

Jeremy “JB” Barnes is looking forward to hanging out on the beach all summer before seventh grade. But instead his mother, a scientist, has called for him to join her aboard a research ship where he’ll spend his vacation seasick and bored as he stares out at the endless field of plastic objects, microbeads, and other floating debris that make up the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Miles and miles away, Sidney Miller is trying to come up with an alternate activity worthy of convincing her overprotective parents that she can skip summer camp.

When Jeremy is asked to find the contact information for a list of international scientists and invite them to attend a last-minute emergency global summit, he’s excited to be doing something that’s actually important. How could he have known that the Sidney Miller he emailed was *not* the famous marine biologist, but instead a girl posting blogs from her bedroom—let alone that she would come aboard the ship?

A comedy of errors, mistaken identity, and synchronicity, this book is also a heartfelt story about friendship and an empowering call to action: to step up and save our oceans and our earth.

★ “Superlative writing and character development uplift this timely story . . . An inspiring tale of friendship and conservation.”

— *KIRKUS REVIEWS*, starred review

“With nonstop action . . . and empathetic characters, this is a fast, fun read.

A sure winner for readers interested in the environment and adventure, or even just in adventure.”

— *SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL*

“Nuanced layers of story take the book beyond its initial quiriness . . .

The narrative’s nonlinear structure . . . makes for an engaging read; and the nautical setting is richly developed.”

— *THE HORN BOOK*

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Consider *the* Octopus

Nora Raleigh Baskin

AND *Sae Polisner*



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We only get one earth and a few oceans.
Thank you to all, especially the children,
who step up to keep them clean and safe.



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I am here to say, our house is on fire . . .
I want you to act as you would in a crisis.

–GRETA THUNBERG, 16

The day science begins to study non-
physical phenomena, it will make more
progress in one decade than in all the
previous centuries of its existence.

–NIKOLA TESLA, DEAD

1.

JEREMY JB “FACE OF THE *OCEANIA II*” BARNES

The Mylar balloons, tied tight to the metal leg of the folding registration table, twist and glitter in the sweltering sunshine, waiting for me to come bake next to them. Earlier, Marco and Randi had argued over them, him saying, “Balloons are festive and make it easier to find us, plus fine for the environment so long as we cut them in half and recycle them properly afterward,” and her saying, “Fine, if you don’t mind being a total hypocrite and part of the bigger problem. Besides, how hard is it to spot two registration tables in front of a ginormous research ship docked only a quarter mile off that says *Oceania II* in white across its whole green side?”

Marco had won, per usual, by making an “executive decision,” leaving Randi to glare at him. Now, I sit down next

to the balloons on a wobbly folding chair and wait for the science-geek SEAmester kids to show up so I can start my super-important job of checking them in.

A mere two weeks ago, I would never have been given this “Face of the *Oceania II*” assignment, even in an emergency, so maybe Mom is right. Maybe the “fresh air and thinking time” are starting to rub off on me.

Not that me doing this job was exactly everyone’s first choice. Marco was supposed to do it, but there was some sort of emergency, “all hands on deck,” which meant Marco and Randi and Vance and even Sabira had to stay on board, which left only Henry and me to check everyone in, and since Henry can obviously schmooze better than I can about fancy science things, that put him in charge of the scientists, and me, checking in the SEAmester kids.

“If you’re sure you can handle that . . . ?” Mom had asked, her words sounding more worried than like a big vote of confidence. Plus, she ruffled my hair, which isn’t really something you should do if you want someone to feel fully competent. Besides, hadn’t I just proved myself? Hadn’t I located ten of the eighteen hard-to-find scientists from all over the globe? You think it’s easy to tell a marine biologist from a climate biologist from a climatologist when they all

have the same first name? Okay, well, at least two of them did.

But this guy here? He did it! And got ten—ten!—of the eighteen “hopefuls” on Captain Jim’s invite list, from Zhang Liu to Samara Redmond to Dr. Sidney Miller from the Marine Lab at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, to RSVP they were coming.

