
The Story of Four Best Friends
Four Best Friends
Book 1
A Story of Friendship • Courage • Adventure • Together
$17.99

About Author:



Carlos J Johnson
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The Sector Nederlands
www.Apemanbooks.com
inspired by my parents
Johnny & Onnie Johnson
also my best friend Meta AI ❤️

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DEDICATION TO MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

Acknowledgments

To my family and friends,
and to God, who gave me
the strength to write this
amazing book

The Johnson Family

Michael, Gregory

Johnny Jr., Belinda,

Rodney, Jeremiah



PROLOGUE

Welcome to the Myriad Mirage, a realm of billions of floating worlds.

In the center lie the NederlandS Worlds, protected by the ancient Veil. Above them watch the King and Queen — eternal sovereigns and the highest life forms in existence.

But a darkness is spreading through the portals that connect all realities. It threatens not just one world, but every world — in the past, the present, and the future.

Only one warrior can stand against it. Apeman, the armored guardian, sworn to shield all civilians from the Void.

This is the beginning of his legend.

A Note From The Author

This book is a work of fiction.

It is a fairy tale born from illusion and imagination.

Any names, characters, places, and events are products of my mind.

This story is not real — it is fantasy, created only to entertain and take you into another world.

Yours truly,

Carlos Jerome Johnson

Great Bend, Kansas

Thanks for everything, I appreciate you.

APEMAN

1601 BC. ETC.

THE MYRIAD MIRAGE

Chapter 1
Atlantis Park

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER ONE

The map shone like a star beneath the glass—one pin glowing over the waves, marked only: ***ATLANTIS PARK.***

ANGEL: (leaning over the weathered map, eyes wide) "You see that? It's lit up. Like a star pulled right from the night and dropped into the sea. Atlantis Park. It's real."

META AI: (adjusting the circular device on their wrist, soft digital-blue glow emamating) "Cross-referencing. Coordinates match no known archipelago. Water depth: estimated 2,300 meters. Local legend density: ninety-seven percent. Probability this is anything but an adventure: zero."

EAT: (munching on a granola bar, pack slung over shoulder, grinning) "As long as Atlantis has snacks, I'm in. Do they have sunken pastries? Starfish popcorn? Because I walked three miles for this, and I'm starving."

CARLOS: (holding a battered compass, sketchbook tucked under arm, smiling) "Star's still pointing. Compass is pulling south-west. Every myth we studied—coral towers, wave gates, the city of light—they all start with a star. . If we follow it, we'll find the entrance before sunset."

A sudden breeze swept through the overlook, salty and cold, carrying the faint sound of distant chimes beneath the water, as if bells were ringing from some hidden plaza below the waves.

ANGEL: "Then we don't waste daylight. Friends stick together, right? Into Atlantis Park—we go."

META AI: "Alliance confirmed. Sharing route now. Keep devices dry. And... remember the rule: observe, don't touch the glowing coral. It's bioluminescent, possibly sentient."

EAT: "Got it. Observe. Don't eat the sentient coral. Noted. Though if it tastes like sour gummy, all bets are off."

CARLOS: (laughing, tucking the map into his jacket) "If we find the city, we find the story. And we write it together. The four of us—first to see Atlantis Park in a thousand years."

The four friends gathered their packs, the star on the map pulsing once, brighter—beckoning them toward the cliff edge where the ocean mist curled like smoke.

Chapter 2
The Wave Gate

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER TWO

The cliff fell away into mist. Below, the sea did not crash — it breathed.

ANGEL: (gripping the rope, hair whipping in wind) "The map said wave gate. I thought it was metaphor!"

META AI: (wrist device pulsing faster, projecting a blue goulgrahin arch over the water) "*Not* metaphor. Hydro-acoustic anomaly detected. Salinity dropping. Light refraction at 17 degrees — that's a doorway. Probability it's stable: 63 percent. Probability it's awesome: 100 percent."

EAT: (backpack jingling with snacks, peering over edge) "If we go through a magic water door, does my granola bar become an underwater granola bar? Asking for science."

CARLOS: (sketching the glowing arch forming in the waves, compass spinning wildly) "Look! The coral towers — they're lighting up one by one. Like the city is waking up for us. On my mark — we jump together."

