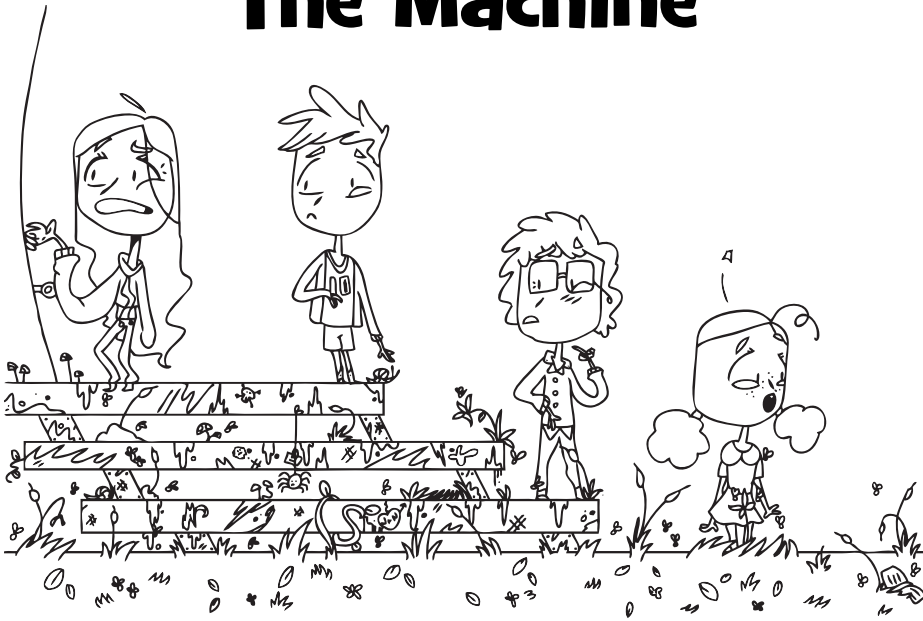


The Forbidden Book Club The Machine



Book 1

The Machine



The children climbed up the creaky stairs of the veranda. They were all regretting the prank that they had played the week before. Ada looked at the flowerbed. It was only stems now, all of the roses having lost their heads. There was a debt to pay. She knocked on the door and paint chips flaked off, spinning as they fell to the ground. Darren, Lachlan, and Skink stood beside her.

An old lady opened the door with a large smile that showed her false teeth. Her glasses magnified her eyes so that she looked somewhat like an inquisitive bird.



“Come in, come in,” she said merrily, standing back so that the children could enter her home.

“My name is Mrs. Quigley. Won’t you come and sit down for a spot of tea and a biscuit?”
The children, having expected a right scolding,

moved over to the lumpy and took a seat. The house looked like a bomb had hit it. There were strange knickknacks all over the place.



The tea was lukewarm and the biscuits rock hard, but the children suffered them with a smile. Ada tried not to get crumbs on the floor. Perhaps she just wants somebody to talk to, Ada thought. She did look very lonely cooped up in the house all by herself.

“Well, now that you are settled in, we must get to the matter of your punishment,” Mrs. Quigley said with a titter. Ada felt the boys squirming beside her and heard a distinctive plop as Skink lost her biscuit in her tea.

“How do you all feel about reading?” Mrs. Quigley asked.

Ada was so taken aback by the question that she didn't know quite how to respond.



Darren picked up the slack.

“We aren't very fond of it Mam. They always try to pick the most boring books that they can in school.”

“Yeah,” chimed in Skink. “Why can't there be any books that you just get to read for fun?”

Mrs. Quigley laughed at that.

“Well, it appears that you are in luck. I happen to have a secret collection of old books that you might find a little more interesting than the ones that you have to read for school.”

Lachlan frowned.

“What are they about?”

“They’re works of fiction,” Mrs. Quigley explained. The children went wide-eyed.

“Weren’t all of those handed in for burning before we were born?” Darren asked.

“It’s true,” Mrs Quigley replied. “But I did love fiction so much. My husband helped me to hide some away, and he even made me a machine so that I could share them some day.”



“It’s alright, we can read,” Ada said.

“Oh, I am certain that you can, but I doubt that you can read these books well. For fiction you need a lot of imagination. If you can’t imagine, you can’t get into the story. And they have done their best to stamp it out of you all I fear.”

