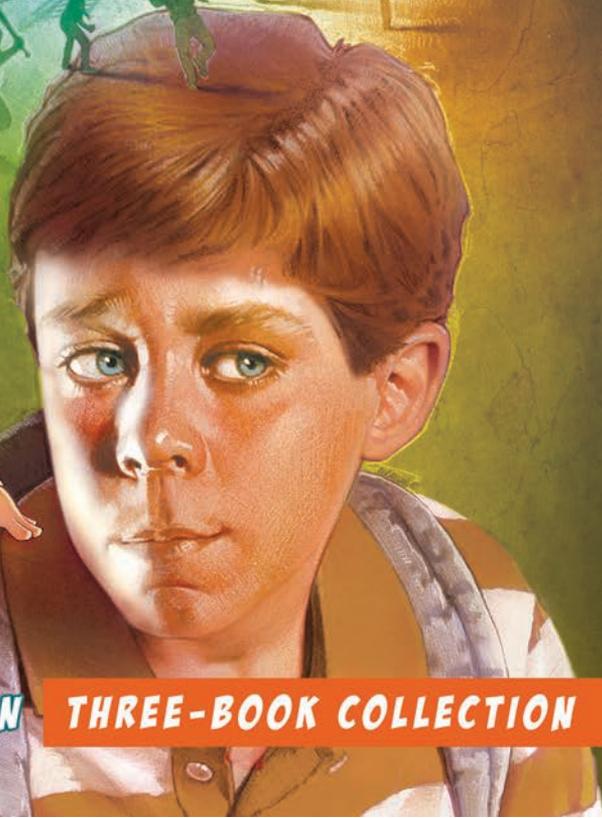
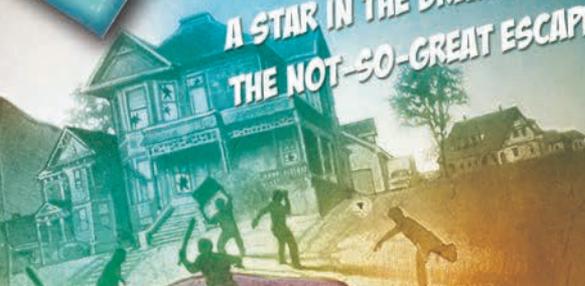


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THE BIG LIE

A STAR IN THE BREAKING
THE NOT-SO-GREAT ESCAPE



MYERS/JOHNSON

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McGee and Me! Three-Book Collection

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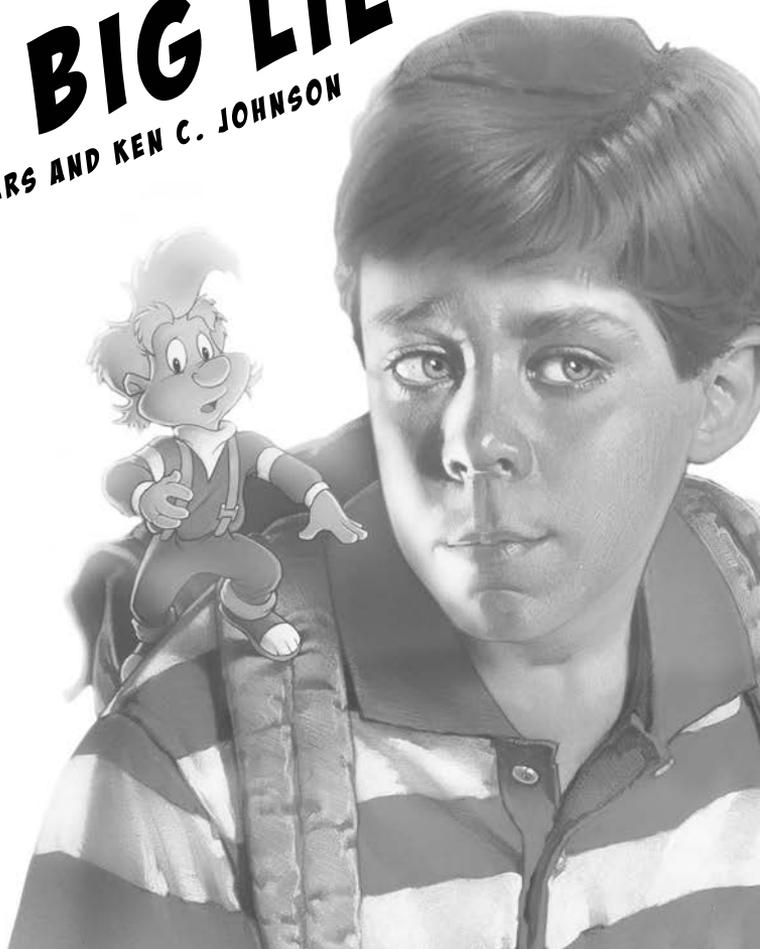
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MCGEE

and me!

