

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

**Book 5: The Revealing of the
Competition**

**from the author of The Shamplin Trilogy and Final
Preparations**

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Chapter 1 Marty

About a month ago, if you asked me, I would say I would probably die in an old persons home, or a hospital room, but ever since a few weeks ago, I think I'll die in the final competition for power. People never really think of how they're gonna die, it's kind of a sore topic. One of those 'I'll cross that bridge when I get there' type of things.

The final competition for our powers was another one of those things. I didn't think it would come so fast. It came 'Sooner than we had hoped'. Those words have haunted me the past four days, as Carlos, Ally and I talked about the competition and how we don't want to be turned against each other. We had been making final preparations for the race to power. We didn't even know what to do in this thing! We had been packing up our bags, looking through what we need and thought about figuring out any more we can before the final competition. Carlos cut his hair, Ally packed food and water bottles and I made up our strategic plan.

We don't know what *kind*, or *type* of competition it is yet, so we need to prepare for every case scenario. If it's an escape competition we're going to travel as a group and plant markers where we've been; if it's a fighting challenge all at once, we'll take down Jake and then Cliff first, and win easily.

Carlos says that it's most likely going to be an escape challenge because Nicole can easily worm her way into there. She left us clues as we thought. Not easy clues, just better than none at all.

Two days until the competition. We have everything packed and are lying low until tomorrow. Tomorrow we're going to go to Stratsford's office and steal some more coins.

Coach won't need them he can't even tell when they're gone nowadays. Carlos is in my room and we're talking about what hasn't been answered. *Stratsford, Coach and who? Where did Nicole and her group go? What should we do with the Scorched Locket?* I had been writing down these questions in hopes to come up with some, if any, theories.

I hadn't thought about this in a while, but I wonder what ever became of Stratsford's journal and the journal puzzle pieces. I hope they won't be relevant for the competition.

"Hey Carlos," I said to him. "What ever became of that journal and it's torn out pieces?"

"Oh!" he said. "You remember I stole those?"

"Yeah I know that, but what did you do with them?"

"Well, I put them in the pipe, and didn't look at them again. It's just some old guy rambling on about the cryptic, it's code, POWER, and the rest of the journal hidden in the library."

"What did the rest of the journal say?" I asked.

"Just a bunch about how the island isn't safe, don't ever go to the Dark Side of the island, and all the rules."

"I wonder what happened to Stratsford's powers?" I told him.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the last group that was here split mostly off into the forest, deciding to form Nicole's group."

Carlos's eyes widened.

“So,” he said, “Stratsford, Coach and the Unknown never developed their full potential.”

“Right.”

It's finally the day. We're going back into Stratsford's office. We made our way through the tunnels and to the cracked open door. We peeked through and saw an enormous red light.

“*Security Breach!*” cried a female computer voice. Carlos, Ally and I looked at each other, panicked. Did someone install a security system in Stratsford's office? We ran down the hall until the tunnels got smaller into the pipe. We climbed back to my room, panicked.

“What the heck just happened?” I asked them.

Carlos shrugged and Ally still looked like we were gonna get caught.

“Maybe,” Carlos said, “the Shadow Man told Stratsford we had been breaking into his office? Or Coach came to his senses and actually saw us go in there one time?”

“Either way,” I said, “the competition starts tomorrow morning. Now we're not gonna be able to go back into Stratsford's office.”

“Or,” Ally said, “he might bring us back here again if we win the competition?”

“Not if,” Carlos said. “*When* we win the competition.”

Chapter 2 Marty

When I woke up this morning, I didn't know what to expect. Stratsford might have set us loose in the Mohave Desert or told us to escape an endless pyramid. But I woke up in the same room. The one looking like the Lake Placid hotel I stayed in two years ago. I put on a pair of jeans, because it was chilly out, a t-shirt, and a sweatshirt.

I took my backpack, looking back at the door only once after leaving. What I looked at more thoroughly was the door next to mine. The one at the end of the long hallway, the one that Carlos picked the lock to the first night we were here.

