

CHAPTER 1

YOU ONLY SWIM TWICE

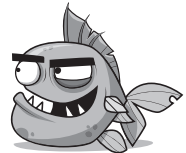


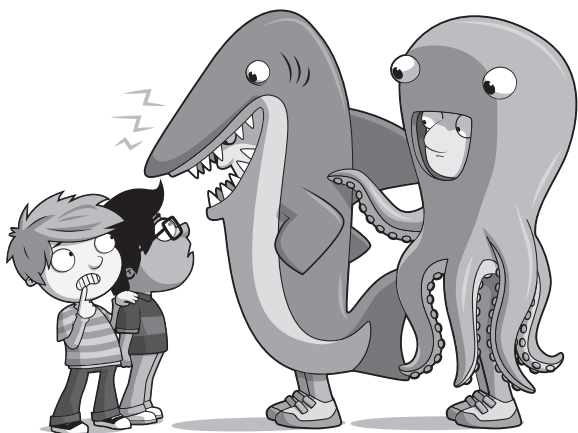
The giant octopus and man-sized shark danced in time to the rap music playing over the Aquarium loudspeakers.

*“You’ll love your trip, you’ll flip your lid,
With Mr. Shark and Mr. Squid!
We’re here to make your day here fun,
When you visit City A-quar-i-um!”*

They finished in a kind of street-dance pose. I was just about to clap, along with the three other visitors that were standing there with us, when my best friend, Pradeep, said, “That’s a nice song and everything, but it doesn’t rhyme.”

“Huh?” the shark replied through his bulky





rubber suit.
“‘Fun’ and
‘aquarium’
don’t actually
rhyme,”
Pradeep added
helpfully.

The shark leaned menacingly toward us, so we could see our reflection in his huge white teeth.

“Not that it really matters.” I gulped. “We could totally see what you were going for!” I shot Pradeep a look that said, “Shut up! Or we may end up being pummeled by dancers in sweaty fish costumes.”

The guy dressed as an octopus wrapped a tentacle around Mr. Shark. “It’s not worth it, dude. Let it go,” he said gently.

The shark sighed. “You’re right,” he huffed.

They were just about to leave when Pradeep tugged on one of the octopus’s tentacles.

“Excuse me?” he said. “I just wanted to clarify something. In the song you say you are Mr. Squid, but you are dressed as an octopus, so . . .” He trailed off as the giant octopus loomed over him and waved his foam tentacles.

“It’s the same difference!” Mr. Squid snapped.

“Actually, the heads are a different shape and the tentacles are arranged differently and—”

“Pradeep!” I interrupted. “Shhhh!”

“That’s it! I can’t take this anymore!” Mr. Shark spluttered. “This is not why I went to drama school, to sing to a room full of irritating kids!”

“Dressed as a squid!” added the octopus. I think he actually flounced a tentacle as he said it.

“You mean an *octopus*,” Pradeep corrected.

“I quit!” the octopus shrieked, throwing all eight arms into the air.

“Me too!” Mr. Shark added as they stormed off.

Pradeep, Sami (Pradeep’s three-year-old little sister) and I watched them waddle angrily down the hall. Sami tried to copy the swish of Mr.



Shark's tail as he stomped along. She was wearing a bright yellow life jacket that she had begged her dad to buy her in the gift shop. It had a big yellow shark fin on the back, and ever since she'd put it on, she'd been pretending to be a shark too.



“Da-dum . . . da-dum . . . dum dum, dum dum, dum dum . . .” Sami mumbled to herself as she crashed into my leg and shark-bit my sleeve. “Mwhy are msinging fishies mgrumpy?” she added, her teeth firmly clamped together.

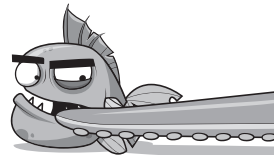
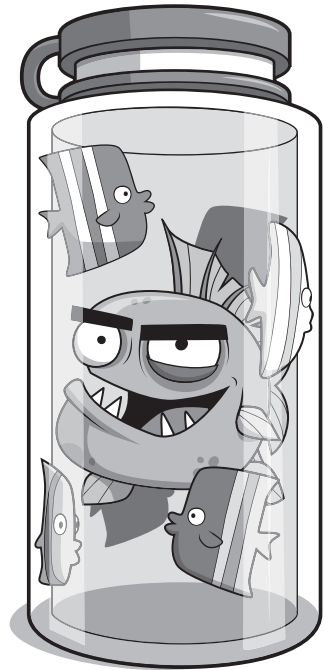
“I was just trying to be helpful.” Pradeep sighed.

