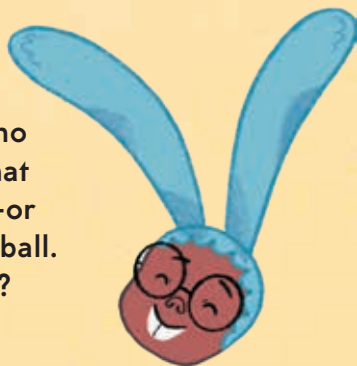


Rex can rock a bunny suit like no one else. But his PE teacher insists that all students must wear gym clothes—or face a punishment worse than dodgeball. What’s a bunny-suited brainiac to do?




ALLEY vows to help his pal Rex survive PE. And to save the free-breakfast cart that was closed due to budget cuts. Everyone knows that kids can’t learn on empty stomachs!



From a heist in the principal’s office to a bake sale featuring mutant bagels, Alley tries everything he can to bring back the food cart. And Rex tries everything he can to turn Alley’s bad choices into good solutions. They will stop at nothing to save breakfast—one mutant bagel at a time!


Cover illustration © 2022 by Nicole Miles
Cover design © 2022 by Simon & Schuster, Inc.


Atheneum Books for Young Readers
Simon & Schuster • New York
Ages 8–12
0123

EBOOK EDITION ALSO AVAILABLE
Visit us at simonandschuster.com/kids

PJ OUR WAY®

www.pjourway.org



Alley & Rex

BITE THE BAGEL

written by
JOEL ROSS

illustrated by
NICOLE MILES



 Atheneum Books for Young Readers
atheneum NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI



ATHENEUM BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS • An imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division • 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020 • This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and events are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. • Text © 2022 by Joel Ross • Illustration © 2022 by Nicole Miles • Cover design © 2022 by Simon & Schuster, Inc. • All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form. • ATHENEUM BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS is a registered trademark of Simon & Schuster, Inc. Atheneum logo is a trademark of Simon & Schuster, Inc. • For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-866-506-1949 or business@simonandschuster.com. • The Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau can bring authors to your live event. For more information or to book an event, contact the Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau at 1-866-248-3049 or visit our website at www.simonspeakers.com. • Also available in an Atheneum Books for Young Readers hardcover edition • The text for this book was set in Aldus. • The illustrations for this book were rendered digitally. • Manufactured in the United States of America • 0123 MTN • First Atheneum Books for Young Readers proprietary paperback January 2023 • 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 • The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows: • Names: Ross, Joel N., 1968– author. | Miles, Nicole, illustrator. • Title: Bite the bagel / Joel Ross ; illustrated by Nicole Miles. • Description: First edition. | New York : Atheneum Books for Young Readers, [2022] | Series: Alley & Rex ; book 2 | Audience: Ages 8 to 12. | Summary: Prankster Alley and bunny-suited brainiac Rex help each other survive PE and save the breakfast cart. • Identifiers: LCCN 2021053971 | ISBN 9781534495470 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781534495494 (ebook) • Subjects: CYAC: Schools—Fiction. | Behavior—Fiction. | Individuality—Fiction. | Friendship—Fiction. | Humorous stories. | LCGFT: Novels. | Humorous fiction. • Classification: LCC PZ7.1.R677 Bi 2022 | DDC [Fic]—dc23 • LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021053971> • ISBN 9781665938358 (PJ Our Way prop. edition)

**To my brother Dylan,
an expert in questionable
culinary decisions!**
—N. M.

1

I love mornings.

Specifically, I love missing them because I'm still in bed. I've got nothing against rosy dawns and chirping birds—I just enjoy them most while asleep.



Can you spot me in that picture?

Look closer.

Did you find me yet?

Here's a clue: no, you didn't, because I'm not there.

I'm already in the kitchen, staring into the fridge.

"What are you doing up so early?" my mother asks me.

"Monna mushon," I tell her.

"You're on a mission?" she says.