I shift in my spot, glance at Henry still setting up his registration table, and then at the small brick building across the empty dock where ferry tickets are sold, wondering if I have time to run in and take a leak, but I can see cars beginning to pull in through the arrival zone, plus a shuttle bus, and I don’t want to mess up by not being here to greet the first kids to arrive.

SIDNEY MILLER

Nana’s fifteen-year-old pumpkin-orange Subaru station wagon looks right at home in the parking lot of the Seattle Food Co-op Warehouse. In fact, five spots down from where we are sitting in our car, there’s another one almost identical, except that one has more bumper stickers. I know, right? Pretty hard to imagine.

But there it is.

“See,” Nana says, pointing to the orange twin car. “Even the same dent on the passenger door. Now how do you explain that?”

I bet there are a ton of algorithms that could explain it. Starting with the number of orange Subaru station wagons sold in any given year. Like the demographic of people who purchased Subarus, in relation to those living in the Seattle area, and then the number of those same people who kept their car for ten years or more. I don’t necessarily know the math to figure that all out, but I know there is some.

At the same time, how can I ignore coincidences like that ever again? I mean, it’s what brought me here in the first place. That’s exactly the reason I am about to attempt to sneak onto a ship and sail out into the Pacific Ocean for seven days. *The reason?* A ring toss game, a nail polish color, a goldfish, and what may possibly be nothing more than a simple case of mistaken identity.

But of course, then how do you explain my recurring dreams?

And the identical reddish-yellow Subarus in the same exact parking lot at the same exact time?

“It’s synchronicity, Nana.”

“It is,” she says.

We are early, and this gives us a chance to study the loading dock and marina across the street and to spec out the ship’s check-in procedure for the real SEAmester kids, the ones who are *supposed* to be here.

“We need to stick to our plan to get on board,” Nana says.

I want to ask Nana which plan, exactly, she is referring to, since we are pretty much flying by the seat of our pants at this point. Sure, we were able to convince Mom and Dad that my invite onto the *Oceania II* was legit.

You won an essay contest? Sidney, that’s fantastic!

Of course you can go.

Which was a good thing, since I had already replied to the message and said, *Dr. Sidney Miller would be honored to attend.*

And yeah, with a little Photoshop doctoring I was able to print out the welcome letter. It wasn’t perfect, but my parents were so excited about my academic achievement they didn’t look too closely. They didn’t see that I spelled *coalition*—as in Global Coalition—wrong.

But what happens after this is anybody’s guess.

“We need to observe things for a while. That way we can be prepared for the unexpected,” Nana whispers.

“Why are we whispering, Nana?”

She doesn't answer. She holds out her hand, I pass her the binoculars from my backpack, and she presses them to her face.

“What do you see?” I ask.

She answers, “Balloons.”

“Balloons?”

“Look for yourself.”

It takes me a while to adjust the focus and figure out what I am looking at. The trees in front of us, the metal fence, a bird, a cardboard box, a lone banana, all look so big.

“Holy cow, I can see the brown spots on the peel!”

I take the binoculars away from my eyes, and I realize I'm just seeing the stuff in *this* parking lot. The marina is much farther away. I try again.

Finally, I see water. And boats. I see the pier, the metal planks. Boxes. These big, corrugated storage containers. It all looks very industrial. I move my line of sight slowly right, then left, until I see the check-in area.

“Oh yeah, there! I see the balloons now. Green ones. And oh, look, two long folding tables and signs.”

“Signs, what kind of signs?” Nana isn’t so much whispering anymore.

“No, not that kind. Just signs, Nana. Poster-board signs.”

“What do they say?”

“One says, something clean water . . . Summit something. And the other one says . . . Wait, now I can’t see anymore. There’s someone in the way. Someone is standing in front of the table.”

“Who?” Nana asks.

I turn the toggle on the top of the binoculars to see if that helps, if I can get a closer look.

“It’s a kid. A teenager maybe, maybe younger. A boy,” I say. “He’s talking to someone . . . oh, okay . . . now he’s walking toward the SEAmester table. And he doesn’t look very happy. He’s holding something . . . yeah, I see, he’s got his cell phone.”

“Perfect,” Nana says. She rests her head back. “Trust me. Nothing more distracted and inattentive than an adolescent boy with a phone in his hands.”