

BATTLE OF THE
BLOCKS

**DESCENT
INTO
OVERWORLD**

LIAM O'DONNELL

DESCENT
INTO
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Battle of the Blocks 1

Liam O'Donnell



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Battle of the Blocks 1: Descent into Overworld

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*For the Rools, the Grims, the Aeries
and all the Youngers and Elders
on GamingEdus.*

1

Things got serious when the creeper blew up the school cafeteria.

Three-day-old macaroni salad covered the kitchen.

“This is bad,” Ant said from under the food prep table. Goopy pasta dripped from the edge. He caught a glob with his fingers and popped it in his mouth. “Bad but very delicious.”

“It’s bad and it’s very much your fault!” Hamid said. He elbowed Ant in the back to get more room under the table.

“I said I was sorry about that.” Ant squished over, giving his best friend prime access to the dripping macaroni.

Ant hated to admit it, but Hamid was right. This was all his fault. Ant had caused this chaos. He was the reason why his school was filled with roaming creepers. And there was no way to stop it.

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A loud hissing came from the other side of the windows running along the kitchen wall. Hamid spied a tall, sausage-shaped shadow crawling through the darkness. The creature peered through the window with sad eyes. Its body flashed like a broken light bulb. Hamid knew what was coming next. He plugged his ears.

BOOM!

Chunky red goop splattered against the windows.

“There goes the pizza lunch special.” Ant rubbed his belly. Tomato sauce and pizza dough covered the floor. It mixed in with the spilled macaroni to create a swirling mess of food that Ant might have sampled if they weren’t hiding for their lives. He stared longingly at the goop. “All that pepperoni gone to waste.”

“Another reason to hate creepers,” Hamid said.

Sharp screeches echoed through the ceiling from outside. The school windows rattled as a squadron of flying ghosts rained fireballs down onto the schoolyard.

“Sounds like they hit the Adventure Playground,” Hamid said.

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“The kindergartners are going to be ticked off,”
Ant said.

The kitchen door burst open. Two thin shapes clattered through the doorway. The sinister pair moved as if they were one. Their long bows were pulled tight, arrows ready to fly. Skeletons. The clean-up crew, moving in to mop up anything that survived the creeper blast. They pointed their bows around the kitchen, looking for a target.

Hamid felt like he'd eaten a tub of rotten mayonnaise. There was nowhere to run. No escape.

“This is the end,” he said. “We've come all this way to be defeated by two lousy skeletons in our own school kitchen.”

The skeletons rounded the end of the table. They spun their bows directly at the two friends.

Ant and Hamid looked their attackers in the eye. They were ready to accept their fate.

The real world would never be the same.

They had lost.

Herobrine had won.

* * *

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Two weeks earlier, Ant and Hamid were thrilled to be surrounded by skeletons and creepers.

“I told you Mini-Minecon was going to be a blast,” Ant said.

“You said it was going to be total fail.” Hamid gave his friend a playful punch.

“Ouch!” Ant rubbed his shoulder in mock agony. He stood a head taller than Hamid and was thin as an enderman but moved slower than a slime-slurping uphill.

“He’s right, Ant,” Jaina said beside them. She was in sixth grade, was almost as tall as Ant, and loved Minecraft just as much as both boys did. “You said no one would come to a Minecraft convention in our home town. Remember?”

“Okay, okay,” Ant said. “Maybe I had a few doubts.”

“Only a few doubts, Ant?” Mr. Rodinaldo’s deep voice made them all jump. It always did. For a guy the size of a refrigerator, Mr. R moved as quietly as a ninja. Hamid wondered if they taught Sneaking 101 at teacher’s college. “I seem to recall you saying our Mini-Minecon convention was going to be just me and a plate of uneaten sandwiches.”

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“Did I say that?” Ant said.

“Yes,” Jaina and Hamid said in unison.

Mr. R chuckled. “I’m only teasing, Ant. I had my doubts too, but this little event turned out to be a success.”

A sea of people moved through the lobby of the convention center. The place was packed with fans of the blocky building game. People in cardboard creeper costumes hurried across the orange carpet. Families wearing Steve heads posed for pictures. There was even some dude on stilts in a full-on enderman costume. For a town as small as Renville, it threw a pretty good Minecraft party.