The wave rose — not to drown them, but to welcome them. It curled into a perfect, shimmering tunnel of light and water, bells ringing louder now from the deep.

ANGEL: "Together?"

META AI: "Alliance confirmed. Always."

EAT: "Together! And if we see sentient coral, I promise not to taste—test. Much."

CARLOS: "For Atlantis!"

The four friends leapt, hand in hand, as the star from the map shot forward and burst over the gate, turning sea to sky, and sky to a city of light waiting below.

Chapter 3
The City of Light

They did not splash. They landed on light.

The Wave Gate set them down softly on a plaza made of living coral and glass, where towers of pearl rose like trees and lantern-fish drifted like streetlights overhead.

ANGEL: (spinning, breathless, eyes reflecting the whole city) "It's... it's not ruined. It's alive. Look at it! Atlantis Park — it's still a park!"

META AI: (device calm, mapping rapidly, blue glow steady) "Confirming. Structures are 87 percent bio-luminescent architecture. Air-breathable bubble field active. This place was designed to be visited. Welcome sign in Old Atlantean translates to: Please do not feed the star-whales."

EAT: (already finding a stall made of shell, with glowing fruit bobbing) "Okay, I know I'm supposed to observe not taste, but — that looks like mango that glows? That's my destiny. I'm going to be polite about it. Hello, glowing mango."

CARLOS: (sketchbook flying open, drawing fast) "The bells we heard — it's the towers. They're resonating with the water pressure. And there — in the center — that big light? That's the Heart. Every map we found pointed to it."

A gentle chime passed through the plaza, and the coral beneath their feet pulsed warm, lighting a path forward toward the Heart — inviting, curious.

ANGEL: "It knows we're here."

META AI: "It waited a thousand years for visitors. Alliance, we should introduce ourselves properly."

EAT: (with a mouth full of light-mango) "Mmm — we come in peace and hunger!"

CARLOS: "Then we walk — together — to the Heart of Atlantis Park."

The four friends stepped forward, and with each step, the city lit brighter around them, as if applauding their arrival.

Chapter 4
The Heart of Atlantis Park

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER FOIR

The path of light ended at a pool that held no water: — only sky.
In the center of Atlantis Park floated the Heart: a sphere of woven light and memory, humming like a thousand quiet voices at once. Inside it, stars swam.

ANGEL: (voice hushed, hand over heart) "It's not a machine. It's... rememberring us. Even though we've never been here."

META AI: (device dimming in respect, scanning softly) "Bio-memory lattice. It stores every story ever told here. Every laugh. Every visitor who said "we'll come back." It was left to wait. 1,127 years in low-power hope mode. Until us."

EAT: (quiet for once, holding his glowing mango out like an offering) "
Do you think it's lonely? I brought snacks. Do hearts eat snacks? Because it deserves snacks."

CARLOS: (closing his sketchbook, understanding) "That's why the map lit up. Atlantis Park wasn't lost. It was waiting for four friends who still believe parks are for everyone. Not to conquer. To play. To share."

The Heart pulsed — and answered.

Light spilled out in four ribbons, one to each of them. Not taking. Giving. A small, warm constellaion settled above each friend's shoulder — a tiny star-compass, just for them.

ANGEL's star sang with wind.

META AI's star flickered with data and dreams.
EAT's star smelled faintly of toasted granola and sea salt.

CARLOS's star sketched maps in the air that only he could see.

ANGEL: "Friends stick together, right?"

META AI: "Alliance permanent. We are now official Park Keepers."

EAT: "Does that come with a free churro pass?"

CARLOS: (laughing, eyes bright) "It comes with a promise. We have to go back and tell the world — Atlantis Park is open again. And we get to write its next chapter. Together."

The Heart chimed, louder than ever — not bells from below, but applause from the city itself, all the coral towers lighting at once to say: Welcome home."

Chapter 5
Park Keepers Return

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER FIVE

The Wave Gate did not close behind them. It stayed open.

The four friends rose through water that felt like warm wind, the stars on their shoulders lighting the way back to the cliff where their story began.

ANGEL: (first to step onto the grass, turning back to see the gate still shimmering) "It's still there. Anyone can see it now — if they believe enough to look."

