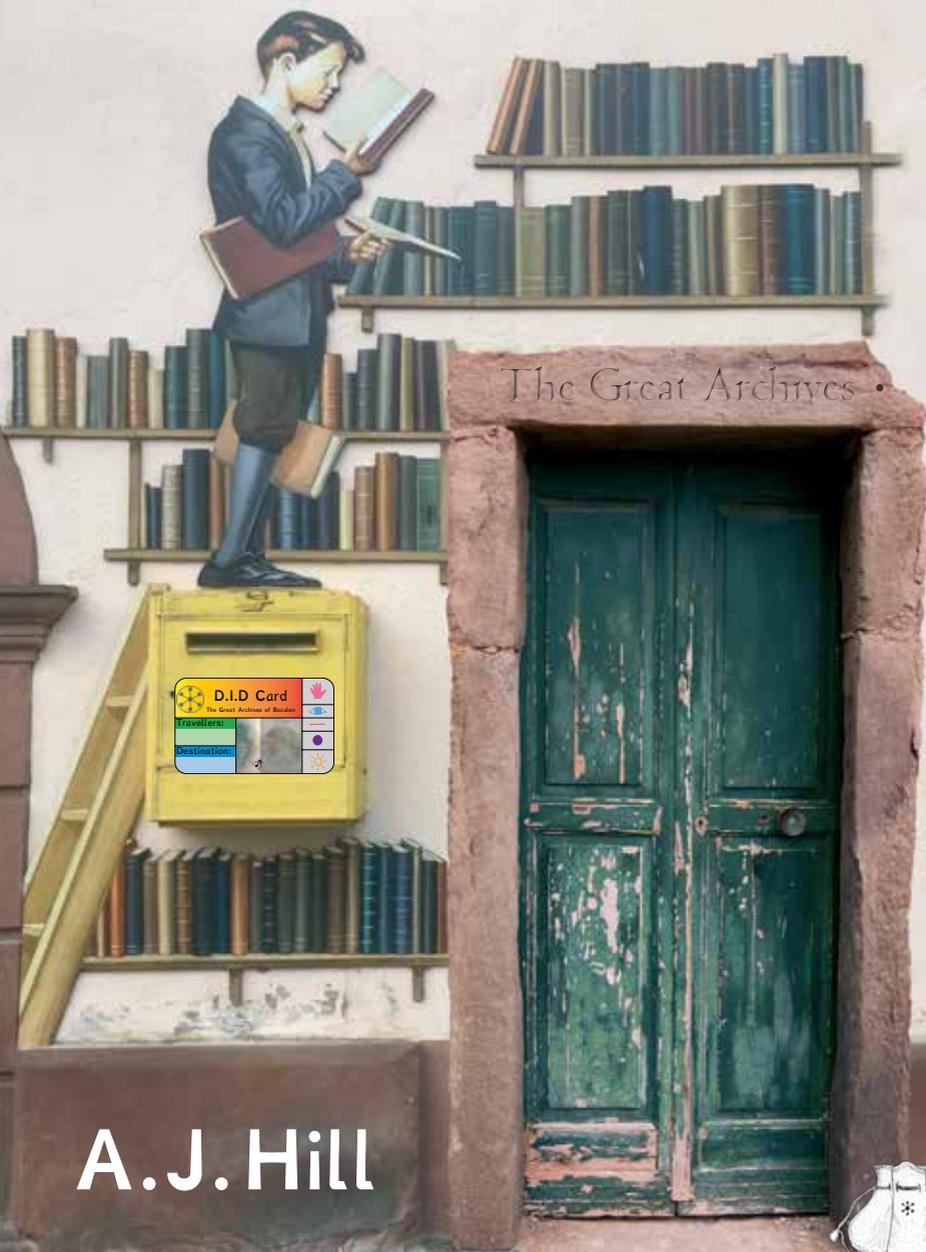


The Story Weavers of Bacalen

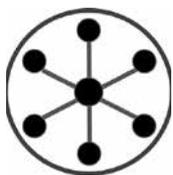
The Story Snatchers



A.J. Hill

Junior authors: M.E. Grace & C. Höök





*Protect your books' stories:
a warning to readers from
The Great Archives of Bacalen.*

The words on the spine and title page of this book are written in an ancient script from The Great Archives of Bacalen.

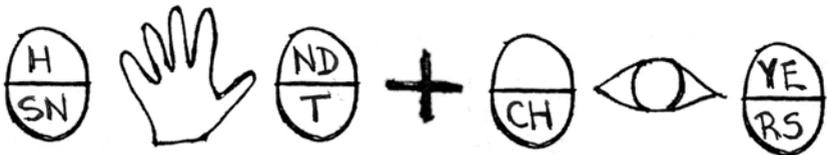
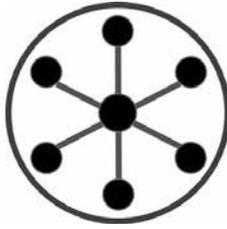
Diegesis Script will protect this story from the steals of Story Snatchers who prowl our world, searching for books so that they can change their stories.

