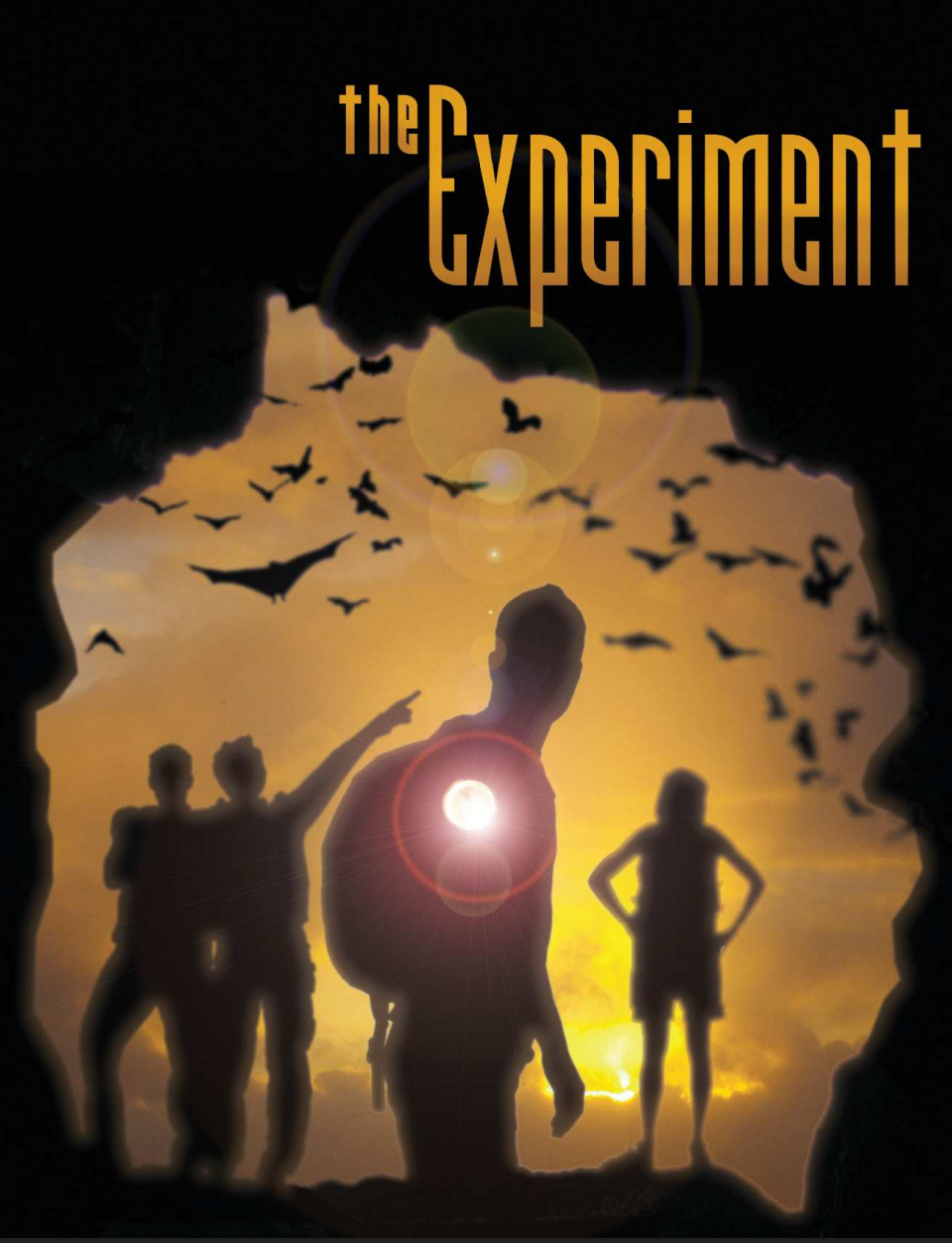
the Experiment



QREADS

Anne Schraff

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Mr. Ramos!" The psychology professor's voice startled Claudio as he sat before the computer.

"Oh, hi, Mr. Fruder," Claudio said. Odin Fruder was standing behind him in the empty computer lab. The man's tall, angular frame loomed like a bent, leafless tree. Claudio didn't like him. He wished he didn't need the money he earned as the professor's assistant.

