

**THE PEPPER**  
**PARTY**  
*IS Completely Cursed*

By  
**JAY**  
**COOPER**

Scholastic Inc.

# For my big sis, Teresa, whose ghost stories scared me silly!

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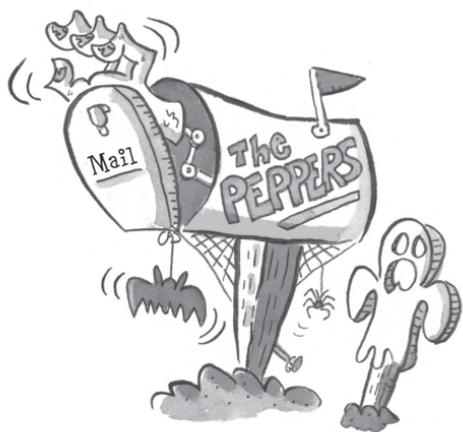
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# CHAPTER 1

Every year, San Pimento went bonkers over Halloween. All across the city, fabric ghosts hung from tree branches, foam gravestones lined the sidewalks, and giant inflatable witches wobbled on every lawn. And everyone always made sure one house was on their



trick-or-treating list . . .  
the Pepper house!

No one in town had more Halloween spirit. But the Peppers could never agree on *anything*, and their Halloween theme was no exception.

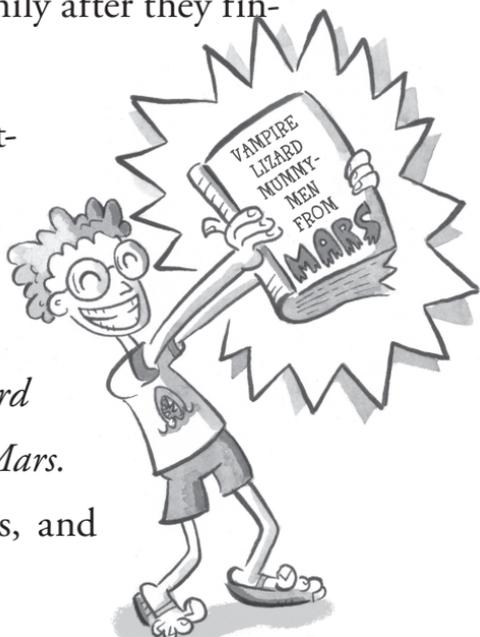
Maria insisted on fairies and glitter, while Annie wanted bloody fangs and evil eyes everywhere. Sal thought a true Pepper Halloween should be themed after his favorite scary movie, *Attack of the Killer Chili*. Since the family couldn't agree, they each decided to do Halloween their own way . . . and the house ended up looking a little mixed-up.

One Pepper in particular took Halloween *very* seriously.

Beta Max planned on making the scariest movies of all time when he grew up. His movies would be bloodier than the bloodiest zombie movies and would make audiences jump higher than Stevie Shpealburger's classic shark movie, *Teeth!* So it's no surprise that Beta thought that Halloween was the coolest of holidays. And every year he made a brand-new, super scary movie to show to the family after they finished trick-or-treating.

This year he had outdone himself.

Beta Max had written a stellar screenplay entitled *Vampire Lizard Mummymen from Mars*. There were thrills, chills, and