A woman with big hair and an even bigger smile walked up to them.

“Are you ready for your interview now, Mr. Rodinaldo?”

It was Mr. R’s turn to jump in surprise.

“Ah, yes!” he said. His face flushed a deep red.

“Excellent. We’ve got the camera set up over here.”

Mr. R followed the woman across the lobby to a quiet corner where a tall man carrying a TV camera on his shoulder greeted them.

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“Is that Sheena Raine from Channel 57?” Ant’s eyes bugged out. He looked like a toad that just swallowed a hot pepper. “Is Mr. R is going to be on the news tonight?”

“That would be cool,” Hamid said.

Mr. Rodinaldo had played Minecraft since it was in beta. He was the one who had started the Minecraft club at their school. Not that it was much of a club, thanks to their principal’s dislike for videogames. Principal Whiner refused to allow any videogames on school computers – even those lame educational games that tried to trick you into learning stuff. Whiner’s motto was ‘If it’s fun, it’s not learning!’ He even had it painted on the walls of their computer lab in the library.

Naturally, Whiner refused to allow Mr. R to start a Minecraft club at the school. But Mr. Rodinaldo’s favorite motto was ‘If at first you don’t succeed, keep nagging.’ Eventually Whiner caved. Sort of. He allowed the club but definitely didn’t want it to succeed. To ensure its failure, Whiner limited the club to only three members.

Chaos ensued. Every kid in the school hounded Mr. R. They pestered him before school, after

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school, at recess and even while he ate lunch in the staff room. They pleaded with him to be one of the lucky three. You would think Principal Whiner would take this as a sign that the club would be a hit with the kids. Instead, Whiner blamed Mr. Rodinaldo for distracting students from their valuable learning.

Most teachers would have just cancelled the club after all this hassle, but not Mr. R. He put all names in a very large hat. Jaina, Hamid and Ant were the lucky three chosen. Everyone at the school hoped Principal Whiner would let more kids into the club next year. Hamid figured they had a better chance of seeing the old fart wear an 'I pork chop Minecraft' T-shirt.

Mr. Rodinaldo had helped organize today's Mini-Minecon in their home town, and what a great day of geeking out it had been.

Jaina had gone to all the redstone workshops and learned a bunch of new tricks and builds for her pistons and redstone contraptions. Ant had spent time in the master building sessions, learning about new ways to use Minecraft's blocks to create colossal builds. Hamid got his nerd on with the

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back end coder types. They sat around talking mod packs, plug-ins and other admin level stuff to keep his server humming along.

“We should say goodbye to Mr. R before we go,” Jaina said. “If he ever finishes talking to Sheena Raine.”

Hamid grinned. “When Mr. R gets talking about Minecraft, it’s hard to get him to stop.”

“He’s not the only one.” Ant fixed Hamid with a knowing stare.

“It’s my Minecraft knowledge that has saved your butt many times, noob!”

A guy in a villager’s costume pushed his way out from the crowd. He ignored the complaints of the other fans and stumbled toward them. Without a word, he collapsed into Hamid’s arms.

Jaina rushed to the man’s side, helping him stand.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

The villager didn’t respond. He struggled to breathe under his mask. Was it even a mask? It was the best Minecraft villager head Hamid had ever seen. He couldn’t tell where the costume ended and the person began. But the guy did get one thing

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wrong: this villager had red hair. Even the biggest noob knew all villagers are bald.

The villager grabbed Hamid's shirt and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Help us," he gasped.

"Get the mask off him so he can breathe better," Jaina said.

The villager shook his head. He let go of Hamid's shirt and sat down on the carpet. He slipped his backpack from his shoulders and began rummaging through the bag.

A thin piece of wood tipped with feathers stuck out from the villager's side.

Ant leaned close to Jaina. "Look at that arrow! Is that part of the costume?"

"I have no idea," Jaina said, unable to take her eyes off the very real and very painful-looking wound on the villager's side.

Jaina kneeled down to get a closer look at the stranger's wound but the villager waved her away.

"There is no time," he said, still fumbling through his bag. "He is coming."

The villager pulled four blue foam Minecraft swords from the backpack.

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Hamid wondered how he fit the long swords into such a small bag. Before he could ask, the guy in villager costume thrust the swords into his hands.

