

Helping you choose books for children



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5-7



7-9



9-12



12+

Opening extract from
Nixie's Song

Written by
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Published by
Simon & Schuster

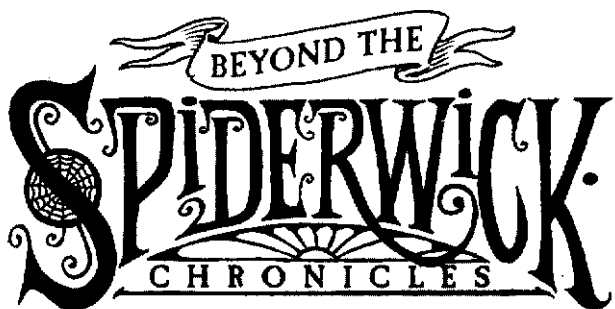
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BEYOND THE

SPIDERWICK

CHRONICLES



Chapter One



IN WHICH There Are Many Different Sorts of Developments

After his mother died, Nicholas Vargas stopped bothering. His Aunt Armena had told him to be good and not to bother his father, but he decided that her advice could extend to everyone and everything. It seemed that Nick's brother had the same idea—Jules never hung around long enough to bother anyone anymore. So the whole family kept on not bothering each other right up until Nick and Jules's dad suddenly decided to get married again.

Leading his new stepsister up the carpeted

Nick thought he was being fair about it, too, because he'd been called a loser and a nerd and a spaz himself. He was eleven, kind of fat, and bad at sports, while Julian shredded waves and made it to state in track. The only thing Nick thought *he* was really good at was school, and that was mostly about being quiet and following directions. So, okay, he knew he wasn't cool. At least he knew better than to advertise everything lame about himself. Laurie seemed to be proud to be the lamest person alive.



"I don't care what people think," Laurie said simply, like she meant it.

He wanted to snap at her, to tell her that *everyone* cared what people thought about them, but his dad had told him to be "civil" on moving day. He sighed. "Okay, so what stuff do you *like*?"

He looked out of her window at the empty concrete shells of houses going up all around theirs. When it had been his window, he'd liked to watch as workers poured and smoothed foundations and cut planks and nailed them in place. He liked to smell the sawdust and see that his dad's development was finally, really happening. Even though there was still some swampy forest left, soon it would all be cut back and turned into golf courses, swimming pools, and lots of other cool things. Stuff *he* liked.

He'd imagined playing out there with other kids, but the construction was behind schedule.

Nothing was done. His dad kept complaining about the weather—it was the hottest summer he could remember. And that, along with the brushfires and water rationing, had everyone on edge. The sun had turned the grass on the front lawn crunchy and brown, and Nicholas's dad hadn't filled the pool in the backyard, even though he usually filled the pools as soon as they were built. Now, with the rainy season about to start, Nick's whole summer was turning out to be as lame as his stepsister.

"I like all this stuff, I guess." Laurie stacked books onto her white beadboard shelves. They were mostly fantasy and fairy tales, but she'd set aside a big tome that had gold letters and what looked like a hawk on the cover.

"What's that?" he asked.

"A field guide. So you can tell which kind of faeries are which. I bet there are a lot around

After Nick and Julian's mom died and before their dad decided he needed to impress Charlene and her wacko daughter, lunch had been cold slices of leftover pizza from the night before or, on at least one occasion, a piece of apple pie with cheese melted on it. Now, apparently, it was alphabet soup and bologna sandwiches. With the crusts cut off. Nick wanted to hurl.

Downstairs in the kitchen, Julian was already sitting at the granite island. Earbud cords hung from his head, and his thumbs jabbed at the game console cradled in his hands. His hair was stiff with salt. He didn't even look up when Nick sat down next to him.

Laurie still had the stupid book tucked under one arm. "After lunch, I'm going to go look for faeries," she told her mother.

Charlene smiled mildly. "Maybe Nick can go with you. Show you around the neighborhood."

"It's too hot to look for anything," Nick said, smiling down at his reflection in the granite. "Especially things that don't exist."

Nick's dad frowned and then rubbed the bridge of his nose. Maybe he was upset his joke hadn't gone over all that well. "Go help her look. Keep her from getting lost."

Nick pushed the noodle letters in his soup so they spelled L-A-M-E. Lame. Like his summer. Like his stepsister. Like how he felt as he slurped his soup down and, without saying a thing, followed Laurie out into the yard.

