

**The Amazingly Magical Story of the
Different Flavors of Apple Cider**

Book 4: Final Preparations

**from the author of The Amazingly Magical Story of the Different
Flavors of Apple Cider, Trust, and The Dark Side of the Island**

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Chapter 1 Marty

We were in the middle of the Dark Side of the Island at night, with no one near us. We were injured, hurt, half unconscience and left for dead. Carlos, Ally and I were about to leave back for the castle, when we got tied up by these goons who ambushed us from behind and set a pile of leaves near us to fire, then left. We were able to get out, thanks to Nicole's hair pin, and also opened the Scorched Locket.

"You think this is Nicole?" Ally asked. I examined the inside of the Scorched Locket for a minute, staring at the smiling picture of a young girl, then looked up at Ally.

"Defiantly. This was taken in, say, second, third grade? Maybe earlier, but I can defiantly say it's her."

"Well, what was it doing on the Dark Side of Island with these people?" Carlos asked.

"I don't know," I said. "What I do know, is that now that these people are gone, what's the point of going back to the Dark Side?"

Carlos and Ally nodded, and murmured things like 'yeah' and 'you're right'.

We stayed at the campsite for a few minutes. Ally and I tried to use our powers to teleport back, but there was still some liquid metal on our clothes, so they weren't working.

"I could try the powers in this vial," I suggested, pulling out a vial of my powers."

"But doesn't that just make you invisible?" Carlos asked.

"Yeah but maybe if we see the right color we can try it out." I shook it up for about ten seconds, than it turned to a brownish color. I threw it against the ground. It spread a huge light over all of us, then the fire expanded in a circle around us.

It then engulfed us. We spun around and around, until we finally came to a stop.

When we opened our eyes, we were at the top of a large mountain, at what looked like the we were on the Dark Side. There were two other people on the summit with Carlos, Ally and me. The other two were Nicole and Sarah.

“Hello,” Nicole said.

“Nicole,” I began, “what’s your picture doing in this locket?” I took out the opened Scorched Locket.

“How’d you find the key?” she asked.

“That’s neither here, nor there,” Carlos said, “but I believe Marty asked you a question.”

“Well,” she began, “Let me tell you a story.”

**A story told by Nicole to
Marty, Carlos and Ally.**

Well, it all started when we were brought to Stratsford Island. Me and Sarah were originally planning to break for it, but about three days ago, I went to the Dark Side of the Island to see if we could sail off from there, without being noticed. I ran into these guys in the woods. They told me they were in a

group that originally was in training the last time a group was here.

They said that no one developed their *full* potential, because they never gave away their powers. Other people have joined them. People working for Stratsford. They are resisting being trained for something they don't want to be trained for.

What are we all really doing here?

The other night you three were watching me near the bonfire, as I was sworn in. That locket represents the one they think can find out why we're here. They took that picture when we were all first chosen. The fire represents an all-burning fire. It will burn until the island's secrets are revealed.

They want to see me win the competition and bring forth a golden age to this place. Where everyone develops his or her powers and there is no competition.

That was a lot to process. Sarah stood as solid as a statue.

"Is it me," Carlos said, "or is this a major déjà vu?"

"Yeah," I said. "I think I've seen it on a T.V. show, or something. Anyway, back to you guys."

"Wait a sec," Ally said. "Those guys look only about thirty, or younger. If half of them competed last time, why don't they look a hundred?"

"Why doesn't Stratsford look a hundred?" she asked.

"What?"

"Never mind. Anyway, I told Sarah about everything before I left, but then wiped her memory. When the group left

their hiding place they released some unstable magic into the air, causing them to accidentally give Sarah her memory back. I told her everything a few moments ago, and now it was your turn to spill. Sarah thinks she's the one to go next before the competition. She decided to say good bye, and is using some gas magic to go."

"Gas magic?" we asked.

"Magic flies around the atmosphere every second of everyday, that's how your powers work. Metal and mini golf ward off those powers though."

"What about Sarah's power then?" Carlos asked.

"Steel is a metal, but it is still an element."

"Did you steal those coins from under Ally's mattress?" I asked.

Couldn't have done without your help. It was useful. They are used before someone is eliminated in the competition."

"Which would explain why Coach had them before Josh, Kate and Jen left," Carlos said.

"And again before Nicole disappeared," Ally said.

"And now Nicole's using them before Sarah goes," I finished. "But, wait! If there are six people in the competition now, then Sarah leaves, that isn't what everyone says will happen."

"Right," Nicole said. Sarah took out another vial of liquid, and put it in her palm, then smashing it. There was a cloud of smoke, and she was gone.

