink?”

“I don’t think you should drink it,” Angela cautioned. “It may be polluted.”

“How can it be polluted if this is the source?” Lente asked.

“We don’t know that this is the source,” Hamid pointed out. “Besides, look at Club. He didn’t drink it.”

He was right. Although Club stiffed at the water the dog soon lost interest and was now relieving himself at nearby tree.

“Well let’s go in and get it over with,” Lenny urged. “Shirts! I’m thirsty and hungry.”

“I don’t see any cave,” Ginny said looking up.

Lenny pointed. “See where the rocks jut out and form sort of a shelf, right next to where the water is coming from?”

Ginny stared. The face of the mountain was craggy, with rocks jutting out haphazardly, forming countless natural stairways. At least they wouldn’t have any difficulty climbing up! The shelf Lenny spoke of was just one of a number of such rocky shelves. She nodded.

“Well if you stand on that shelf, you’ll see a large boulder. You can’t see it good from down here. But if you stand on the shelf you’ll see it. The cave is behind it.”

“Time to get moving.” Hamid pushed himself off the rocks. “I’ll go first. Come, Club.”

The climb up was easy and he was at the cave’s entrance in a minute. Club came as far as the cave’s entrance then stopped.

“Couldn’t we rest first?” Lente tipped her head up to ask. She was using a stick to get the worst of the muck off her sneakers. Ginny and Angela began copying her.

“No. We don’t have enough time.” Hamid called down. “You can clean up your sneakers when we get back home. C’mon Club. It’s just a cave.”

Hamid tried pulling Club by the collar but the dog simply sat on his hunches and refused to budge. No amount of tugging got him moving.

“Leave him.” Derrick had clambered up beside Hamid. “He’ll stay here ‘till we come out.”

From below, Angela anxiously watched Club. “Maybe we shouldn’t go in since Club doesn’t want to go,” she suggested.

Hamid immediately picked up her fear. “If you don’t want to come, you can stay here with Club.” He had removed his flashlight and was already slipping between the two rocks.

“What about the girls?” Lenny shouted. “They haven’t any light.”

Hamid’s head reappeared. “I want to save my spare flashlight for any emergency.” He didn’t think there would be a problem, but he was just extra cautious—most often unnecessarily so. “Let them walk between us and use our light.”

Lenny and the girls climbed up. Club began whining as they disappeared into the cave but he still did not follow them.

The passage was long and narrow... and wet. The walls were slimy to the touch. Even the floor was damp—the soil, sandy rather than muddy. But at least the ceiling was high enough for them to walk upright. In a single file, they slowly followed Hamid.

Then Angela screamed.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” They were all jumpy.

“Something brushed against my leg,” Angela cried.

“It’s only Club.” Hamid bent and gave Club a huge squeeze, masking his relief. Club stood quietly, his tail thumping a beat on the ground. “So you decided to come after all, eh Club.”

“C’mon let’s hurry. I don’t like it in here.” Ginny looked around. The flashlights were casting spooky shadows on the walls.

“I want to go home,” Lente wailed.

“Nobody forced you to come.” But Hamid wasn’t crowing at her fears. This place gave him the creeps.

“Can you see the end, Hamid?” Derrick was last in line.

“Well... there is a corner coming up. I can’t see around it.”

They squeezed around the corner then stopped dead. A huge boulder blocked the path.

“This is it. This is as far as we can go,” Hamid said. Just thoughts of turning and going back made him feel cheerful. He used his light to scan the area.

The passage had widened slightly allowing them to stand three abreast. But there wasn’t much to see. A huge boulder, about ten-feet tall and four-feet wide, filled the entire height and width of the passage.

Angela gave a nervous giggle. “Doesn’t it look as if someone just plugged up the passage? That boulder is an exact fit.”

“Shirts! I could easily climb it.” Lenny reached up to grip the boulder with both hands. The surface was rough so he had actually found sufficient hand holds to start pulling himself up when the floor started to shake and rumble. He jumped off in alarm.

“Let’s get the heck out of here!” Hamid yelled.

They all turned but they didn’t get a chance to run. The floor was disappearing from under them! There were screams and utter confusion as they felt themselves falling. The boulder vanished with a huge splash.