I pulled Nicole's hairpin out of my pocket, picking the lock easily. I saw the tree in the middle of the dark room. The room was designed to look like it was taken at night. I made my way over to the cryptic in the tree, where I put in the password:

P-O-W-E-R

The cryptic popped out and I searched around it for a minute.

"What did you want me to find Stratsford?" I said aloud. I searched around the cryptic for another moment. I saw, out of the corner of my eye, some old fancy writing. It said: *Insert the code on my side. For I have waited a long while for you.*

Insert the code on my side, for I have waited a long while for you. What the heck did that mean? I brushed away some dust on the side of the cryptic to reveal a circle of frozen paint. On the other side, I brushed away the dust, and low and behold, there it was.

There was a sun shaped compass like drawing that had a five-letter combination. I thought for a second. It wasn't POWER, because I tried that. I tried opening it, but it wouldn't

budge. I also tried picking the lock with Nicole's hairpin. I decided to bring it, the Scorched Locket, and another vial of my powers.

I wonder if I should tell Carlos and Ally about the cryptic. I decided not to. I placed the cryptic back in its tree slot, because I figured, if I'm one of the three to win the competition, I'll be back here for at least another hundred years! That's plenty of time to guess the password.

But for now, I need to worry about winning this competition.

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.”

Chapter 3 Marty

I went out onto the field where Carlos and Ally already were, gazing at the castle. Cliff and Jake weren't out yet, though.

"When does the competition start?" I asked them.

Carlos shrugged. Ally shook her head.

"Maybe when Jake and Cliff are awake Coach will send us to the competition point?" Carlos guessed.

"How do we know it isn't here?" Ally asked.

"Because Coach wouldn't have spent all that time training us for something stupid," I said.

Jake and Cliff came out about twenty minutes later, dressed in sweatpants and t-shirts.

"You guys ready for the competition?" Carlos asked.

"Wait a sec!" Cliff said.

"That's today!" Jake shouted.

We all started spinning around, getting dizzy by the second, then falling on the ground. We looked at each other our vision getting blurry, than everything went black.

Stratsford took the tiny desk and stack of books away from the door's entrance. He hadn't been in the tunnel for nearly two decades. It was still cracked open, from when Woodworth tried to break into his office.

Stratsford had found the tunnel/pipe when he was at his training. He, Coach and, *the unspeakable*, were all best friends, waiting to win the competition.

Stratsford raced through the tunnel, with the charmed yardstick in his pocket. Stratsford made his way back to Marty's room. When he got to where the tunnel became the pipe, or vice versa, he raised his hand and a walkway of stone and tiles.

When Stratsford got to the tile, he crawled through it and into Woodworth's room. Stratsford looked at the room and went through the door.

He took out the yardstick, and broke it. The room turned to all tiles, as the others would. The room was entirely tile, and Woodworth would never find the tunnel/pipe again.

We woke up in the middle of a mountain. It had crystals growing from the ceiling, and two trails. One leading left, and the other one right.

"We've been through much worse than this at school!" Carlos said. "Remember when we had the school sleepover and Sebastian got stuck under the teacher's room fridge?!" Carlos laughed, remembering the Second Grade School Sleepover. I couldn't believe it was four years ago. It feels like it was just yesterday.

“Yeah!” I said. “Remember when we did that Fourth Grade Car Wash school fundraiser? When Josh shot you,” I pointed to Carlos, “and Jen in the gut by accident!”

“Yeah!” he said. “Accident!”

“Remember when we had that assembly?” Ally asked, joyous. We all laughed historically. “With the clown music and pizza delivery guy!!!” We all started rolling around the floor, remembering that day last year, in fifth grade.

“Good times!” we all said at once. “Good times!”

Jake and Cliff stared at us.

“So,” Jake said. “Where are we going?”

“Oh no!” Carlos said. “There is no *we* in your *we*. Only *we*.” He said, pointing to himself and Ally, and me.

“Marty?” Cliff asked. “Will you help us?” I felt kind of embarrassed. These guys were my friends from the beginning of first grade. But, Carlos, he and Ally helped me through the competition. What to do?

