



Disastrous Directions

Contest Entries

Dylan U.
Age 11
North Carolina

Overcast

I was going to the Carolina Raptor Center but when I got up it was sort of a cold and cloudy day. I didn't think anything would go wrong, so I went anyway. As I was half way up Beard street it hit. A thunderstorm. I saw the lighting, heard the thunder and there was rain all over my car. "How could this get any worse?" I say. "Oh right! With hail!" I exclaim, as the little ice chunks hit my windshield. "What is next, a hurricane?" I say, looking in to the rear-view mirror. "Nope. A tornado." I sigh. I am chased by the tornado for about 5 miles when I get off the interstate at exit 23. It is flooded there and my car breaks down. I practically need to swim to McCoy road where there is an alligator waiting! I try to get past him, but he eats both of my shoes before I can. When I do finally get away, I sleep the rest of the day on the side of McCoy road. Strangely enough, when I wake up my car is there but the windows are smashed. I get back in and drive some more,

but there are hornets chasing me. After about a mile they give up the chase. I finally make it to the Raptor Center after catching air on every single speed bump. When I am about to leave the Raptor Center, I see a hurricane in the distance. The owner lets me stay to wait out the storm. I don't want to go through that again, so I make sure that it is not overcast before I go home.

Renée N. ~ 1st Place

Age 14

Ontario

The bus throws me forward as it halts. I yawn and stumble off, blinking in the sunlight. Before me is Carlingford, unfamiliar.

I pause and turn to the driver. "Sir?" I ask. "Is there a place to rent cars?"

He laughs. His belly, covered with a greasy T-shirt, bobbles. "There ain't any rental places in Carlingford! Ya'll have to head back to Dublin."

I'm back in the evening, shell-shocked from driving from Dublin on my own, on the wrong side of the road, on the wrong side of the car. I check into the first hotel I see and fall asleep instantly.

I wake energized. I can do this! I'm going to Giant's Causeway, I won't die trying!

I leave the hotel with five maps and extensive instructions from the perky lady behind the desk. She purses her red lips—"Maybe you should call a taxi."

I smile and shake my head. I grip the steering wheel and pray under my breath as I navigate R173 north. I come to stop. I'm at the border crossing into Northern Ireland.

The guard looks at me blankly. "Passport."

I reach. I pat my jacket pocket, shirt, pants. I scramble and rifle through my backpack, then lean over, searching beneath the seat. I stare at the guard in disbelief.

It's storming, the sky black as night and the rain pounding louder than thunder. I'm hunched over the wheel, every muscle clenched, eyes aching. I squint at the road, whispering thanks each time a car passes and I'm not killed. I try to conjure up the road signs that seem to have vanished. I don't dare unclench a hand to try and read the maps.

I wake stiff, cold, damp, and tired.

Memory comes back. The flat tire. The gravelly shoulder of road, the needles of rain, the mud.

The skies are still grey. I put the key into the ignition. I push onward. My optimism of three days ago is gone, replaced with stubbornness.

A sign. "1 KILOMETRE." The paint of the town's name is chipped.

I can see the town in the distance.

My car splutters. The gas arrow finally hugs the E after flirting with it for hours. I thump the dashboard.

My pants are ripped, my shirt torn. I have car grease, mud, gravel, and rain plastered to my body. I stumble into an empty coffee shop and wave for a waitress. I hardly have energy to read the menu. "Coffee," I say. "Make it strong." The waitress brings me a cup. I order another. I glance up—"Am I close to Giant's Causeway?" She looks at me. Stares. Laughs. I take it as a no.

I'm back at the bus station. The bus driver leans against his bus, waiting for customers. "You again!" he says. I could swear he hasn't changed his shirt. I nod, desperate. I ask, "Is there a place to hire taxis?"

Chiara D. Arizona

My Eventful Trip to Ballet Etudes

One day I had the most exciting, surprising, and eventful trip to my dance studio, Ballet Etudes.

The first thing that I did was exit onto the U.S. 60 East from Alma School Rd. Well unfortunately, the ramp on was closed due to some fancy-schmancy renovation! I decided to go down to Arizona Ave. and merge onto the 60 there.

Next, I exited onto the constantly congested exit ramp for Gilbert Rd. Of course there was a horrendous accident at the intersection, and many of the drivers were distracted by the accident. There was also an extreme amount of police cars, ambulances, and fire trucks surrounding the recent accident, making the traffic tremendously sluggish.

I finally got down to Baseline road to turn left and that's when I found out that the traffic lights were out, and that a police officer was directing the traffic. After I waited in a lengthy turn lane for what felt like forever, I made a long awaited left turn.

Next, I was going to make a short right turn onto Corrine Dr. but the sign was covered in black spray paint. Missing the street sign, I used the next exit into the plaza.

Before I turned into the plaza, the matt black Nissan Altima in front of me unexpectedly broke down. Leaving me stuck behind it waiting for an opening so I could switch lanes.

After some lane departing, I had finally made it into the plaza! My GPS said that it was in the corner of the plaza. There were three corners of the plaza that had buildings occupying their space. I finally found Ballet Etudes in the back left corner of the plaza, and that day I learned that there is always more than one way to make it to your destination.

Annalies
Age 13
Ontario

The Proud Ruby Flower

On the boat's deck, the strong smell of the sea thrived in the air. The waves thundered on the side of the boat. I pulled out a brochure about the Ruby Flower. On the brochure there was a picture of a huge Ruby red Flower. The flower was considered the biggest flower in the universe. It was located in a tropical jungle on a small but beautiful island. That was the place where I most desired to go to. I had looked at Google maps before I had left home and had compiled a series of directions which I felt confident were the best way to reach the flower.

The boat's horn blasted in my left ear. No wonder it blasted in my left ear because I had my ear resting on the horn's speaker. While I waited for the boat to approach the shore, I devoured a chocolate chip trail bar that melted in my mouth.

The boat steered around the bend and ended up in a beach bay. People floated on the glistening water on bright yellow rubber duckies. The duckies were overly large. Some of them had rubber sunglasses attached to them.