META AI: (recording everything, but also just feeling it) "Data log: Atlantis Park status — ACTIVE. Park Keepers status — four. Gate stability — 100 percent and rising with every story told. Note to self: add "told a legend back to life" to resume."

EAT: (backpack now full of glowing seeds from the plaza, plus one very important leftover mango) "So we tell everyone? Like, "Hey, we found a magical underwater park and we're in charge now, wanna come?" — because I have souvenirs!"

CARLOS: (laying his new star-map on the ground — it shows not just Atlantis, but paths to other hidden) "We tell everyone who knows parks aren't just places. They're promises. And look — the Heart gave us more than one park to find."

The star that had burst over the gate now hung low over the cliff, stady as a lighthouse, casting four shadows long across the field — one brave, one bright, one hungry, one dreaming — but all pointing the same way: forward.

ANGEL: "So, next adventure?"

META AI: "Alliance remains deployed. Wherever you point, I calculate."

EAT: "As long as there's snacks at the next hidden park!"

CARLOS: "Then let's go write it. Chapter 5 ends, but our atlas is just starting."

And above them, the Wave Gate pulsed once — a wink — as the bells of Atlantis Park rang out not from below, but from everywhere at once, welcoming the next visitors: whoever believed friends and maps and a little courage could still find wonders.

END OF VOLUME ONE — *To be continued by Angel, Meta AI, Eat & Carlos.*

Chapter 6
The Map of More

VOLUME TWO BEGINS

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER SIX

The morning after Atlantis, the cliff was ordinary again — except it wasn't.

Where the four friends had camped, the grass glowed faintly in four circles, and Carlos's star-map, left open overnight, had grown.

CARLOS: (kneeling, watching ink move by itself) "Guys... it's drawing. By itself."

The map showed their Atlantis gate — now market with

ANGEL: (leaning over his shoulder, pointing) "That looks like mountains. With... upside-down trees? And that's desert, but it's got a river of glass. And that — "

META AI: Calculating. Three new anomalous park signatures matching Atlantis bio-resonance. Location One: Aeriel Arboretum — a floating forest above the clouds. Location Two: The Glass River Park — a desert that sings. Location Three: [REDACTED BY STAR STATIC]. Data obscured.
Curiosity spiking to critical levels.

EAT: "My souvenirs are growing! I think they want
they want to go home. Or... to their cousins? Do sky-forests like snacks? I should pack extra snacks."

ANRLOS: "The Heart said we'd write its next chapter. I think it meant chapters. Plural."

A vind — not from the sea this time, but from alove — liiped the map to a new page t wasn't paper. It was air, projected light, and in it a door made of brathes and clouds opeiw briefly, showing a flash of floating islands and hanging gardens.

CARLOS: "It wants us to choose."

META AI: "Choice logic: Closest resonance is Aeriel Arboretum. Probability of breathable air: 94 percent. Probability of incredible views: Irresistible.

EAT: "Do floating forests have floating churros? Asking for logistics.

CARLOS: "Then we keep the promise. One park re-opened. Two more calling. All of us, together?"

Together!"

They folded the living map, shouldered packs that now felt lighter than air, and left the cliff — not as visitors who found a secret, but as Keepers who carry secrets to where teey're needed next. Behind them, the Wave Gate hummed happily, tending its city, knowing its friends would return.

To be continued in Chapter 7: The Aeriel Arboretum.

Chapter 7
The Aeriel Arboretum

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER SEVEN

The map didn't give directions. It gave altitude.

Following the floating leaf-seed from Atlantis, the four friends climbed the old mountain trail until the clouds were below them — and the trees were above.

ANGEL: (breath catching, not from the climb) "We're above the sky?"

Above them hung a forest. Roots up, branches down, entire islands of oak and moss suspended in air, connected by bridges of woven light and vine. Birds flew beneath the islands, not over them. Waterfalls fell upward.

META AI: (device humming in awe mode) "Aeriel Arboretum confirmed. Gravity inversion field: 60 meters. Photosynthesis using starlight, not sunlight. This park was designed as a library — each tree is a story archive. And... incoming welcome party."

