

BATTLE OF THE BLOCKS 2

NETHER NIGHTMARE



AN UNOFFICIAL MINECRAFT ADVENTURE

LIAM O'DONNELL

Nether Nightmare

Battle of the Blocks

Book Two

Liam O'Donnell

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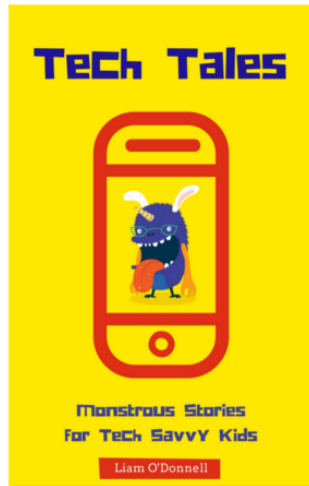


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Chapter 1

Being in the Nether was fun for about five minutes.

Then it became deadly.

BOOM!

The fireball blasted into the wall of netherrack in front of Hamid. Chunks of sandy red rock flew through the air, creating a very big hole in the very small wall Hamid, Jaina and Ant were hiding behind.

“They found us again,” Hamid said.

“You think?” Jaina snapped.

“Not my fault!” Ant said.

Above them, two ghasts floated on the lava-heated air like a pair of giant cube-shaped balloons drifting over a holiday parade. Except these balloons breathed fire and were doing more than drifting. They were hunting.

The angry screech of the closest ghash ripped through the air. Hamid didn't speak ghash, but he was pretty sure the flying, fire-breathing marshmallow above them disagreed with Ant.

“This is totally your fault,” Hamid said. “Why did you have to shout ‘Come and get us!’ at that pack of ghasts?”

“I was trying to unlock the Return to Sender achievement,” Ant said. “Is it so bad to want to smack a ghash with its own fireball?”

“Yes!” Jaina snapped.

“We can't take dumb risks like that,” Hamid said. “If we die in this Minecraft world, we could die in the real world. Remember?”

“We don't know that for sure.”

“We'll find out the hard way if we don't get out of here,” Jaina said.

“Where should we go?” Hamid asked.

“Does it matter? We're totally lost,” Ant said.

“Again, your fault, Ant.” Jaina ducked behind the ever-shrinking wall that stood between them and the ghasts flying overhead. “Incoming!”

Another fireball smashed into their meager defense with a deafening boom.

“I thought that river of lava would lead us to higher ground,” Ant shouted over the blast. “How was I supposed to know it would bring us to a ghastr nesting ground?”

“Because Jaina and I both warned you!” Hamid said. “But did you listen?”

“No, he did not,” Jaina answered.

“I was only trying to help,” Ant said.

“You can help by keeping quiet and following us,” Hamid said.

“Maybe you'd like it better if I just went away for good,” Ant mumbled.

“Don't tempt me,” Hamid said before he could stop himself.

Hamid and Ant had known each other since they were in diapers. From daycare to detention, they had been through it all, including getting sucked with their friend Jaina into this crazy world of Minecraft known as the Seed Server. The trip into the blocky world was not Ant's fault. That honor went to Bano, the mysterious villager who gave them the True Diamond swords that pulled them into Minecraft. It was Bano who sent them deep under Overworld in search of the Seed, the powerful artifact that shapes every Minecraft server created in the real world. The Seed was missing, but that wasn't Ant's fault either. Principal Whiner was to blame on that one. Their school principal had been sucked into the Seed Server with them and had been a bigger pain in the butt than a barrel of creepers. Whiner hated Minecraft so much, he wanted it destroyed so no one could ever play the game again. He stole the Seed and brought it into the Nether in search of the one being who should never, ever get it: Herobrine.

Minecraft's dark legend was real, and he was trapped somewhere on the Seed Server. If Herobrine got his hands on the Seed, he could escape into the real world. And he wouldn't travel alone. Creepers, zombies and skeletons would all escape the game world and cross into the very real world of Earth. Hamid shuddered at the thought of Herobrine leading an army of creepers through his neighborhood. The destruction would be massive. Homes would be destroyed, people would be hurt and, worst of all, video games would be banned forever. Finding their principal before he found Herobrine was their only hope of stopping this destruction. At that moment, Hamid would have been happy just finding a better place to hide.