“You will have to do,” he said.

“Have to do what?” Ant asked.

The villager paused as if he was thinking about Ant’s question.

“Save the Seed. Save us from Herobrine,” he said. His whole body slumped like he had just fallen asleep.

But he wasn’t asleep. Jaina shook him gently. He didn’t wake. She turned to the others, her eyes filled with worry.

Around them, people kept moving through the convention center. No one took any notice of the little man on the ground.

Ant was about yell for help when the villager began to sparkle. The sparkle grew into a glow that lit up their corner of the lobby. Then, as quick as flicking a light switch, the glow vanished.

And so did the villager.

The three friends stared at the empty patch of carpet where he had been moments before.

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The only trace of the strange visitor was the foam swords in their hands and his words echoing in their minds.

Save us from Herobrine.

2

The foam sword lay across Principal Whiner's desk. It looked out of place on top of the teetering stack of spreadsheets, test scores and detention records. Each piece of paper represented the worst thing about school: children.

Principal Whiner often dreamed of the day when some genius would figure out how to run a school without those miserable, gap-toothed, snot-nosed monsters known as children. They were loud, rude and always getting in trouble. And when they got in trouble, it was up to him to punish them. He considered it one of the perks of the job.

Whiner scowled at the two boys standing in front of his desk. Anthony Thistle and Hamid Parvan. Two examples of what was wrong with schools today: they let in brats like Hamid and Anthony. Unlike many teachers at North Gray Elementary, Principal Whiner refused to call

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Anthony by his nickname, 'Ant'. Nicknames did not appear on report cards. They were a distraction to a child's learning at school. And often they were fun. To Principal Whiner, fun did not belong in school. Ever.

Whiner picked up the foam sword and held it like it was something pulled from a first grader's nose.

"This is from that game of yours. Isn't it?"

He said game like it was a swear word. To Principal Whiner, videogames were worse than any bad word. They warped the minds of children. They made kids lazy. They made kids violent. Videogames were a scourge on the youth of today. And this Minecraft, with its zombies and skeletons, was the worst one of them all. It had seeped into the minds of children in his school unlike any game before. Even the teachers enjoyed it. Some, like that fool Mr. Rodinaldo, wanted to play the game in class to make school fun. School was not meant to be fun. It wasn't fun when Whiner was a child and it should not be fun today. There was no question about it, Minecraft had to go. Principal Whiner didn't just want it gone from the halls of North

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Gray Elementary, he wanted it gone from the world. And the first step in that quest began with the two boys in front of him.

Whiner dropped the sword back onto his desk.

“Well,” he said. “Are you going to answer me or just stand there like two terrified guppies?”

Ant took a deep breath and launched into his prepared defense.

“It is from Minecraft and it’s perfectly harmless – ”

That was as far as he got.

“Harmless?” Whiner said in that high, squeaky tone he got when he was getting ready to lay into an unlucky student. “Young man, there is nothing harmless about a sword! It can seriously hurt people.”

“It’s made of foam,” Ant said. “You know that, right?”

Hamid cringed. Was his best friend trying to make things worse? Interrupting Whiner when he was on a roll only added to the inevitable punishment.

“I don’t care if it’s made of diamonds!” Whiner said. “You know the rules. No weapons at school.”

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Foam, wooden or real.”

Hamid knew better than to tell his principal the blue foam sword was meant to be a diamond sword in Minecraft. Ant, who clearly didn't know better, opened his mouth to speak. Whiner silenced him with a look. Their principal read the pink note that had traveled with them from class.

“According to Ms. Talagrand, you were playing with them during a math test.”

“We were finished, sir,” Hamid said. Technically, Whiner had stopped talking so he hoped this didn't count as interrupting.

“Don't interrupt me!” Guess not. Whiner continued to read the pink note. “You were chasing each other around the classroom waving this weapon while one of you was shouting, and I quote, ‘SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS ... BOOM!’ Does this sound correct?”

Ant stood up straighter and cleared his throat. “Hamid was a creeper, sir. And I was merely trying to save my classmates from being blown to smithereens.”

Principal Whiner turned his glare up a notch. “Are you messing with me, young man?”

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“No, sir, he’s being totally serious,” Hamid said. He struggled to keep a straight face. He was scared of what Whiner would do but the confused look on his principal’s face was pretty funny.