THE BIG LIE

BY BILL MYERS AND KEN C. JOHNSON



ONE

BEGINNINGS . . .

I pulled my space shooter from its holster. Time was running out. I had to reach my aircraft. The planet beneath me was about to go to pieces.

Just ahead of me lay a dark hallway filled with smoke. Live electric cables flipped wildly across my path. One touch from them meant total destruction—and that would mean no pizza for a long, long time.

Taking a deep breath, I leaped into the hall. The first cable hissed and crackled just over my head. I hurdled another cable, then another, and another. Finally the exit hatch lay just in front of me.

I stretched my hand toward the release handle. But a green

slimy tentacle suddenly wrapped itself around my wrist. One of the guards must have hidden himself in the darkness.

“Prepare yourself for the worst,” he gurgled.

“Hah!” I laughed, turning to face him. “I’ve already had lima beans in cream gravy. . . . Your threats don’t scare me!”

But even as I spoke, another oozing tentacle curled around my throat. He pulled me off my feet and lurched forward. His face was hideous. And his wicked smile showed grimy teeth that had never seen a dentist.

I knew in a few more seconds I’d be dead. So I brought my space shooter up with lightning speed. “I’ve got no time to dance, frog-face,” I sputtered through his choke hold. A blast exploded from my laser and consumed the green goon.

A rumbling sound below reminded me that my time was almost up. I had to get off this planet. I quickly bounded through the exit hatch. I reached the planet’s surface and made for my aircraft.

As I leaped into the cockpit, the ground opened up in front of me. Fire shot up from the inside of this lost and dying world.

I hit the ignition. A bolt of fear shot through me as my engine coughed and sputtered. I didn’t have any jumper cables, so I did what any good mechanic would do—I kicked the control panel. The engine roared to life!

I engaged the lifters and blasted into the star-filled sky.

As I reached orbit, the planet below exploded. A million meteors shot into the sky. I settled back for the trip home, satisfied. The formula for low-fat, freeze-dried pickles was tucked

securely in my space jacket. The world would again be a safer, if not thinner, place to live.

Pretty exciting stuff, huh? But, believe it or not, that adventure was nothing compared to the one Nick and I were about to take. But I guess I'm getting a little ahead of myself.

My name is McGee. I came about through the talents and imagination of my best buddy, Nicholas Martin. You see, at the ripe old age of eleven, Nick is what you'd call a cartoonist. And we've been together from the first day he drew my adorable image on his sketch pad. And we stay together for good reasons. Sure, it's Nick who imagines and draws my amazing escapes (like the one I just mentioned). But it's me who makes sure my shy little pal finds the adventures in real life.

Adventures like those first few days at the new school—back when we all moved into Grandma Martin's house. And by "all," I'm talking about the WHOLE family. . . . First, there's Nick's older sister, Sarah. She's an okay kid, I guess—except she likes to give orders and mess with her hair a lot. Then, there's his kid sister, Jamie—a real cutie, full of energy, with a permanent ring of jelly around her mouth.

Then there's Nick's father, or "Mr. Dad" as I call him. He's a cool guy . . . honest, funny. And does he know his Bible? Let me tell you, Billy Graham's got nothing over this guy. He works as managing editor at the local newspaper, which gives me and Nick plenty of chances to get information to help solve crimes and stuff.

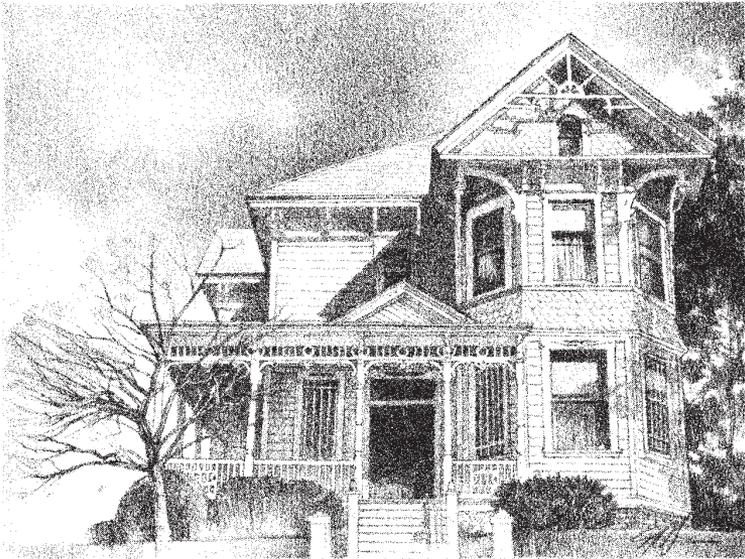
Then there's Mom. Like Grandma, she's smart as a whip and

spends lots of time helping people who have needs. She also makes great pancakes.