"Muh," I agree.

She points her toast at me. "Are you trying to write 'ALIEN PARKING' in duct tape on the school roof again?"

"Guh," I say.

My dad forks his cheese blintz. "He's going to eat Frooty Noodles cereal at the free breakfast cart until his brain explodes."

"Mah," I say, then sleepwalk to my bike.

And roughly a thousand hours before the first bell rings, I arrive at Blueberry Hill School, as bright-eyed and bushy-tailed as a chipmunk in a firecracker factory.



That's me. My name is Alley Katz, and my mission is this: elite training for my friend Rex.

I'm in sixth grade and Rex is in fourth, but we have lots in common. For example, he's skipped a few grades, and *I've* skipped a few classes. Also, he wears a bunny suit to school every day, and I have a *friend* who wears a bunny suit to school every day.

See? We're like twins!

On the other hand, my favorite class is PE. Frankly, I think every period needs more squeaking sneakers and screaming chaos. But Rex isn't a fan of the bouncing and the yelling. Not with dodgeball starting this week.



That's why I'm here, to train him in the Art of the Dodge.

I have everything I need: one brick wall, two soccer balls, a soft football, a whiffle ball, seven pairs of tightly rolled socks, a bunch of water balloons (empty), and a shampoo bottle that I forgot to put in the recycling.

Also, a few rolls of duct tape, in case I accidentally find myself on the roof. (Thanks for reminding me, Mom!)

However, the grand total of Rexes is zero.

Of him, I have none.

So I wait patiently for six or seven seconds, then head for the breakfast cart to grab some Frooty Noodles. (Thanks for reminding me, Dad!)

Every morning before school, the lunch ladies wheel a cart into the courtyard outside the cafeteria for an extra bonus snack. There's fruit, cereal, bagels, drinks, and granola bars for needy kids—and for kids whose parents buy cereal that tastes like unsweetened twigs. Everyone's welcome!

During my first few years at Blueberry Hill,

my mom dropped me off on her way to work every morning, and I'd raid the cart. My stomach still remembers and growls happily when I reach the courtyard.

Then the rest of me growls unhappily.

Because this is what I see:

- 1) a bunch of kids I recognize—mostly fifth, sixth, and seventh graders
- 2) a bunch of younger kids I don't recognize—a knee-high forest of piping voices and two-ton backpacks
- 3) posters for a school fundraiser

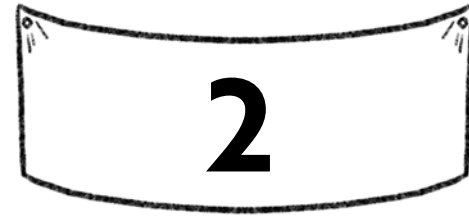


(Here's some BONUS EDUCATIONAL CONTENT! You see that word "fundraiser"? I just learned that's *fund-raiser*, not *fun-draiser*. Why? Why do grown-ups always take the *fun* out of everything?)

- 4) locked cafeteria doors
- 5) the big TV screen in the cafeteria window scrolling School News of the Day
- 6–32) candy wrappers and trees and walkways and loads of other stuff

Yet there's one thing I don't see. I mean, I look *directly* at where it isn't and still can't find it.

The breakfast cart is gone.



I stagger closer and say, "What? How? Where?"

"Alley Katzenjammer!" Mouse bellows, which answers exactly zero of my questions. "No bagels!"

"I see that," I say. "But *why*?"

"Because the cart isn't here," Mouse bellows. "It's still in the cafeteria."

"Aha!" I say, spotting the problem immediately. "But the cafeteria is locked."

"With the cart inside," Mouse bellows, raising her tennis racket over her head.

Mouse plays every sport in school—the whole A to Z, from basketball to badminton. She's small and bouncy, like a Super Ball with a ponytail, and even though she's in sixth grade, she's stronger than most eighth graders.





