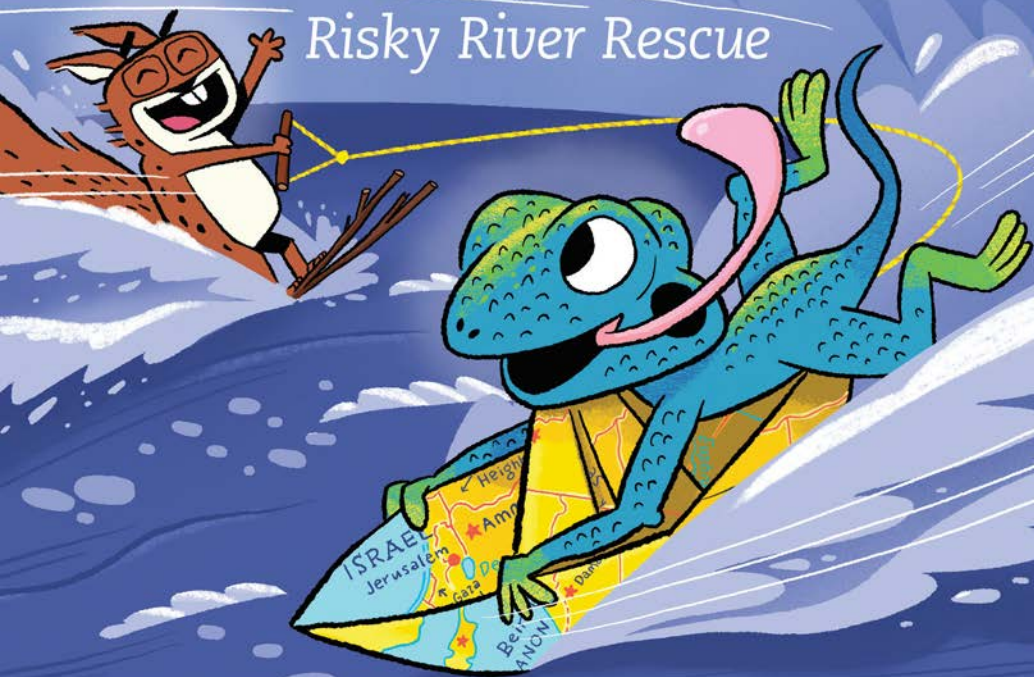


THE DEAD SEA SQUIRRELS

Risky River Rescue



From the co-creator of VeggieTales

Mike Nawrocki

Illustrated by Luke Séguin-Magee

The Dead Sea Squirrels Series

Squirreled Away

Boy Meets Squirrels

Nutty Study Buddies

Squirrelnapped!

Tree-mendous Trouble

Whirly Squirrelies

Merle of Nazareth

A Dusty Donkey Detour

Jingle Squirrels

Risky River Rescue

The title is presented on a grey scroll with white text. 'THE' is in a small, simple font. 'DEAD SEA' is in a large, bold, blocky font with a slight shadow. 'SQUIRRELS' is in a very large, bold, blocky font with a thick black shadow, making it the most prominent part of the title.