Hamid knew his dad would be furious to hear his son was in trouble again. That would mean no screen time at home. And that meant no Minecraft. He had a dozen things to do on his server. He had plug-ins to update and most likely griefing to rollback. There was always griefing to fix. He couldn’t lose his screen time.

Ant began to speak again but Hamid jumped in first.

“We won’t do it again, sir. Whatever punishment you feel is fitting, we will gladly do it.”

Hamid could feel Ant’s glare burn into him. His friend had trouble with that whole ‘knowing when to quit’ thing. Hamid would have to explain it to Ant. Again.

“A month’s detention for both of you. Starting today.” Principal Whiner jabbed his finger at the foam sword on his desk. “And I’m keeping this.”

“You can’t do that!” Ant said.

“Yes, I can,” Whiner said. “Now get back to class

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before I make it two months' detention."

Hamid dragged Ant out of the office.

"But! But ..." his friend stammered on the way through the door.

The office door closed with a satisfying slam. Mr. Whiner's whole body glowed with satisfaction. Finally, those two brats got to see who was in charge at this school. A month of staying after school instead of rushing home to play that silly game would wipe the smug smiles from their faces.

Whiner allowed himself a satisfied chuckle. There were parts of this job he did enjoy. Showing young people who was in charge was definitely up there as one of his favorites. Principal Whiner tried to enjoy the satisfaction of a kid well punished. But something wasn't right.

It was that blue foam sword on his desk. It lay there across his very important papers. It seemed to call to him. Try as he might, Principal Whiner couldn't take his eyes off that sword. Without realizing it, Whiner's hand moved to the hilt and gripped it.

Immediately, a feeling of warmth ran up his arm, through his chest and down to his feet.

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Whiner checked over his shoulders in case there was anyone watching in his tiny office. Silly, he knew, but he had to be sure.

The warmth from the sword coursed through his whole body. A smile spread across his normally stone-like face. He wanted to laugh out loud, something he never did at school. He held the sword above his head and swung it through the air. He imagined enemies crawling up from the carpet. Swing! Splat! More coming behind him. Turn, swing, splat!

Principal Whiner, a man who prided himself on crushing the joys of children, skipped around his office, swinging that strange blue sword at imaginary enemies.

With each swing, the energy from the blue sword grew stronger. It charged through him. There was something about this strange sword. It held him as much as he was holding it. Principal Whiner still hated children and he still hated Minecraft, but he knew one thing for sure.

He was never letting go of this sword again.

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Detention moved slower than a zombie through soul sand. Ant and Hamid stared at the clock for the entire hour of their punishment. They were meant to be doing homework, but all Hamid could think about was his Minecraft buddies logging into his server looking for him and Ant. After school was prime Minecraft time. Parents weren't home from work, so homework and chores could wait.

And now that was gone. For a whole month, Hamid and Ant were stuck in Mr. Mackowitz's science classroom with the other poor kids who had ticked off Whiner.

When the hour was finally up, Ant and Hamid charged for the door. They burst through it like a pair of creepers on a late-night noob hunt. Mr. Mack was right behind them. The old science teacher hurried down the corridor and out the school doors like his underwear was packed with taco spice.

Jaina stood outside the classroom holding the remaining three foam swords they got from the strange villager.

"Catch." She tossed a foam sword to Hamid and

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another to Ant. “Good thing you guys didn’t bring these to class or Whiner would have them, too.”

Jaina’s after-school homework club finished around the same time as their detention. The rest of the school was deserted. Everyone had gone home, except maybe Mr. K, the caretaker. He was probably on the third floor unblocking the toilets.

Ant swung his foam sword through the air in one smooth motion. Hamid’s sword bounced off his hands and crashed to the ground. He picked it up in time to swing it around and stop the attack from his best friend.

“Nice block!” Ant said. “I’ll get you next time, you vile creeper!”

His words echoed down the empty corridor.

“Thanks for waiting for us, Jaina.” Hamid batted away Ant’s sword, signalling the game was over, or at least on pause. When Ant was around, games and silliness were never over.

“No worries,” Jaina said.

“So, did your search turn up anything?” Ant swung his sword at a new invisible enemy.

