

BOOK THREE

THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

BROCK EASTMAN

JUNLEAST



FOCUS[®]
ON THE FAMILY

Praise for *Unleash*

I found *Unleash* such a perfect book. Brock delivers the elements to keep kids—even reluctant readers—engaged and excited, while giving them lessons for life. Any teacher or parent should have this on their bookshelf for their kids.

—**Sigmund Brouwer**, author of the best-selling Robot Wars series

The title for this book says it all. *Unleash* literally unleashed my kids' hunger for reading. With action on every page, I myself couldn't help but keep the light on a bit longer at night. *Unleash* will make even the most stubborn reader tear into this book from cover to cover.

—**Tricia Goyer**, mother, author, and host of *Living Inspired* weekly radio podcast

Warning: Don't pick up this book unless you're ready for a thrill ride that won't let you off until the very end. Join the four Wikk kids as they travel through deep space and encounter enemies right out of your darkest nightmares. This is my kind of story—twists in every chapter, adventures galore, and characters I wish I could hang with. Unleash your imagination and read *Unleash* now.

—**Robert Liparulo**, best-selling author of The Dreamhouse Kings series, *The 13th Tribe*, and *The Judgment Stone*

Praise for *The Quest for Truth* series

Racing across the galaxy in a stellar ship, the *Phoenix*, you won't be able to put these books down. Be careful not to rip the pages as you tear through the text and devour the adventure. Thrilling scenes, cool gadgets, and memorable characters are all part of what make *The Quest for Truth* a must-read series.

—**Wayne Thomas Batson**, best-selling author of *The Door Within* Trilogy, *The Berinfell Prophecies*, and *The Dark Sea Annals*

Kids will enjoy the nonstop action, suspense, and excitement in the Wikk family's adventures. Brock Eastman cleverly weaves a thrilling tale that takes young readers on a rollercoaster ride of intrigue and mystery.

—**Jeff Sanders**, fourth grade teacher, Chino, California

The Quest for Truth is a riveting tale of four young kids who have to learn to help and rely on each other. With lives on the line, courage, wit, companionship, and teamwork are vital for Oliver, Tiffany, Austin, and Mason.

—**Hannah Davis**, age 14

It got right to the adventure; it wasn't hard to figure out what was going on. You should read it. . . . Watch out for the Übel!

—**Alex Peterson**, age 9

UNLEASH

THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

TAKEN

RISK

UNLEASH

TANGLE

HOPE

UNLEASH

THE THIRD ADVENTURE IN
THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

BROCK EASTMAN



P U B L I S H I N G

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Summary: The Wikk children face fierce lizards and betrayal by a trusted ally when they return to Obbin's plundered planet, where Oliver and Tiffany slip into a high security laboratory and Mason, Austin, and Obbin take on Corsairs.

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To Kinley:

You make me smile. With your words. With your laugh.
With your kisses and hugs. With your every breath.

You are a gift from our Creator, and every day I get to see
the amazing imagination he gave you.

You're just two and a half and yet you make up words and
stories; you sing songs with me and do the motions. It won't
be long before we'll be writing together.

I'm so blessed to have the pleasure of calling you my daugh-
ter, although when I do, you quickly say, "I'm not daughter!
I'm Kinley."

I love you.

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Elsie Mae—or E. C. Mae, as I adore calling you—you grow more every day, and your personality does too. You are so silly and quite the comedian. You certainly know how to make me laugh. You also know how to melt me too. When you stare at me with those eyes and cute frowning face, how can I say no?

Baby Eastman, we just found out days ago, but I know you are growing inside your mommy. I can't wait to find out who you will be. I'm thankful to God for you and can't wait to meet you later this year.

Mom and Dad, I couldn't have done this without you. Your love and support help me on this journey.

Ty and Tiffany, thanks for your ongoing support. Tyler, thanks for giving me the words for the prayer in the back of the book.

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Prologue

The moon of Slan Idrac was one of the most hostile he'd ever been on. Razor-sharp rocks jutted from the mineral-laced terrain, making it impossible for the small assortment of craft on their exploration ship, the *XPLR Grazer*. The sky scooters' engines would explode if they sucked the moon's poisonous gases through their intake, and the wheeled vehicles were too wide to navigate the narrow crevices. They had no choice but to travel by foot.