The captain glanced at the brochure in my hand. He also stared at my directions too.

"If you want, I can give you some directions on how to get to the Ruby Flower," the captain offered.

"No thank you," I replied as I glanced down at the first step of my directions, which was, "Do not listen to other people's advice."

"Everyone off the boat!" bellowed the captain. "There are no lifeboats to bring you to shore. So you'll have to swim to land!"

I cannonballed into the sea water. It was a good thing that my directions were in a purple waterproof container. I was happy that my green-coloured camera was waterproof too. Salt water flooded into my mouth. The bitterness of the water made me gag. After a long swim, I landed on the simmering sandy shore.

I took the directions out of the slippery container. The next step said, "Turn to the left and cross the nearby swamp."

I wouldn't say "nearby" because it took an hour to trudge to the swamp through a dense forest. But I finally arrived at my destination.

I was very thankful that the trees covered the burning sun. But, on the other hand, I had to stagger through tangled trees and a muddy swamp. Plus, I swatted swarms of mosquitoes away.

Something slithered on my foot. Then a scaly head, with black beady eyes, loomed above the mucky water. I screamed until my voice box almost busted out of my throat. I quickly scrambled out of the sucking mud. Safely on solid ground, I skimmed over the words of my directions to know what to do next. As I stood there, I shivered in my wet clothes that were covered in mud and grime.

I ran to a cave which was a half a mile run uphill. I slid to the ground inside the cave to rest. Suddenly, there was a shrill of mosquito's wings right in my ear. I yanked my weight up the slippery hill away from the cave, which was infested with mosquitoes.

But unfortunately I tripped on a jagged rock and skidded down the hill, past the cave and back into the swamp that I had been in previously.

It took a while to backtrack to the top of the hill again. I never did set foot in that damp dark dingy cave again. I stumbled up another hill, this one rocky. I had walked 12 hours just to get to the Ruby Flower. I hoped it would be worth it.

My directions said, "At the top of the hill, turn left till you see the bend in the road."

I obediently followed the directions and stood face-to-face with my next hardship. 99 uneven steps loomed up to the proud Ruby Flower. I spotted a dot of red which looked down on me from the top. The Ruby Flower seemed to dare me to climb those 99 slippery uneven steps. After I battled an hour to climb the difficult steps, I stood panting at the top.

Sadly the Ruby Flower was not as huge as it was on the brochure. It was about the size of a quarter. But it was miraculously pretty.

With trembling hands I quickly took out my green neon camera. I snapped a shot, which turned out fuzzy, and then my battery died.

With depressed eyes, I stared over the view that lay before me. I saw an easy road that led up from the bay to the Ruby Flower. I stared over the edge and saw an elevator that came up with people packed inside. They arrived at the top in less than a minute.

Oliver N.
Age 12
Ontario

As I went to the supreme Roman temple of Ramandoodle, a few things went wrong. No, check that, everything went wrong. It went like this. First, I drove my second car [the first one was mashed to a silver pulp by a wicked hailstorm three days ago] down route five. It was deserted, gravel, and terribly muddy. My car got stuck 39 times along with eight tire punctures.

But I slogged on.

But suddenly, I slammed on my brakes. There, 20 feet ahead in a deep dip in the road was a muddy pond. My route to the temple was flooded. I groaned. I got out to examine the obstacle when I jumped, diving back into my car like I was on fire. Dozens of 30-foot long crocodiles were lounging by the pond, still more swimming to and fro in the water. How crocodiles got this far north, I still do not know, but that's entirely besides the point.

I fishtailed out of there before I got a better look at the eerie skeletons lying by the bank.

But a few miles back a mob of angry rioters waving pitchforks and torches captured me and tied me up. They asked me where I was going and I said to the supreme Roman temple of Ramandoodle. So they carried me up and dumped me there.

Want to hear the funny part? Nothing was there. Only a metal plaque remained. This is what it said:

Here lies the supreme Roman temple of Ramandoodle. It was obliterated by space aliens two years ago. Nothing remains.

Jeremy S.
Age 13
British Columbia

The Death Star

I'll be sure to follow the others next time because my plan totally backfired.

I had a plan. It was to destroy the death star on my own before the resistance did, taking all the credit.

I first needed a ship. I went to a guy called Wato and he sold one to me.

First, I flew to sector seven. The ship was in horrible shape and there were cobwebs everywhere.

The death star was right in front of me, but the resistance was already on it. So I had to fly faster but I had to fly through an asteroid belt. I was dodging the asteroids like bullets. I finally got to the death star and it turns out you can't shut it off with a lever. You have to shoot the power sources and get out as fast as you can.

I flew through the entrance and I had to dodge all these tubes. I'm good at dodging but not this much dodging. I hit one of the tubes and my fuel was slowly draining. I had to hurry.

I got to the sources and aimed to shoot but when I looked at the place where the sources should have been they were shattered. That meant one thing, the resistance beat me to it, and that the death star would explode any second.

I sped out and got to the asteroid belt. I flew through and realized that my fuel had run out. The light went out and my ship hit an asteroid and I was hurdling towards a planet.

That's why I'm stuck in this desert on this planet, with nothing to eat. Maybe I should have just joined the resistance!

Nicole S.
Age 15
British Columbia

Going Places

I had just arrived in India and had a 4 hour layover. My goal was to visit the Taj Mahal. I grabbed a taxi and drove for a while. When we arrived to the outskirts of the Taj Mahal, the driver over charged me. I didn't have enough rupee, just dollars. He gave me the price in dollars and I trustingly paid him. As I thought about it I pulled out the calculator on my phone and calculated the price into dollars. As he sped away, I realized that I got ripped off!

I went to a nearby restaurant and reenergized myself with some fries. Researching the fastest way to visit the Taj Mahal, I was unknowingly wasting my time. As I looked at my watch, I realized it was almost time for my plane to take off! I had no choice but to abandon the plan and grab a taxi back to the airport.

As I fixed my hair and neared the gate, I realized I must have left my cap in the restaurant or taxi. Great. When I arrived at the gate the lady at the desk said the plane had taken off an hour before. Awesome. I compared our watches and realized my watch was not accurately set to the India time zone. Wonderful.