“Nothing,” Jaina said. “Not a single mention in any of the local newspapers or Minecraft blogs or

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forums.”

“I don’t get it,” Hamid said. “A dude dressed up as a villager collapses in the middle of the biggest Minecraft convention in town and then just vanishes. And no else saw it but us. That is just too weird.”

“Even Mr. Rodinaldo didn’t see anything!”

“That’s because he was talking to Sheena Raine,” Ant said. He attacked a defenseless locker with his sword. Each swing sent the little combination locks swinging. “Who cares anyway?”

Hamid stopped mid-step. “I care! That guy vanished right in front of my eyes. Yours, too. You might have the memory of a goldfish, Ant, but things like that kind of get stuck in my brain. Once my brain grabs onto a problem, it can’t let go.”

But Ant wasn’t listening. He slow-marched toward Hamid and Jaina, his arms held out straight.

“Braaaaiiins ...”

“Ack! Back, zombie!” Jaina whacked Ant with her sword.

Ant ignored the blow and lurched forward.

“Braaiiins! Must eat brains.” He leaned in and

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pretended to munch Jaina's shoulder.

Jaina laughed and pushed her friend away.

Hamid sighed. "Would you two be serious? Something very weird happened yesterday at Mini-Minecon. And no one saw it but us. Don't you think that's a little odd?"

Ant stayed in zombie mode. And now Jaina had her arms out in front of her.

"Tasty brains," she moaned in her best zombie voice.

Hamid knew it was no use. When Jaina and Ant started playing the zombie game, there was no stopping them. Well, maybe there was one way to stop them.

"Back, zombie scum!" Hamid yelled. He doubled-whacked Jaina and Ant with his own foam sword and ran down the hall.

"Get back here!" Ant chased his friend down the empty corridor. Jaina was right on his heels.

"Not fair!" Hamid shouted over his shoulder. "Zombies can't run!"

"These zombies can!" Jaina waved her foam diamond sword in the air like a warrior queen.

Hamid rounded the corner, sliding on the

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freshly mopped floor. He took another sharp right and scrambled into the library, making sure not to let the door slam shut behind him.

The lights were off. The librarian was long gone. It was just Hamid and the shelves of books, stretching into the darkness. He crouch-ran to the picture book section and hid behind the giant stuffed library dragon sitting on the Story Time carpet.

Hamid could see the whole library all the way to the computer lab in the back. Jaina and Ant ran past the windows lining the graphic novel section.

“Suckers,” he whispered.

His friends would end up at the main office near the front doors and have no idea where he went. They would have to backtrack to find him. And when they thought to look in the dark library, he would be waiting for them.

Hamid crouched low. His whole body tingled with anticipation. He gripped his foam sword tightly. He would show them how Hamid the Hammer dealt with zombies.

Something clattered in the darkness near the computers at the back of the library. It sounded

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like a ball rolling down bamboo. He had heard that noise before but couldn't place it.

"Ant?" Hamid called into the darkness. "Jaina? Is that you?"

The noise came again. This time it was closer.

Hamid stepped out from behind the library dragon. His grip on the sword tightened and threatened to smush the foam flat.

"Joke's over, guys." How did Jaina and Ant get into the library? There was only one door and he was watching it the whole time. "This isn't funny."

Hamid moved through the darkness to the back of the library. He kept his steps slow and his sword raised. It was only foam, but it was better than nothing.

Bamboo clattered again, this time from behind him. Hamid spun around. Cold dread oozed from the shadows near the door, like someone suddenly turned on the air conditioning.

Blood-red eyes stared out from the darkness.

Hamid tried to run. His brain screamed. His legs quivered. But his feet remained still. Fear rooted him to the ground.

The eyes moved out from the shadows to reveal

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a grinning face made of bone. With each step, the skeleton clattered like bamboo knocking together. It tilted its square head to one side and reached out a long, fleshless arm.

“Give them to me,” the skeleton hissed. “The four must be mine!”

Somewhere in Hamid’s terrified mind, a connection was made. He suddenly knew where he had heard the noise before. This creature standing in front of him, in the middle of the Story Time carpet was real, but it wasn’t from reality.

It was from Minecraft.

3

Hamid raced for the library door. The skeleton was faster.