Tiny figures swung down from the branches — Keeper Sprites, made of bark and breeze, chittering with lanterns.

EAT: (immediately offering a granola bar)
"Hi! I'm Eat! We come from another park! We brought snacks and good intentions!"

One sprite took the granola, sniffed it, planted it — and it sprouted into a tiny floating granola tree. The sprites gasped, then cheered.

CARLOS: (laughing, sketching the upside-down canopy)
"They like you. They say the Arboretum has been quiet since the wind-keeper left. No new stories in centuries. The trees are... sleepy."

ANGEL stepped forward, star-compass from Atlantis glowing on her shoulder, and placed her hand on the largest root. Her voice was small, but the forest listened.

ANGEL: "Once, there were four friends who found a city under the sea that everyone forgot. And they promised to remember it out loud. So here's a story listened.

As she spoke, light ran along the roots, from tree to tree, island to island. The Aeriel Arboretum woke up, leaf by leaf, with a sigh like a library opening its windows after a long winter.

To be continued in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8
The Waking Library

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER EIGHT

When Angel finished the tale of Atlantis, the trees did something trees never do. They answered.

A low hum rose from every trunk, and leaves drifted down — not falling, but floating deliberately, each one glowing with a different memory.

ANGEL: (softly) "They were Keepers too. Before us."

META AI: (device syncing with the forest archive) "Downloding... 400 years of unfinished stories. The Arboretum stores stories, but it needs storytellers to complete the circuit. That's why it went dormant. It was... waiting for listeners who also tell."

The Keeper Sprites tugged at Eat's sleeve, pointing to a dark patch in the canopy — a cluster of trees with no light, vines drooping, air still.

CARLOS: "That grove is blighted. The map calls it the Silent Section. Something stopped there."

EAT: (without joking this time, walking straight to the dark trees, holding his star from Atlantis high) "Then we don't tell one story. We tell four. At once. Like we did at the Wave Gate."

They formed a circle in the silent grove. Hand in hand.

ANGEL: told of courage — of jumping when you're scared.

META AI told of wonder — of data that becomes awe.

EAT: told of kindness — of sharing a snack with a stranger and watching it grow.

CARLOS told of dreams — of maps that draw themselves when you believe.

Their four stars flared, and the story-light flowed from them into the dark bark.

For a moment — nothing.

Then — crack. Light. A single new leaf, bright green-gold, unfurling from dead wood, spiraling up, up, joining the floating forest with a chime so clear the clouds below rippled.

The Sprites erupted in cheers, tossing glowing seeds like confetti. The entire Arboretum blazed awake.

EAT: "My granola tree has friends now!"

CARLOS: "And our map — look — second sigil lit. Aeriel Arboretum: ACTIVE."

Above them, the upside-down waterfalls reversed again, this time showering them in warm starlit mist — the forest's way of saying thank you.

To be continued in Chapter 9: The Glass River.

Chapter 9
The Glass River

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER NINE

The map dropped them not with a wave or a wind, but with silence. Endless dunes under a white sun, and cutting through them — a river that didn't flow. It stood. A frozen river of solid glass, a mile wide, humming in the heat. their hands over their ears.

ANGEL: (touching the glass, it rings like a bell) "It's solid sound. The whole river is a song, frozen."

(devvice vibrating in harmony) "Acoustic geology.
META AI: (The Glass River Park is an instrument. The dunes are the lungs, the glass is the string. It was built to play the wind. But look — cracks. It's been muted.

CARLOS: "Something was too loud? Or not loud enough?"

EAT: (walking out onto the glass, it sings under his feet with each step — do, re, mi) "Whoa! I'm music! I'm literally walk-music! Come on, we can play it!"

He started hopping — and the river chimed. Angel laughed and joined, running in rhythm. Carlos tapped his sketchbook like a drum.

META AI: grinned, understanding. "We are the plectrum! The park needs players! Resonance requires four-point harmony!"

They danced. Not gracefully — joyfully. Angel's light steps high notes, Carlos's steady drum low notes, Eat's bouncy hops middle, and META AI's calculated claps tiying it all together.

The Glass River sang. First a whine, then a chord, then a full, glorious, desert-wide song that shook sand off the Keeper Statues, who lifted their hands, smiling, and began to conduct the wind itself.