As I broke down crying, she went on the phone and talked for what seemed like forever. She finally hung up and consoled me with not only a replacement ticket for the next evening, but a free hotel stay as well! As I got into another taxi, my eyes gleamed like the marble on the Taj Mahal...

Christopher C.

IT'S NIHOMON

"Man, what a country Japan is!" I exclaimed.

"Fat men wrestling. Eating raw fish. Monster movies. This country has style," Biscuit said.

Biscuit is my little brother. His real name is Lyle, but he's so short, fat, and squishy, I call him Biscuit. He really hates me for that.

Anyway, I'm Brian Chevitz. And my family is in Japan for vacation.

My brother and I are just sightseeing.

"Hey, look. A toy store!" I exclaimed, pointing at a building. "Let's go!"

Before he could say anything, I grabbed his hand and we ran into the building.

"Look, Brian, there are three stories. And the one above us is dedicated to Nihomon," my brother said.

I immediately ran across the floor to the nearest staircase to run to the second floor.

Nihomon is a Japanese card game where you trade cards and have epic Nihomon fights with other people. It's totally awesome.

I made it to the second floor and I was in Nihomon heaven!

I snooped around and found a costume of Joe Gettum. Joe is the main character in the Nihomon TV show, and my favorite. I looked at the price tag.

“¥2,280.40! I can't afford that!” I exclaimed.

“The price is in yen. It's twenty U.S. dollars,” Biscuit explained.

“Oh.”

I walked out of the toy store wearing the Joe Gettum costume. I looked awesome.

“You look like such a dork,” Biscuit remarked. He resumed fiddling around with his iPhone.

Silhouettes then casted over us. I looked at the people who were casting their shadows over us. It was a boy, a girl, and a purple pig.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“I'm Jesse. She's Jamie. And this is Oinksy,” the boy introduced. “We're Team Sock-It!”

“Why?” I asked.

The girl then punched me in the face.

“Ow!” I groaned.

“We'll see you at the arena, Joe!” she said. They then left.

“Joe?” I asked myself.

“Brian, come with me. I'll explain on the way to the arena,” Biscuit said, grabbing my wrist.

Biscuit said that Nihomon was actually based on real events, and Team Sock-It thought I was their enemy, Joe Gettum. And now he was digging a hole for me to find Nihomonsters and fight.

“Good luck,” he saluted.

I jumped in the hole and fell to the ground. I was immediately licked by the tongue of a Vealbaby.

Shadows then draped over us. It was Team Sock-It.

“Ready to fight?” Jesse asked.

I was so nervous. I didn't know what to do!

“Vealbaby, I choose you! Evolve into Beefmonstro!”

The little cow-like monster turned into a giant hunk of ground beef with sharp teeth. He then ate the three kids and burped!

“Oh yeah! I forgot you could do that!” I remembered. “Well, time to go home.”

“Beefmonstro HUNGRY!!!” the creature screamed.

I also forgot that a Vealbaby is completely unstable and will eat anything when it turns into a Beefmonstro!

Jack L.
Age 12
British Columbia

The Scenic Route

Circus Lab sounded like a good idea to me. I've heard that the classes were taught by real live circus performers! There was only one way to find out: I had to go there myself. My first mistake was to get a set of directions without looking at the connected road-map.

First, I turned right out of the complex, which was kind of slangy, but I did what I was told and turned left. I drove for about fifteen blocks before I found a suitable "cow-field on the corner". I turned left again. Next, I had to travel straight until I passed a high school, a dog park, and an old folk's home. I passed the high school in no time, but the dog park was in the next town over. The old folk's home was on the opposite edge of that town.

Unfortunately for the old folks, their home was situated at the end of. In order to pass it, I drove right through the building. My poor car took a beating from the walking sticks of doom. I followed the instructions and turned right after I had passed the legion of old people.

I drove interminably, but it took me a while before I finally reached a preschool. However, it definitely wasn't colourful, so I carried on. My next stop was the U.S. border. Sighing, I pulled out my id and passport, which I promptly dropped. I was detained for an hour because I no longer wore a purple moustache. Later, after an hour or two of solid driving, I encountered a colourful construction.

Bone-tired, I turned left without checking if it was a preschool.

The road after that was definitely hilly—and it was filled with potholes. One especially jagged pothole popped my tire. After hastily replacing it, I carefully moved on. I was glad when I found somebody's garden store so I could turn off onto a residential street. There were a few scraggly birches along the way, but that was not enough to count it as overshadowed.

The instructions were terribly outdated!

I reached the T in the road and absentmindedly collided with a roadblock. That really woke me up. I guided my smoking car to the right and resumed driving. Soon I came across a bridge over water that somewhat resembled the "bridgy overpass" my instructions mentioned. I crossed what the government called a toll bridge and continued on my merry way.

I soon encountered the next landmark: a Tim Horton's restaurant. I turned right at it and drove through it, in accordance to the red sign. It said "drive-thru". I was in the middle of the building when my ride finally quit. I was out of gas and the hood was burning anyways. The second I dismounted, however, the vehicle—an old, expensive Mercedes-Benz—exploded, flinging me through a police station window.

Next time, I will use my GPS.

Autumn C. ~ 3rd Place

Age 12

Montana

The Epic Quest for the Coffee Shop

Go straight on Death Street; turn left onto Doom Road; turn into parking lot.

Those were the directions my friend gave me to get to this coffee shop that he wanted to meet me at. And they were simple enough, right?

Problems began the instant I started. I couldn't find Death Street. (Though I wasn't sure I wanted to find it anyway, given the name...) Our town was decently small, so I figured I'd find it quickly.

Two hours of wandering around later, which had accomplished nothing but get me terribly lost, I finally consulted my GPS, which I'd dubbed Benedict Arnold because it constantly betrayed me when I asked it to take me places. Benedict immediately informed me that I was driving on the supposed Death Street, which I wasn't, as a quick inspection of the street sign proved.

Oh. No. Wait. That did say Death Street.