If you are truly a friend of The Great Archives, you can use this script to save other stories from The Snatchers.

Translate your book's title into Diegesis Script, write it on a bookmark or strip of paper and place it between the book's pages each time you have finished reading. The Snatchers can't remove a bookmark touched with Diegesis Script. It will protect the story forever!

To translate a book title into Diegesis Script, you will need to decipher the words woven into the magical bookmarks that the Story Weavers find in this adventure.





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Junior Authors: M.E. Grace and C. Hook

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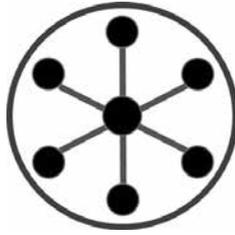
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Back Cover illustration: Ned ‘Elly: the original painting, ‘Ned Kelly’ by Sidney Nolan resides in The National Gallery of Australia in the capital city of Canberra. The picture has been transformed by The Picture Pinchers (or by Annabel Bowcher!). The important thing is that the author has acknowledged the source and original artist (sadly The Story Snatchers and The Picture Pinchers would not have bothered to do this!).

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The History of Stories

“Stories are everywhere;

And in everything;

In all that we do;

In all that we see.

They are why we learn.

They are why we question.

But,

If stories are lost;

If stories are changed;

Then our lives;

Then our world;

Changes too.”

*(Diegesis, The First Great Storyteller
at The Great Archives of Bacalen)*



Chapter 3:

Who knows the book's real story?

It was lunchtime outside the library.

Only a few students took the leisurely lunch approach. They liked sitting on the wooden benches, talking to friends and eating slowly from their lunch boxes. Most students used the **CRASS** (chew rapidly and swallow speedily) technique to maximise game time.

The older students were playing games of handball on the grey concrete squares or soccer, netball and touch-footy on the small, grassed oval. The younger children had found hoops, skipping ropes and balls. Others built in the sandpit or climbed on the playground.

I turned to Meg as we walked away from the library. She grabbed my arm and pulled me over to a nearby bench. I sat down with a thud.

“Ouch!” I said, “Stop doing that!”

This time she did not apologise. Meg stood

in front of me, her eyes focused on my school library bag.

“We need to sort this out,” she said. “I don’t know why you wanted that old book but I do know where it’s from.”

She looked directly at me. Her blue eyes fixed me with a gaze that made me uneasy. I didn’t feel quite as brave or connected to her now we had left the library! Our eyes were locked together in a strange, staring competition.

“I need to take the book back.” Meg continued to stare at me. Her words melted into my mind. “Give the book to me, Samuel, you need to let it go.”

Meg held out her hand for the book. Her voice was steady and hypnotic. I was powerless.

I knew my hand was moving towards the library bag. I didn’t want to give Meg the book but I was not in control. My fingers closed around the battered book. I continued to stare at Meg. Holding the book immediately caused my body to tense and tingle. Meg’s quiet words had made a dense fog fill my head. Now feeling the book in my hand, the fog cleared. I could think again!

Meg has been hypnotising me to give her the book! Is SHE some sort of magician?

I shook my head and looked down at the book. It seemed so worn and lifeless in the sunlight. Its strange cover made of a thin, dark-brown material, fraying at the edges and falling off the spine had no words on it anymore. Instead, there was a faded symbol—a gold circle with six smaller circles spaced around it and thin gold lines connecting them to the central circle. The symbol began to softly glow in the sunlight.

Somehow this battered, old book with its strange symbol gave me the courage to look into Meg's blue eyes again. I would tell her that she could not have this book.

I looked at Meg. What's going on? Meg's face had changed. Her eyes were now sparkling and dancing with delight. She was chewing her bottom lip.

“So you were really drawn to this book?” Her words began tumbling out. “You did see the words? You can see the star? It called to you. I'm right aren't I Samuel? Aren't I?”

Why was she so excited?

“Well, it seemed like an interesting book,”

I replied slowly, staring at Meg in wonder. “It did grab my attention.” I looked down at the book again. The symbol had faded away. Did I imagine everything this book had done?

“Do you want to read it?” Meg persisted.

“Sure,” I shrugged, trying to sound casual. “If I had found this book during the lesson, I would have borrowed it. I’m really sick of not being able to find a book to borrow.”

Meg listened intently. Her left foot wriggled and tapped impatiently as I spoke. I knew she was desperate to tell me more about this book. She’s wondering if I can be trusted! I was two years younger than Meg and not somebody she would usually share things with.

“All the amazing books my sister has told me to find have vanished from the library.”