Another fireball crashed into the ground. The sound of the blast nearly drowned out the barking behind them. Jaina followed the noise to an opening in the top of the cliff of netherrack. A small furry shape stood in the cave mouth.

“Bones!” she shouted. “You found a place to hide! Good doggie.” Jaina's pet wolf had followed them every step of the way through the Nether. His sharp nose had already saved them from stumbling into a wandering pack of zombie pigmen. Now he had sniffed out the perfect spot to wait out the ghastr

bombardment. Jaina studied the cliff, plotting a path up to the safety of the cave. "Let's get climbing."

"And get blasted to pieces?" Ant said. "No way."

"You got a better plan, Ant?"

Even if he did, Hamid didn't think Jaina would listen. Ant's carelessness had brought the ghosts down on them. Jaina had little patience for Ant, even on a good day.

"One of us needs to distract them while the others climb," Hamid said.

Jaina turned to Ant. "You still want to get that achievement, Slugger?"

Ant gulped. Even with his blocky Minecraft avatar, it was easy to see he regretted his earlier boasts.

"I'll stay with you, buddy," Hamid said. "We can get the achievement together."

A diamond sword appeared in Ant's hand.

"Let's do this," he said.

The pair of ghosts drifted closer.

"Here they come," Hamid said. "Get ready to climb, Jaina."

Jaina crouched like a sprinter waiting for the starting gun. "Do what you do best, Ant. Get big and blimpy's attention, and I'll get moving."

Ant didn't need a second invitation. He jumped to his feet and waved his blue diamond sword.

"Over here, noobs!"

The ghosts screeched and turned to face Ant. Hamid jumped up beside his friend.

"Show us what you got, you big marshmallows!" he shouted.

Flaming orange balls burst from each ghost's mouth, fireballs shooting straight at them.

Hamid readied his sword. "Go, Jaina!"

Jaina raced up the cliff, hopping and climbing her way up toward the cave mouth.

The fireballs raced closer to Hamid and Ant.

"I got the one on the right," Hamid said. "You get the other one."

"And who gets that one?" Ant pointed to the far side of the lava lake. A third ghost had rolled into the canyon. Its own fireball was already zooming toward them both.

Hamid cursed his carelessness. They had been so busy bickering that they hadn't noticed the new arrival to the party.

"Time for Plan B!" Hamid dove behind their pathetic netherrack wall.

"There's a Plan B?" Ant said.

Hamid pulled his friend down beside him. Three fireballs blasted into the wall, sending chunks of rock scattering. The ghosts screeched in frustration and floated back out over the lake of lava.

"They're coming around for another attack," Hamid said. He looked up to the cliff. Jaina was only

halfway to the cave. “We need to distract them again or they’ll shoot their fireballs at Jaina.”

“This wall won’t survive another blast,” Ant said.

“That’s why we’re abandoning it.”

Just as the ghastrs finished their turn, Hamid stood up from behind the low wall. He waved his arms over his head until the red eyes of the ghastrs locked onto him. With an ear-piercing screech, each monster sent a ball of flame hurtling toward them.

“Now you’ve done it,” Ant said.

“Run!” Hamid scrambled up the cliff.

The fireball smashed into the wall, wiping it from existence. Exposed and out of ideas, Ant charged up the cliff behind Hamid.

“For the record,” he shouted with each step, “I don’t like Plan B!”

Chapter 2

Hamid wasn't a fan of Plan B either.

It involved too much fire and too many chances of dying. But everything in the Nether involved fire and nearly dying, so Plan B was their only option. Hamid scrambled up the cliff face with Ant a step behind.

The second ghastr fireball crashed into the ground beside them. The ground around Hamid burst into flames. *This must be what climbing Mount Everest feels like*, Hamid thought. *That is, if Everest was made of firewood and guarded by fireball-throwing monsters.*

Now that they had flushed out their prey, the ghastrs were raining fireballs down on them. With each blast, more blocks burst into flames around them. If the fireballs didn't get them, their fires would.