Last and most certainly least, there is a creature so awful words cannot describe him. In fact, his name says it all—“Whatever,” the family dog. I think he’s a cross between a Pekingese and a poodle. I’m not sure, but it comes out ugly any way you look at it. Besides, he sheds.

Anyway, about that adventure. It’s probably best if I let you read it on your own. But don’t worry. I’ll be dropping in from time to time to make sure you get the facts straight—especially about the role I played in this, one of our greatest adventures.

It was six months ago that Mom and Dad had asked the family to think about moving in with Grandma. Everyone



was pretty excited. The kids had always loved the old house with its mysterious past. They loved the cellar. They loved the attic. And best of all they loved checking the loose bricks for hidden treasure and tapping the walls for secret passageways. So far, no luck. But that wouldn't stop them from trying.

Mom and Dad had other reasons for the move. . . .

First of all there was Grandma. As much as she hated to admit it, she was definitely getting older, and those stairs were definitely getting steeper.

Then there was the fact that Dad wanted to get the children out of the suburbs. It seemed that all that money and all that snobbery were starting to have an effect on the kids. "Half the world is starving to death," he said. "And the only thing our neighbors care about is who gives the best tennis lessons." Dad wanted the kids to be with real people who had real needs. "Let's put our faith into action," he said. "Let's see how we can help."

And finally there was Mom. Instead of her hectic teaching job, she felt that she should be spending more time with her family. "The kids won't be kids forever," she said. "I just want to be around in case they need me."

So . . .

Mom quit her job at the junior college.

Dad left his job as assistant editor at the *Tribune* and took over the small community paper.

And Grandma now had the entire family living with her. Everything was perfect. Except for one small detail—no

one bothered to tell the kids how different life would be in the city.

Nicholas began to suspect it when his bike was stolen. It had barely made it off the moving van before it was gone.

And Sarah began to suspect it when she discovered that the nearest mall was almost ten miles away.

But that was only the beginning. . . .

Monday was hectic. Grandma's kitchen hadn't seen such activity in years. The Martin children and Mom and Dad were squeezing past each other. They were climbing over and around dozens of unpacked boxes.

"Where's my blue denim coat?" Sarah demanded. "Has anybody seen my blue denim coat?"

But no one was paying much attention. Mrs. Martin was hunting for bugs with a flyswatter the size of Kansas. Grandma was reminding everyone that the fire in the toaster had started out as bread. Mr. Martin was doing his best imitation of a handyman as he tried to fix the broken paper-towel rack. And little Jamie was sitting on top of the tallest stack of boxes, quietly munching the last of the Captain Crunch.

At last Nicholas himself came into the room. And by the look on his face it was pretty easy to see that he hadn't quite been able to "rise and shine" that morning.

"Hurry, honey. You don't want to be late for your first day at school," Mom said.

Being late wasn't exactly what Nick had in mind. More like never showing up. With eyes sealed shut, he somehow

managed to fumble for the nearest box of cereal and dump it into a bowl.

“Please, God,” he was praying, “don’t let it be bran.”

“There, solid as a rock,” Dad said as he gave the paper-towel holder a proud pat.

Nicholas paid little attention. He was thinking about his chances of survival at the new school.

Meanwhile, the dog had hopped up on one of the nearby boxes and started gobbling down somebody’s toast.

“Get down from there!” Dad shouted at the dog.

He scampered off. But Sarah, who had her back to the whole thing, spun around to her pet’s defense.

“Daddy, why are you always picking on Whatever?”

Her father opened his mouth to explain. But Sarah, who was too busy being a teenager, cut him off. “Honestly, Daddy, you’ve got to learn to loosen up.”

With that she popped the remainder of the dog-chewed toast in her mouth.

Dad started to warn her but caught himself. “You’re right, honey,” was all he said. “I’ll try harder.” He caught Nicholas’s eye and gave him a little wink. Nick managed to smile back.

The phone began to ring, and Grandma headed off to answer it. Meanwhile, Sarah, in a last-ditch effort, turned to her little sister. “Jamie, have *you* seen my blue denim coat?”

The girl nodded, and Sarah’s face lit up.

“You have? Where?”

“I was with you the day you bought it.”

The light faded as quickly as it was lit. And, with the

world's longest sigh, Sarah turned back out of the kitchen to continue her search.

Jamie quietly followed.

“Look at the time,” Dad said, as he glanced at his watch. “I was supposed to be at the paper by 7:30.” He gave Mom a quick peck on the cheek and was out the door with the usual good-byes.

Meanwhile, Sarah was calling for help in her search-and-rescue efforts from the other room. “Mother, *please* . . . MOTHER!”

“Coming!” Mom called as she reached for a paper towel and suddenly wound up with the entire “solid as a rock” towel holder in her hand. She groaned slightly as she headed out of the room.

Now, at last, Nicholas was alone. Now, at last, he could have some peace. Now, at last, he could have some quiet. Or so he thought. . . .