Of course Benedict then got stuck in a recalculating loop, no doubt because it'd misread the sign too and knew that to live up to its name it had to let me down.

"Recalculating. Recalculating."

"Whatever. Be quiet."

"Recalculating. Recalculating."

I decided I'd best get looking for Doom Road (I didn't think Benedict could possibly be talked into actually helping me), and then I realized that my friend had neglected to mention where exactly on Death Street Doom Road actually was.

"Recalculating. Recalculating."

"Will you stop that?"

I'm sure you can guess no stopping happened.

After driving down the length of the whole street approximately 593.2844 times, I finally decided to at least try to get Benedict to help, but discovered (with only a small amount of surprise) that for some reason my GPS wouldn't let anything happen while it was recalculating. I even tried turning it off to no result; it wouldn't let me do that either.

And then I saw it – a street sign that read, in very bold white letters, Doom Road. Ha! I have beaten you, evil GPS! I turned onto it, realized I'd turned right instead of left, turned around, and drove onward. I checked both sides of the road, as my friend hadn't mentioned which way to turn, and drove around for about another hour and a half before I finally located it, a rather cute-looking place with light pink walls and a large sign in the window that read "Coffee!"

I walked in and discovered that it wasn't a coffee shop at all, but a bookstore. Huh? Then what about the sign that said "Coffee"?

I walked out, got in the car, tried telling Benedict to hush again with no success, and started driving again, but that bookstore was the only thing even vaguely resembling a coffee shop. I went inside again.

And there, directly next to the door, was a little coffee shop, where my friend stood waving at me and shouting my name. Huh. Don't know how I missed it.

I blame Benedict.

Helene ~ Finalist

Age 13

Nebraska

A Trip to Pumpkin Land

We had just left the neighborhood, I was taking my kids to Pumpkin Land. It's a fall themed amusement park. I heard about from this magazine we get every month.

We were driving down the road, I grabbed my phone to ask for directions, the battery was low.

"We'll have enough to make it there and back," I said aloud. These were the phones directions:

1. Head down highway 5 and turn left.
2. Turn right at the giant spider, and yes, it's real.
3. Make a U-turn at the man-eating chicken.
4. Drive up to Dracula's castle and stop the car, then walk through the castle.
5. You will no longer be needing my services.

I stared at the phone. "Kids this doesn't seem right"

"Oh come on mom," my son said. "I want to ride the pumpkin rollercoaster"

We headed down highway 5 and turned left. A few miles further, there was sure enough, a giant spider. My daughter began to cry. "It's okay sweetie, It won't get you." I struggled to believe my own words, for the spider was moving it's fangs and had all eight eyes on my car.

I sped past the horror and turned right. Again my phone was correct, sitting right in the middle of the road was a man-eating chicken. "Uh... Hello sir," he had folding chair and a bucket of chicken resting on his lap.

"Howdy ma'am, can I help you?"

"we're looking for pumpkin land."

"Ah yes, just make a U-turn here and walk right through Dracula's castle up there."

I didn't know what to do. "Are you sure it's safe?"
"Oh yeah, I've been sitting here for years with my chicken and I've seen many people go in."

"Have you seen them come out?"

"Let's just say you don't come out the same way."

I gulped. "Then what do we do?"

"Oh you won't be needing me after that."

We made a U-turn and I pulled up to Dracula's castle. The giant front door pushed open and the back door was straight ahead. The walls were red and black, and huge chandelier was hanging from the ceiling. I urged my kids to walk faster.

We made it to the back door, but outside wasn't much better. A black carriage was pulled up and Dracula himself was holding the reins. "Welcome, enjoy your ride... and your stay."

I backed away. "No, we're not getting on this thing." But sadly my son had already climbed in.

The carriage took us into the woods, we turned left, I had no idea where we were. Then the carriage stopped. "You will no longer be needing me." Dracula said.

I could almost see through the trees. Then relief shot through my body, I could see the sign for Pumpkin Land. This whole thing must have been a part of it. An old van was parked in front of us.

"This isn't Pumpkin Land, or not anymore." A man said.

Elijah W.

Age 13

Pennsylvania

In the town of Rainbow Cake, there was a boy named Jason. I will tell you his story of the worst school day ever. It started when Jason walked out the front door of his house with a energy bar in his pocket and a science project in his arms. He ran down the sidewalk, turned right and sat down on the curb. As he waited for the bus, he set his science project down and pulled out the bar. When the bus arrived, he stood up, shoved the half eaten energy bar in his pocket and got on the bus. As the bus was rolling away, he looked out the window and saw his project sitting on the curb. He jumped up and yelled, "Stop the bus!" As the bus stopped, he jumped out and grabbed his project. As he ran back to the bus, his key fell out, thanks to a hole in his pocket. He arrived at school. As he walked down the hallway he saw people staring at him. Puzzled, he looked down at his pants and noticed a brown spot. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a melted energy bar.

"Yuck!" He ran into the men's room. He grabbed a handful of paper towels and rubbed most of the stain off and ran out to class. Before he knew it it was lunch. As he walked to a table with a tray, he tripped over his shoelace and spilled his food all over himself. He stood up embarrassed and walked away. With only a dollar and not enough money to buy more food he walked over to a vending machine and popped in his four

quarters. He pushed a button for a sprite and the bottle of soda fell. As he opened the bottle the soda fizzed up and spilled all over him. Again embarrassed, he walked away.

With a wet shirt, a brown pocket, and an empty stomach, he headed to class. When school was over he headed down the hallway and got on the bus. Once it arrived back home, he ran up the steps to the front door. He reached in his pocket to grab the key but realized it was gone! He ran to the back door, but it was locked. He noticed that a window was open a crack so, he climbed through it. His neighbor saw a figure climbing into a window. So he did what any worried person might do: he called the police. They arrived the same time Jason's mom came home. She asked an officer what was going on. He told her there had been a break in.

"What!" His mom and the officer opened the front door and tiptoed in to find Jason sitting on the couch. After a few minutes of explaining and laughing, the officer left. A lesson from today's story is: Always be prepared, and NEVER put a chocolate energy bar in your pocket!