Above them, Jaina made it to the mouth of the cave. Bones jumped to greet her with barks and wet licks.

"Hurry up you two!" she shouted from the cave mouth.

"What a great idea!" Ant called back. "I was planning to have a nap out here."

"Quit yapping and keep climbing." Hamid looked up to see a cube of red slime hop onto the block behind Ant. "Watch out!"

Before Ant could jump away, the magma cube jumped again and covered his arm in goo. Ant stumbled back from the deadly slime, frantically wiping the glowing goop off his arm.

"It burns!"

The magma cube slurped closer. The living block of slime was hungry for more. Another splash like that and Ant would be too dead to worry about the ghastrs circling for another attack.

Hamid jumped from his rocky perch and swung at the slime with his diamond sword. The blade cut through the cube with a loud squelch. The blow knocked the magma cube down the cliff.

"Nice one. Now there are four of them!" Ant said.

Hamid's strike had given Ant the time he needed to scramble further up the cliff face, but it also quadrupled the danger.

Below Hamid, four smaller magma cubes slurped up the steep incline of the cliff. Everyone knew hitting a slime only cuts them into smaller, deadlier slimes. He watched the approaching cubes and hoped he hadn't just made a big mistake.

The deep red bodies of the magma cubes blended in naturally with the red netherrack. Hamid backed away up the steep cliff face, keeping his eyes on the approaching slimes. Something wasn't right about the creatures. Within their red bodies, a green light pulsed, like a heartbeat. Hamid had never seen anything like that before in the Nether.

In the air, the ghosts shrieked and drifted in closer, ready for another fiery attack. This time there was no netherrack wall to stop the fireballs. Hamid continued climbing up the cliff, desperate to be anywhere but right there.

An arrow thunked into the ground behind him, just missing the slime slurping at his heels.

"Sorry!" Jaina shouted from above him.

Hamid stole a glance to the top of the cliff. Jaina had a bow in her hands, another arrow notched and ready to fly. Ant had found a clear path and now scrambled onto the ledge of the cave mouth at Jaina's feet. They had grabbed a lot of gear from Slashax's lair before stepping through the Nether Portal. Now, Hamid was glad they had taken the time to come prepared.

Another arrow thudded to the ground right beside Hamid. He just wished Jaina had taken the time to practice her archery skills.

"Shoot the slimes, not me!" he shouted.

The ground two blocks below Hamid exploded from the impact of a ghost fireball. With any luck, it had blasted the magma cubes into a million pieces. Hamid wasn't wasting a second to look back.

"Almost there, Hamid!" Ant shouted from the safety of the cave mouth.

Hamid threw himself up the final blocks and allowed his friends to drag him into the cave. The three of them collapsed in a heap just as the latest blast of fireballs rocked the cliff face.

"We made it!" Jaina jumped to her feet and ran to the cave mouth. "Let's get ourselves secured in here."

A netherrack block appeared in her hand. With the swift movements of a Minecraft pro, Jaina blocked the cave mouth with netherrack blocks. In seconds, they were safely cocooned inside the mountain. They were also pitched into complete darkness.

Hamid found a torch in his inventory and stuck it to the nearest wall. The cave lit up with warm, flickering light. Bones curled up on the ground below the torch and watched the walls nervously. Outside, the screeching of the ghosts echoed around them. The dog whined with each screech.

"Easy, boy." Jaina rubbed the fur behind Bones' ear. "We should be safe in here for a while. As long as those ghosts can't see us, they can't spit fireballs at us."

Hamid checked the remaining hearts hovering at the bottom of his vision.

"One more ghost blast and it would have been game over for me."

“Same here,” Ant said. He winced as he spoke.

“You okay, Ant?” Jaina moved to Ant’s side. “You better sit down. Looks like those ghastr fires got you bad.”

Ant waved Jaina away with a blocky arm.