Slan Idrac's poisonous atmosphere required some of the heaviest exploration gear he'd ever worn. He was thankful for the outfit's durability. XPLR Corp provided all he needed—that wasn't what worried him. He wanted to get home. He wanted to see his wife. Her smiling face often came to mind. He missed her so very much.

Slan Idrac was the last stop on the Resource Scouting Tour, also known as RST Mission 1042009. He'd been gone three months. Even now his team was laying markers across the area where the new Ore Crusher would land and begin excavation. Their last mission was to create enough power for the equipment. The sun wouldn't provide enough light for the solar panels, so they would also have to connect a thermal line.

His mission now led him toward a potential thermal vent. The reconnaissance probe's map indicated high temperatures, and the glowing reflection on a spire ahead confirmed its accuracy.

Though it was against company policy, he coveted the times he could explore on his own. XPLR stated the team-exploring policy was for safety, but he'd always felt it was to stop thievery. XPLR sent crews into areas with resources worth billions—if not trillions—of federal credits. The green mineral that dusted the surface of Slan Idrac was worth a thousand credits per gallon once mixed with a solution created by GenTexic, a genetics company.

As he hefted himself up a wide wall of rock, the ledge crumbled. He slid down toward a glowing inferno, a flickering pit of burning ash. Twisting onto his stomach, he scrambled to grab something. Pebbles slipped through his grasp. His right hand hooked something solid; his body jerked to a stop. His legs dangled precariously over the glowing pit. Reddish gas spiraled upward.

After catching his breath, he turned his gaze to his lifeline. It was a wooden stake. He pulled himself up onto the slope and dug his boots into the loose stones until he found a solid ledge. He released the stake. It was clearly foreign to the planet. He dug around it, revealing a crossbeam. He dug farther. The wood formed a lowercase *T*. The end of the stake disappeared into a slab of stone.

What had he found? He looked back up at the ledge. It was a wall. He glanced around the pit; it was a good two hundred feet in diameter. There were no other walls. He looked again at the one collapsed wall.

What was that? Something glinted in the rubble. He'd have to get closer to investigate.

He tugged at the piece of wood once more, but it wouldn't come loose. He'd have to come back for it. An artifact like that could be worth a lot. He started up the gravely slope with extreme caution. After a few close calls, he arrived at the

crumbled wall. He shifted the pieces of stone and discovered a thin, half-burned box. The metal remains of a latch on the otherwise wooden box had caused the glint. He picked up the box. Inside was a rare find; a shred of paper. It was blackened and burned. A number in the corner indicated that it was a page from a book.

He read the words to himself: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.” Eternal life? A powerful concept, but one he knew was impossible. People died. That was the way of it. You lived, you died.

But he didn’t discard the scrap of paper. It was as valuable as the cross. Maybe even more so, because it contained text. This page was an artifact from the past. Some people still paid handsomely for a scrap like this. And he’d once heard a rumor about a group searching for the secret of eternal life.

If he could sell this, he would never have to work another day in his life. He and his wife could travel and spend every moment together. They could see the galaxy.

The problem was selling it. He would have to smuggle it back onto the *XPLR Grazer*, which wouldn’t be too difficult, but then he would have to slip it past the inspection teams that scoured the returning crews and ships to prevent this sort of thievery. Any discoveries were considered corporation property. This was no different. If he could get past the search, he’d have to wait a few months before quitting. If he quit and suddenly came into a large sum of credits, he would raise suspicion and be investigated. He had to do this right. He had to be patient.

Then he’d seek a buyer on the Dark Market. It shouldn’t be too hard, but he wasn’t accustomed to dealing with those sorts of people. What would he tell Sylvia? How would he explain their sudden wealth? He couldn’t tell her about the paper; she’d not approve of his stealing it. Guilt churned in his stomach. He should just turn it over to XPLR Corp.

He sighed and sifted through the rest of the rubble, as well as the rocks covering the slope. He found nothing else. If only he could free the stake.