"Don't worry," Nicole said, shedding a single tear. "She'll be fine." Nicole turned to us. "We'll be back."

Chapter 2 Marty

The last thing we heard was a screeching, and then I woke up in my room. I took out my iPod and sent a text to Carlos and Ally: **MEET ME, TUNNEL BY S OFFICE, TEN MIN.**

I crawled in to the pipe and took a few turns, and eventually came out by the tunnel/storage area. I remembered the turns from two nights ago, when we first found these storage areas. I waited at the old door by Stratsford's office.

About a minute later, Carlos emerged from a door next to where I was standing.

"What do you need?" he asked.

"Wait till Ally's here." Ally came through the tunnel and out about another minute later.

"Guys," I asked, "what just happened tonight?"

"How much of that on the mountain do you think was real?" Carlos asked.

"Half?" Ally suggested. "None."

"I mean, frankly," Carlos said, "we can't even tell if that was a dream or not. Does anyone else find that a little bit strange?"

"There is one way we can tell," I said. Ally and Carlos looked at me for a minute. I pulled out the open Scorched Locket from my pocket, showing them the picture of the fire, and a nine year old Nicole.

"He's right," Carlos said. "Maybe, for now, we should focus on winning the competition. Now that there's only five people left, and Nicole's coming back, we should find out about the competition."

“Yeah,” I said, “I guess you’re right.” I looked around the tunnel for a minute. “Maybe we should head back. There are only another few hours until the sun’s up.”

We were all called out to the field the next day. Ally has been pretty excited, because she is the only girl left in the competition until Nicole comes back.

Coach entered the field from the castle. He looked strait ahead, not looking at us, or anything. He stood about ten feet in front of us, and then spoke.

“Congratulations!” he said, joyfully, “you five are going to be the final six in our competition. It is my destiny to train you all how to succeed in the final competition. It has occurred sooner than we had hoped.”

“Wait a sec!” Jake said. “If this is the final five, where’s the sixth person?”

“Nicole will be back,” Ally said, looking at Coach.

“She’s right,” Coach said. “Now, everyone let out your palm and think of your ability. Let it overwhelm your body and move your hand in a random motion.” Jake crossed his hands diagonally, creating an enormous X of blue light. Cliff moved his hands in a box-shape forming an enormous box of fire shooting at Carlos. Carlos quickly moved his hand down and up, shooting a bolt of lightning to meet the fire, erupting in an enormous firework.

I decided to make a squiggly line that cross-combined around me, and shot sparks up into the air.

“Coach?” Ally asked. “Is there a move that can cause somewhat of an explosion across your body?”

“Interesting?” Coach said. “There is one. It is called the human engine. It will cause an explosion so big it can engulf everyone around you and make an enormous explosion. It is very dangerous and there is only an eleven percent chance of living.”

“Cool!” Ally said.

“Now, everyone,” Coach began, again, “remember to let the feeling overwhelm you. It can cause a massive eruption and kill you inside.”

We went over a few more drills for about five hours, and worked hard, dueling each other and once in a while leaving a little bit of a bruise. I really couldn’t believe that since this training eliminated over one third of the competition, we were all using it so safely.

At about eight o’clock we went down for the night.

Chapter 3 Marty

I had a dream that night. Carlos and I were in the tunnels. We were walking through them, and something passed behind us: a shadow of someone. It wasn't a shadow of me, nor Carlos, so we turned to see a man, about twenty years old look at us.

"Sooner than we had hoped," he said.

"Who are you?" I asked him.

"Sooner than we had hoped."

"What are you doing down here?" Carlos asked him.

"Sooner than we had hoped," he repeated.

"Where have we heard that?" I asked Carlos, thinking. "*Sooner than we had hoped?*" I thought for a moment, and then snapped my fingers. "Coach! He said that's when the competition is: Sooner than we had hoped."

The man nodded. "Sooner than we had hoped."

"When is the competition then?" Carlos asked.

"Sooner than we had hoped."

"We?" I asked.

"Beats me," Carlos said.

"Who are *we*?" I asked.

The man stared at us for a second than turned his head. "We."

"Marty this guy is annoying the heck of out me!" Carlos said, irritated. "Where are we going to get with this maniac just repeating 'Sooner than we had hoped' and 'We'?"

"Maybe it's a kind of message?" I suggested. "Maybe Stratsford wasn't the only one to win the competition?"

"'My powers are going' that's what Coach said that night we were in this very tunnel."

“So, Stratsford, whoever he is, Coach, our trainer, and who?” I asked.

“How come there’s another person?” Carlos asked.