“Ghasts, fire, magma cubes, I can take them all,” he said. The way his head drooped suggested otherwise. Hamid helped Jaina lower Ant to the ground with his back against the wall.

“Get some rest,” Hamid said. “We're safe here. For now.”

Ant slumped against the netherrack wall and closed his eyes. Hamid felt his remaining energy drain away at the sight of his friend resting. Their journey into the Nether had started with such promise. They had spent time packing supplies and preparing for the worst the Nether could throw at them. They had stepped through the Nether Portal totally ready and in high spirits. At first, they tracked Principal Whiner like a pack of bloodhounds. But as the hours stretched into days, their excitement faded. Soon they were wandering around the fiery realm, lost and bickering.

The Nether would do that to you. Located beneath the Overworld, the Nether was a land of fire and not much else. Red, sand-like netherrack covered the ground, blowing on the heat-infused winds and piling into high cliffs and mountains. Rivers of lava carved through the netherrack and poured into massive lakes of molten rock. Fires dotted the landscape, like the aftermath of a massive battle. There was no sky down here. And no sun. The netherrack engulfed the whole land, rising high into the air to form a massive ceiling. It was like being stuck inside a giant cave.

Hamid never liked venturing into the Nether when he played Minecraft. Back in the real world, when things were normal and Minecraft was just a game, he could log out when he’d had enough of the Nether’s burning landscape. Now, he was stuck here, as far away from home as he had ever been. Home was the one place he wanted to be right now, away from the computer, hanging out with his dad. Not even doing anything special, just helping him shovel the driveway or take out the trash. Normal stuff. He’d even settle for doing homework at the kitchen table. Anything was better than being stuck in the Nether.

At least he wasn’t alone. He had his friends. Aside from their usual bickering and the odd screw-up from Ant, they all agreed their only way to escape was to find Principal Whiner and the Seed before he gave it to Herobrine. That wasn’t happening any time soon, while they were trapped in a tiny cave with a squadron of fire-breathing ghasts lurking outside.

“Come back, Hamid,” Jaina said from the far corner of their little cave. “You've got that lost look on your face again.”

Hamid grinned. “You can tell even with me looking like a blockhead?”

“I haven't known you as long as Ant has, but I can tell when your mind is walking over paths better left alone.”

“That's pretty deep,” Hamid said.

Jaina shrugged and pulled a strange gray block out of her inventory. She set it on the ground and studied it.

“Blame my grandma,” she said. “She's always saying heavy stuff like that.”

The block lit up with colored lights on each side. Hamid immediately recognized it as the command block she had salvaged from Slashax's lair. The skeleton king had stolen the Seed for Herobrine and used the command block to speak with him. Jaina had insisted on bringing it with them into the Nether. What use it would be against the lava and fire of this realm, Hamid had no idea.

“Any luck turning that thing on?” he said.

“Not yet,” Jaina answered after a minute. Her focus was fully on the block. “Give me time to work it out.”

Time. That seemed to be the thing Jaina always wanted. She had taken her time gathering supplies before jumping through the Nether Portal after Principal Whiner. In addition to food, torches and the command block, Jaina had brought along redstone dust and a bunch of levers, buttons and repeaters.

Out of their little Minecraft group, she was the redstone whiz. Ant was the creative builder who could construct amazing structures that boggled the mind. Hamid preferred to work behind the scenes in the game. He ran the server they played on at home and the one they used for their Minecraft club with their teacher, Mr. Rodinaldo.

Ant moaned from where he slumped against the wall. He was definitely asleep and dreaming, but it didn't sound good.

“Should we wake him?” Hamid said.

Jaina poked her head around the command block.

“Leave him,” she said. “He needs to rest.”

More ghastr screeches came from the other side of the cave wall.

“Those ghastrs aren't going anywhere,” Hamid said. “It's like they know we're in here, and they're just waiting for us to stick our heads out that hole.”

Jaina studied the cave mouth she had covered up.

“True,” she said. “We can't fight them, but maybe we can sneak away.”

“Sneak away? How?”

“There's a small opening in that far wall.” Jaina poked the command block. The colored lights covering the sides of the block were dull and lifeless. She frowned. “I saw it when I first got in here.