He looked back at the pit. The crater was not a source of thermal energy. The destroyed wall, the smoldering ash in the pit—this was the site of an explosion. Something had blown up, destroying the building and creating the fire below. How long ago? It was impossible to tell. The ore on the planet could burn for hundreds of years, which was one reason it was so valuable.

He didn't understand why anyone would live there, though.

A second thought crossed his mind. He'd read about the atmosphere: some of the gases were unusual, not naturally occurring. Observing the crater again, he noticed the similarities it had to a missile impact crater. Understanding rushed over him.

This site had been attacked, and gases had been released on the moon. Someone had wanted the place destroyed and uninhabitable. The explosion had likely happened some time ago. This scrap of paper could be dangerous to its owner or . . . worth a whole lot of money.

He knew what would happen if he reported that the thermal vent was actually an explosion crater. XPLR would terminate their activity on Slan Idrac until the Federation investigated and cleared the moon. The moon would be quarantined. XPLR would not place corporation equipment in a hostile zone. It was too valuable, and they'd dealt with too many ransom situations on personnel in the past.

It could be years before XPLR would be able to return, or before he could. He tucked the scrap of paper in a pouch and climbed back over the remnants of the wall. He would return to the *XPLR Grazer* and somehow smuggle the scrap back with him. He'd find a way to make Sylvia see that he deserved to cash in on the relic's value.

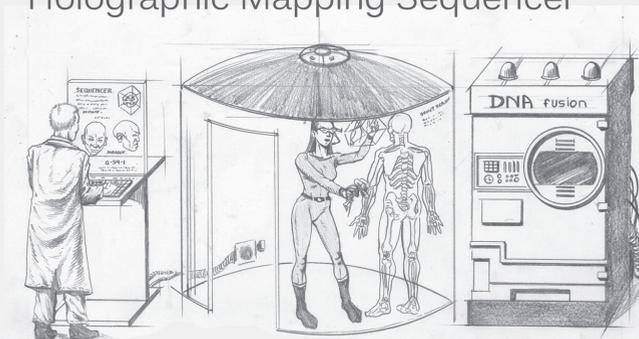


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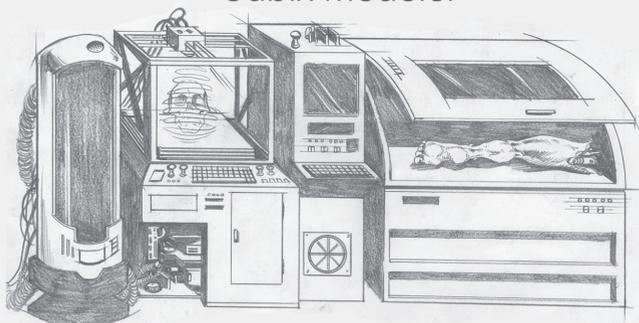