I patted him on the back. “I don’t think they were happy here. You were just the straw that broke the octopus’s back.”

“Octopuses don’t have bones,” Pradeep said, “so technically that would be impossible. But thanks anyway.”

“Swishy fishy not grumpy,” Sami said, unclamping her teeth and picking up the City Aquarium water bottle that I had used to smuggle in my pet zombie goldfish, Frankie.

It was one of those bottles that had little plastic fish and glitter suspended in a pocket of liquid, so that it looked like the fish were actually *in* your drinking water. I’d kept it ever since our school field trip here in first grade. No one would notice one more fish in there. Even an undead, brought-back-to-life-with-a-battery, green-gunk-eating zombie goldfish with hypnotic eyes.



At least I hoped not.

Pradeep shot me a look that said, “You brought Frankie to the Aquarium?”

My look answered, “I’ve brought him to school, to a museum, on vacation, on a camping trip, to our sports day and the school play. I’m not gonna let him miss out on a trip to somewhere fish are *actually* supposed to be!”

“Fish are supposed to be IN an aquarium, they aren’t supposed to VISIT one!” Pradeep looked back.

“Not till now!” I said out loud.

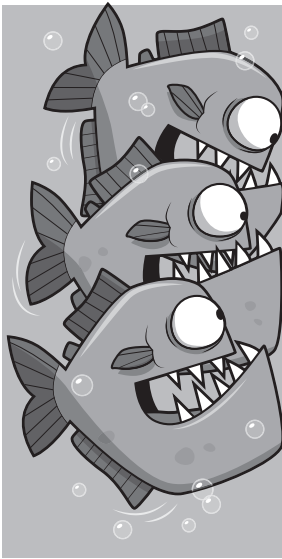


CHAPTER 2

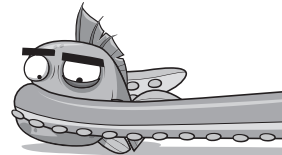
ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET GOLDFISH



“Say hello, swishy fishy,” said Sami, holding Frankie’s bottle up to the piranha tank. The piranhas swam by, completely ignoring us, until



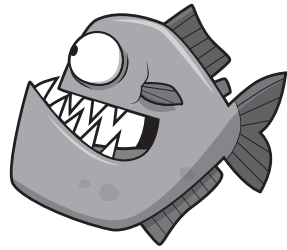
Frankie smiled at them with his big jagged teeth. Suddenly, they all threw themselves at the glass in full attack mode.



Pradeep, Sami and I all leaped back and I *might* have screamed for a second.

I could swear Frankie was sniggering to himself as he swam safely in his bottle.

“Um, maybe we should move on to the next tank. I don’t think Frankie is making friends here,” Pradeep said.



“Good call,” I replied. “Hey, how long is it until the Amazing Antonio is on?”

“Mmwant mto msee moctopus!” Sami mumbled while shark-biting my leg.

“We’re meeting our dads and Mark and Sanj at the shark tank in an hour for the shark feeding, and then at the octopus tank an hour after that for the Amazing Antonio, the Octopus’s Psychic Prediction Show,” Pradeep answered, looking at the laminated schedule his mom had given him.

Both of our dads had been stuck on their

phones with work texts and e-mails since we'd gotten to the Aquarium. As soon as we left the shop, where they had bought Sami her shark life jacket and me and Pradeep each an Aqua Survival key ring, they'd headed to the café to work.

Sanj (Pradeep's Evil Computer Genius big brother) and Mark (my Evil Scientist big brother) had gone off together, leaving us with Sami.

It had worked out pretty well, actually, as it meant we could take Frankie out of my backpack so he could see the Aquarium properly, even if all he'd done so far was terrify a cuttlefish, spook the angelfish and provoke the piranhas.

All Pradeep and I *really* wanted to see was the Amazing Antonio anyway. For an octopus, he has a pretty impressive record for making psychic predictions. So far, he has accurately predicted the results of over twenty soccer games, five horse races, one



heavyweight boxing championship, three global elections and a sudden surge in Chilean chocolate prices.

“OK, we’ve got time then,” I said. “Let’s explore.”

As we continued wandering through the Amazonian section, Frankie started getting fidgety. I peered into his water bottle. His eyes were a bright zombie green and his fins were balled up, ready for a fight.

“Frankie, what is it?” I asked.