THE
DEAD SEA
SQUIRRELS

Risky River Rescue

Mike Nawrocki

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Risky River Rescue

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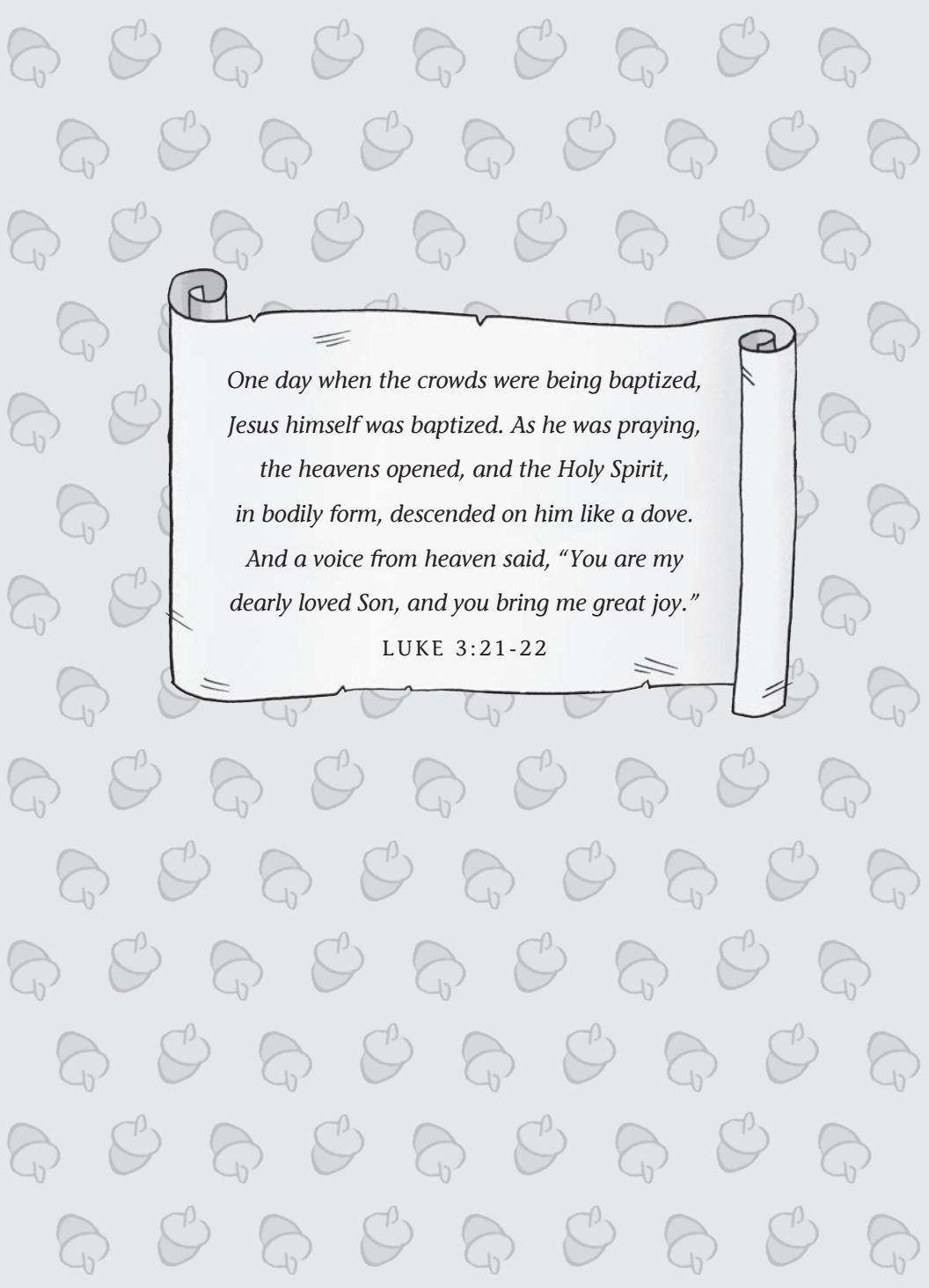
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*To my father- and mother-in-law, Karl and
Lucia Klepp-Gomez, whose love and legacy
live on in the lives of their grandchildren.*

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of small, light gray dove icons. Each dove is shown from a top-down perspective, with its wings slightly spread and its tail feathers visible. The doves are arranged in a regular grid. In the center of the page is a white scroll with a black outline. The scroll is unrolled in the middle, with the top and bottom edges slightly wavy. The text is written in a black, serif font. The scroll has small black lines at the top and bottom edges, suggesting it is a piece of paper or parchment.