With one great leap, it flew across the Story Time carpet and blocked the door. It landed with a clatter Hamid had heard a million times during his dungeon delves at home. And home was where this thing in front of him belonged. Home on his computer. In his server. A cartoon of pixels and programming, not a fully formed monster standing in front of the librarian's book return cart. There was no doubt about it. From the square skull and blocky rib cage, this was a Minecraft skeleton. And it was in his school library. If this was one of Ant's jokes, that guy was banned from their server for all eternity.

The skeleton reached out its bony hand again.

"Give it to me. The four must be made one!"

Hamid had no words. All he had was fear. This

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skeleton, which looked very real to him, was going to turn him into a pile of floating inventory items.

Hamid's heart was a rock in the pit of his stomach. There was nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. He raised his foam sword before him. Foam versus bone. No competition there, but it was all he had.

The library doors swung open. Jaina's voice cut through the dark.

"Hamid! You in here?"

He'd never been so glad to see his friends. Jaina stood in the doorway, Ant at her side.

"Watch out for – !"

"Me!" The skeleton stood to its full height, towering over the three friends.

Jaina fell back, her eyes as big as ender pearls. Ant stood in shocked silence. For once.

Hamid saw his chance for escape.

"Run!" he shouted as he charged past the skeleton and through the doors.

Ant and Jaina were right behind him. Unfortunately, so was Mr. Big and Bony.

"Give them to me!" the skeleton wailed. The rattle of bones echoed along the lockers lining the

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hallway.

“Where did you find your friend?” Ant asked when he had caught up with Hamid. Ant had always been a faster runner. And more sarcastic.

“He found me!” Hamid said.

“He better unfind us, quick!” Jaina said.

The three friends rounded another corner, bringing them near the front of the school. Hamid slid to a stop outside Ms. Thalwick’s music room.

“In here!” he said.

“What are we going to do? Teach it how to play the ukulele?” Ant said.

“He’s right,” Jaina said. “We’ll be trapped in there.”

Ant jumped up and down on the spot, like he always did when he got frustrated with a boring math lesson. “We have to do something!”

The music door exploded in a shower of paint and wood chips. A thick arrow shaft stuck out from the middle door. At the far end of the hallway, the skeleton pulled back on its bow, another arrow notched and ready to fly.

“This way!” Jaina said. She ran down the hall before Ant or Hamid could argue.

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Another arrow thudded into the door between the boys, missing them by a hair.

“Wait for us!” Ant shouted and took off after Jaina. Hamid was only a step behind.

The front doors to the school appeared at the end of the corridor. They were close to escaping. Only a few more steps and he would be outside and free to run all the way home and hide under his bed and never play Minecraft again.

But Jaina didn't run outside. She pushed open the door to the Main Office and disappeared inside.

“She's got the right idea,” Ant said. He ran down the hallway to catch up to her. “It's raining.”

“Thanks for the weather report,” Hamid snapped. “I'm more worried about becoming a skeleton pincushion than getting my hair wet.”

An arrow thunked into the floor beside him, cracking the tiles like a broken mirror. Mr. K was not going to be happy about that.

“Dude, have you ever played Minecraft before?” Ant opened the door to the office. “The sun is behind the clouds. We run outside in the rain and Bony the Wonder Archer will just chase us. At least

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there's a door and a phone in here!"

Ant pulled Hamid into the office and slammed the door shut. His friend had a point. The time for dealing with things on their own was long gone. It was time to call for back-up. The police, the fire department, the parent council, anyone.

The room was empty. Mrs. Vernon, the school office assistant, had gone for the day. Jaina stood at her desk. She mashed the buttons on the phone like it was a game of whack-a-mole.

"How do you get an outside line on this thing?"

Another arrow smashed through the window on the office door. The missile flew across the office and thunked into Mrs. Vernon's phone. Sparks erupted from the number pad. A thin trail of black smoke wafted into the air, announcing the machine's demise.

The skeleton appeared at the doorway, glaring at them through the broken glass. Its red eyes burned deep into Hamid's own bones. It raised its bow, arrow notched and ready to fly.

There was nowhere to run.

Hamid dug his feet into the ground and raised his foam sword in front of him. Ant stood beside

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him, his sword raised.

“This is it, old buddy,” he said. “We’ll go down like heroes.”