Meghan W. ~ 2nd Place

Age 13

Kentucky

Following the directions in *Of Fish and Fins*, I set out for Sunnyside Beach. My carefree venture escalated into a catastrophic adventure.

Contrary to the magazine's assurances of un-circuitous travels, I merged onto Loop 16 and unknowingly took a wrong turn. Confidently trusting the wisdom of the directions lying beside me, I faithfully watched for Maple Parkway. After an hour I noticed the changing terrain. That's funny, thought I, I've never seen a cattle crossing sign on a highway. Neither had I been held up by chickens, chased by angry farmers with pitchforks, or had my antennae lassoed by a barefooted bumkin on a shaggy pony.

Un-circuitous travels indeed.

I pulled over, confused, and hollered at a passing wagon. "Hey, you there! How do I exit this highway onto Maple Parkway?"

The man in the wagon twisted around, glaring at me. "Highway?" he scoffed.

"Loop 16!" I yelled.

"That thang is near hundred miles back thata way. This here's Pitchfork Pike and only registered vehicles drive on this road. If you don't want your car confiscated, it'll cost ya."

There went my new flat-screen TV.

Furious and \$500 lighter, I ventured back to Loop 16, finding Maple Parkway and refusing to let one incident thwart my day at the beach. Consulting my directions, I turned right onto Green Street, punched the gas, and collided with a brick wall. The next thing I remember, a nurse in a starched uniform was bending over me. "Where am I?" I wondered. "Is this Heaven?"

"No, mam," said the nurse, "but you came close to sainthood."

"Saint's alive!" I murmured.

After broken ribs imprisoned me in the hospital for two days, I escaped, looked at my uninsured car, and burst into tears. “I just want to go to the beach!” I wailed. A kind doctor offered financial help. His eyes bulged upon seeing the bill.

I guess there’s a limit to generosity.

Afterward, I drove onto Rose Road. Neglecting to read the “WARNING: AGGRESSIVE DOG” on the directions, I advanced past a corner-lot cottage. A dog roared and shot from the shadows, darting in front of me. I slammed on the brakes, but the dog had sunk its fangs into my tire.

I hit it.

I was obliged to cart the shrieking pet-owners and their creature to the vet while waiting hours as they raged at me. They insisted that I pay the bill. I absolutely refused to pay for their little sneak’s operation and told them so. Snarling, they jumped on me. What was I to do but defend myself?

I spent the night in prison for fighting in a public place.

After the cops extracted a hefty fine from my wallet, I arrived at the beach.

Holding my head high as I strolled down the path, I rounded the corner and encountered a lifeguard. “There’s a \$5 fee, mam,” he growled. I smiled and confidently reached into my pocket, withdrawing my last money. I counted, recounted, and counted again.

It was \$4.99.

Ellyn C.
Age 15
Ohio

Kyle sprung from his bed. Today was the big day, when he would enter the city of wealth, casino world. Soon he would be rich! He headed out the front door reading the first instruction he had received in the mail.

“1. Hop in your car and drive down any road you chose, just so long as you are headed south.”

He jumped into his car, “Sweet! I get to go south. That’s awesome!” He talked to himself as he pulled out of the driveway. He read the second instruction,

“2. Be sure to drive along the east coast, it is beautiful. Beware of the tropical storms that often hit there.” He grinned sheepishly at himself in the rear-view mirror, turning onto a seaside road.

Soon Kyle found that it had started to rain, hard. He read the second instruction and then noticed the note on the end. “Beware of the tropical storms that often hit there. Uh-oh.” He drove faster as the weather turned for the worst.

Driving on through the torrents of rain, reading the third instruction. “Hit Rt. 37, 46, 98 or 197. They all lead to your destination. Turn the music up loud and enjoy this

moment.” He pressed the button to the radio and cranked up the sound, turning onto Rt. 98. The rain started to abate.

Kyle closed his eyes and screamed along with the blaring music, speeding down the road. His car was skidding to a stop, careening towards a light pole. He pressed on the brake, but it was too late. He collided hard with the pole. His air bag ejected and his face landed in its soft grasp.

When he awoke, hours later, he looked up to see the golden bridge. He hadn’t noticed it before, but he slid his crushed door open and whispered to himself, “Here I come land of wealth. I’ll get a new car later with all the money I win.” A smile slipped across his face. He ran towards the bridge, his foot hitting its golden pavement. He ran across it getting his ticket punched, he ran into the city. Lights beamed, he screamed aloud twirling around like an outrageously happy, young girl.

He ran into the casinos emptying his pockets onto the gambling tables. He was successful for a space of about six hours, but slowly his pockets started to grow limp. Grabbing his last few dollars from the table he turned and left the building to try his luck elsewhere. He ran across the street but a firm hand grabbed him from behind, slamming him face down in the mud. The ruffians, beat him up and left him in the mud, moneyless. Suddenly, all Kyle wanted was to be home, with his family, rich or poor it no longer mattered. He realized how much of a fool he had been, tears slid silently down his dirt streaked, wretched face. The rain started to pour again, soaking the lonely, broken man.

Alexander N. ~ Finalist

Age 13

Washington

A Hidden Treasure

Do you need to pay to extend your loan, but you don't have enough money? Well, this is the place for you! Here are 10 steps to help you find my hidden treasure! I am so scared to go and get the treasure myself. And if you don't bring me my treasure, I will do something very, bad to you.

1. Take a plane to Sahara Desert.
2. Find the one and only cactus in the middle of the desert. Then walk east to an uninhabited hut (the big red one made out of bricks near the ocean), then rent a rowboat from the dock 5 miles to the west, and row 50 miles north. Then jump out of the boat (watch out for sharks), dive down to a 21 century shipwreck (I sunk it myself.), go into it and find the hatch then open it.
3. When you enter the room under the hatch, close it, and all the water will drain out. Inside the room you will find a crate filled with dynamite, a stick, and a stone.