“What the heck are they doing!!!” Stratsford yelled at Coach. “They’re laughing and crawling around the floor like idiots!”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Coach said. Stratsford looked at him for a moment. “They think it’s weak. They think the competition is too weak.”

“What do you mean?”

“They knew it was coming. I can sense it.”

“Well let’s make it more interesting, shall we? I need to ensure Woodworth doesn’t win. If he does, I’ll need to tell him everything. That’s a promise.”

Chapter 4 Marty

Cliff and Jake looked at me for help.

“Guys,” I told them, whispering in. “Maybe you should go up the left way by yourselves. I’m gonna get these guys lost and meet up with you. Okay?”

They walked up the left trail and left Carlos, Ally and me alone.

“Okay,” I said. “Let’s head up the right trail.”

“Why right?” Ally asked.

“Well Ally,” I said, turning to her, “have you ever read a middle-school book about a competition where a character has gone left? Or even a movie? Right is always the right choice.”

“Alright then,” she said. “Right it is.”

We traveled right for about an hour, and it soon became dark by, what for us, would be noon. We traveled farther and saw something in the distance. It was a light. Not just any light though, a bonfire.

I took out the opened Scorched Locket and looked at the picture of the smiling young Nicole knowing our paths would cross with a few minutes.

“What’s that up there?” Ally asked.

“It’s a bonfire,” Carlos said.

“And not just any bonfire,” I finished. We saw someone by the fire. A single person. They looked out at us, motioning their hand to come closer.

I shot a look at Carlos and Ally, as they did me. We carefully came closer and saw a girl at the fire. She was dressed in camouflage from head to toe, and had dirt over her face.

“Hello Marty, Carlos and Ally,” she said.

“Who are you?” Ally asked.

“You don’t recognize me?” she asked. “Marty, you remember me don’t you?” She pointed at my pocket, where the Scorched Locket was.

“Hello Nicole,” I said. Ally gasped. “No offense, but what are you doing here?” I finished.

“I told you,” she said. “‘We’ll be back’? The last thing I told you, at the end of that dream?”

“It wasn’t a dream,” I said, pulling out the open Scorched Locket and pointing to her picture. She smiled.

“You left us clues as we had thought,” Carlos said. “Hidden clues, but better than none at all.”

“Well, if you win the competition, I’ll tell you exactly what happened to our group, but for now let me let you stay here for the night. I’ll get you some hot chocolate and food.”

Nicole poured some hot chocolate for the chilly night and we had some cheeseburgers for dinner. Nicole’s power really came in handy for making the food and microwaving the hot cocoa.

“Well,” Nicole began, “like I told you, my group believes Stratsford Island should be used as an actual training facility, where Coach doesn’t only train you before the competition. We believe that you should be trained to know of no competition. They think I should win the competition and re create the Island. They’ll help me. Although, the fire will burn until our beliefs are fulfilled and all of the island’s secrets are found out. But that fire,” she continued, pointing to it, “will have to burn a little longer, because it’s not my destiny to win.”

“You’re giving up?” Ally asked.

“Yes,” Nicole said. “But, I do want to see you again. All of you. If anything win the competition for you three and me. Would you?”

“Sure we,” I said, taking a bite from my cheeseburger, “will. Of course, because we’re looking forward to the history of your group.”

“Okay then,” she said. “After tonight, I’ll meet you at the summit. Oh, and by the way, it’s not who makes it to the summit first wins, it’s the two that don’t make it lose, and the other three win.”

“Well how are Cliff and Jake doing?” Ally asked.

“Don’t ask,” Nicole said. “They’re so far behind and not into it, you mind as well be competing with a rock.”

“Well how do we get them out of the competition?” Carlos asked. “We don’t want to harm them, they’re too defenseless.”

“True,” Nicole said, “but they only act defenseless. They are actually ready for a challenge, and if you get to the summit one hour ahead of them, you will win.”

“Okay then,” Ally began. “So I can just use my powers to send them back to the beginning of the competition?”