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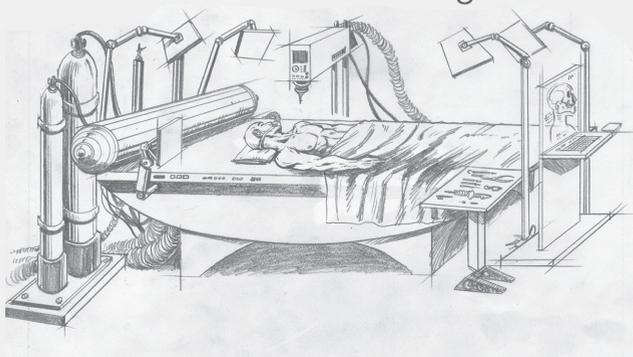
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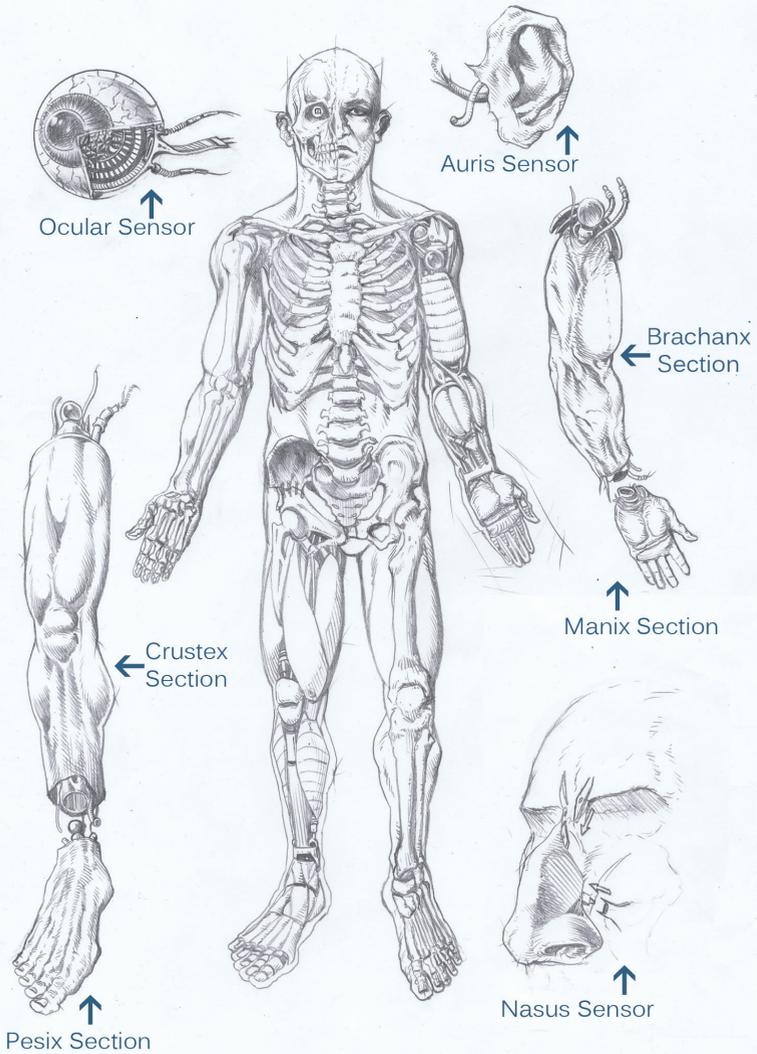
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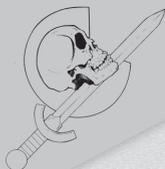
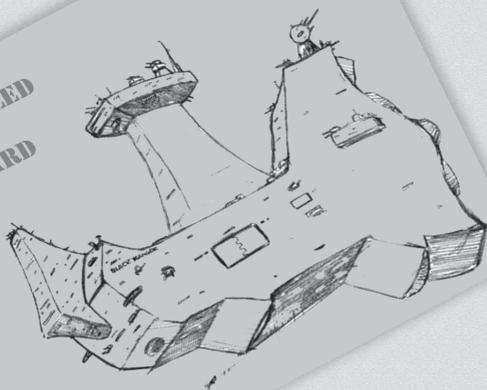
Reassemblance and Configuration Lab



Body Assemblance Components



**INSTALLATION SCHEDULED
7.10.85
LEVEL 9; MEDICAL WARD**



**BIOTRONICS INTERVENTION UNIT
PLAN VERSION 11.21.20.13**



Parting Gift

The *Phoenix* blasted through the sky, barreling toward the remaining storm clouds. Lightning flashed inside them.

Oliver blinked at a dark silhouette within the cloud. Had the Übel waited for them? His hands gripped the controls, ready for action. His body grew rigid in the pilot's seat.

When he looked again, the mysterious shape was gone. Relief escaped his lips in a heavy breath. He stroked back his usually spiky brown hair. He'd not spiked it for several days now.

The ship's altitude increased, and the sky grew darker. They were nearly free of Evad and on to Jahr des Eises, where they would return Obbin and locate Mr. O'Farrell. Oliver had so many things to ask the Wikks' benefactor and fellow explorer. He seemed like the most likely source of information for them, the only one who might know the truth about their parents' work.

The *Phoenix* pitched forward, and a thundering explosion echoed all around. Green light enveloped the ship. Oliver shielded his eyes. The displays on the *Phoenix* flashed. Warnings erupted on every screen.

"What was that?" cried Tiffany from the copilot's chair, her brown eyes wide and alert. Yet she never stopped working

the screens before her, swiping and tapping her fingers as if playing a piano. Her brown ponytail swished back and forth with her movements.

The ship jolted again.

