



JICKY JACK
AND
THE OMINOUS
PROMISE

BY
C.D. BRYAN



What critics and others are saying about:

**Jicky Jack
And
The Ominous Promise**

*****Winner of FWA's Royal Palm Literary Award for
Elementary/Middle Grade Fiction*****

“I originally purchased this novel for my son who said it was an Awesome Story (his words). So, I read it too and I absolutely loved this book. What a wonderfully original story. I hope Mr. Bryan writes a sequel.”

—Sara Powers, Teacher

“Epic Novel . . . I chose this book because my mom said that it would be a good book. I think it's a great book.”

—5 Star Amazon Review

“I bought this book for my grandson . . . I read it first and really liked it . . . It's a good read for any age.”

—5 Star Amazon Review

“I bought this for my preteen son . . . he found it to be a real page-turner. He said he can't wait until the next book in the series comes out.”

—5 Star Amazon Review



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Personal Message from C.D. Bryan:

I Love writing books! But what I love even more is hearing from readers. If you enjoyed this or any other books, it would mean the world to me if you send a short email to introduce yourself and say hi. I always personally respond to my readers.

I would also put you on my mailing list to receive notifications about future books, updates and contests.

Please [click this link and introduce yourself](#), so I can personally thank you for trying my books.

DEDICATIONS

For Amanda, Sharon, Nancy and
my fellow adventurers—All of you.

—C.D.

MAP OF WHITTLES CREEK





CHAPTER ONE



What's Coming is Here After 150 Years

J.R.'s eyes popped open and shifted from side to side. They were filled with suspicion and for good reason.

It had been six days since his grandfather said it was coming. And in that time, J.R. was sure someone or something had been stalking him.

Worry and fear quickly flooded his mind. He knew he'd run out of places to hide. And now, something else was wrong—something new.

He could feel it.

He wiggled his nose with irritated twitches. Then he puckered his lips, rolling his gaze downward. And while focusing past the end of his nose—looking almost cross-eyed—that’s when he saw it.

“What in Sam’s Dams is going on?” J.R. grumbled in a jaw-dropping state of panic as he rubbed his fingers in a downward stroke over a Fu Manchu mustache. “That’s it. Grandfather owes me a better explanation.”

Things were getting worse. Everything from the feeling of a menacing stare on the back of his neck, with each trip to and from school, down to the shadows jumping around in the tree outside his bedroom window every night. And now this—waking up with a Fu Manchu mustache.

J.R. peeked out from under his bed.

The coast was clear.

He rolled out, jumped to his feet and did his fastest cleanup ever, including the painstaking process of shaving. That part he hated. Razor burn is no laughing matter at twelve-years-old.

“Oh great, late again,” he grunted, while glancing at the clock and pushing through his typical eight and a half push-ups. He knew getting a better explanation from his grandfather would have to wait. So, he grabbed his backpack and dashed for the door.

“Jicky-Jack, I’ll be back,” he whispered, rubbing the head of a gray wooden statue of a peregrine falcon.

J.R. opened and closed his door as quietly as possible thinking that his grandfather might still be sleeping. But that didn’t seem to matter because a loud snake-like call echoed from down the corridor.

“Psssssst.”

J.R. looked in the direction of the call but saw no one. He and his grandfather were the only two with bedrooms upstairs, and his grandfather’s door was closed. Then it came again.

“Psssssssst . . .”

It was followed by the clicking of a latch and the squeak of a knob. The door to his grandfather’s bedroom opened.

“Hey, Jackrabbit,” whispered his grandfather while peeking around the frame of the door, “is that you?”

J.R. didn't really like that nickname but he lived with it. He knew his grandfather meant well, giving it to him because J.R.'s first name was Jack and because he was a fast runner. But what he didn't understand was why his grandfather was acting so mysterious and whispering like he was.

At the end of the corridor, his grandfather, Mr. C, as he was called, rested his bony hand on J.R.'s shoulder, and pulled him into the doorway and out of the hall. Then he coughed and cleared his throat. "Jackrabbit, listen to me and listen carefully."

J.R. listened and made a mental note of the fact that his grandfather was dressed in a gray silk suit instead of his pajamas.

"It's happening," he declared, staring into J.R.'s puzzled eyes. "I told you it was coming and it's here. It happens only once every 150 years, Jackrabbit. You're the one. You're next in line for the secret honor. And you can stop the spread of that pandemic. It's probably in your blood." He coughed again, this time muffling it in the bend of his elbow. And J.R. seized the opportunity for more answers.

“What’s coming, what secret honor and what’s in my blood?” asked J.R., feeling his heart pound faster and faster as his voice began to shake. “Something or someone’s been following me, grandfather, I can feel it. Who is it? And what’s wrong with me? This morning I woke up with a Fu Manchu mustache. And what’s a pandemic? I don’t even think I really know what that is.”

“Oh, you will,” said his grandfather. “You will. Your life will never be the same after today, Jackrabbit. That’s a life-changing promise you can count on; I saw it in your tree.”

J.R. guessed his grandfather’s mind was slipping but he didn’t dare to say such a thing. He just nodded, all the while feeling something was seriously wrong.

“What do you mean my tree? And tell it, whatever it is, that I don’t want any of this.”