“There’s no rule against it? Plus, it will make you pretty much win the competition!”

“Good,” Ally said. She let a small ball of yellow light surge from her hands over to the other side of the mountain, where Jake and Cliff were asleep, and sent them flying through the mountain to the beginning.

Stratsford looked at the door at the end of the boy’s dorm.

“I’ve always wondered what was through this door,” he said aloud. “When we were here, we were told it was storage, although I’ve never actually seen it.” He looked at the door.

“Probably nothing,” he said. Stratsford walked down the grand hallway towards the door. He exited and looked at the sunny sky, hoping that Woodworth would be destroyed by the end of the day.

Chapter 5 Marty

We hiked up the mountain from when we woke up. Nicole had left some pancakes and orange juice on a plate with foil wrapped around it for breakfast. She had mysteriously disappeared, but we knew she'd be fine. I wondered this morning if Coach took a roll of coins out of Stratsford's office desk drawer before Jake and Cliff were sent back to the beginning.

Anyway, we hiked up the mountain, until about noon, and stopped for some fruit lunch. I had a banana, two kiwis and an apple; Carlos had three oranges and an avocado (even though I kept telling him I thought it was a vegetable); and Ally had a pear and an orange. At around five o'clock we saw the trail widen, as we got closer to the top. Carlos stopped and suggested we camp for the night.

"No we can't do that!" Ally said.

"Why not?" Carlos asked.

"Because we have no food and no beds for the cold mountain weather!" Ally insisted.

"You're right," Carlos said. "Besides, I bet we're almost to the top anyway." I wondered how Jake and Cliff were doing, if we'll beat them to the top. Carlos, Ally and I saw something. The trail widened, until it finally stopped on a flat surface: the mountain summit.

We had made it to the top.

We had almost won.

Carlos, Ally and I dropped our bags and raced to the top. We saw an enormous platform that had two words written on it: STAND HERE!

We went over to the platform, and looked up, at a bright white light that emerged from the sky. The night became day, as Carlos, Ally and I high-fived each other. We had won.

Jake and Cliff were at least an hour behind us, and all's fair in love and war, and this was war. The enormous light raised us up to the sky, and we were watching, waiting for something, anything to happen, and when we thought it would, everything went black.

Stratsford was excited when he heard someone had won.

"Who won it!" he yelled to Coach, as Stratsford raced in the castle door. Coach swallowed.

"Woodworth, Tetrizzini and Shuffle. Salem helped them stay for the night, and gave them advice on how to win," Coach said. The color in Stratsford's face drained.

"Sooner than we had hoped," he said. "Too soon."

"Well, now you have to tell them about everything. The cryptic, the generations, the Unspeakable, everything."

"Fine," Stratsford said. "Summon the white light to bring them here. Oh! And I want you to make sure that they never hear from Salem again. Understood?"

"Yes sir," Coach said. Coach wasn't really going to take out Nicole, was he?

Chapter 6 Marty

We woke up in Stratsford's office, only to see him and Coach on the couch. Stratsford looked about twenty years old, and had a small mustache and beard.

Hello," he said. "I am James Stratsford and I want to congratulate you three on winning the competition!"

We turned to each, with looks of joy and celebration.

"Now, Stratsford said, beginning his story, "I need to tell you the story of this island. It was never Stratsford Island. It has been Glen Island, Hopper Island and many more, because the three that win every competition are destined to train the next class here. There are also three positions: Headmaster, me, Trainer, Coach Dave here," he said pointing to Coach, "and the Keeper. Our last Keeper wasn't the most stable, and had some ideas of his own. He said, we were corrupting the image of this facility, and it will never be the same." He paused.

"Where exactly are you going with this?" Carlos asked.

"You'll see," Coach said. Stratsford continued.

"He ran off into the woods and was never heard from again. He's still out there. We can feel it."

"So who's who?" Ally asked.

