

BLUE DELTA BOOKS



# ESCAPE WORLD

GAIL HERMAN

## CHAPTER 1

# DECISIONS

**T**wyla looks around the crowded school lobby. The space appears different. Doors line every wall. Students point at them and whisper to friends.

For years, Twyla has hardly been to school. She wonders why Principal Becker would call this meeting right before graduation.

Finally, the principal speaks. “Welcome, class of 2079. As you know, our high school has been part of a new program. It’s been an

experiment—a test, if you will. Of course, you haven't taken many of those.” She laughs dryly. “All tests have been optional. There have been no requirements. Attending class has been a choice.”

“You've got that right!” Preen shouts.

Twyla's friends grin. None of them have gone to school either.

A girl up front shakes her head. It's Shandy, Twyla's ex-best friend. They were in the same science class this year. Twyla never went, though.

The principal continues. “There is one test you must take to graduate.”

A shocked silence falls over the room. Twyla leans forward to listen.

“We can't force students to take it. Your parents have no say either. You're all 18.” Principal Becker pauses. “But I highly recommend all students be tested. Even those

who have missed every class. Believe me. This test can change your life. A high school diploma is worth more now than ever before.”

Preen whispers to Twyla. “Don’t fall for it. I bet Becker just wants a raise. She’ll look better if more students take the test.”

“Everyone, please think carefully,” the principal urges.

“I *am* thinking!” Preen cries out. “I’m thinking about the fun things we’ll do instead of taking this test.”

Principal Becker frowns. “If you’re *not* taking the test, step through here.” She waves at the door behind her. “Right now.”

The room hums with voices. People whisper as they make up their minds. Twyla’s friends head to the door.

“Twyla! Come on!” Preen calls.

*What am I waiting for?* Twyla smiles and joins her friends. Still, something feels off. Principal Becker was so serious.

*How important is this test?* Twyla wonders.

One by one, all of Twyla's friends go through the door. Now it's her turn. She takes a step. Then she stops.

Twyla calls out to her friends. "We'll meet up after."

Nobody answers. They're already gone.

## CHAPTER 2

# DOOR #3

**T**wyla turns back to the lobby. It's half empty now. Principal Becker nods at her. Then the principal gives more details. The test will start in minutes. All students will work in groups.

“What is the test anyway?” one crashball player shouts. He flexes his biceps. “I’m ready for anything.”

*Nico, Twyla thinks. That’s his name.*

Crashball is the roughest sport in school. Players are known for being big and not very smart. *I wouldn’t want to be with any of them.*

Principal Becker explains. “The test takes place in escape worlds. Your mission is to get out alive.”

Twyla always loved escape worlds. She enjoyed timed puzzles the most. But she hasn’t been to one for years.

“In the beginning, there were escape rooms,” Principal Becker lectures. “These were small spaces. People solved made-up mysteries to escape. Players had to figure out puzzles. Some involved getting out of fake danger, like a plane crash. Later, the rooms turned into virtual worlds.”

The principal looks around at the students. “This test is a mix. It’s real *and* virtual. Beware. There may be actual danger. You’ll need puzzle skills. Knowledge, quick wits, and courage are your friends. The doors lead to various time periods. Escape worlds here are built around history.”

This is a lot to take in. Twyla's not sure how she feels. *Scared? Excited?* She decides it's both.

Shandy raises her hand. "How will we be graded?"

Twyla rolls her eyes.

"There are no grades," the principal says. "It's pass or fail. Those with the shortest escape times will pass. The ones who fail will join the students who have already left."

"Join them?" Twyla asks. "Where?"

"In a locked, below-ground community. There will be little food or light."

Nico frowns. "That sounds like prison."

Principal Becker nods. "Yes. There are 10 billion people on Earth. The world can't provide enough food or energy for everyone. Those who pass the test are our best and brightest. They're the ones who can solve our problems. They will need the resources."

The doors light up with numbers.

“Please check your PDs.”

Twyla looks at the personal device on her wrist. It flashes *Door #3*. She hurries over. Nico is already there. A theater kid named Dom is too. Shandy joins them.

*Uh-oh*, Twyla thinks. *This won't be good.*

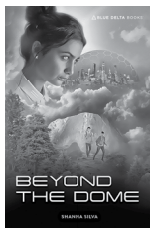
The door slides open. Nobody moves.

“Go!” the principal shouts.

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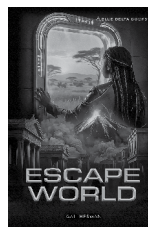
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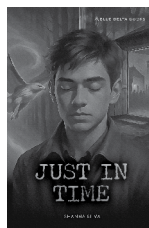
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DYSTOPIAN

# ESCAPE WORLD

In 2079, high school is optional, and so is the final exam. Twyla chooses to take the test but soon discovers there's a steep price to pay if she fails. To pass, she must navigate a series of immersive escape worlds. When Twyla is teamed with an unexpected assortment of classmates, the challenges feel even more daunting. Can the group escape the virtual worlds in time, or will failing the final exam cost them everything?



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