Before I saved your butts.”

“You mean before you nearly shot off our butts.”

“Details.” She smiled. “See where it leads. You’re clearly not going to sleep, and you’re making me nervous hovering around like that.”

Hamid had to agree. It was a good idea to see where it led. They didn’t want to be surprised by more slimes or zombie pigmen looking for their next meal. He left Jaina to her tinkering and Ant to his troubled sleep.

The tunnel was low, only two blocks high and narrow at only one block wide. It climbed like a set of stairs. Hamid wondered if it was natural, or if it had been carved out by an earlier explorer. Had Whiner come this way? As far as he knew, they were the only people from the real world on the Seed Server. Every other being they had met had been either a non-player character or a monster.

A square of pale red light drifted in from the opening at the far end of the tunnel. Hamid continued to climb, attaching torches to the walls as he went. He stepped through the opening and stood on a narrow ledge. Beside him, a steep cliff face of netherrack climbed sharply upward, disappearing into the ceiling of the Nether. Below him, an endless desert of netherrack spread out as far as he could see. Magma cubes mindlessly slurped across the open ground. A narrow, well-worn path cut across the terrain. Slimes didn’t make paths like that. Who did? And where did it lead?

The fat white shape of a ghast drifted into view in the distance. It floated over the lake of lava they had seen earlier. Hamid ducked behind a chunk of netherrack. If the big blob spotted him, their chance at escape would be blown. The ghast drifted over the flaming lake like a blimp at a ball game. Hamid’s gut tightened, like he’d been hit with a baseball bat. He used to go to games with his dad. They’d sit way up in the outfield with their gloves, hoping to catch a home run and get a free souvenir. They hadn’t gone to a game in a long time. His dad would offer, but Hamid would always choose to stay in and stay glued to the computer. Now, as the ghast floated across the waves of lava, Hamid wanted more than anything to unplug from this world and hang out with his family. He pulled himself out of those memories and back down the tunnel.

Jaina buzzed around the command block, muttering to herself, when he got back. The lights on the block flickered and pulsed like a computer hard at work. Jaina’s diamond sword stuck to the side of the block. Ant still lay asleep in the corner, oblivious to Jaina’s excitement.

“I did it!” she said when she noticed Hamid had returned. “I turned it on!”

“And this is important because ...”

Jaina rolled her eyes at Hamid. “I thought you would get this right away.”

“Get what, Jaina?” he said. “Whiner could already be giving Herobrine the Seed. We need to get out

of here and find him. Do we really have time to noodle around with command blocks?"

"Yes, we do," Jaina said. "As server admin, you know command blocks can be very powerful."

"Yes, but only players with Operator status can use them," Hamid said. "We're not OP in this world, so what good are they to us?"

"We're not OP, but our swords are." Jaina grinned. "Our blades are crafted from True Diamonds. Those diamonds can do a lot of things."

"Like drag us into this Minecraft world."

"Exactly." Jaina circled the command block. Its lights flashed quietly. Her True Diamond sword stuck against the block like they were meant to be together. "I couldn't open the command block on its own because I am just an ordinary player on this server."

"But with your sword, you become OP?" Hamid said.

"When I put the sword near the block, it snapped right into place. It was almost as if it had been designed for that exact purpose."

"No wonder Slashax wanted the swords for himself," Hamid said.

"That old bonehead is the one who gave me the idea," Jaina said. "Slashax used this command block to communicate with Herobrine."

"Don't remind me." Hamid shuddered at the memory of the Skeleton King talking with the ultimate force of chaos.

"Herobrine wasn't in the Overworld where Slashax had his base," Jaina said.

"Do you think he's in the Nether? Slashax did have a portal to this world."

"I don't think he's here, either." Jaina turned to the flashing command block and studied it. "Slashax used this block to speak to Herobrine in another world. There must be a way for us to do the same."

"You're trying to phone Herobrine?"

"Wrong." A wide grin grew on Jaina's blocky face. "I'm going to phone home."

Chapter 3

The voices woke Ant.