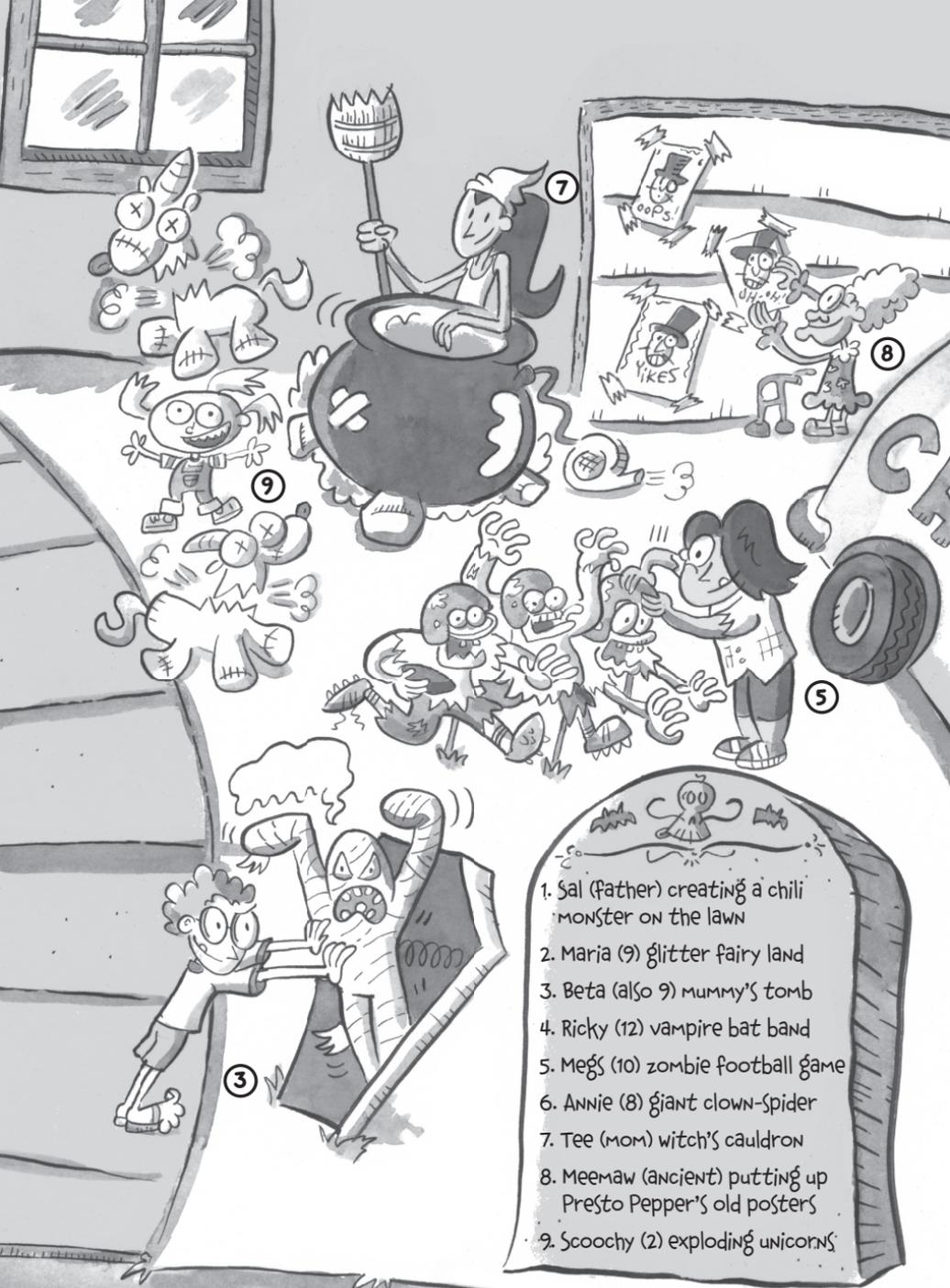


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1. Sal (father) creating a chili monster on the lawn
2. Maria (9) glitter fairy land
3. Beta (also 9) mummy's tomb
4. Ricky (12) vampire bat band
5. Megs (10) zombie football game
6. Annie (8) giant clown-spider
7. Tee (mom) witch's cauldron
8. Meemaw (ancient) putting up Presto Pepper's old posters
9. Scoochy (2) exploding unicorns

even a romance. Beta thought love stories were kind of gross. But he wanted there to be something for everyone. Mostly the movie was just plain scary! And he was nearly ready to start filming.

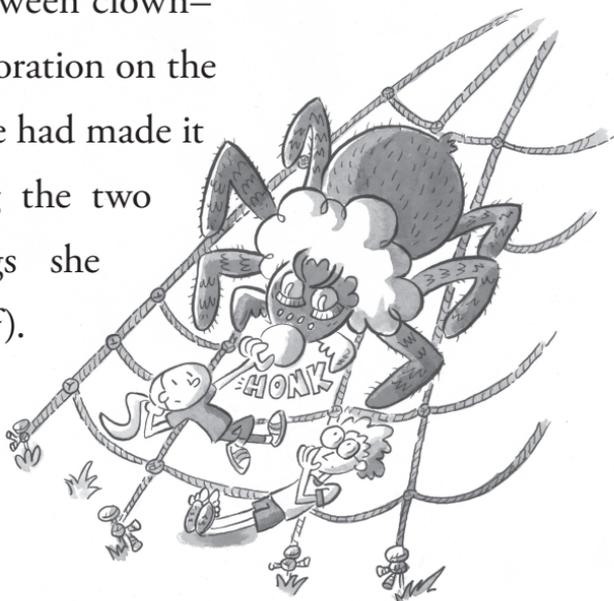
He had a big family and truckloads of friends he could use as actors. In fact, he had already cast his big sister Megs in the leading role, as the heroic space marine with fists of gold and a heart of steel. (Or was it the other way around? Yes! She had fists of *steel* and a heart of *gold*!)