"I was getting to that. You all need to wait till the end of the story before I tell you what will happen. Anyway, Coach and I found that we stayed on the island until you eleven came along, but we couldn't show you our true forms. See, on this island, you stop aging. So Coach and I are actually one hundred and thirteen, but as long as we're on this island, we are actually in eleven year old boy bodies."

"So we're not aging?" I asked.

“Correct. But Coach and I want to be more than just young. We want to be immortal, and as long as you three won the competition, that won’t happen, so you’ll have to leave.”
What!

“What!” I said.

“We just won!” Carlos said, “you said it yourselves, we are destined to be the next great trainers here!”

“You can’t do this!” Ally said.

“And why not?” Stratsford asked with an evil tone in his voice. “We’re in the form of grown men, and you’re only a couple of kids!” Stratsford cracked his neck and there was a flash. He had changed forms into our worst nightmare!

“You’re him!” Carlos shouted. Stratsford had turned into the man with the five o’clock shadow and short hair. The Shadow Man. He had been watching us. In our dreams, our break in attempts, he’s the reason why the security was there.

“I’ll tell you why we’re stronger,” I said. “Because,” I continued with a laugh, “you never developed your full potential. That’s what the group out in the woods is doing, they’re not corrupting your image, you’re corrupting theirs.”

Stratsford stood silent as the Shadow Man.

“Stratsford,” Coach said. “These kids are right. I’m with them.” Stratsford turned and shot blue fire from his palms at Coach, slamming him into the old tunnel door.

“As I was saying,” Stratsford continued, as if nothing had happened, “we want to be immortal, but it has to be a third generation.”

“A what?” Ally asked. We were all standing up now. We were glad to get some answers, but afraid that at any minute, Stratsford could easily blink and kill us all.

“A third generation,” he said. “One of you.”

“So one of us has to be immortal?” I asked.

“No, but you have to open the cryptic.”

“The what?” Ally asked. We hadn’t told Ally about the cryptic, but Carlos and I were trying to play it cool. If the cryptic was Stratsford’s key to immortality, we couldn’t let him get it. I could tell Coach would be backing us up, you know, if he was conscience.

“It’s a small metal bar with a five letter password input, and we know the password,” he said. I thought ‘POWER’. “But we don’t know where it is. And one of you three know!” He was getting angry.

“No we don’t!” I begged, as he backed us into the corner of the room. Then, Stratsford was shot with a dark blue liquid on the back from out of nowhere. He turned to see smoke coming off of Coach’s hand, who was now up and using his powers.

“Run!” Coach said.

Chapter 7 Marty

We ran across Stratsford's desk over to the tunnel door. We quickly threw the desk to the side, as we blocked the door. Stratsford burst through it, leaving a room filled with fire behind him.

I threw a small wood table from one of the sides at him. He broke the table with a clench of his fist.

"Who do think found these tunnels and pipes?" he asked. "Why do think there was a door leading to my office through it? Because I found them eleven decades ago!"

We ran at full speed through the tunnels, taking sharp turns, and using magic so he wouldn't see where we were. I could tell we were getting closer to my room, because you could see the rock carved out wall. We raced towards it, and I quickly told Carlos and Ally to go through the pipe. Stratsford was catching up. My heart was beating and sweat was pouring down my face.

I crawled through the pipe and saw Stratsford turn the corner towards the pipe. He shot red liquid from his hand to my back. I started bleeding down my back and off my face as I crawled through the pipe. My face and back stung so bad, I couldn't tell which was worse.

I shut the pipe as soon as I got into the room, but my room was no longer the hotel in Lake Placid, it was just an enormous tiled room with a wood door.

We ran for the door as Stratsford broke through the pipe. We ran out the door and to the door next to mine, the one with the letters that make no sense. I took out Nicole's hairpin, that had been lying in my pocket, and quickly picked the lock. We ran through the door.

“Ally!” Carlos shouted. “Lock the door behind you and hold them off!”

Carlos and I ran to the cryptic. I placed in: P-O-W-E-S. Wrong password. The letters reset themselves back to A-A-A-A-A. P-O-W-E-R. The cryptic came out, as did the tree face, and placed the face back. The door was being slammed on. Ally had pink sparks shoot from her hand to the door, creating a barrier, but it wasn’t holding on for much longer. I turned the cryptic on its side.