“I should have seen it in my own tree,” said his grandfather, casting a piercing stare into the corner of his bedroom as if gazing beyond the wall. “But no matter about all that, I can’t tell you anymore than I already have. Except to say, it fits like a key to your destiny, and you’ll have to make the connection before it’s too late and

before the pandemic spreads. Keep your willpower strong, Jackrabbit, and follow the signs.

“But grandfather, what key, what—”

“Now, off to school, you’re running late as usual. And here I want you to have this ticker before I . . .” his grandfather paused as if deep in thought and scratched the gray whiskers on his chin. “Well, never mind that. It’s for your birthday. It’s a pocket watch. It’ll help you stay on time.”

Mr. C placed a sparkling gold watch in J.R.’s palm and bent over to whisper in his ear, “Each time it’s opened, something happens.”

J.R. slipped the watch into his pocket as his grandfather commanded his attention and grabbed him by the shoulders.

“And remember these three things, J.R. One . . . the death of a flower or fall, is the beginning of life in the spring. Two . . . you can’t stop time for life, but you can stop life for time. And three . . . last but most importantly, the machine has time on its side.”

Mr. C’s posture sank, and with a deep sigh he pushed J.R. on his way, and then closed his door.

“Ok, this is too weird,” said J.R. “School, get to school, that’ll be normal. Wait, did I just say that? I *must* be losing my mind.”

J.R. raced along the corridor then slid down the banister of a golden-oak staircase. His thoughts raced as well, what did Grandfather mean, fits like a key to my destiny?

He hit the landing below and charged into his mother’s den. And as usual, she was watching the morning news before heading to work at the library. He zigzagged through towering stacks of books and sat next to her on a small couch. Together they listened to a horrific story being broadcast on the morning news.



CHAPTER TWO



Bad News Boggles Boy in Broadcast

A TV reporter was interviewing a doctor and the latest victim of a new and wildly spreading pandemic.

“Doctor,” said the reporter on the TV, “What can you tell us about this mysteriously spreading pandemic?”

“All I can say . . . and should say at this point . . . is that it’s all in the victim’s head,” replied the Doctor, “you know, infecting the mind. It’s a complete mystery. I call it the Pango Syndrome, named after myself, of course, Dr.

Dorian Pango. And for reasons that are not yet clear, it seems to have chosen our children as its host; particularly those with weakened willpower of the mind. It leeches onto these kids and drains their minds of every single dream they've ever had for what they want to be and do in life. And there's no known cure. All of them fall into a zombie-like state of existence, operating like robots, with society telling them what to do. At least that's been my observation abroad."

"And so tell us, Daniel," said the reporter, turning his attention away from the doctor and down to a boy, "you've actually acquired this pandemic disease spreading around the world, or the Pango Syndrome, as the doctor has coined it. It's not killing you or making you sick in any way, right? Can you describe the symptoms for us, Daniel?"

The chubby-faced, brown-haired boy stared into a camera near the reporter, his eyes changing from an autumn brown to a winter gray.

"W . . . well," he said trembling, "at first it was like someone or something was following me, you know,

stalking me. Then, I began losing my willpower. Then it was gone.”

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J.R. leaned forward in a panic, staring at the TV. The boy’s symptoms sounded just like his own.

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“And before I knew it,” the boy continued, “it was like someone had stolen the dreams I used to have, dreams of what I wanted to be and do in my life.” The boy stopped speaking and scratched his head, tears rolling over his chubby cheeks. “They’re missing. There’s nothing. I can’t think of a single one. I don’t even feel like I want to do anything with my life. I guess it’s like the doctor said, I’ll just grow up to be a robot in society, doing whatever I’m told to do.”

“And so, Daniel,” said the reporter, “do you worry about spreading it to other children? And do any of your friends have it?”

“Yeah, I guess so, but I’m not sure how others would catch it,” said the boy, looking to his father for reassurance, “because the doctors said they aren’t sure

how it spreads. And my friends, well, I can't say for them—”

“Very well,” said the reporter, cutting the boy off in the middle of his answer and returning his attention to the doctor. “And doctor, what can you tell us about the number of existing cases and how quickly this pandemic is spreading?”

“Well,” said the doctor, “the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization have both estimated that over two million cases exist worldwide, and there may be as many as 50,000 unknown cases in our country right now.” The doctor redirected his attention away from the reporter and stared into the camera. “It’s spreading like a wildfire and where will it strike next? Nobody knows. All we know is it could be your hometown.” The doctor moved closer, pointed directly into the camera and flashed a mysterious wink, “even your hometown, J.R. Timble.”

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J.R. jumped off the couch in a state of shock when he heard the doctor announce his name on national television.

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“Well, there you have it, Central,” said the reporter on the TV, stepping in front of the camera, “an accounting from both the discovering doctor and the latest victim of what’s been dubbed the Pango Syndrome. Central, this is Tom McKay, reporting live from the big city, back to you.”

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“Mom,” J.R. yelled in a panic, “did you hear that?”

His mother picked up the remote and turned off the TV. She sat in silence for a moment, as if deep in thought and considering what to say, then stood and headed for the kitchen. “I don’t want you to worry about a thing, J.R.,” she said. “Those people are thousands of miles from here so you’re safe.”

“No . . . no . . . I mean, yes, that’s great, but that reporter. Did you hear him?”

“Yes, I heard him, J.R.”

“But did you hear what he said? Did you hear him say my name on national television?”

Mrs. Timble leaned back far enough to peer through the doorway from the kitchen. “J.R.” she said, “Now honestly.”

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