"I see you're here very early today, Mr. Ramos," the professor said. "I like that. You're a dutiful fellow!"

"Yeah, I'm doing research for a project," Claudio said. "I don't get much time to keep

up with homework, what with my part-time job. And it's like a three-ring circus at home. I've got three noisy little brothers, you know."

Mr. Fruder smiled. He had a very large mouth and several gleaming gold teeth. Somehow his smile reminded Claudio of an alligator's smirk. Although Claudio really had nothing against the teacher, the man just looked sinister. "You have a hard time, don't you, Mr. Ramos?" he asked in a smooth voice. "You struggle to make ends meet. It's a real challenge for your family to stay afloat, eh?"

"Yeah," Claudio admitted, wondering what this was all about.

"Mr. Ramos, you are a very bright student. I would like you to do a special project for me. There would be additional pay, of course. But best of all, the project will be *interesting."* Mr. Fruder's eyes gleamed. "You see, I'm doing a very important research paper on how various people react to fearful situations. Your part is simple. I want you to take several students out to a cavern. Once you get there

you'll pretend to be trapped for a few hours. And you'll make note of the other students' behavior—"

Claudio was shocked. "That sounds—uh—really wild," he said nervously. How could he dupe his friends into being Fruder's unwitting guinea pigs?

"Your pay for the job would be excellent," Mr. Fruder said. "How much does your after-school job at that burger joint pay?"

"Uh—you know—minimum wage. Maybe a couple hundred bucks a month for part-time," Claudio said.

"For just one morning's work, I am offering a thousand dollars," Mr. Fruder said with a sly grin. He removed a stack of bills from his wallet. Then he wiggled the money under Claudio's nose. He looked like a fisherman dangling a worm in front of a hungry fish!

A thousand dollars? Claudio felt weak. The whole room seemed to dance.

■ ■ ■

So, what's this all about again?" Claudio asked. "I mean—it's not dangerous or anything, is it?"

Mr. Fruder settled his long body into a desk beside Claudio. "It's child's play. All you need to do is take three of your fellow students to this cavern." He took a map from his briefcase. "The directions are here. After you lead them deep inside, there will be a fake landslide and a giant boulder will block your escape."

"Huh? A landslide?" Claudio groaned. "That sounds risky."

"No, no, no! I'll send a fellow out there with a forklift. He'll simply drop a big boulder in front of the cavern entrance. It will make a loud noise, and you will cry, 'Oh! A landslide! We're trapped!' " The gold teeth in Mr. Fruder's mouth seemed to glitter with delight. "For the next few hours, your fellow students will scramble about, looking in vain for an escape—and *you* will

jot down their reactions for my research paper. The forklift guy will hurry back to shove the boulder aside. He'll pretend that he heard the landslide and came to help. Then *voilà*—you will be rescued! And *you* will be a thousand dollars richer!"

The idea of easy money sounded good to Claudio. His dad's wages as a clerk in a convenience store weren't that good. And even when his mom worked part-time there was never enough money.

Claudio figured he could help at home, buy himself a few things, and then throw a nice party for his friends to make up for putting them through the ordeal. Of course, they would never know what really had happened.

"I guess I could do it," Claudio said.

"Excellent. We shall plan it for Wednesday. Tell your fellow students that it's a field trip. Say that they're supposed to find prehistoric cave paintings that reveal the emotional level of the cave folk," Mr. Fruder said.

"So, should I just pick any three kids?" Claudio asked.

QREADS

SERIES 1

Black Widow Beauty
Danger on Ice
Empty Eyes
The Experiment
The Kula'i Street Knights
The Mystery Quilt
No Way to Run
The Ritual
The 75-Cent Son
The Very Bad Dream

SERIES 2

The Accuser
Ben Cody's Treasure
Blackout
The Eye of the Hurricane
The House on the Hill
Look to the Light
Ring of Fear
The Tiger Lily Code
Tug-of-War
The White Room

SERIES 3

The Bad Luck Play
Breaking Point
Death Grip
No Exit
No Place Like Home
Outcast
The Plot
Something Dreadful Down Below
Sounds of Terror
The Woman Who Loved a Ghost

SERIES 4

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Beasts
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Dimes to Dollars
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