“Because you told me there was. Three people to win the competition and keep their powers? Remember? That rule must have been applied since Stratsford, Coach and whom won the competition.”

“Well then,” Carlos asked, “who’s the third person?”

The man then turned to smoke, and flew past us, towards Stratsford’s office.

Chapter 4 Marty

When I woke up, there was a chill running down my spine. I usually don't remember my dreams but since I got to Stratsford Island, it's been kind of hard to forget them. I wonder if Carlos had the same dream? Why wasn't Ally there? Could this all be a sign that Ally may not be one of the three to win?

When we went to the field the next day, Coach was waiting for us.

"Castle," he said, "Now."

"Psst," Carlos whispered. "Marty, did you have the same dream as me last night?"

"We were in the tunnels with the Shadow Man repeating 'Sooner than we had hoped'? Then yeah, we had the same dream!"

"What does that mean?" he asked.

"Could it not have been a dream?" I asked. "Maybe we had a vision-dream, or sleep walking or something? Do you find it weird we had the *exact* same dream?"

"I guess?" he said. "Who was that Shadow Man anyway?"

"I don't know?"

We approached the large castle, that only Jake and Cliff hadn't been I before, and entered the enormous grand doors. It was much different from that night almost two weeks ago, when I broke into the castle to steal the journal. I never actually found out what happened to it.

Anyway, it was much different because it looked abandon. There were torn up papers across the grand staircase, vases broken etc.

“Now everyone,” Coach said firmly, “you know that you five are destined to be in the final competition, and only three out of the six will emerge victorious. The competition is sooner than we had hoped—.” Carlos and I shot looks at each other. “And we wish to tell you the date of it. The final competition will be one week from today. I will not be practicing with you from this day forth, and Mr. Stratsford wishes he could have met all of you, but had immediate business to attend to. You may train together, or separate until the day of the competition. Good bye, and I enjoyed training all of you.”

We all looked at each. Coach walked up the grand staircase until he was out of sight. Cliff and Jake left the castle, and us three stayed.

“Let’s go!” I said.

“Go where?” Ally asked.

“Stratsford’s office,” Carlos said. “Duh! It’s like Headquarters. We might even see who Stratsford is!”

“Well,” Ally began, “where are we even gonna find a pipe around here?”

“We don’t need one,” I said. “Because look at that door.”

Do Not Enter!
Authorized Personnel Only!

“What good does an electrical room do?” Ally asked.

“Because there’ no electricity in the middle of the Pacific!” Carlos said. “And it won’t even work if time is frozen anytime someone’s here!”

Ally took out a hairpin, and picked the lock, and we all opened the door and looked inside: the tunnels.

“Let’s go!” I said. We all ran down the halls and then, Ally stopped.

“I can’t go,” she said. “You guys go ahead, you’ll need someone to cover for you while Jake and Cliff are on full alert!” Carlos and I looked at each other, and then made sure Ally got back to the open door. Carlos and I ran through the tunnels taking a sharp left, right, left and then following dead ahead.

When we took the last turn, we were right at Stratsford’s office door. It was still cracked open from those days ago.

When Carlos and I thought we were home free, we saw something behind us: a shadow.

We turned around to see a man. A man that was about twenty years old and had a twitch in his eye. Carlos and I were scared. Our dream had become a nightmare.

The bad part was that we knew what he was going to say, before he did.

Chapter 5 Marty

“Sooner than we had hoped,” he whispered. The man then turned to smoke, and flew by us into Stratsford’s office. We looked through the crack to see if he was in the office. He wasn’t. Carlos turned to me saying, “Stratsford, Coach and who?”

Sneak Peek at Book 5

Stratsford paced around the living room, looking at Coach rapidly.

“You’re sure this security system will work?” he asked.

“Definitely,” Coach said. “We even caught the three on our tunnel camera and then they set off the security. The competition will soon be over, and we must hope they are not the next three.”

“Nicole Salem has given up on the fight, though,” Coach said. “They were smart for making an alliance of three, because now at least one of them will make it into the final three.”

“Well, we can only hope they will be killed in time so they don’t find the cryptic before me.”

“Our hunt has only lead us to guessing. We must find it before Woodworth, Tettrazzini and Shuffle.”

“Especially Woodworth. He has more power than I’ve seen in any other group before him. Tettrazzini is smart and skilled enough; I believe he will be our next trainer. His friends bring out the best in him.”

“And as for Shuffle?” Coach asked.

“We can only hope she will not lead them to betraying them, like our last teammate did us.”

“And Woodworth? What should become of him?”

“I can’t let Woodworth’s search for the truth interfere with my search for the cryptic.”

Coming Soon:

Book 5: April 2011