*One day when the crowds were being baptized,
Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying,
the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit,
in bodily form, descended on him like a dove.
And a voice from heaven said, "You are my
dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."*

LUKE 3:21-22

**BUT
WAIT!**

BEFORE WE START...

Who are the
Dead Sea Squirrels?

**ISRAEL,
AD 70**

Merle and Pearl cruise
down the Jordan River ...



The squirrels end up at the
Dead Sea, where ...

You can't sink!
I've always
wanted
to not sink!



Soon the two salty squirrels are
hot, thirsty, and desperate for
shade. Then they spot a cave.



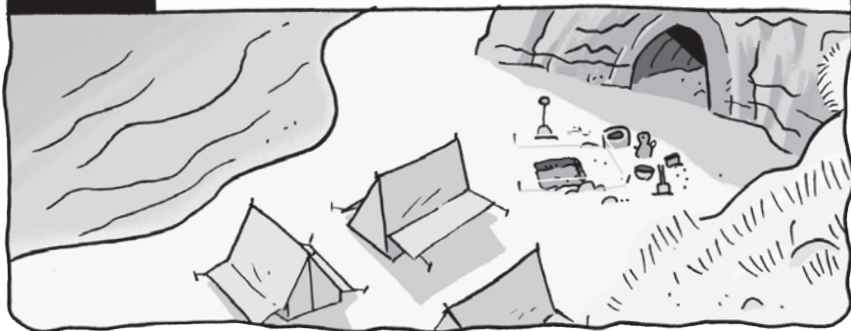
Merle's sense of adventure lures him
into the cave, despite Pearl's protests.

If God wanted you to
go into a cave, he
would have made
you a bat.

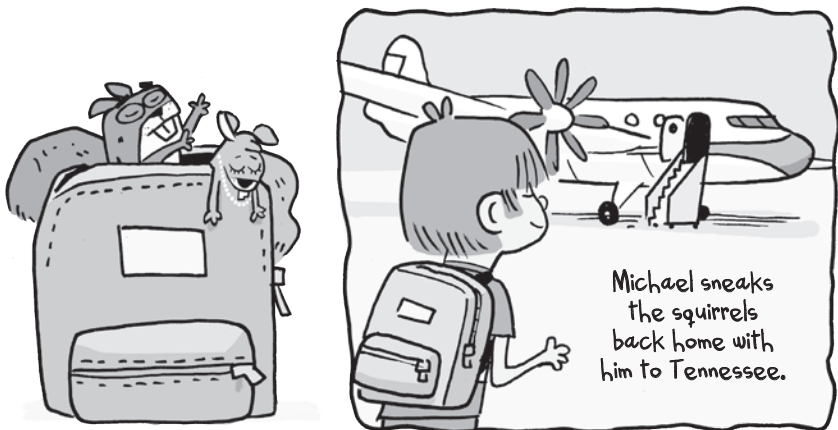


1,950
YEARS LATER

Ten-year-old Michael Gomez is spending the summer at the Dead Sea with his professor dad and his best friend, Justin.



While exploring a cave (without his dad's permission), Michael discovers two dried-out, salt-covered critters and stashes them in his backpack.



Michael sneaks
the squirrels
back home with
him to Tennessee.

He sets them up like posable action figures on his dresser—
under an open window.



While Michael is sleeping,
a thunderstorm rolls in,
and it begins to rain ...



... rehydrating the squirrels!



Up and kicking again after almost
2,000 years, Merle and Pearl
Squirrel have great stories
and advice to share
with the modern world.

They are the
Dead Sea
Squirrels!

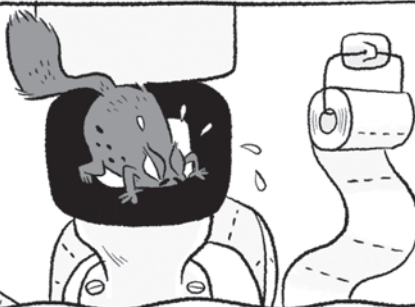


But the Dead Sea Squirrels' adventures don't end there.