Tiffany pulled Midnight, her new pet cat, close. “There’s something wrong with the generators. And the navigation information for Jahr des Eises has disappeared.”

“I see that.” Oliver glanced at the radar screen. A red dot flashed on, then off again. The systems were on the fritz. He was blind to anything not in his line of sight.

He felt an urging in his gut. He twisted the controls of the ship, and the silver craft dove, then spun. The structure of the ship groaned under the maneuver. “Hold on!” The words had become all too familiar to his siblings.

“Whoa! Go, Oliver!” shouted Mason and Austin from the second row.

A ball of green light encapsulated by glowing blue mist sailed past them. Oliver hadn’t known the shot had been fired, but he’d sensed the need to barrel roll.

As Oliver jerked the controls back, a piercing pain shot through his body like a knife thrust into his ribs. His arm went numb, and he lost his grip on the controls. He grimaced at the tearing sensation in his side.

Something was wrong. When and how had he been hurt? He gasped in a shallow and painful breath. He didn’t have time to feel pain, let alone do anything about it. They were under attack.

Gritting his teeth, Oliver pulled back the controls. The *Phoenix* shot up, then rolled onto its back. Like prisoners, the kids were locked into their chairs by the extreme g-force of the tight turn.

“Obbin, it’s okay,” Austin said.

“Yeah, Oliver is a great pilot,” Mason said.

“That’s not why I’m closing my eyes,” Obbin explained.

Oliver increased the thrust and turned the controls. For a split second, he saw their attacker: a gray ship unlike the

black Übel fighters. This one had a globular canopy, set on a fuselage with short, rounded wings and three tailfins. The enemy fighter twisted and slipped out of sight like a phantom.

Oliver tried to follow. As far as he knew, the *Phoenix* was unarmed. He hoped to keep the ship behind the enemy until they could escape, but how to do that was unclear. Far from any canyon, cave, or obstacle, he had nowhere to take cover.

The new pain continued in his right side. Oliver was still wearing his wetsuit from his underwater dive, and its tight fabric wasn't helping. It rubbed against the injury with every movement.

"Oliver, what was that?" Austin asked, brushing his sandy-colored bangs clear of his green eyes. The youngest Wikk was always alert and ready for action.

"A fighter. Not sure whose."

"Aren't we cloaked?" Mason called out.

Oliver shook his head. He glanced at the silver ball still engaged with the system, then clicked the remote.

No confirmation message flashed on the screen. "It isn't working."

"Whatever hit us earlier damaged something in our electronics," Tiffany said. "The systems are still sporadic."

Oliver couldn't believe his slipup. After uncloaking the ship so the kids could reboard, he'd forgotten to reactivate the device. The failure added to his dismal feeling of helplessness. If he'd taken his time and turned it on, they'd have been invisible and unable to be attacked.

The fighter zipped into view again. No time for regrets. Oliver had one choice: stay on its tail.

Fiery pain shot through his side. It felt like a knife was being dragged along his skin. The unknown injury threatened his ability to fly.

How long could he keep this up?

Oliver released the controls, but not in defeat. His left arm flew to shield his eyes. A blinding purple orb came from out

of his field of vision and struck the small tri-finned fighter. A brilliant flash blasted out in a ring of violet plasma.

The ship glowed and dropped in altitude, falling through the sky.

Oliver turned the *Phoenix*. Could he get a glimpse of the new entry to the sky battle?

The arrival was a ship identical to his.

“The *Eagle*,” said Mason.

“Brother Sam!” Obbin exclaimed. “Thank Creator!”

Oliver turned to look at them. “What?” *The Eagle? Brother Sam? Creator?*

“There he goes!” called Tiffany, pulling Oliver’s attention back.

The *Eagle* turned and dove. Oliver followed. The phantom enemy ship twisted toward Evad’s surface. Oliver was just about to turn the ship away to spare his siblings the sight of a pilot slamming into the jungle below when the canopy of the crashing craft popped free and the man ejected. Instead of using a parachute, he zipped through the air on a jetpack.

The saving silver ship flew after the pilot. Much as Oliver wanted to meet this Brother Sam, he had other priorities. The Übel had just departed for Enaid with the Wikks’ imprisoned parents, and he had a detour to make before he could follow. He had no time to waste at the present. Oliver pulled the controls, and the *Phoenix* again pointed toward space.