“Any thoughts?” I asked Carlos. He looked at the piece and examined it.

“It’s easy!” he said, as if it was a piece of cake.

“Uh guys!” Ally managed. “I think Stratsford’s next blow may sting a little!”

“There won’t be another!” Carlos said. “Marty,” he pointed to the cryptic. “It says it’s ‘waited a long while for you’. How does it know who you are? It’s obviously waiting for a person, so the keyword isn’t an average word, it’s a name!”

“What name?”

“Isn’t it obvious? You’re going to be the next Headmaster, not me, not Ally, you! You’re name! Marty!”

The door’s protection was breaking, and we were running out of time.

Chapter 8 Part 1 Marty

The shield around the door had cracks in it. I slowly put in Carlos's suggestion. M-A-R-T-Y. The cryptic's sun picture swirled open, to reveal a hidden compartment. Inside was a vial filled with liquid. Across the topped, swirled in black ink was the word: *Power. Cryptic=Power.*

Power. Cryptic=power. This is what Stratsford was searching for. This must have something to do with him getting eternal life. The door had only one more crack left before it blew. I took the vial, clenched it in my hand and said,

"Ally, do you remember how to do the human engine?"

"Why?" she asked, struggling.

"Because I want to try it!"

"But there's only an eleven percent chance of living!" she said.

"It's eleven percent more than we had before, then! Just tell me how to do it!"

"Okay! Let your powers run a muck through your body, then channel them out every direction possible! Be careful!"

"Okay," I told her. "Carlos, Ally I want you guys to wedge in that tree. Don't slide down, but wait. I'm going to destroy this thing, and with any luck, Stratsford once and for all."

"Oh, Marty!" Ally said. "One more thing! The human engine doesn't kill people, it just destroys their bodies, and they'll probably never see life again, but they won't be dead!"

"Good."

"They wedged in the tree, and Ally let the barrier go. Stratsford burst through the door to see the open cryptic, the vial in my hand and I.

"Hello again Woodworth," he almost screamed.

“Hello and good bye again Mr.,” I said mockingly, “Stratsford.” The powers ran through my body, and channeled out every open direction, letting light engulf Mr. Stratsford and the treetop. The vial in my hand shattered, and the liquid quickly dissolved.

I saw Stratsford’s body crumble second by second, until it all finally turned to sand.

I fell to the ground. I saw Carlos and Ally race out of the trunk, and come to my side. The last thought I had, ‘The Keeper would be happy. I now know that when I’m dead, I’ll have died for a greater cause and one day, I will be thanked’.

Chapter 8 Part 2 Marty

I'm not dead.

Chapter 9 Marty

I'm not dead. I'm not dead? I'm not dead! I woke up in the infirmary. Carlos, Ally and Coach were standing there with the Nurse.

Ally held her hand to her heart, saying,
"Marty! We thought you were dead!"

"Yeah," Carlos said, "for a while you didn't even have a pulse." Coach looked at me. He cracked his neck, and he turned to a boy at about twelve years old. He had shaggy blonde hair and a little bit of facial hair.

"Hello Marty," he said. "It was a brave thing what you did. Stratsford has nearly been destroyed, but it is a good thing you destroyed him, not killing him. I understand you couldn't possibly go the rest of your life being known as a murderer."

"Thanks Coach," I managed.

"How are you?" Ally asked concerned.

"A little sore, and my back is still cut from Stratsford, but I guess we won't have to worry about him anymore."

"Yeah, but there are a few questions we still have," Carlos said. Coach nodded. "Like, if Stratsford never knew about the tree, then how was one of his journal entries in it?"

"I actually hid it there," Coach said, scratching his head. "I was one of only six people who knew where the cryptic was hidden. Stratsford never wanted to kill anyone, so he had me

hide it there. Even his powers wouldn't let him see its location. That's a different stronger magic, that you three all contain."