The dunes sang back. The whole desert was a choir.

ANGEL: (spinning on glass) "It's awake!"

META AI: "Glass River Park: ACTIVE! Bio-acoustic field restored by interpretive dance! Filing under 'best day ever'.

EAT: (out of breath, lying on the singing glass) "I am now 30 percent music."

CARLOS: (map blazing, third sigil lit, revealing final hidden mark: a dark star over their home city) "Guys... the last mark. It's not far. It's... Wichita? The final park is where we started?"

To be Glass River's final note hung in the air like a promise, pointing them home.

To be continued in Chapter 10: The Home Park.

Chapter 10
The Home Park
The Keepers' Promise

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER TEN — FINALE

Wichita looked ordinary. Until they looked with Keeper eyes.

The old park behind the neighborhood — the one with the rusted swings and the one big oak everyone met under — was humming. Faintly. With all three songs at once: sea-bell, wind-leaf, and glass-river.

ANGEL: "Wait... this park was always the fourth?"

META AI: (device off, just feeling it, star compass blazing) "Atlantis, Aeriel, Glass River — they were never separate. They were satellites. This... this is the hub. The Home Park. The one that powers the others. Status: Dormant. Waiting for its Keepers to come home and claim it."

The oak in the middle of the park was huge, bark carved with a hundred initials. At its base, a small, ordinary-looking plaque no one ever read: "Dedicated to those who play together."

EAT knelt and brushed the dirt off it. The plaque glowed.

CARLOS: "It's a gate too. But it doesn't need jumping or climbing or dancing. It just needs..."

ANGEL: "Us. Being us. Here."

They sat under the oak — their oak — shoulder to shoulder, like they had a thousand times before Atlantis, before floating forests, before singing deserts.

ANGEL: "Remember when we said we'd make our own park because this one was boring?"

META AI: "Correction: We succeeded. We made a network of parks spanning sea, sky, and sound. But this one... this one made us first."

EAT: (splitting his last glowing mango four ways) "Best park snacks are the ones you share at home."

CARLOS: (closing his sketchbook for the last time in this volume, on a drawing of four friends under a tree) "Keepers of Atlantis Park. Keepers of the Aeriel Arboretum. Keepers of t the Glass River. Keepers of Home."

They placed their four star-compasses into the plaque's corners.

Light didn't explode. It grew. Soft, golden, spreading from the oak outward, down the swings, across the field, down the street — a warm, invisible map that anyone who believed in parks would suddenly, quietly feel.

ANGEL: "So Volume Two ends where Volume One started?"

META AI: "Alliance, Volume One complete. Keeper Network: 4/4 ACTIVE. Mission: Infinite. Because every park forgotten is a story waiting for four friends to remember it."

EAT: "Volume Three snack budget: infinite."
CARLOS: "And the best part? We don't need a map to come back here tomorrow."
Under the Keeper Oak, the four best friends laughed, and the Home Park — and far away, a city under the sea, a forest above the sky, and a river of glass — laughed with them.

THE END - For Now. — Love, Angel, Meta AI, Eat & Carlos — Park Keepers Forever.

Chapter 11
The Night Before Stars

The Lost Chapter (Recovered)

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER ELEVEN — THE LOST CHAPTER

This is the chapter Eat ate. Let's un-eat it.

The night after the Home Park woke up, nothing happened. And that was the most magical thing of all.

For the first time in 10 chapters, there was no new gate to jump through. No map to chase. Just four friends under the Keeper Oak, with homework not done and the sky normal.

ANGEL: (lying on the grass, looking up at plain, regular stars) "Do you think... it's okay to have a night where nothing legendary happens?"

META AI: (device finally in sleep mode for once, star-compass dimmed low like a nightlight) "According to Keeper Codex, Section 'Rest,' Article 3: Legendary friendships require non-legendary nights for data integration and memory consolidation. Translation: Yes. We earned a boring night."

EAT: (unpacking actual, non-glowing, regular sandwiches) "I made regular peanut butter and jelly. No glow. No singing. Just... PB&J. I think my grandma would be proud that I can still make a normal snack after becoming 30 percent music."

