

“A wonderful read told with elegant simplicity.” KIRKUS REVIEWS



## What would you do with a thousand dollars?

Buy a new bike? A set of drums?  
Or let your parents convince you  
to fix the leaky roof of the house?

It's the winter of 1965 and Norman Fishbein faces just such a dilemma after he wins the “Guess-the-Doozy-Dots Contest.” Norman decides that what his family needs is their first real vacation—a luxury trip to Miami Beach.

There, he and his older brothers meet the dreaded Horvath sisters. But Norman secretly befriends youngest sister Amy. Meanwhile, at the hotel pool, Norman spots an old man in a black suit—the once famous comedian Mort Ziff. An unusual friendship begins between Norman, Amy and the old comedian. After hearing that Mort Ziff has been fired by the hotel owner, to be replaced by a pop group called the Centipedes, Norman and Amy need to enlist their siblings to give Mort Ziff one last chance.

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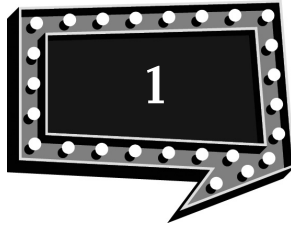
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## Counting Doozy Dots

My brothers were only one and two years old when I was born, but even so, it was as if they got together and decided that three was a crowd. Who needs another brother? At least that's how it felt, because I never really fit in with them. And they never made it easy for me.

For example, it was always a mistake to compete with them. If I got suckered into having a bicycle race, Marcus (the older one) would secretly let half

the air out of my tires. If I agreed to a match of miniature golf, Larry (the middle one) would bump my arm while I was putting. If I refused to play cards or Monopoly, the two of them would beg me on their hands and knees, promising not to cheat. Then, of course, they did. Making me lose was to them the funniest thing in the world. They never got tired of it.

Which was one reason it was so fantastic that I won the “Guess the Doozy Dots” contest at Shoppe Heaven Mall.

Doozy Dots were these little candies with funny faces on them that fizz and pop in your mouth. At the mall there was a special promotion. Women in green elf outfits were standing around a giant glass jar of Doozy Dots. It must have been ten or twenty feet high. You had to guess how many candies were in the giant jar.

This happened on the last Saturday in October, a super-beautiful day, maybe one of the last nice days before winter. I wanted to be outside, flying the balsa-wood airplane that I had just finished building. It had a rubber-band motor and a plastic propeller, and I couldn't wait to try it. But my parents thought that this was the perfect day for me and my brothers

to buy new shoes. Not running shoes even, but ugly leather shoes that had, in my mother's immortal words, "healthy arch support."

So there we were, pushing our way through the crowds to where the green elf women were handing out forms and little pencils. On the form, you were supposed to write down your guess, along with your name and address.

"I'm going to win this for sure," Marcus said, holding the paper against a post and squinting as he filled it in.

"Don't get too excited, Marcus," Dad said. "Nobody wins these things."

"Well, I am. I'm picking my number right now. I'm going to guess ten billion and eight."

"That might be a little high," Mom said.

"No, it isn't. It's exactly right. I calculated." He tapped the side of his head with the little pencil.

"How did you calculate it?" Larry asked. He hadn't filled out his form yet. He always thought Marcus was right. He thought Marcus was a genius.

"You think I'd tell you, flea-brain?"

"Okay then," Larry said. "I'm going to put down the same number. Ten billion and eight."

“You can’t do that! Mom, Dad, tell Larry he can’t.”

“Never mind,” Larry sang, printing carefully. “I’ll put down ten billion and nine.”

Marcus began to chase Larry, but Larry managed to stuff his form into the slot in the plastic container made to look like a box of Doozy Dots. I filled out my own form. I put down a smaller number. I put down 4,243. I didn’t calculate at all. I just pulled it out of the air.

When Marcus gave up trying to catch Larry, he came over to look at my form. “Are you kidding me?” he said, and proceeded to laugh his head off. Actually, I wish he had really laughed his head off so that it rolled all the way down the length of the Shoppe Heaven Mall.

I put my form into the box and we all went to the shoe store. Marcus and Larry begged for loafers but Mom insisted we get three identical pairs of lace-up shoes. My brothers immediately began to scuff them up on the way back to the car. We drove our creaky old Buick home, by which time I had to start my chores and couldn’t fly my balsa-wood airplane.

All of us forgot about the Doozy Dots contest. We forgot about it for a whole month.