“So you **HAVE** noticed that the good books have gone!” Meg said, her voice sounding triumphant. A smile spread across her face. She looked like she was about to burst!

I nodded slowly. “I guess you could say that.”

“Well it has happened,” she said, lowering her voice and leaning closer. “It’s happened all over town.”

“All over town?”

“Yes,” Meg continued, her face becoming serious. “All the librarians and bookshop owners are trying to stop the stealing. The bookshops have installed security cameras but nothing has been recorded.”

Books are being stolen? How does Meg know all this? Of course—her parent’s bookstore!

“Your parents own Multi-Story,” I said. “Have books gone from there too? It’s a brilliant book shop. My sister and I always find a way to visit it when we’re shopping with Mum and Dad. We stay there for ages.”

Mum and Dad love bookshops too.

Mum would say, “There are worse things than getting your nose stuck in a book!”

Dad would always joke outside a book shop, “The family that reads together...”

And we would yell, “...is the REID family!” and then race inside to investigate what amazing tales were on the shelves.

“It’s a lot harder to get out of a bookshop than it is to get into it,” said Meg, and a smile briefly flickered across her face.

I nodded, remembering how often I had sat

crouched between the bookshelves at Multi-Story, trying to quickly finish a book before we had to leave!

In the holidays, the store had storytellers—how I wished I could tell a story as they did! Children of all ages would sit mesmerised, listening, totally absorbed in the words. Those who could not stay until the end of the story, would beg their parents to buy the book before they left—Kate and I had certainly done that!

“The stealing has been happening at Multi-Story. People just won’t visit a bookshop or a library anymore if they can’t find the right book,” said Meg.

“Why would somebody want to steal so many books?” I asked. “I’m sure heaps of books are missing from the school library, but there aren’t any spaces on the shelves. Wouldn’t Miss Paige notice if books had been stolen?”

“Of course she’s noticed!” said Meg defensively, “And it’s not the **BOOKS** that are missing, it’s the **STORIES.**”

“Same thing,” I replied shortly, annoyed that Meg thought that there was a difference.

“It’s not,” Meg said firmly. “It’s not the same thing at all. Books protect and hold

stories inside them. A skilful story is the essence of a good book. If their story is lost or changed, the book becomes a hollow shell, not worth the paper the story is printed on.”

WOW! I had never thought that a book and a story were different. What’s going on? If stories are being stolen, then this is a mystery that needs to be solved! Could Meg and I solve it together?

“If these stories are lost,” Meg continued passionately, squeezing her hands tightly together, “then people will lose interest in reading books. They won’t read about history or great discoveries; they won’t know about the world or understand about our universe; they’ll be glued to screens and fed information that they never question, I mean really question.”

Meg paused and her hands relaxed. She looked at me with her penetrating gaze. I stared back at her, beginning to understand what she was saying.

It’s difficult to believe but I know it’s true! The stories I remember enjoying with my sister have actually been changed! These new stories are not ones that I want to read!

How had it happened? Why had it

happened? When had it happened? Who had made it happen? And why had I noticed that the stories had changed but my friends had not?

“Can the stories be found? Can they be put back?” I asked Meg. “Can I help? Can this book help?”

“I WILL need to take that book back.”

I froze. The voice was not Meg’s.

It belonged to our librarian, Miss Paige. She had walked over without me noticing. Her serious green eyes were fixed steadily on the book in my hands. I turned to Meg, unsure what to do. She didn’t look at all surprised or concerned.

“Come on,” she said casually, grabbing my arm and pulling me up from the bench. “We’ll explain it inside the library.”

Meg propelled me back into the building from which I thought we had escaped! I grasped the book tightly in my hands. It made me feel safe and secure. Miss Paige followed, locking the library door behind us. Her long, purple boots marched behind us. **CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK.**

Meg directed me to the small group of

reading chairs at the far side of the library. We sat down. I waited nervously on a blue chair, my finger tracing the swirling pattern on the cover. My eyes slowly looked up at Miss Paige.

What is going on in this library? When will I hear the book's story?

Miss Paige ran her hand through her short, curly, greying hair and then reached into the green pocket of her dress. I held my breath. She pulled out a pair of green glasses.

Why does Miss Paige have glasses? She doesn't wear them during lessons.

She put them on and looked at me steadily through pale green lenses. I stared. There was no time to ask about her glasses—I knew why she wore them.

She held out her hand. Unlike Meg, she did not say a word. I did not want to give her the book but I had no choice. The book was in control this time.

I saw my arms stretch out toward Miss Paige. She gently took the book from me. I felt my body relax as it left my hands. Then my mind flooded with questions.

What just happened? Are Miss Paige and Meg working together? Can I trust them?

First, I wanted to get out of the library and now I don't want to leave until I know the whole story!

This was the best adventure a book had ever taken me on! It was a REAL mystery!