Also, her volume is stuck at ten. When she calls for a time-out, kids in the next state take a break.

“C’mere, I’ll show you!” she bellows, and whacks an imaginary tennis ball toward me.

I “return” her pretend serve, and we volley over to the cafeteria window. Then I press my face against the glass and spot a familiar shape.

“The lunch ladies forgot to wheel out the cart.” I shove her imaginary tennis ball into my pocket, in case I need it later. “They’re going to feel pretty bad when they realize.”

“I feel pretty bad now,” Mouse bellows. “I need the cart for second breakfast.”

“For some kids it’s *first* breakfast,” I tell her.

A wave of hungry little kids swirls around our ankles like a gap-toothed tide. They peer through the window, and their squeaky voices say things like, “There’s food on the cart! Cereal! Juice boxes!”

“Bagels!” Mouse bellows. “If only we could get inside . . .”

That’s when a plan springs fully formed into my brain.

I don’t want to brag, but I’m pretty good at planning. In fact, I once heard Principal Kugelmeyer say, “Alley thinks ‘planning ahead’ means ‘checking if you have a parachute *after* you jump from the plane.’”

Parachutes? Cool.

Free fall? Awesome!

“Give me a lift,” I tell Mouse, and point upward.

Have you ever noticed those wide windows above some doors? The ones that open like see-saws? They’re how teachers talked to each other before email: by messenger pigeon.

Of course, now there’s a better use for them.





Anyway, I happen to know, from the four or five times that I accidentally climbed through one of those windows, that I can climb through one of those windows.

All I need is a desk or chair . . . or a kid as strong as Mouse.

She weaves her fingers together. I step onto her hands, balancing myself on her shoulder, and she hefts me toward the window.

I'm almost there when an urgent voice across the courtyard says, "Alllley!"



Urgent voices usually say "Alllley!" in one of three ways.

The first is a whisper: *Alllley, drop the frogs—the teacher's coming!*

The second is a chant: *Al-ley, Al-ley, Al-ley*, like while I'm trying to break the school's Toilet Paper Unraveling record.

The third is a roar like Poseidon while he prongs a foolish mortal with his trident. I get that one from . . . pretty much all adults.

This particular "Alllley!" sounds extremely tridental . . . but it's a kid's voice.

So I squirm around Mouse and see my friend Chowder glaring at me from across the courtyard.



“What do you think you’re doing?” he barks.

I don’t know if you’ve met Chowder, but he rarely glares or barks. He is a gentle soul, more into gazing and cooing, so this takes me by surprise.

“What does it look like?” I ask him.

“I’ll tell you what it looks like!” he snaps.

“Okay, what?”

“I’ll tell you!”

“So tell me!”

“I will!” he says, then flushes Valentine’s Day pink and says, “It looks like you—you’re up to no good!”

I don’t know if you caught that, but my eagle eye spotted a clue. *Valentine’s Day* pink?

He’s in love again! I don’t know who he’s crushing on this time. Maybe one of the seventh-grade boys, maybe one of the sixth-grade girls. Though probably not Mouse, because he once recited a love poem to her in science class, and they say that, even now, if you put a beaker to your ear you can hear her laughing.

“I’m not up to no good,” I assure him.

“Ha!” he says.

“I’m up to good.”

“Ha *ha!*” he says. “Like I don’t believe my own eyes! You—you’re . . .”

“I’m breaking into the cafeteria. The lunch ladies forgot to bring out the cart.”