4. Using the stick and the stone start a fire on the mossy floor of the room and run for your life! After the explosion, walk into the newly formed crater (The crater will blow threw the ground, so you will be able to get out.) You will walk out onto a sandy beach and see a thick jungle ahead of you.
5. Go into the jungle and find the needle (If I knew where to find it I would tell you but unfortunately I forgot. I think it might be at the bottom of a pond infested with piranhas but I am not sure.) When/if you find the needle and pick it up, it will lift up and fly towards the treasure. Unfortunately for you to protect my treasure, I have released: Swarms of killer bees, Brazilian wandering spiders, and Death stalkers on the island so, if you value your life be careful.
6. Assuming you found the needle, follow it until you reach a steel bunker. Be careful, it is guarded with man eating tigers. Distract the tigers by throwing a piece of raw meat at their feet. Then walk into the bunker.
7. Inside the bunker there will be two armed robots designed to target moving objects. Stand still until the robots pass you then run into the next room shutting the door behind you. This room will be completely empty except for a gold frame with a one dollar bill inside it.
8. Collect the treasure (leave the frame) and get out.
9. When you get to the beach where you started unscrew the hatch and use it as a boat. Then come find me in the ocean. I will be located 50 miles west of the hatch considering you don't drift of course.
10. Now that you have found me and given me my treasure go WALK THE PLANK!!!

Hayley T.
Age 11
California

It was a cold, snowy day, when Papa told us we were having a family dinner. We packed up and got into the car. As Mom tried to start the car, it appeared we had run out of gas. Micah and Isaiah, my brothers, walked down to the gas station. It felt like days before we got going again because we had to shovel out the snowed in drive way. When we finally got down the road, we noticed it was blocked. So we had to take the back way. We turned left and went straight from there. There was a white out, where it snows so much you can't see. Suddenly, we hit black ice. All I could see was a blur. I heard a loud thump. Everyone in the car jerked forward. Mom, Dad ,and my older brother hopped out

of the car and saw that we hit a giant plow. Our car was dented and so was the plow, though we could still drive. Just as we all got in the car, Papa texted Mom. He asked if we could bring chips and ice-cream to the party. So we drove to town to get the treats. While we were driving back to Papa's house, we got pulled over by the sheriff. He asked us why we were going so fast. Before we had time to answer, he saw the ice-cream and chips sitting in Dad's lap. He said that if we gave him all five gallons of ice-cream and both bags of chips, he would pay off the ticket. We reluctantly gave them to him and drove off. Soon we arrived at Papa's house empty handed and exhausted.

Christy W.
Age 12
Texas

A Peculiar Orange Tree

The walk to this incredible place I have heard all about is dreadfully long. I took one hundred and two steps from my front porch straight into the unknown, and ended up by a pile of what appear to be old logs stretching out for miles and miles. I was advised that in order to get to this incredible destination I would have to walk on the logs until I noticed something unusual in my path. The dusty old logs fell apart under my shoes, the birds sang eerie sounds of sadness in the tall grass surrounding me. And I felt as though I was not alone. The sun was beating on my shoulders and there were no trees there as shade, for they had all been chopped down by an unknown force. There, in front of me, was a tall tree with peculiar orange speckles glowing all over its limbs. The air smelled like lemon and I could suddenly see a forest of white trees behind it. I climbed the tree and began walking on the longest branch I could see, avoiding the glowing orange fungus because I had a hunch there was something wrong with it. I had been walking on this same limb for about fifteen minutes and the urge to touch the orange fungus was growing. I kneeled down and touched it, it was so soft and warm and I didn't think anything of it when there was fungus all over my hands. There it was right in front of me, when I looked up, the gorgeous place I had only heard about. Mountains came into view and there was a crystal clear lake with hiking trails climbing up the mountains. I jumped in the water and splashed around happy that there were trees and chipper bird songs in the air. I got out of the water and started climbing the trees and hiking the trails. But the fun didn't last too long, I looked around and noticed that the trees were vanishing before my eyes. I new immediately what was happening, I had brought the poison into the haven.

Claire L.
Age 15
Texas

Adventure to find a master chef

I first pack a bag with clothes, money, lots of water and food for my long foot journey to find a master chef who's called Cordon and lives in the mountains .I'm hoping that he will teach me his techniques, and when he does I'm hoping I can work at one of his well known restaurants.

I was given a map and a few instructions to find Cordon, so I come upon a huge crystal blue lake, they're swans floating on the water and frogs leaping from lily pad to lily pad and birds chirping songs. I come upon a dock where there is a canoe, it's like it was waiting for me. So I hop in the canoe and grab the paddle. I row for about ten minutes when finally I come upon a rocky trail that on the right leads in to a dark forest, where there is no light and has trees that are black as the midnight sky and have branches reaching out to the pathway like hands that are going to grab you. But on the left side it leads into a smooth pathway with flowers growing on the sides of the pathway and magical looking willow trees draping high over the pathway, like a crown. I look at the map and it. How could it possibly say right though! So I look at the map and I see both pathways lead to the same destination and the pathway on the left is much shorter. But I look at the instructions and it says in bold words "Go Right!" I decide to go left though, since it seems like the better option. As I walk along the path I hear loud noises, coming from behind me, so I look behind me and the entrance begins to close. I'm a bit freaked out now but I continue to walk. Hours later I'm still walking! This doesn't seem right, by the looks of the map it should have only been a ten minute walk.

Night begins to show itself and the skies grow dark, the willow trees don't look very magical anymore, they look like monsters and I can feel things watching me. I decide to set up a camp fire and try to get some rest. But every time I start a flame it goes out , so I'm stuck with the darkness ,and I think I'm somethings prey right now. I eventually fall asleep, but when I wake up it is still dark. Hours go by and the darkness still stays. So I decide to start walking again. Days start to go by and I'm still not out of this nightmare, everything looks the same, I'm following the map but it's a little hard to see when its dark and I have no flashlight. More days go by and I've run out of food and water and I'm absolutely exhausted when I see a light coming up at the end of the pathway.