What Beta really needed to bring his vision to life were amazing sets and props. *Vampire Lizard Mummymen from Mars* wasn't any old cheesy movie he could make with stuff he found around the house. This one was extra special, and it needed to look that way!

Sadly, Beta was totally broke. He didn't have so much as a dollar to buy supplies to build his film set.

He had hired Annie as his assistant director, since she'd done such a great job on his last movie. Together they would have to find cheap, creative ways to make their scenes spring to life on the screen.

One afternoon, they were lounging in Annie's Halloween clown-spiderweb decoration on the front lawn (she had made it by combining the two scariest things she could think of).



They brainstormed ways they could make their movie.

“We could set up a lemonade stand to raise money,” suggested Annie.

“In October? No one buys lemonade in October,” Beta glumly replied.

Beta stared at the giant clown-spider’s silly red nose, wondering if he could give his vampire lizard mummymen glowing red eyes using some borrowed night-lights from his brother’s and sisters’ rooms, when Meemaw Pepper hobbled

past, barely visible beneath a load of rolled-up posters.

Their grandmother decorated for Halloween by tacking up old posters that belonged to her



father, Presto Pepper, on the garage door. Presto had been a famously terrible magician—he had been so bad at magic that people had traveled across the country to watch him screw up his tricks. He'd even been the toast of a European tour, and had famously failed to make Big Ben disappear. (He'd only made the first two floors of the clock tower vanish, and they'd renamed it Not Quite as Big Ben.) When he'd offered to make the crown jewels disappear, the queen politely said no. She was worried she'd never get them back!

But Meemaw loved her father dearly, and since Halloween had been his favorite holiday, she liked to honor him. Beta watched as she slowly unrolled a poster and started putting it up. The poster read, “The Amazingly Terrible Presto Pepper: You Will Believe Your Eyes!”

THE AMAZINGLY TERRIBLE

PRESTO

PEPPER!

YOU WILL BELIEVE  
★ YOUR EYES ★



“Hey, Meemaw,” called Beta. “Those old posters are so cool! Why don’t we get one framed for the house?”

Meemaw took a step back and smiled at the image of her father losing his grip on a deck of cards. “Pappy liked to make an entrance (usually by tripping over the curtain and falling into the audience). He wouldn’t want to be just hangin’ around all the time. You’d never give him a second look!” She shook her head. “Nope. After Halloween, I’ll put ’em back in the attic along with Presto’s other props.”

Beta froze, and Annie, who’d been playing with her giant clown-spider’s red nose, stopped mid-honk.

“Props?” asked Beta, trying to sound casual.

“Oh, sure,” said Meemaw as she tacked another poster to the garage door. “All his

doodads and whatchamacallits and magic show sets are up in the attic. My little Sallie's always threatening to throw them out, but then I just give 'im THE GLARE. So they're up there, just collecting dust."

Beta and Annie stared at each other. They were thinking the same thing. And it wasn't that Meemaw's glare could wilt a flower, although it could.

Annie asked in a sweet voice, "Meemaw, would you mind if we used them in a movie we're making?"

Their grandmother smiled. "I think Presto would think that's a mighty fine idea. Just don't break anything . . ." she warned sternly. "Or Presto may come back to haunt you!"

Beta and Annie looked scared.

“HA!” Meemaw hooted. “I’m just pullin’ yer legs! HA HA!!!”

With that she pulled out another poster. This one read, “Presto the Not Nearly Amazing! Can He Escape the Water Tank of Doom?” Meemaw shook her head. Apparently, Presto couldn’t.