Jaina joined them.

“Yeah, if anyone believes us.” She held up her foam sword to face the skeleton. “Come and get us, you old bag of bones!”

Principal Whiner’s door swung open. He stormed out of his office, face red with rage. In his hand he held the foam diamond sword he had taken from Ant only a few hours earlier.

“What is the meaning of this?” he said. “What are you brats doing in my offi – ”

His words froze in his throat. Maybe it was the broken window and shattered glass sprayed across the floor. Maybe it was the sight of three children, clearly up to no good long after they should be at home. It could have even been the sight of a blocky skeleton the size of an NBA basketball player outside the office door. Each of these things would be enough to send any principal into early retirement.

The skeleton’s red eyes flamed brighter at the sight of Principal Whiner. It dropped its bow and

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pointed a long bony finger at them.

“The Four!” the skeleton hissed. “Together as they should be.”

Hamid’s foam sword was suddenly very warm, like he just pulled it out of a fire. Blue light burst from each of the blades.

The blue light quickly filled the office. Hamid couldn’t see the skeleton anymore. Then he couldn’t see his friends anymore. In the time it takes to sneeze, the whole world turned a bright, diamond blue.

And then it all went black.

* * *

A pig snorted in Hamid’s brain. A sheep bleated near his toes. His head felt like it was stuffed with two-month-old homework. Flashes of pixelated diamonds bounced across his brain. He rolled over on his side and reached for his blanket. Today was totally a stay-in-bed kind of day. This was all Ant’s fault. Maybe it was too much pizza last night or too long helping his friend build his latest Minecraft masterpiece. Either way, Ant was to blame and

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Hamid was staying in bed.

His hand fumbled around in search of his blanket. It landed on something warm and fuzzy.

“Baaaa.”

Hamid cracked open one eye to see two eyes staring back at him.

He bolted straight up, his eyes wide open and struggling to focus.

Sunshine and green. That's all Hamid saw. And a sheep nuzzling at his shirt.

He jumped to his feet. He wasn't dreaming.

“Get out of here!” Hamid said, shaking his fist at the sheep.

The startled sheep trotted away. It stared back at him like a puppy left in the rain.

Hamid stopped mid-shake. His hand wasn't there. His arm just ended in a flat square. It was like it had been sliced off in an accident.

“Don't scare them away. We'll need their wool later to make beds.”

Ant walked out of a patch of trees not far away.

At least, it sort of looked like Ant. He was handless, too, just like Hamid. His whole body looked like it was made of cereal boxes. Even his

Descent into Overworld (Preview)

head, which was one large cube with Ant's dumb grin plastered on the front.

Ant wriggled his body like his underwear was creeping up on him. From somewhere in his chest, a brown cube appeared and thunked on the ground.

Along the side of the cube hung saws, hammers and a few tools Hamid didn't recognize. But he did recognize the box.

"A crafting table," he said.

Ant's dumb grin doubled in size.

"Yep. And we better get busy with it." He turned his cube-head to the hills in the distance. "The sun's getting low. It'll be night soon. And you know what happens at night."

Hamid's brain felt broken. But strangely, it all made perfect sense. He turned to face his best friend and saw only a blocky character from a world he knew all too well.

"You mean ..." he couldn't say it out loud. It couldn't be true.

"That's right," Ant said. "We're inside Minecraft."

Keep Reading for More!

Thank you checking out this preview of *Descent into Overworld!* There's more blocky action ahead for Hamid, Ant and Jaina.

Why are they in Minecraft? What's the deal with that red-eyed skeleton? Will the three friends make it back home alive?

Read the rest of *Descent into Overworld* to find out!

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About the Author

Liam O'Donnell is the award-winning creator of over 35 books for young readers, including the *Max Finder Mystery*, *Graphic Guide Adventures* and *Tank and Fizz* series of graphic novels.

He is also an elementary school teacher in Canada. When he's not writing or teaching, Liam is usually playing Minecraft. He's the co-founder of the GamingEdus Project, which helps teachers n00b it up in Minecraft, so they can play it with their students. Learn more about that at: gamingedus.org.

He lives in Toronto, but you can visit him at liamodonnell.com or follow [@liamodonnell](https://twitter.com/liamodonnell) on Twitter for geeky updates.