Merle and Pearl soon find out that things are

a whole lot different from the first century!

For one thing, there are self-filling fresh water bowls...



an endless supply of walnuts and chicken nuggets...



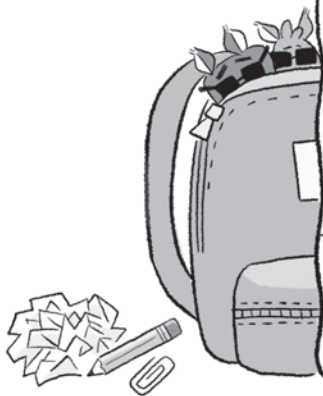
Thank you, chickens, for your nuggets!

and much fancier places to live!



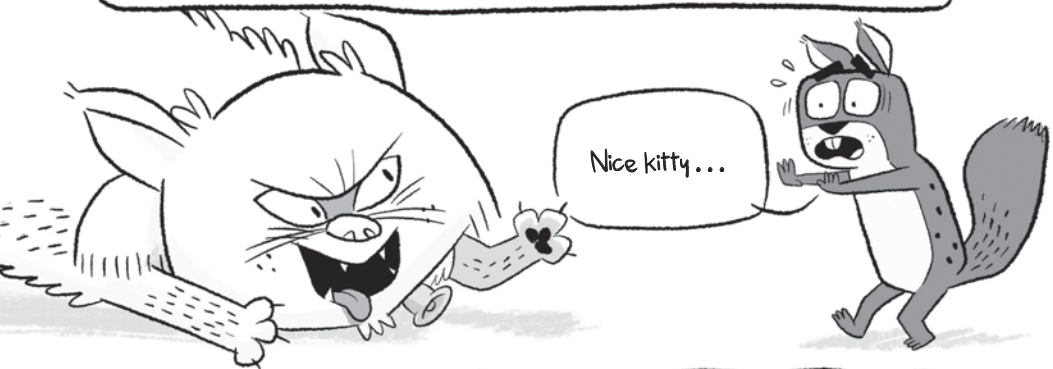
I could get used to this!

Plus, they get to go to fifth grade (as long as no one sees them)!



Stay still, Merle! Pretend you are stuffed!

But even in quiet Walnut Creek, Tennessee, danger is never too far away!



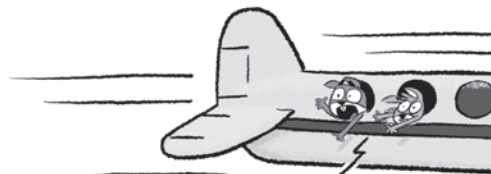
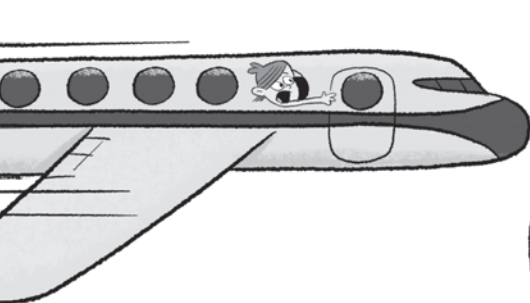
What if Mom and Dad find out?!



And a man in a suit and sunglasses who wants nothing more than to get his hands on the squirrels... does!



Now it's back to the Holy Land to rescue the squirrels!



MICHAEL!



