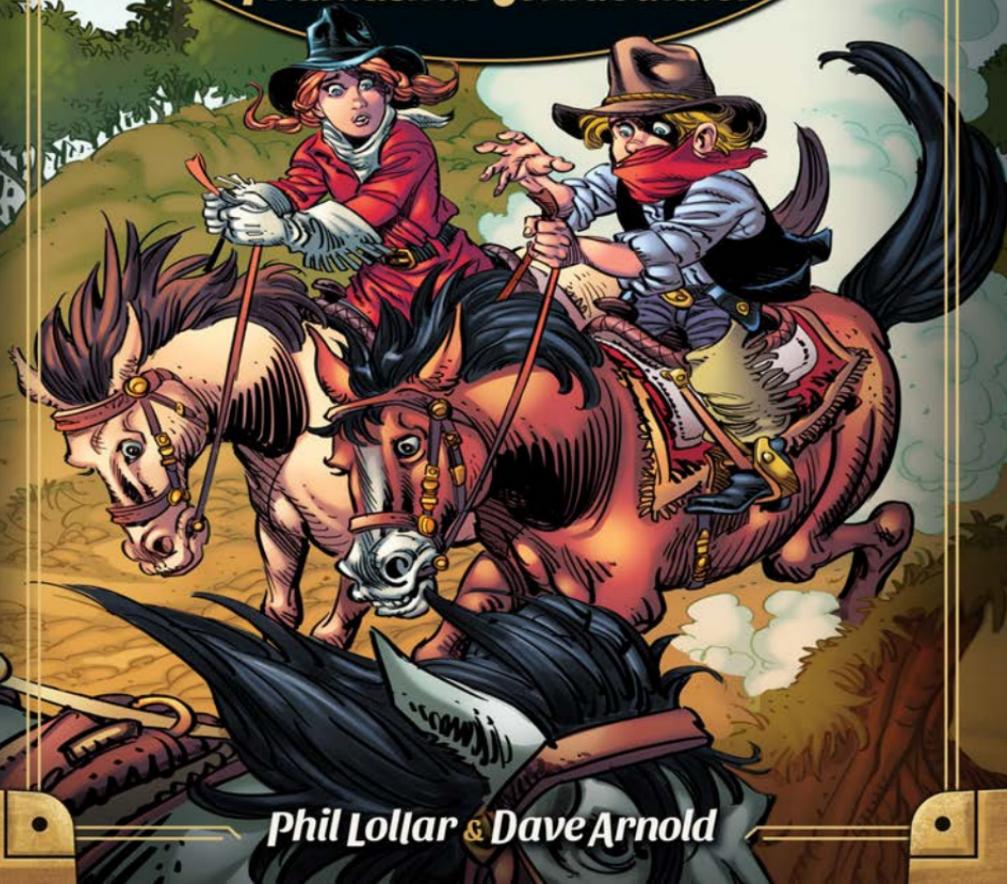


FOCUS ON THE FAMILY PRESENTS

Adventures in
ODYSSEY

YOUNG WHIT

&
*the
Phantasmic Confabulator*



Phil Lollar & Dave Arnold

YOUNG
WHITTM
the
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ON
THE FAMILY[®]

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Young Whit and the Phantasmic Confabulator

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Prologue



Here we go again, he thought.

Flying.

Floating.

Drifting.

The old familiar pattern.

Falling.

The horrid sound.

His mother's screams.

Pain.

He knew it was a dream—the dream. It had disappeared for a while. But it was back now. Every night.

The pleasant smell.

The lovely sound.

The gentle touch.

The sweet taste.

The soothing light.

Warm.

Safe.

Secure.

Forever at peace.

He knew where it was going. In the past, he'd try to stop it there—he *wanted* it to stop. But not now. Now he wanted it to continue.

Sickness.

Medicine.

Whispers.

Separation.

Grandfather grim.

Father's anguish.

Mother's weak smile.

Door closing.

Wail of grief.

Black coffin.

Mother lifeless.

This was where he used to wake up, startled, shaking, sweating. But something had changed. The pattern had altered—no, not altered. Expanded.

An icy cold river.

A deep plunge.

His father's smile.

Friends laughing and clapping.

Fiona beaming.

And among them all, a new Face. One he didn't know, yet it was completely familiar somehow. And he knew that Face was why he didn't want the dream to end. Why he actually wanted it to go on forever.

And why he knew that one day, it would.

Chapter One



The robe of Jesus Christ?

Ten-year-old John Avery Whittaker shook his head every time he thought about it. In an old, scarred, wooden trunk, in his upstairs bedroom at the end of Magnolia Lane in Provenance, North Carolina, he actually had a piece of the robe of Jesus! *How can it be possible?*

He knew from the beginning that the cloth wasn't normal. After all, he had used it to wrap his dog, McDuff, after accidentally stabbing the pooch with a sword in the woods behind his house last October. He had gone back to the house to get medicine and

bandages, and when he'd returned, McDuff was completely healed, the cloth folded neatly on a nearby fallen log. And when he examined it, the cloth, which should have been saturated with blood, was spotless!

Same with his friend Ben Huck last November. Ben's father, Clarence, had accidentally shot him at the moonshine liquor still behind Granville Manor. Ben was bleeding profusely when Johnny and his neighbor Emmy Capello got to him. But a few moments after Johnny used the cloth to staunch the flow of blood, Ben sat up, groggy, but without a mark on him! And later, when Johnny examined the cloth, it was, again, spotless!

