

M.G. HIGGINS

REBEL



MATH

GEOGRAPHY



STATS OF SPORTS IN AFRICA

MOST POPULAR SPORTS



FOOTBALL



CRICKET



RUGBY

FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS



TOP TEAMS IN CONFEDERATION OF AFRICAN FOOTBALL





FOOTBALL PASSED DOWN
FROM COUSIN BAAKO



CHAPTER 1

TO SEE THE WORLD

Dear Patrick,

Thank you for your letter. Your family and home in America sound very nice. I would like to visit your country one day. I would especially like to see Disneyland. And I would like to meet Mickey Mouse.

You asked me to describe my home and myself. I live in a small village in Africa. It is the dry season now. It is very dusty. In a few months the rains will come. Then the

ground will turn muddy. The grass will grow. I don't like mud. But we need the grass for our cattle.

I have a mother and father. I also have three younger sisters. I have many aunts, uncles, and cousins. Two of my grandparents live in our village. Our house is round. Our roof is made of reeds. The school is square. It has a blue metal roof. It is loud when the rain falls.

My best friend is Jojo. We play soccer. Only we call it football. Do you like football? I like it. I would play it all day long if I could. But I like school too. I like learning about the world. My favorite subject is geography. I want to become a teacher one day.

I am looking forward to being your pen pal.

Sincerely,
Koji

I set my pencil down. Most of my classmates are still writing. Including Jojo. Maybe I should write more. But I read over my letter. Decide it's enough. I hope Patrick writes back. I want to learn more about his life halfway around the world. I pick up my pencil again. Write a note at the bottom of the page.

Please tell me more about your life in America.

There. Now it's enough.

"Time to finish," Mr. Wek says.

Pencils hit the desks.

"Put your letters in the envelopes you addressed," he says. "Pass them to me. I will see that they get mailed."

I watch my letter. It goes hand over hand to the front of the classroom. The beginning of its long journey. I wonder how it will travel. By plane? By boat? I wish I could travel with it.

"Get out your math books," Mr. Wek says.

A few students groan. Jojo too. They don't like math. I don't mind it. I'm going to be a teacher. So I will need to know many things.

It's the end of the day. I'm restless. Want to go outside. But I try to sit still. Don't want a scolding from Mr. Wek. Finally he says, "History exam tomorrow. You may go."

Jojo and I are the first out of our seats. "Race you home," he says.

The village is a mile north. We run the whole way. I sprint at the end. But he still beats me.

"Hah! I won!" he shouts. He throws his hands in the air. Like he's a big champion.

"I'll beat you one of these days," I tell him.

"No you won't," he says. "My legs will always be longer than yours."

"Maybe. But I'm a better footballer."

He laughs. "You are not."

"Am so." I run to our hut. Grab my football. But I don't leave quickly enough.

"Koji!" my mother says. "Change out of your

uniform. And put down that ball. I need you to fetch water.”

I groan. “Why can’t Onaya do it?”

“Because she’s helping me cook. Go on.”

I quickly change out of my yellow uniform. I grab the plastic water jug. Carry it outside.

Jojo is playing football with his brothers. I sneak up behind him. Steal the ball out from under his foot. “Hey!” he shouts.

“See?” I laugh. “I told you I’m better!”

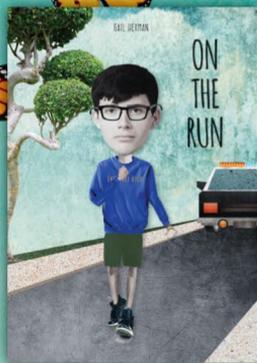
I play with them for a few minutes. I’m still holding the water jug. I’m tempted to set it down. And really play. But I need to get going or Mama will be angry.

The pump is at the other end of the village. I pass the village leader’s hut. He sits outside. A number of men sit around him. My father’s there. I’m surprised to see Papa here. He’s usually out with our cattle.

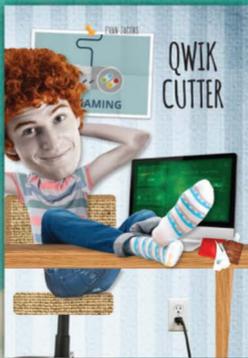
I leave the path. Step closer to them. One man points south. Another points west. They speak in

hushed and hurried voices. The one word I hear
sends a chill through me. “Soldiers.”

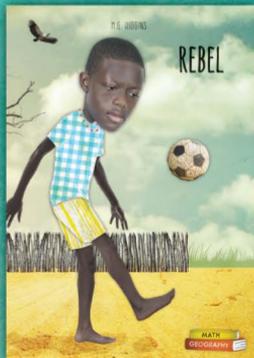
Papa spies me. Shoos me away.



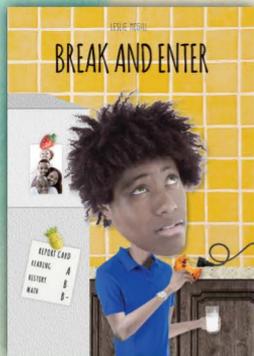
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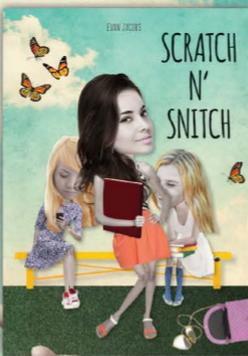
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KOJI'S VILLAGE IS LIKE MANY OTHERS. THEY ARE POOR, BUT EVERYONE IS DOING OKAY. THE CHILDREN GO TO SCHOOL. STUDY HARD. PLAY SOCCER. DREAM BIG. BUT BOYHOOD ENDS QUICKLY. REBEL FORCES ENTER THE VILLAGE. BOYS ARE FORCED TO LINE UP. MARCH. TRAIN. CARRY GUNS. THEN KILL.



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