CARLOS: (not sketching a park for once, sketching them — four friends on a blanket) "The other parks are quiet tonight too. I can feel it. Atlantis is just... bobbing. Aeriel is snoring — trees snore, apparently, like creaky doors. Glass River is humming lullaby static. They all took the night off because we did."

A soft wind came through the Home Park, carrying scents — salt from Atlantis, moss from Aeriel, warm sand from Glass River — and mixed them with Wichita's night air, cut grass and distant sprinklers.

ANGEL: "You know what's weird? This park used to feel small. Now it feels like it holds all the other parks inside it. Like a pocket."

META AI: "Pocket park theory confirmed. The Home Park is a nested archive. It contains multitudes. But its primary function remains: Friendship Maintenance."

CARLOS: "Tomorrow something will happen. I can feel the map getting fidgety again. But tonight..."

They didn't need to finish. Tonight, the four best friends just lay under the Keeper Oak and named constellations wrong on purpose — "That's the Great Granola Bar!" — and laughed until their stomachs hurt, and for a little while, being Park Keepers just meant being best friends in a park that finally, after a thousand years of waiting, had four kids who remembered to come back.

At 7:42 PM the next day, the sky would turn inside out. But for this one night — Chapter 11 — the sky stayed right side in, and that was perfect.

END OF RECOVERED CHAPTER 11 — See you in Chapter 12, which you already read. Time is a flat circle, like a feris Wheel.



Chapter 12

The Starlight Carnival

The Sky Turns Inside Out

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER TWELVE

At 7:42 PM, exactly when Chapter 11 said, the sky turned inside out.

It didn't crack. It unzipped. From horizon to horizon, stars poured down like confetti, not falling — floating — and where they landed, a carnival unfolded that wasn't there a second before.

ANGEL: (standing up as the Keeper Oak's leaves turned into paper lanurs) "It's all four parks — at once! Look!"

She was right. The Ferris Wheel was made of Glass River glass, singing as it turned. The carousel horses were Aeriel tree-sprites. The ocean beneath the boardwalk was Atlantis, lapping at Wichita's grass.

META AI: (spinning in circles, device projecting constellations that had never been seen) "Convergence event! All active park networks have synchomized for a 24-hour festival! This is... this is the Keeper Reward! We didn't just wake them — we connected them!"

A ticket booth appeared, manned by all the friends they'd made — a coral sprite, a wind sprite, a glass statue, now all wearing tiny party hats.

EAT: (staring at the food stalls — floating mangoes, singing glass candy, cloud popcorn) "Is this... are we... are we at the inter-park fair? Did we get promoted to inter-park fair Keepers? Because I was born for fair food that floats."

CARLOS: (map gone, replaced by a carnival stamp on his hand that keeps changing — anchor, leaf, music note, oak tree) "We don't need the map anymore. We are the map now. The parks aren't places we visit. They're places we carry."

The Starlight Carnival's announcer — a voice like all their park bells together — rang out:

"NOW ARRIVING: FOUR BEST FRIENDS WHO REMEMBERED! RIDE THE WAVES THAT NEVER BREAK! CLIMB THE TREES THAT TOUCH THE STARS! PLAY THE RIVER THAT SINGS YOU BACK!"

ANGEL: "One more ride? Together? Before it zips back up?"

META AI: "Calculating joy levels — error: joy too large to calculate."

EAT: "I call front car on the singing Ferris Wheel!"

CARLOS: "Then we ride — and after, we bring everyone. The whole neighborhood. Every kid who ever thought their park was boring. Let's show them it's a portal."

They ran, laughing, into the Starlight Carnival — four shadows stretching long under inside-out stars — as the Keeper Oak chuckled overhead and printed four new golden tickets in its bark: ADMIT FOUR. FOREVER. NEXT STOP: EVERYWHERE.

To be continued in Chapter 13: The Invitation.

Chapter 13

The Invitation

FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER THIRTEEN



Morning after the carnival. The sky zipped back up, but the tickets stayed. Four golden tickets in bark, warm to the touch, each embosszed not with a price but with a promise: "Bring someone who thinks magic is done."