Come to us. Bring them and leave. Now.

He cracked open his eye, ready to beg Hamid for a few more minutes of shut-eye.

Hamid lay not far away, sleeping. Jaina was stretched out on her own red and white bed against the far wall.

Ant, come to us. Take what we seek and bring them to us.

Ant sat up at the mention of his name. The rough netherrack dug into his back. A single torch flickered on the wall across from him. He was in a small cave. His body ached. His head felt like it had been used for soccer practice. His left arm burned. A large green welt pulsed there like he had dipped it into a vat of toxic acid. The mark didn't scare Ant. He knew it was supposed to be there. It tugged at his memory. Something about being chased. Then it was gone. The thread slipped away.

Bring us what we seek.

The voices returned and steered his thinking. Hand over hand, Ant pushed up the wall and got to his feet. Gingerly, he took a step. Then another. He shook his head, trying to loosen the cobwebs that cluttered his mind. A shiver ran through him from head to toe. He had picked up something, for sure. Some bug or maybe the flu. Maybe he should wake Hamid. He would know what to do. Hamid was always the responsible one. He would have some chicken soup or something. He bent down to wake his friend, but his hand froze in the air.

Disturb him not. Take what we seek. Bring it to us.

Ant pulled his hand back. Hamid looked so peaceful sleeping there. It wouldn't be right to wake him.

Bring us ...

If he were careful, Hamid would not be disturbed. Ant bent down beside his friend again.

An inventory appeared in front of him. Each slot filled with items Ant did not place there. Blocks of netherrack, stacks of torches, loaves of bread and lumps of coal. Ant didn't wonder how he was able to see into Hamid's inventory. He just could. That was all that mattered.

Bring us what we seek.

Ant knew what would appease the voices. All the items in Hamid's inventory were from Slashax's storeroom. All, that is, but one.

With a thought, Hamid's True Diamond sword vanished from its slot and reappeared in Ant's own inventory. Hamid snored on, undisturbed. Transfer complete.

Bring us ...

Ant moved away from his sleeping friend with the grace of a rogue. He stood beside Jaina. Like Hamid, she too slept soundly. All that marching and running from ghastrs had taken its toll. That would help Ant in his quest.

The fever burned through him like a wave of molten rock. Ant fought the urge to scratch the pain away.

Bring ...

Ant concentrated on Jaina. Again, without knowing how it was done, her inventory appeared before him. The same collection of blocks and food and supplies. And something else. A block unlike others. It flashed with a rainbow of blinking lights.

What we seek ...

Ant snapped his attention away from the strange block to the blue diamond sword. With another thought, the True Diamond sword transferred from Jaina's inventory into his own.

Bring us ...

Silently, Ant moved away from his friends and slipped into the tunnel on the far side of their cave. He moved like a shadow to the ledge overlooking the endless Nether. A ghastr drifted lazily overhead. Magma cubes slurped along the ground below. None of these troubled him. He knew their minds as well as a hunter knows his quarry. He knew the Nether as well as one who was born here. The shallow footprints covering the ledge told him Hamid had stood here only a few hours ago. The shimmering air trailing the floating ghastr revealed its flight pattern and showed Ant where the monster was headed. He could easily avoid its notice and its fireballs.

A shiver ran through him. The fever burned him to the core. It also revealed the secrets of every block in this fiery world.

Ant did not know how long he would survive. But as he stared out on the burning landscape before him, he knew he was home. He belonged in the Nether, and he would never leave it.

Bring us what we seek ...

He studied the three True Diamond swords in his inventory. He would bring what they sought. Ant would deliver his promise to the unseen voices in his head. He climbed down off the ledge and stepped out onto the flat plain of the Nether.

In minutes, he was a dot on the horizon, far away from his two friends who lay sleeping, dreaming of an escape that would never come.

Where is Ant going?

What will Hamid and Jaina do without their swords?

And where in the Nether is Principal Whiner?

Download *Nether Nightmare* for the answers and more blocktastic action!



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About Liam



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, growing tomatoes and wishing he owned a cottage.

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