After what seemed like hours, but was probably only a few minutes of coughing and sneezing, Hamid slowly dragged himself up.

“Lente! Everybody okay?”

Lente! Everybody okay? His voice echoed off a distant wall.

They were okay. The flashlights, scattered around, were still casting eerie shadows. Slowly, the six scrambled to their feet, dusting off the worst of the dirt. They were all damp, courtesy of the splash the boulder had made. Club began whining and pressed his nose against Hamid’s legs. As the dust settled and the noise stopped, they realized they had been fortunate. They had dropped only about four feet, onto a wide ledge. But the ledge overlooked a cavern—a huge, water-filled cavern.

“Shirts!” Lenny shivered as he looked down.

Shirts! His echo replied.

Lenny used his flashlight to search the water. There was no sign of the boulder. But it was down there, more than thirty feet down, which meant that the water was very deep.

The cavern was about quarter the size of a football field. Looking at the now calm and still surface, they found it hard to believe the water had, only minutes before, swallowed a huge boulder.

“Do you realize that we’ve found the source? It’s the source of the stream,” Hamid whispered excitedly.

Lenny frowned. “But how does the water get outside to the stream? It’s too far down.”

His echoes were the only answers.

“I want to go home,” Lente wailed. But she spoke in a whisper—afraid of the strange echoes.

Hamid gave her an impatient look, then shone his light up. “We should be able to climb out of here. It’s not that far up.” Just by standing upright, he was able to see into the cave passage. The cave roof now continued as the roof of the cavern. But his light could not penetrate the darkness to see the other side of the cavern. The answer to Lenny’s question was puzzling. How *did* the water get up?

“Hello!” Ginny suddenly shouted. She giggled as she listened to her echo. After a bit even Lente lost some of her fear and began shouting for the echo effects.

Club pushed even closer to Hamid. With his tail tucked tightly between his legs he looked miserable. And Hamid could not understand why. “What’s wrong Club? Are you hurt?” Bending, he examined his dog, but found no sign of an injury.

“Club is like me,” Lente said. “He just doesn’t like caves. Can’t we go now?”

Angela looked at her watch. “Do you all realize it’s almost four-thirty? It’s been one hour since we left home.”

“Yeah. I have to wash my hair and clothes before Mom gets in or she’ll have a fit.” Ginny looked down at her dirty T-shirt and jeans.

They examined each other in silence as the cave continued rumbling with the echoes of their speech. They were all equally covered in dust and dirt. Hamid and Derrick had already removed most of the dirt from their short black hair. With their short shave there wasn’t much to remove anyway. Lenny, who sported a crew cut, also had no trouble. His dark blond hair was almost free of dirt. Even Lente, whose black hair was neatly braided in corn-rows, had managed to get rid of most of the dirt—but not so Angela and Ginny. Angela wore her straight, waist-length black hair loose, and it was now a tangled mess. Lenny began using his fingers like a comb to get the dirt out of Ginny’s equally tangled hair. Like Angela, Ginny wore her dark brown hair loose, the curly strands reaching just below her shoulders.

“Don’t worry about it,” Ginny said, giving Lenny a smile. “It’ll wash out.”

“Let’s get out of here first,” Angela suggested. “Then we can think about cleaning up.”

“Derrick, you go first,” Hamid suggested.

Lenny objected. “Let’s get the girls out first.”

“No.” Hamid shook his head. “Better let Derrick go. He can lead the way out.”

“Oh, alright.” With palpable petulance Lenny turned, looking Derrick up and down, taking in his six-foot two-inch height and said, “Need a hand up?”

Derrick gave Lenny a dirty look. Placing his flashlight on the cave floor, he casually reached and gripped the floor of the cave with both hands. He easily hauled himself up.

Ginny went next. With the help of the boys, she was able to scramble up to the cave floor. Then it was Angela’s turn. Next, Hamid lifted Lente—the youngest and shortest—and Derrick pulled her up. At five-feet nine inches, Lenny had no difficulty climbing up by himself. That just left Club and Hamid. Club, uncharacteristically timid, was continuously whining. His tail was still tucked well down, and he refused to budge from Hamid’s side.