"Well," I said, "who are the other five people?"

"There are you three, myself, Sebastian, who is still in the infirmary, and one other."

"Who is it?" Ally asked.

"The Keeper," I said, confirming. "The last Keeper who betrayed you and Stratsford."

"No," he said. "I betrayed him. Stratsford forced me to win. I was going to go with him out to the woods, but Stratsford's magic bound me here."

"Okay," I said. "One other question. When's Nicole coming back? She said she's gonna tell us exactly about her group when we win."

"What makes you think she's not already here?" Coach asked. The Nurse pulled the curtain by my bed across, to reveal Nicole Salem, standing there in regular clothes.

"Great job Marty!" she said. "I will, as promised, tell you of our group."

I don't want to say *exactly* what Nicole said, but there are a few things. The last Keeper founded their group, and that there are only about seven people left in it, including her and the Keeper. She also said that there would be another group, the one we'll have to train. They'll have that strong magic, that none of us had. And they'll be coming very soon.

So, after a few hours of rest, we went to the castle for lunch.

Chapter 10 Marty

We had lunch at the castle to discuss what to do.

“So, who’s who for our powers?” Ally asked.

“Marty, you are to be the next Headmaster, Carlos will take over my position as Trainer, and Ally will be the next Keeper. I will pack my bags, and leave before dusk.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked him. “You’re staying!”

“What?”

“Of course! We’ll need all the help we can get on this next group. In fact, Nicole, we’ll go into the woods after this to get your group. We’re not training the same way Stratsford told us to be trained. We’re going to follow Nicole’s group’s ideals. So that the next group won’t have a bloodbath for a competition. We’ll help them all develop their full potential.”

“Are you sure?” Ally asked.

“He’s right,” Carlos said. “The next group will be more difficult, and even more questions will arise during their time here. *We* didn’t even figure out some mysteries here.”

“But what about school?” Ally asked. Coach thought for a moment.

“What if we have you enrolled at a *new*,” he put air quotes around new. “School, and if it’s okay with your parents, you’ll stay here. Everyone remembers you, except Jen, Kate and Josh, but they won’t miss you. It isn’t even technically a lie, because we do have teachers here to educate you.”

“Okay,” Carlos said. “But how long until the next group comes?”

“Sooner than you think,” Coach said. “They’re all too powerful to wait longer. If time wasn’t frozen, which we can fix afterword (long story), than it would be October 27th in real days, so, sometime in the winter, we’ll bring the new group in.”

“October 27th?” I asked. “Tomorrow’s my birthday!”

“For real!” Ally asked.

“Yeah! I got some books when we got here, and couldn’t ask for a better present than being here with you guys!”

Epilogue Marty

So I guess that's the end of our story. We're gonna be ready for the next group that comes in. We all developed our full potential, and intend to do the exact same with their group.

Before I go though, there is one last thing I should do.

I ran down the hallway to the second to last door on the left and saw the door was open. It had smoke marks all over it. The tunnel-pipe was carved out, and I went through it.

"I worked my way down through it to my new office. I opened the door and saw it was almost brand new. Some of my things were on the desk, and James Stratsford's things were disappearing rapidly.

I went over to a small drawer with index cards in it. The cards had all of our names on them. They had our name, Apple Cider flavor and description on them. That must be how Coach knew Ally's name all those weeks ago, when time first froze.

I flipped through the cards, until I saw Woodworth, Marty at the end.

That's why I came. To see my flavor.

Flavor=Making Good Choices.

I took the cards and set down through the tunnel. I swore I heard a whisper 'Sooner than we had hoped'. But no one was there. Could it have been Stratsford's ghost? I don't know.

If our job was to bring forth a golden age to Stratsford Island. We will. By the way, I decided to keep the name of the island the same. Even though Stratsford was an evil villain, Woodworth Island sounded like a log factory.

Anyway, we were getting ready to head back into the forest to find The Keeper with Nicole.

Let's do this.

Even if it is for only one month.

At least I know for now, I have an entire golden age to spend with Carlos and Ally.