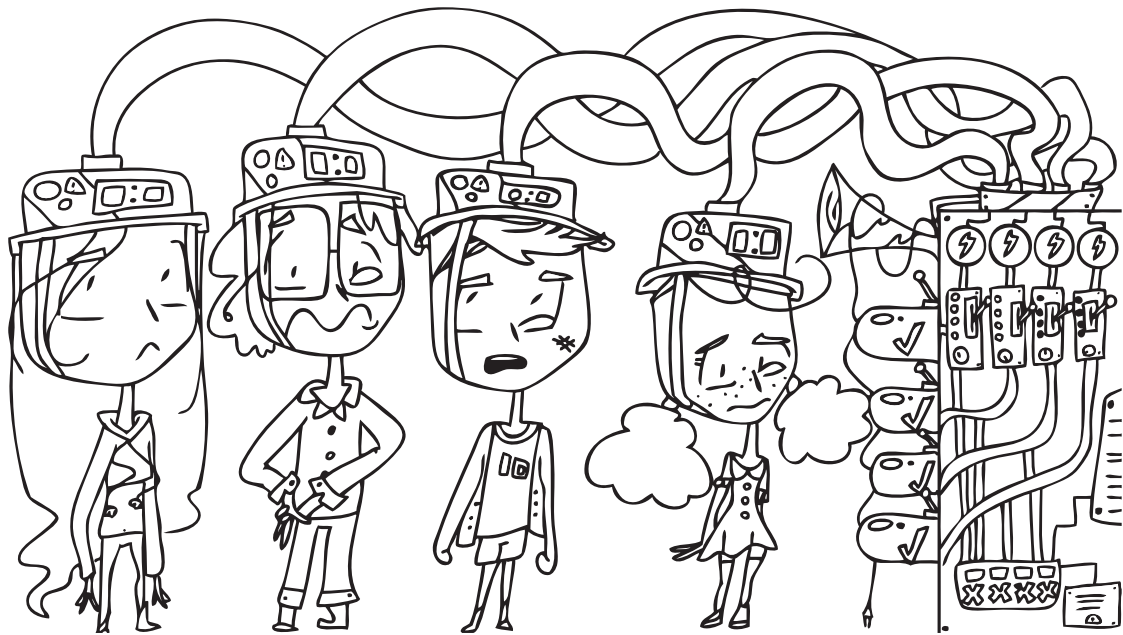
Ada pursed her lips. She didn’t feeling dumb, but Mrs. Quigley did have a point.

“So that is our punishment?” Skink asked. “To read some books?”

Mrs. Quigley nodded.

“Follow me down to the basement please.”

The children walked down into the basement. It smelled old and musty like a tomb. Mrs. Quigley took them to a different couch. Ada went out on a limb and sat down first. Mrs. Quigley placed part of the machine on her head. It buzzed and whirred, making her head feel numb. Then, the others were hooked up as well.



Mrs. Quigley brought out an old chest that had subtle carvings of different animals all over it. There were lions and mice, lambs and wolves, all running around the chest. She opened the latch with her thumb.

“Before we begin, you will need to think of a character for yourself.”

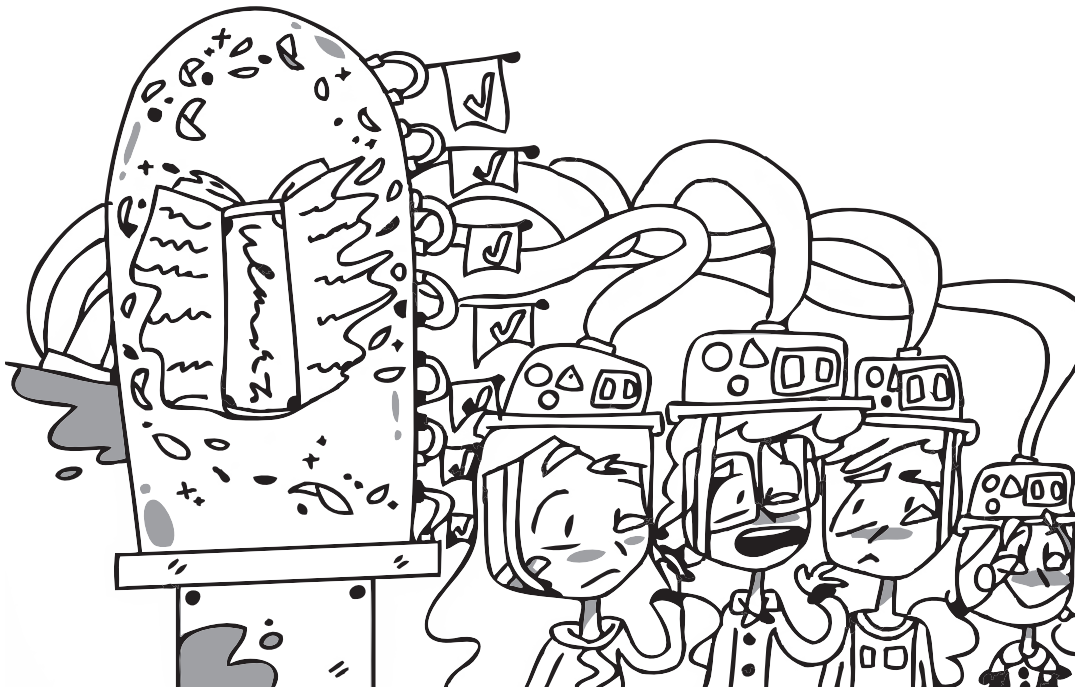
Ada, Darren, and Lachlan tried, but they couldn't think of anybody else to be. They chose themselves. Skink, however, decided about ten different animals that she wanted to be before settling on a shape shifter.

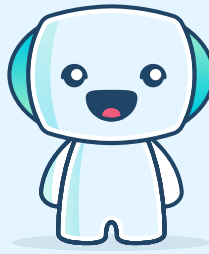


“Alright, are you ready?”

The children nodded. Mrs. Quigley took a book out of the chest and brought it over to a tank that sat beside the couch. She placed the book in the tank and the liquid began to eat away at the cover and pages.

Then, the children felt a cold sensation as the liquid shot through the tubes of the machines and into the domes around their heads.





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