“Come Club. You’re next.” Hamid tried to lift Club’s eighty-nine pounds. The whines grew louder. Club did not want to leave the ledge, but obviously he was also uncomfortable where he was. The dog began backing away from Hamid. Fearful that he would back right off the edge of the ledge and into the water, Hamid stopped reaching for him. “Come *on* Club. We’re trying to get out of here!”

“Come up and see if he’ll follow,” Lenny suggested as he watched them.

“He won’t be able to climb up,” Hamid said. But he turned and placed his flashlight on the floor of the cave as he pretended to pull himself up. “Keep the lights shining down here.”

Club moved away from the edge. Hamid immediately released his hold on the cave floor and dropped down to the ledge. The entire ledge rumbled and shook.

“Shirts, Hamid!” Lenny cried. “Come on up! That ledge doesn’t sound safe.”

“I can’t leave Club.” Hamid slowly approached the dog, then bent and hugged him. “Come, Club. We got to go.” His arms tightened around his dog. It wasn’t easy but he lifted the whining, wiggly, dog and shoved him up to Lenny. “Grab his collar! Pull him up!”

Lenny and Lente both grabbed hold of Club’s collar. With Hamid pushing and them pulling, they were able to get Club into the cave passage. Hamid then quickly scrambled up.

“Okay,” Derrick urged them. “Let’s get out of here now.”

“What’s the rush now?” Lenny had picked up on the unease in Derrick’s voice.

“Remember when we were coming in how slimy and wet the walls were?” Derrick aimed his light up and down the cave walls. “Look at them now.”

Using their combined lights, they stared at the walls. The walls were dry and smooth.

Hamid looked down. The floor was still sandy—but totally dry.

Ginny huddled closer to Lenny and Lente slipped one hand in Hamid’s.

Their unease mounted as they turned the corner. “What’s ahead?” Lenny called out. “Can you see any light?”

“Yeah,” Derrick said. “There’s a faint light ahead.”

They hurried on.

“So that’s it then.” Derrick didn’t bother hiding his relief as he squeezed past the final boulder—the entrance to the cave. “So much for our cave exploration.”

He stopped abruptly.

“Move out,” Hamid called. “Don’t block the entrance.”

“What’s wrong?” Lente asked.

“Next time, signal or something,” Angela complained. “Lente crashed right into me.”

“Just get out of the way, Derrick,” Ginny yelled.

Derrick did not move. “The stream is gone!”

Chapter 2

“What do you mean the stream is gone?” Hamid impatiently tried to push forward. “Derrick! Move will you!”

The pressure of the others finally moved Derrick. Soon the six were standing on the ground, just below the cave, looking around.

Derrick was right. There was no longer a stream. Not even a streambed. Nothing! Just woods, and the dense woods came right up to the rocky hill!

Hamid ran his hands along the outside walls of the cave, where less than half an hour ago water flowed. The walls were dry; the soil was flaky.

Lenny gave a shaky laugh. “Shirts! So the water really couldn’t make it up from that cavern.”

None of the others appreciated his attempt at humor. They ignored him.

“Could we have taken a wrong turn or something?” Angela whispered.

“We couldn’t have. It was a straight passage.” Even so, Hamid looked up.

“I’m not going back in there,” Lente said instantly, reading his mind.

“I don’t believe this,” Hamid muttered as he looked around.

“Let’s just go back in and check,” Ginny suggested.

“Check for what?” Derrick was scowling. “Like he said, it was a straight passage.”

“Well, we can’t just stand here and do nothing.” Angela was looking around as if expecting the stream to reappear.

Hamid ran his hand along the cave wall again. “I remember reading a science fiction where some people stepped in a secret passage and stepped back in time.”

Lente began crying.

“Shut up, Lente,” Hamid said roughly.

“Don’t shout at her,” Angela frowned at him. “She’s just scared.”

“I want to go home,” Lente wailed.

“We are all scared, and we all want to go home,” Hamid said. “But you don’t see us crying.”

“Do you realize that if we went back in time we’re all in deep trouble?” Derrick said.

Now they all stared.

“What do you mean?” Lenny asked.

“Hamid and Lente are black.”

“So?” Hamid still didn’t get it.

“I’m black too—and Angela is Chinese....”

“I’m not full Chinese,” Angela inserted. “Only my father is Chinese. My mother is Puerto Rican.”