Unfortunately, Johnny wasn't the only one who saw what happened to Ben. Karl Mangle, the owner of the moonshine still and the father of his friends Steve and Paul, all but demanded that Johnny give him the cloth around Christmastime last year in order to heal Steve. Afflicted with muscular dystrophy, Steve took a turn for the worse at yuletide and wound up in the hospital. *Or, rather, back in the hospital*, Johnny thought, *and no word yet on when he might come home.*

Oddly enough, it was a visit to Steve during his prior hospital stay after Halloween that made Johnny doubt whether the cloth had any power at all. He visited Steve's room to heal him with it, but it didn't

work. Steve thought it was a grand joke, and Johnny pretended the same, but Paul was not happy about it. “And he still isn’t,” Johnny muttered to himself. Paul had been decidedly cool toward him ever since.

And then Johnny became really confused when his stepmother, Fiona, refused to be healed by the cloth after being blinded in a horseback riding accident. But though he couldn’t understand it (*and still don’t, to be honest*, he thought), it was Fiona’s remarkable contentment at her lot, her amazing ability to say, “It is well with my soul,” that led Johnny to make the best decision he had ever made: giving his life to Jesus Christ.

And now, I have an actual piece of His robe in my trunk!

At least, that was the conclusion that his father’s associates examining Grandpa Jackson’s journal came to.

The journal was another incredible discovery from that vaunted trunk. Written in several ancient languages (most of them forgotten) by quite a few people (most of them also forgotten), the journal apparently catalogued more about the history of the cloth than even Johnny’s father, Harold, the consummate scholar, had been able to discover. “And that’s saying something!” Johnny muttered aloud. While his father’s research had been useful, important, and even entertaining, it hadn’t uncovered

anything remotely as momentous as this! He wondered what other revelations the journal had in store—and more importantly, when he'd get it back.

*The Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! The Son of God!
Creator of the universe! And I have a piece of His robe!*

Johnny suddenly shivered with an overwhelming sense of responsibility. Somehow this cloth had come into his possession. He wasn't sure why or even how, just that it had. He shuddered to think of how many times he almost lost it in the past few months. He would have to be more vigilant from now on. People will stop at nothing to get this cloth! *I need to be more alert, more watchful, more aware of what's going on around m—*

WHAM!

Something smashed into the left side of Johnny's face—something hard and fast. He saw stars and blanked out for a moment. The next thing he knew he was on his back, looking up at a high, white, plastered ceiling through one eye, the taste of blood in the back of his throat. Ears ringing, he probed the area around his left eye gingerly. It was swelling and, along with the left side of his nose, was completely numb to the touch—for a few seconds. Then both his eye and nose burned like a raging inferno, and his head felt as if someone had buried a dull tomahawk in his skull.

The ringing faded and was replaced by what Johnny thought at first were distorted moans and muffled explosions. But these soon morphed into the more familiar sound of mocking laughter and bouncing balls—familiar because, as his senses cleared, he recognized just who was doing the laughing and bouncing.

“Strange way to catch a basketball, Whittaker—with your face!”

“This ain’t soccer, Whittaker! You *can* use your hands!”

Hulking Lazlo Farnsworth and smirking Wilson Knox chortled, guffawed, and snorted in derision. *The effect was not unsimilar to a group of feeding hogs*, Johnny thought. He was aware of several other snickering students gawking at him, and he remembered why: He was in the middle of a full gym in P.E. class. He sat up slowly, and blood dripped from his left nostril onto the wooden gym floor. And then new sounds pierced his hearing, turning the dull ache in his skull into a sharp throb: a referee’s whistle and the voice of Coach Conrad, the gym teacher.

Tweeeeee! “Don’t bleed on my floor, Whittaker! I just had it refinished!”

Johnny pulled up the bottom of his P.E. jersey and held it to his nose in a marginally successful attempt

to staunch the flow of blood. He glared up at Coach Conrad through his good eye and said tartly, "It's nod really somedink I can help, sir. And I wouldn'd be bleedink if Lazlo and Wilson hadn't pumm'ud me wif da ball!"

Lazlo and Wilson immediately donned looks of feigned innocence and were about to protest when the coach's whistle again pierced Johnny's headache.

Twueeee! "I don't wanna hear it, Whittaker! I saw the whole thing. Farnsworth passed to Knox, Knox back to Farnsworth, and Farnsworth to you. Only you were off in la-la land!"

"Bud, sir—!"

Twueeee! "No 'buts,' Whittaker! It was a legal pass. I've warned you about daydreaming while on the court. Maybe next time you'll remember to pay attention!"

"Yes, sir."

"Knox, Farnsworth, help him up!"

The goons started forward, but Johnny waved them off. The last thing he wanted was those two touching him. "I can do it byself." He stood on wobbly legs.

Coach Conrad examined him. "Nothing looks broken. Go to the nurse and get some ice. And stay there until your nose stops bleedin'. Then hit the showers. Can you do that by yourself too?"

“Yes, sir.” Johnny thought of a tart retort, but he stifled it, in part because he knew it wouldn’t do any good, and also because deep down, he knew the coach was right. He should have been paying attention and not daydreaming. He headed toward the nurse’s office on jelly legs.

Behind him came another whistle blast. *Tweweee!* “All right, show’s over! The rest of you get back to the game! Unless you wanna start running drills!”

The gym instantly sprang back to life, as did the snickers and whispers aimed at Johnny. He reached the swinging door to the locker room, but because of his eye, which was already swelling shut, he misjudged the distance and, in a scene right out of a *Three Stooges* short, ended up walking into it instead of through it. His head even made a *Kook!* sound, like Curly’s did when Moe hit it with a two-by-four. More pain in his noggin; more guffaws and chortles from the crowd.

Johnny corrected his course and exited the gym, successfully this time, and one thought cut through all the pain and humiliation: *Boy, do I hate basketball.*