

A young man with dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt and a black VR headset, is shown in profile, looking towards the left. Behind him is a large, glowing, blue and purple clock face with Roman numerals, set against a background of a sunset or sunrise over a desert landscape with rolling sand dunes. The overall scene is illuminated with vibrant, futuristic colors.

BLUE DELTA BOOKS

THE CLUB

JENNIFER LISS

CHAPTER 1

WORLD CAVE

The day started as a typical Saturday morning. My dad was going to the harbor. It was his favorite spot. He had wanted to be a pilot like his father. Yet planes hadn't flown in years. There wasn't enough oil for that. People rarely traveled anymore. Boats only carried goods. My dad liked watching them. He always asked me to join him. I usually had other plans.

This morning, I went to the underground mall. An arcade there had *World Cave*. That was the name of a game-trip. It was like a virtual game,

only better. The point was to travel as far and fast as possible. It was as close to real traveling as I could get.

World Cave was hard. I spent most of my time in the dark, feeling for cracks. This required patience and focus. If I found a crack, I had to have the right tools. Then I could break it open and enter a bright, new world. The feeling was such a rush.

Each world was worth points. Racking them up let me stay in the light longer. But if I wasn't careful, I would get sucked back into the cave. More exploring would begin.

Other *World Cave* travelers called out to me. "Hey, Kenny!"

I gave nods and fist bumps. At the arcade, I was treated like royalty. It was because of my status in *World Cave*. I had just reached 10,546

points. No other traveler was even close to me. Dax was in second. He had 8,432 points.

Dax and I had known each other since preschool. We weren't really friends. But because of *World Cave*, we respected each other. At least we acted like it. We were the best travelers in the arcade.

That morning, I played for a couple of hours. It wasn't a great session. I only scored 30 points. But gaining any points was better than losing them.

I left to get a burger. On my way to the food court, I stopped outside of The Club. My pulse quickened. *World Cave* was thrilling. But it was fake traveling. The Club was real.

At The Club, people could time travel. They could go into the past or future. It was the ultimate trip. But it was only for the very wealthy.

When I was six, my dad and I had come to the mall. I stopped outside of The Club then too.

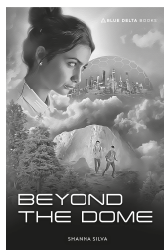
“I want to time travel!” I said.

My dad had laughed. “Kenny, one trip costs more than your mom and I make in a year.”

That was when I realized I would never step foot in The Club. I would never be a real traveler.

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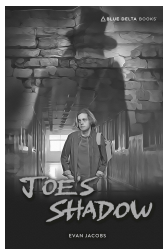
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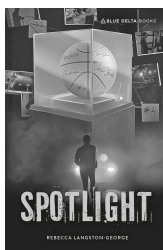
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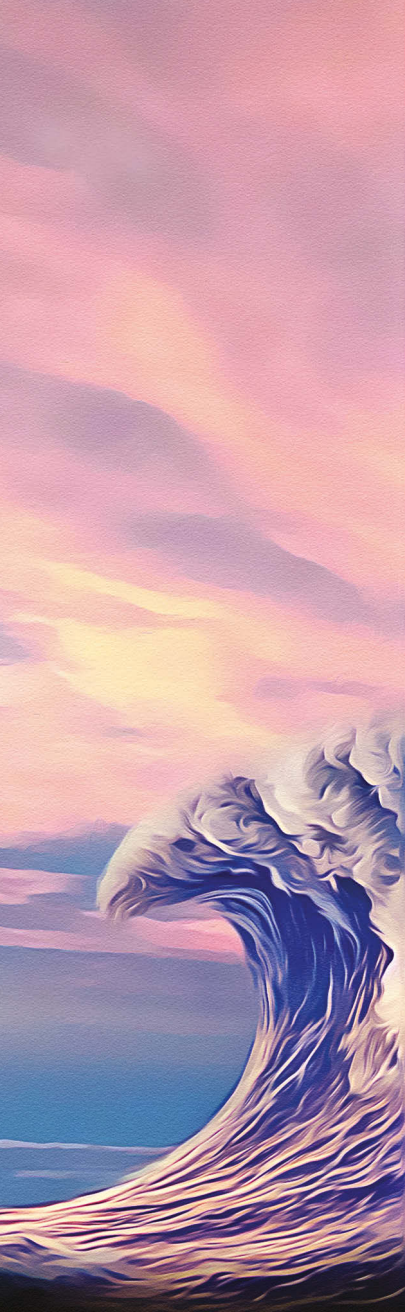


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SCIENCE FICTION

THE CLUB

Kenny dreams of traveling, but virtual reality is as close as he'll ever get to discovering new worlds.

Or is it? When Kenny is offered a time-traveling trip on the black market, it is everything he ever wanted and more. But making his dream come true comes at a steep price. Is he willing to pay it?



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