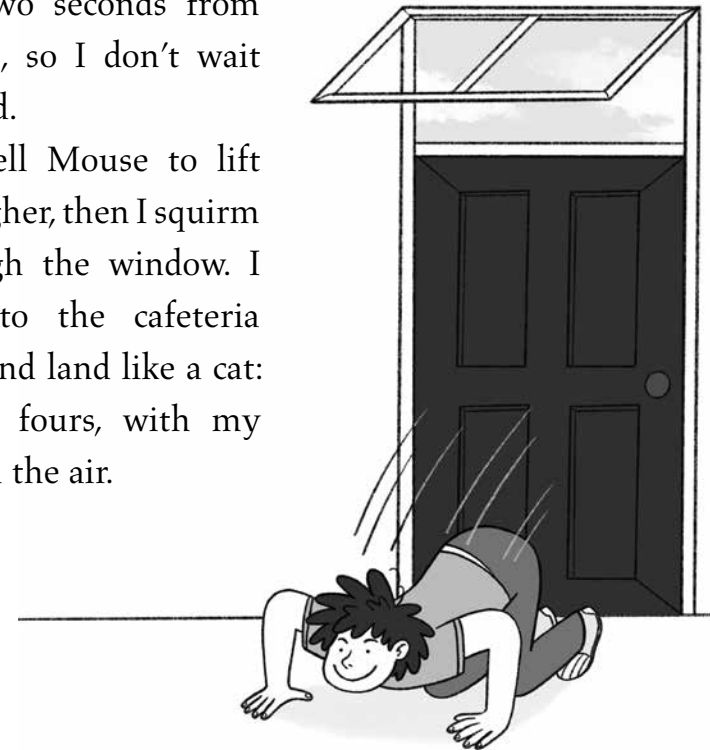
He blinks at me. “Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh, cool,” he says. “Grab me a juice box.”

Then he smiles in my general direction, the extra-drippy smile that he saves for his crushes. I’m not sure who he’s aiming at, but it looks like he’s two seconds from cooing, so I don’t wait around.

I tell Mouse to lift me higher, then I squirm through the window. I drop to the cafeteria floor and land like a cat: on all fours, with my butt in the air.



Then I creep to the breakfast cart and distribute the goodies in an orderly fashion.

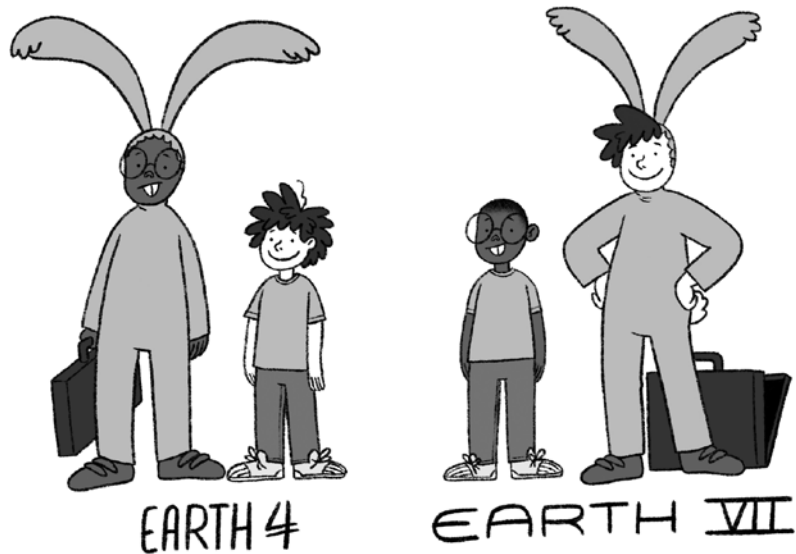
There's only one snag.

Mouse makes a gentle suggestion: "THROW ANOTHER BOX OF CEREAL, ALLEY! THAT ONE EXPLODED!"

She's so loud that the building shakes.

She's so loud that jackhammers cover their ears.

She's so loud that her voice punches a hole through the multiverse into a different dimension. Frankly, I'm lucky that the tentacled sheep of Earth 9 don't start trotting through.



Less luckily: a yard monitor *does* start trotting through. He marches into the courtyard and gapes at the fog of vaporized Wheatie-Os from the cereal box that burst.

So what I do is, I panic.

Instead of hiding in the cafeteria, I hurl myself at the window.