They passed free of Evad’s gravitational pull. Oliver brought the ship into an orbital holding pattern above Evad. “Everyone watch for anything unusual. With our systems down, we have to do this ourselves.”

The *Phoenix* flew in a wide circle. Oliver scoured the black space around them.

“Over there,” called Austin.

The *Phoenix* jerked as Oliver stopped its turn. Everyone searched for Austin’s sighting with bated breath. A red light blinked in the distance. Oliver strained his eyes. Should he speed away or wait?

A golden ball grew in size as they coasted toward it. The red light flashed.

“Most likely it’s Evad’s planetary beacon,” Mason said. “At least, that’s what it looks like.”

Oliver sighed. “You’re right. The Federation placed beacons near every known planet within its borders.”

“What now?” asked Austin.

“We have to fix the NavCom,” Tiffany said. “We can’t launch into hyper flight when it’s offline and our other systems are malfunctioning.”

Oliver knew she was right, but he wasn’t a mechanic or systems technician. He had basic knowledge of what needed to be fixed, but he’d have to rely on the manual and schematics to actually do it.

“You’re right, Tiff,” he said. “Austin, Mason, and Obbin, when we get into space, I need you to check the NavCom servers. They’re in the room next to the engine room. The status screen on the server rack should normally read *100 percent online*. My guess is it’s far from that. I think we were hit by some sort of EMP. We might need to restart.”

Obbin’s green eyebrows raised on his blue forehead. “EM—what?”

“An electromagnetic pulse,” Mason said, his blue eyes twinkling. “They’re used to short out electronic systems.”

“The *Phoenix* is somewhat shielded from that sort of attack, but it seems the weapon did some damage. Anyhow, I need you guys to see—” Oliver paused, hiding a gasp as his injury throbbed. Before he did anything else, he needed to find the source of his pain.

He was still facing the windshield and knew his brothers and Obbin could not see his pained expression he wore. If Tiffany had, she was holding her tongue. “See if the systems need to be reset, then report back,” he said.

“Shouldn’t you be the one to—?” Mason started, but Austin stepped in.

"I'll be glad to take on this mission," he said. "Obbin, let's go."

Mason sighed as Austin and Obbin released themselves from their harnesses. "I'm coming. This mission needs more than brute strength. It's going to require someone with a brain."

Austin scoffed but didn't argue. The three left through the hatchway, their shoes clattering down the staircase to the lower floor, and Oliver let out a groan.

"Oliver, what happened?" Tiffany asked, releasing Midnight. The black cat jumped from her lap and tucked itself under her chair.

"It's my side. I think I'm cut." Oliver twisted, trying to lift his arm.

"Don't," Tiffany cautioned him. "Keep still. I'll get the medic kit from the galley. Meet me in your room."

Oliver nodded, and they departed.

CLAWS RAISED, MOUTH OPEN, IT WAS COMING FOR HER!

Game on! The Wikk kids unleash fresh courage in the face of new adventures! Working as a team, they tackle their greatest dangers yet: lies, betrayal, a frozen planet, and fierce lizards that want to eat them all! Facing their fears and searching for answers, Oliver and Tiffany slip into a high-security laboratory while Mason, Austin, and Obbin battle Corsair pirates and make a shocking discovery! Will they be able to unlock the truth about Creator and take the next step? Will you?

THE QUEST FOR TRUTH series follows the four Wikk kids in their desperate race to find the mysterious planet Ursprung and stop the Übel renegades from misusing its long-lost secrets. Ancient cities, treacherous villains, high-tech gadgets, the *Phoenix*—encounter all these and more on this futuristic, interplanetary adventure.

“This is my kind of story—twists in every chapter, adventures galore, and characters I wish I could hang with. Unleash your imagination and read *Unleash* now.”

—ROBERT LIPARULO, Bestselling Author of
The Dreamhouse Kings Series

“Brock delivers the elements to keep kids—even reluctant readers—engaged and excited, while giving them lessons for life.”

—SIGMUND BROUWER, Bestselling Author of the Robot Wars Series



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