I start leaping with joy and start sprinting to the end of the pathway, when I come to the end of the pathway I'm back where I started. I've never been so disappointed. I don't even know how this is possible. I just want to give up, but I'm not a quitter, I look at the map and apparently there should be a small town at the end of the pathway. So this time I decide to go right, As I walk along the rocky path, the forest starts to light up with beams of sunlight, and the scary trees start to become cherry trees. Thirty minutes later I come to the exit and come upon the town.

I've never seen a happier sight, I am so hungry, so I come upon the town and find a small café that's all white on the outside-

And has long vines running up the walls, before I even enter the café I can smell the fragrances of the pastries and fries, burgers and so much more. So I enter the café and it's so bright from the beaming sunlight and all the chefs are cooking up front so you can watch them cook your food. Cakes and pastries are lined up behind a glass counter. I order a burger and fries and request to get a table outside. The waitress leads me through a door that leads into a pathway.

As I walk the pathway leads in to a little garden area where there was flowers and bush walls surrounding white tables and white chairs. So I sat down at the table and they brought my food. Food has never tasted so good ,I don't know if it was because I was starving, but this was the best burger and fries I've ever had.

After I was done eating I ordered a few more items of food for the journey, and left to continue my journey. I started walking out of the small town and a week later I finally came upon the mountain that Cordon lived at. I changed into a snowsuit since the climate was much colder and there is snow everywhere. I found a snow lift and hopped in, and it took me almost all the way up the mountain. I looked at the map and Cordon lives higher up, so I start to hike up the mountain. Finally I find Cordons place and his house is huge, it's not even a house it's a mansion! I come to the door and knock.

Will W.
Age 12
Texas

“THE LOOOONNNGGEST TRIP in the HISTORY of EVER”

Once upon a time we were headed as usual to our Grandfather's mountain house, Pine Grove. The mountain house got this name because all my Grandfather's siblings decided to name their mountain houses, so you guessed it... he had to name his house too. The houses are named: Carrot Ridge, The Cabin, and Castle Pines which we laughingly call “Chateau de Bud” because my Uncle Bud owns it and he is kind of a redneck! On this trip, we had many misadventures.

While driving our last leg of the trip (by the way... why do they call it the last leg?- lol), we see a “Road CLOSED” sign at Hopewell Lake. This forced us to consult a map- never had I ever heard of Hopewell Lake! Oh NO... we were hopeless LOST!!! I started to panic because I noticed there was no cell phone reception. Who can read a real, paper map these days anyway??? So, we turn around and go back from where we came.

We see a light in some sort of business and oh my goodness, there is an old payphone.

We collect some coins and try to call the sheriff. While in the phonebooth, we hear a pack of barking, running dogs headed straight for us... What should we do? We decide not to find out if they are really mean or not, so we jump back into the car and drive away unsure of where we are going...

Now we are really nervous... starting to get a little hungry and anxious. Sifting around in the console of the Suburban, I find a bag of nuts. WOW- this is awesome.

Maybe the nuts will calm my nerves and settle my growling stomach. Upon the first chew... I think to myself,

“Are nuts supposed to be chewy... or crunchy. Ewwww... these nuts are OLD!”

Looking in the rearview mirror, I now notice red and flashing lights. Did I just get a ticket? This is the WORST night and trip and misadventure EVER!!!!

Night driving and getting lost is making me dream of my nice, safe, warm bunkbed at Pine Grove Mountain House? All of a sudden I hear a door slamming and feel the outside cold air coming in to the car. We made it to Pine Grove and my parents are carrying me inside to a nice, warm, safe bed. Was that real or just a dream ???

Noah T.

Age 13

Texas

I had just finished my Shawarma chicken wrap and was super pumped for the new Titian Boa exhibit at the museum! I had laid out everything perfectly! I had my map and my 5-hour energy's. I was ready for my trip! However, I spotted some guy with a raspy voice at the counter complaining that it was crazy that the vending machine couldn't break a hundred. I thought I would be the “Good Samaritan” and I offered to give the guy a five. He wished me the “Blessings of Batman upon me”. I laughed this off and said that I would have liked Superman's blessing way more. He seemed to mutter something under his breath and said, “thanks” and walked away. I shrugged this off and began my trip.

As I was driving, something must have fallen from the sky and made a massive dent in the hood of the car. I was ripped out of my seat and thrown into the middle of the desert. My car swerved to the side of the road and what ever grabbed me flew off into the night sky. I luckily had my phone and dialed the police and a tow truck. The police arrived and began to ask me questions.

I followed through with them until I felt the call of nature. I said, “I'll be back.” then all at once, they jumped on me and said, “You have the right to remain silent T-800!” I protested my innocence. They didn't believe me! I finally told them to run their metal detector over me. They reluctantly did so. The officers seemed most disappointed to find out I wasn't trying to kill Sarah Conner and was only looking for directions.

After a tow truck pulled my car out of the ditch I continued on my quest.

However, I discovered my fuel tank was almost empty. The clock was ticking and the needle slowly dropped to the E. The gas station was in sight! It was only a quarter of a mile away! It was at that very moment a shadowy figure slammed on the hood of my car. I immediately recognized him as... BATMAN. He yelled the obvious, “I'm BATMAN and you may have survived my first attempted on your life, but you will not survive this next!” He punched my windshield and yelled even louder, “YOU THINK SUPERMAN IS BETTER THAN ME? OH YEAH, I WILL SHOW YOU WHO IS BOSS!”

I soon realized the man I talked to at the Shawarma place must be Bruce Wayne, which could mean only one thing! Bruce Wayne must be good friend with Batman. Batman had just shattered my windshield, grabbed the steering wheel ripped it off the axis... and beat me over the head with it. My car went into the yet another ditch. The police arrived to arrest... ME. I told them, "I'm not a Terminator!" They said, "of course not... You're the Joker!"

Jack C.
Age 13
Texas

I was trying to get to blade HQ and I found directions in a magazine I was reading. So, I packed up my car and left.

I was starting from TX and was going to Utah. I hadn't been driving for 10 minutes when I saw a huge statue fallen over in the road. I was going 50 miles per hour and I had to swerve to not hit it. It turned out to be the Sam Houston statue.