Hamid looked to the sky for inspiration. “What are you getting at?”

Derrick continued. “Ginny is Puerto Rican. So Lenny is the only one safe. He’s white.”

“He isn’t pure Italian,” Ginny said. “He told me his grandfather was from Morocco.”

“So he isn’t safe either. Besides, they didn’t like Italians back then.”

“Shirts! You’re talking about slavery, right?” Lenny was scowling.

“Oh my God!” Ginny cried.

Derrick nodded grimly. “If we’ve gone back in time, we’ll all be slaves.”

Lente began crying harder.

Hamid awkwardly patted her head.

“What are we going to do?” Angela asked.

“I think we should go back into the cave,” Ginny said.

Hamid was shaking his head. “We would have to go back onto the ledge.”

“But the ledge isn’t safe,” Angela said.

“It was after we got off the ledge that the passage changed,” Derrick said. “Remember? That’s when I noticed the walls weren’t wet.”

Nobody had any ideas and Lente was still crying. Hamid stared at the dense woods before them. There wasn’t even a path. What were they going to do? One by one, they simply sat on the rocks.

“Come, Lente,” Angela said pulling the younger girl down beside her. She began hugging Lente, trying to stop her cries.

“Any ideas?” Lenny asked.

Ginny looked up at the cave. “I still say, let’s go back in.”

Hamid looked at Lente who was still crying softly. “Alright,” he finally agreed.

“I’ll hold her hand,” Angela offered.

Hamid nodded. “Okay, let’s go in quickly.”

It didn’t take long. They were soon standing above the ledge.

“I am *not* going down there again,” Angela said looking down.

Lenny shone his light around. “The walls are still dry.”

“I don’t think it’s just the ledge,” Hamid said. “Nothing feels strange anymore. Remember the creepy feelings we had when we first came in the cave? All of that is gone. And Club followed us in without whining and carrying on like he did before. I think shifting that boulder caused the whole thing.”

“Well, since there’s no way we can go diving in that little puddle to search for the boulder, we’d better think fast how we’re going to survive.”

Ginny glared at him. “For God’s sake Lenny, will you shut up? Nobody likes your sense of humor.”

“C’mon.” Hamid had been staring blankly at the water. He now gave a dispirited sigh and turned. “Let’s get out of here.”

Once outside, Hamid took his backpack off his shoulders. He pulled out his cell phone and flipped it open. After a minute, Angela, the only other person with a cell phone, did the same.

Angela sighed. "There's no signal."

Hamid gave a brief nod as he closed his phone. Neither phone registered a signal. "Let's find out what we have."

They emptied all pockets and bags.

Lente had brought nothing. Ginny and Angela carried small handbags. Between them they had two nail files, two combs, two makeup sets with mirrors, two pens, an iPod (Angela's), lipstick and eye makeup (Ginny's), a diary (Ginny's), change purses with \$10.76 combined. Lenny also had an iPod plus a flashlight, a change of batteries, a pocketknife, a small comb and \$6.24. Derrick carried two flashlights with spare batteries for both, a pocketknife, a pen and \$4.54.

Hamid had a combination compass, binocular and magnifying glass set; a pen; two pencils; a pencil sharpener; a box of colored chalk; a blank note book; a small book on cave exploration; a New York City road map; coiled climbers' rope; four candles; three packs of matches; three flashlights with spare batteries for all; a pocket knife; a box of saltine crackers; a half-full bottle of bottled water; a folded canvas sheeting; a first-aid kit with gauze bandage wrapping; and a thin plastic raincoat, rolled to a one-inch square packet.

"A rain coat?" Lenny asked, "Shirts!" His tone expressed the disbelief on the faces of the others.

"Just in case we had to pass under a waterfall or something," Hamid said defensively.

Lenny made a repulsive snort.

"Don't knock it," Derrick said. "If he wasn't so disgustingly over-organized, we wouldn't have anything. At least now we may have a halfway chance of surviving."

His comment only served to depress them further.

"We *can't* live here," Angela wailed.

Hamid looked around. "We could try the caves one more time. We're... What's that?"

From the woods, came the sounds of yapping and snarling. A dogfight? Here?

"Where's Club?" Hamid looked around frantically. "Club!" he called before rushing off in the direction of the snarling.