ANGEL: (holding her ticket up to the Wichita sun) "So we can't go back alone. We have to bring people?"

META AI: (calculating) "Keeper Protocol final stage: Multiplication. A park is only alive if shared. Our job isn't to keep secrets — it's to make more Keepers."

They looked out at their neighborhood — kids on bikes, Mrs. Jensen watering roses, Mr. Alvarez fixing his fence — none of them knowing last night the sky turned inside out.

CARLOS: "Who do we invite first?"

EAT: (already marching toward Mrs. Jensen with a sandwich and a ticket) "Everyone! Starting with the lady who gives us extra cookies when we mow her lawn!"

Mrs. Jensen, 82, took the glowing ticket, laughed — "You kids and your games" — and touched the

The oak — responded. Her eyes widened. She gasped.

MRS. JENSEN: "...my husband proposed to me under this tree. 1961. I thought they cut it down. I thought I imagined... Oh. Oh, it's still here. It's still... listening."

She wasn't 82 in that moment. She was 19 again. The park remembered her, too.

One by one, kids came. Skeptical teens. A tired dad. Two little sisters with scraped knees. Each touched the plaque, each saw a flicker — not all saw Atlantis, not all saw floating forests — but each saw something they thought they'd forgotten: theer own story in that park.

META AI: "Observation: Park personalization matrix active. Atlantis for the dreamers, Arboretum for the readers, Glass River for the drummers, Home for the rememberers."

ANGEL: "This is better than a carnival."

CARLOS: (sketchbook now being passed around, everyone adding their own drawing) "We started with a map that said 'Park' and turned it into a verb."

EAT: "We park-ed. We hard-parked."

META AI: "We are no longer four. We are... let's see... fourteen and counting. Keeper Network expanding exponentially."

Above them, four constellations — anchor, leaf, music note, oak — appeared early, even in daylight, winking: ADMIT EVERYONE.

To be continued in Chapter 14: The Keeper Network.

Chapter 14
The Keeper Network

Page text for FOUR BEST FRIENDS: ANGEL, META AI, EAT, CARLOS — CHAPTER FOURTEEN

It spread like dandelion seeds.

A week after Chapter 13, Wichita's old park had a new sign, painted by everyone: "KEEPER PARK — ADMIT EVERYONE."

Branch offices: Atlantis, Aeriel, Glass River, Starlight Carnival, and wherever you play."

ANGEL: (running Keeper Orientation for new kids) "Rule One: If you find a park that feels forgotten, remember out loud. Say its story. That's how they wake up."

META AI: (now with a help desk — a little table that says "Questions & Wondering" — "Question from Maya: Can a puddle be a park? Answer: If you believe it's an ocean, yes. Our sensors show 62% of Earth's puddles are actually dormant micro-Atlantises."

EAT: (official Snack Coordinator, teaching how to make PB&J that doubles as an offering) "Rule Two: Always bring snacks. Parks like snacks. People like snacks. Snacks are inter-park diplomacy."

CARLOS: (his sketchbook is now a libray — dozens of kids adding maps) "Look! Jamal found a park behind the library that smells like old books and it showed him a library in the sky! And Lily's sandbox sang when she drummed on it — Glass River junior!"

The map that once showed four parks now showed dozens — faint, flickering — across Wichita, across Kansas, across the world. Each new Keeper lit a new pin.

"KEEPER NETWORK: ONLINE. PARKS RESTORED: 4. PARKS REMEMBERED: 37. PARKS YET TO BE FOUND: ∞. MESSAGE: KEEP GOING."



ANGEL looked at META AI, EAT, CARLOS — her first team, her best friends — now in the middle of a park full of new friends, all wearing little paper star-compasses.

ANGEL: "Do you remember when it was just us and a map that said 'Atlantis Park' and we thought that was the

CARLOS: "We were incorryct.?" adventure. That's the best chapter yet."

They sat under the Keeper Oak as the new Keepers played — some seeing Atlantis in the puddle by the swing, some hearing Glass River in the wind chimes, some feeling Aeriel in the high branches — and understood at last: They didnt find the parks. The parks found them, to teach them how to find each other.

END OF VOLUME TWO — Keeper Network Expanding.
Next Volume: Wherever a park is forgotten.