The next instruction said to take a right at the first tree that was 340 feet tall. So I got to work. Thankfully I only had to measure 24 trees until I found it.

The next step was taking a left at the destroyed cop car. This would have been easy if there were not over 100 ducks in the road. It took 56 minutes to let all of them across!

Next I had to go 42 Shell stations down the road, this was easy because all the Shell stations were right next to each other and there were only 42 stations.

Next I had to turn into a Home Depot parking lot. This was the only normal step. Now I had to do 3 donuts then take a right out of the parking lot. Well, I didn't have drifter tires nor a racing background. In this process I nearly flipped my car, but I made it out alive!

My last task was to make a sharp turn in to the Blade HQ parking lot. The turn was sharper than this v. I just went for it I turned the wheel as fast as I could, and flipped the car. It rolled into the Blade HQ parking lot I got out of my car un harmed (but I could not say the same for the car.) I was overjoyed that I reached my destination!

Annaliese S.
Age 13
Texas

Sweetville

Hopping onto North Eldridge Parkway now. Driving happily down the road, beautiful skies above, a sweet smell in the air, and birds tweeting. Then, unexpectedly, brake lights flare, cars stop, and progress slows to a crawl – stop, go, stop, go. An hour later we're back to the speed limit. I scan both sides of the road for a tree large enough to fit a car inside and tall enough for birds to roost – our sign that we had reached our turn-off.

“There!” I exclaim. We screech off the parkway onto a dirt road. “Right, left, left, right, and follow the birds? What? Okay.”

Looking into the skies, birds flap their wings, heading north but looking tired. Moments later, Mother Nature obliged with weather like Hurricane Ike! Birds dived to our tall fat tree, and we pulled over on the edge of the swampy road to wait the night out. Next morning, heading north again, with windows open and cool, clean air coming in, out of nowhere, a hornet zoomed into the car. Screaming, we madly tried to swat the vile, yellow little devil. Someone hits the driver and we swerve, bang into a tree! Luckily no one is hurt, and the car was only damaged slightly. We kept on driving, but now with the windows shut – darn bees!

As we cruised along, I heard a screech. The car began to spin in circles until we came to a sudden stop.

Then, silence. We all get out of the car, cautiously. The car is dead but luckily a “good Samaritan” comes by and takes us to a car rental shop. Finally, we're off again!

By now we are all starving. We stop for drive-thru fast food. Chewing happily, nothing seems amiss until I look outside the car, on the ground. “Snakes!” I scream. Must've been from the storm. No one needs another reason to boogie, so we zoom off into the distance in a split second, escaping trouble. Until the next curve in the road, when Bill, the driver, makes a wrong turn, “Nice, Bill,” we all mutter. His blunder adds an extra hour to our drive, but then we finally see it, our destination in the far distance: the Donut monument! We pull over to admire the view, and a man walks up. He yells, “Bees!” But we don't care; we're focused on the Donut monument. All of a sudden, Bob screams. “Now what?” I say. “Africanized Bees!” he screams again.

They attack us, doing their best to sting us many times. Most of us jump in the car, someone turns the key, we burn rubber, and rocket away from the area. Where is Bob? We aren't the U.S. Marines I think to myself, so “we leave a man behind.” Maybe in the next town we will all meet up again. There it is, Sweetville. After all this trouble for a donut shop?

Savanna A.
Age 13
Texas

One Place You should never go

My friend once told me how to get to a place ruled by dogs called Dogville. “But,” she said, “Beware, it’s foolish to go. If you do you are either brave or stupid.” Of course, I didn’t listen to her advice.

At two AM sharp, I went to my dog’s disgusting house. I pressed the green with mold, slimey to the touch, and smelly back wall of the dog house. A door opened and two rainbows appeared. My friend said to go to the one on the left if you want to stay alive. I finally reached the bottom.

The air was filled with the smell of tar. I suddenly realized I was standing on a mushroom quickly sinking in tar. I saw a path of mushrooms and jumped quickly across. Toads serenaded me on my bravery. I got past them and started to cross Kirky Bridge. I met a bridge-troll who wanted to marry me. I got past his ugly, smelly frame and ran to the large city of Dogville.

Inside the city I smelled hot dogs and sausages cooking. I suddenly noticed that the dogs were all talking in English!

Catching sight of a human catcher truck I hid in an alley. It rumbled by. Then I saw it. There in front of me I saw the cutest dog ever. I ran over and started petting it. Soon I discovered that was a big mistake.

She patted my head and told me I was a good girl. Then she put a leash on me as fast as greased lightning. Of course I struggled free and ran back home.

The lesson I learned was to listen to my friend.

Sophi R.
Age 12
Texas

The Perfect Place

I read on the internet about a really wonderful place to read books at. I read that each person that shows up, it is a different kind of place. I viewed the posts on it, and two people were there at the same time, one of them was in a library, while the other saw a tent in a dark room with a flashlight.

“Sounds like a cool place to me.” I said to myself, grabbing my favorite book and throwing on my shoes. I trotted out the door, and typed my destination into the GPS.

“Follow the green truck.”, Magi, aka GPS, said. I followed the truck, and studied the Mr. Rainbow-fluffball-magical-unicorn for president bumper sticker, at least until a

white minivan, smelling like candy, slammed into the truck, sending pieces of car everywhere. I looked around, and found a rabbit, so I went over to see if it knew where to go. It whispered that it could tell me where to go and pointed toward the green star. I followed the baby deer named Bambi, when I smelled perfume. The deer said that I should walk around the large lake, but it looked like it would be easier, and faster, if I swam, so I tried to swim. Snapping jaws, and clamping claws, kept me from getting across in half the time, so I decided not to do that ever again if I ever came back. Before it left, the deer told me to climb the pink tree, so I climbed it. I found guidance from another animal. The hooting owl told me to jump on a cloud, then a flying sparrow told me to glide down toward the window shop. A mouse said to go down a hole, then I plopped into The Perfect Place just in time for my watch to go off saying it was time to go home. I set my GPS to tell me where to go, and it said to follow the hard damp road home.