Frankie pointed to a door labeled “Staff Only” just beyond the piranha tank. It was open a crack, and there was a puddle of water on the floor. We could see what looked like tiny, wet paw prints trailing from the puddle.

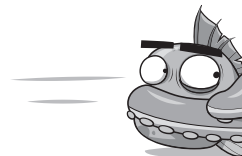
“Mess!” Sami cried, shark-toddling toward the water.

Just as we were heading over to investigate, a silver-haired janitor with a square jaw and a scar across one cheek came out of the “Staff Only”

door. As well as his City Aquarium janitor coat, he wore a black bowler hat and carried a tightly rolled umbrella. He looked around, then pressed a button on the side of his umbrella. It instantly lengthened and a mop head popped out of the bottom. He quickly mopped up all the evidence, then pressed the button again and the mop disappeared back into the umbrella.



He tipped back his hat and gave us a look that said, “There’s nothing to see here. Move along.” Grown-up looks are usually really hard



to read, but this was pretty clear.

We grabbed Sami and walked back toward the other fish tanks.

“Did you see that janitor’s cool umbrella?” I asked Pradeep.

“Yes, and did you see the way he mopped up all the paw prints before we could investigate them?” Pradeep whispered back.

“Maybe he’s just really tidy,” I suggested.

“Or maybe he’s covering something up,” Pradeep added.

“Whatever it is, Frankie’s eyes are *still* glowing zombie green, which means there’s something fishy going on,” I said. “I think we should keep an eye on that janitor.”

“Agreed,” Pradeep said. “There’s something just not very ‘janitor-y’ about him.”

We were walking past a huge tank of tropical fish when we spotted Sanj and Mark.

“Get back,” I whispered. “Evil big brothers dead ahead.”



We all ducked behind the tank.

“Do you think they could have had something to do with that puddle?” whispered Pradeep.

“Let’s follow them and find out,” I replied.

We crept along the side of the tropical fish tank, but when we got to the corner, Mark and Sanj were gone. All we could see was another “Staff Only” door down by the clownfish tank, along with some overexcited toddlers screaming “Nemo! I found Nemo!” and hammering on the glass. A piece of plastic tubing was propped against the wall outside the door.

“Where did they go?” Pradeep asked.

“Maybe they just wanted to avoid us?” I suggested. Then I realized it was silly to even try and think of a non-evil reason for whatever they were up to. “Or maybe they *are* planning something evil? But seriously, how evil can you be in an aquarium?”



We looked over at Sami, who was holding Frankie in his bottle. They were both making silly faces at the clownfish. The clownfish didn't seem impressed.

"You're right," said Pradeep. "Let's just relax and check out the tropical fish section."

We headed over to join Sami. Frankie was clearly enjoying scaring the cute little clownfish when he suddenly froze, as if he'd spotted something suspicious.



We were just down the hall from a big display tank that had a black curtain around it and a sign on the front that read:

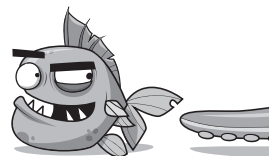
**THE AMAZING ANTONIO
(THE OCTOPUS)
WILL APPEAR HERE
THIS AFTERNOON!**

Pradeep and I turned to look where Frankie was looking and caught a glimpse of the silver-haired janitor slipping through another staff door, right next to Antonio's tank.

That in itself wasn't suspicious. I mean, he works at the Aquarium, right? That's what "staff" means.

But the way that the janitor looked around before he went through the door, as if he was checking to see if anyone was watching him—that *was* suspicious. That, and the way that he looked like he was talking into the handle of his umbrella.

"There's definitely something fishy about that janitor," I whispered to Pradeep.



I lifted Frankie's bottle out of Sami's hands. "Is he who you're suspicious of, Frankie?"

Frankie glared at the door.

"Look, more wet paw prints!" I added, spotting a trail on the ground. The prints led into the staff area.

"OK, let's look at this logically," Pradeep said. "Shifty-looking janitor—*check*. Suspicious wet paw prints—*check*. Sanj and Mark disappearing, confirming possible presence of Mark's evil vampire kitten sidekick, Fang, who could have left wet paw prints—*check*."

"We should investigate," I said. "Frankie's zombie sense is telling us something is wrong, and he tends to be right about these things."

I paused. "Not that it ever really goes well when we follow Frankie's instincts. To be honest, we usually end up being tricked by a booby trap and suspended from the ceiling . . . but you know . . . Frankie's instincts are still right."



“So are we going in?” Pradeep asked.

“Yes!” Sami said, and shark-toddled ahead of us toward the door.

