

As we pull into the parking lot at Ecola State Park, the beach is bustling with crowds of people-families with little kids, older couples, groups of teenagers and more. It's a cloudy day, with the sun trying its best to cast its rays on the sand. Josh, Chris and I step out of the car, ready to head towards Haystack Rock.

"Wait just a moment!" David exclaims in a loud voice. "It's 11:32 a.m. Meet back here at 3:00 p.m. sharp!"

"Got it!" We each yell as we dart towards the beach.

"Wow!" Josh says, amazed by the sight of Haystack Rock.

Chris and I quietly join Josh and head towards the huge rock that resembles something from another world, almost like the volcano-looking structure from the movie, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The cloudy day, with a hint of sunshine poking through, makes it look even more eerie. I remember from geology class that Haystack Rock rises around 235 feet from the edge of the shoreline. We missed the lowest tide, during sunrise, but we can still get close to the rock. As we walk closer, we observe sea creatures and vegetation clinging to its side, including starfish, mussels, snails, and lots of kelp. To the left and right of the main rock are two smaller formations.

We walk along the beach, staring at shells and other things that have washed up on the shore. Along the way, Josh notices two girls and decides to go over to talk to them. He returns minutes later, looking pitiful. I'm sure whatever the reason, his new hairstyle didn't help.

"Hey, I'm getting hungry. You guys wanna find something to eat?!" I ask excitedly.

"Yeah... um... I guess I'm fine with that," responds Chris.

"Me too," says Josh, sullenly, still licking his wounds from whatever those two girls told him.

We walk over to a burger stand to place our orders. Once they're ready, we pick them up and head back over to the beach to sit down and eat. It's a breezy day, and the sand's kinda damp, but we don't mind. We've waited a long time to be able to travel to Ecola State Park and see the old movie set, so a little wet sand can't bother us.

After throwing away our wrappers, we decide it's time to head over to the old set. As we approach it, we all pause to take in the view of the water in the background, only faintly visible from where we're standing, due to the clouds. In the foreground are trees and green hilly terrain. When we turn around, we recall the scene from the movie where the kids held up the treasure map, aligning it with the rock formations to confirm they are in the right location to start the treasure hunt, along Indian Beach Trail.

Only one structure is located on the former set, a picnic shelter that appears to be new. We decide to walk closer to get a better look. After making our way through the tall grass and up a hill, we finally arrive at the structure. There are only a few other people around, checking it out, probably fans as well.

"This is too cool! I can't believe we're actually here!" I exclaim, wondering why Chris and Josh are lagging so far behind.

"We're coming!" responds Josh, running to catch up with me.

Chris is not far behind.

"Um... why do you think they tore down the old set?" Chris asks, looking puzzled, as he walks inside the shelter.

"They were probably afraid some kids would end up getting hurt or something," I reply.

“Yeah, you’re probably right,” Chris says.

“Hey, dudes, look at this view!” Josh exclaims.

Josh is outside the shelter, standing on a small hill, looking out at the water. Chris and I join him. We can see people walking and jogging along the coast, not far from us.

“Hey, I’m going back inside to explore the shelter some more!” I exclaim.

As I walk towards it, I notice the other folks who were inside have already left. I take my time, looking at the ceiling, the beams, and the picnic tables. Everything’s in fairly good condition. Nothing seems strange. But, for some reason, that eerie feeling returns. Something’s not quite right.

“It’s nothing but a picnic shelter. The rest of the set’s gone. What’re you looking for?” Josh asks.

“I don’t know. I’m just exploring,” I reply.

“Well... um... explore quickly. It’s already 2:30 and we have to be back at David’s car by 3:00 or he’ll kill me!” Chris exclaims.

“I will... relax... I just need a little more time,” I reply, rolling my eyes and getting irritated with Chris for always being so nervous.

Josh and Chris join me in looking around, not knowing what they’re looking for either. I decide to leave the shelter and explore the wooded area nearby. I stare down at the ground and notice something that doesn’t seem like it belongs. I move back the leaves and debris and there it is.

“Hey, guys, look at this!” I yell excitedly, in a voice that’s louder than necessary.

Josh and Chris come running over to find out what’s gotten me so worked up.

“It’s a trapdoor right in the middle of the woods! Can you believe it? I wonder where it leads!”

I exclaim.

“Uh... you’re not thinking about going down there are you?” asks Chris, sounding very concerned.

“Of course I am! What if the caves from the movie are really down there?” I reply.

“I don’t know about this, man. We don’t even know what’s down there and we need to get back to David’s car by 3:00!” Chris exclaims, becoming even more nervous.

“I’ll go down with you. Chris, you stay up here in case something happens,” Josh states.

“Uh... what do you mean ‘in case something happens’? I don’t like this one bit. You dudes are crazy. I’ll... uh, wait for you guys, but if we’re late getting back to my brother’s car, it won’t be my fault!” Chris exclaims.

“We won’t be late!” I call out, as I descend the dilapidated staircase, not knowing what I’ll find.

Chapter 3

Jacob

(1984)

As I descend further, a strange sensation comes over me, as if I'm being led deeper and deeper into a place I should not be. A place where no one should be. Suddenly, bright lights begin flashing, causing me to close my eyes. When I open them, I'm in my bedroom, but something seems different. Things aren't where I left them and some objects I recognize, but I haven't seen them for years. I jump out of my bed and start walking around my room. As I walk, I catch a glimpse of myself in the dresser mirror.

"Ahhh!" I scream.

I cannot believe what I'm seeing! It's me, but I'm seven or eight years old, yet I remember everything that happened today, like arriving at Ecola State Park with my friends and David.

I begin frantically looking around the room, trying to find a staircase or something that will take me back to the shelter. *Where are Chris and Josh? Oh no, what is David thinking? How long have I been here?* These thoughts race through my mind as I try to figure out how I ended up back in my room as a child. *What's happening? Did I hit my head? Am I dreaming or is something else going on?* I recall the bright lights that flashed when I descended the staircase. All of a sudden, the strangest thought enters my mind. *Did that trapdoor lead me into some kind of time portal? No, that's crazy. Those don't exist.* I keep walking around my room and pinching myself to figure out if I'm dreaming, but I can feel the pain each time I do.

I start to realize my room looks the way I remember it when I was younger. My Legos are scattered around the floor, my frisbee that I lost is on my window seat and my schoolbooks are resting on my dresser.

I look out the window and see that it's a sunny day. Just then, something happens that causes me to freeze in my tracks! I can hear someone calling me from downstairs.

"Mom?" I say out loud.

"Jacob, we're leaving for the zoo in about one hour. Do you need help getting ready?" Mom asks.

I can't believe it! This is the day that I went to the zoo with Mom and Meghan. *How can this be?*

"Jacob, did you hear me?" asks Mom again.

"Yes, Mom. I don't need help. I'll be down soon!"

A million thoughts swirl through my mind. *How did I get back here? Why am I back here? Are Jacob, Chris and David looking for me? Why am I so young? I should have listened to Chris when he said we needed to head back to the car,* but the thought that is the loudest, that rises above all others, is that *I'll soon see my mom again!* It has been three, long, sad years without her. I think about her every hour of every day since she's been gone and the thought of actually seeing her and being near her is more than I can comprehend. I quickly get dressed and head downstairs. I race to the kitchen where I know my mom is cooking breakfast and I just stand there, staring at the back of her from the doorway of the kitchen, afraid that any wrong move might cause this moment to disappear forever.