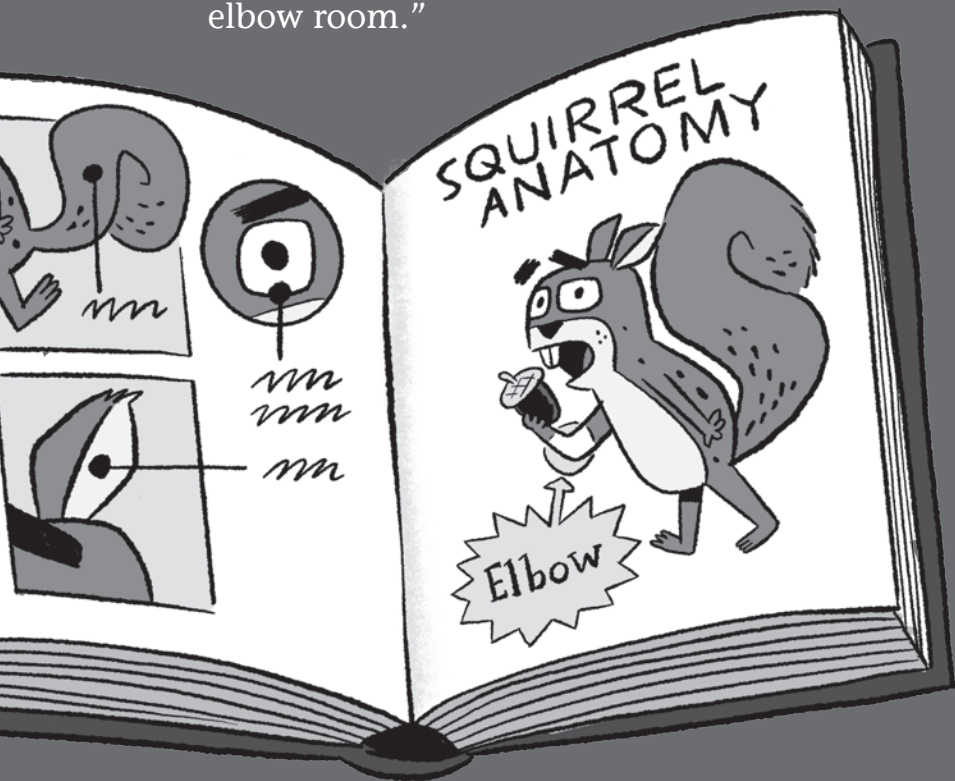


CHAPTER 1

“Couldn’t you find something roomier!?” Merle shouted from inside a backpack resting on a spare tire in the trunk of Ruben’s car. “And by the way, it’s pitch-black in here! I’m not a fan of the dark!” Having gotten himself trapped in a cave for 2,000 years, Merle’s uneasiness was certainly understandable. “Can I ask what’s wrong with the back seat?!”

“Nothing is wrong with the back seat. It’s a perfectly good back seat,” Ruben called back over the road and engine noise from his spot in the driver’s seat as they jetted down a highway in Israel.

“Whatcha got in here?” Merle said as he shifted uncomfortably. Sharing the pack with him were a number of Ruben’s supplies, including a change of clothes, a bag of trail mix, a tin of tea leaves, and a bottle of honey. Ruben never went anywhere without his tea supplies. “I’d love a bit more elbow room.”



“You don’t have elbows!” Ruben hollered.

“You, sir, are ignorant of squirrel anatomy!” Merle replied, rubbing his elbows.

“Whatever!” Ruben barked. “I’m not taking any chances!” This too was understandable on Ruben’s part, since the last time he left Merle and Pearl in the back seat of a car in a zipped-up bag, the two resourceful rodents managed to escape. Ruben would have preferred to keep Merle locked up in the giant birdcage that had held him captive for the past several months, but the squirrels had also figured out a way to escape from that. (It was actually their new friend Adriana the alpaca who had picked the lock using a large splinter and her muscular lips, but Ruben

didn't know that.) He had managed to recapture Merle, but Pearl was now safely back with the Gomezes.

“Can you at least tell me where we are going?” Merle pleaded.

“No more questions! You'll find out when we get there,” Ruben replied sternly. He knew that Pearl and Michael would be looking for Merle, and he wasn't going to give away any information that might aid in his rescue.

“Are we there yet?” Merle called out.

“I said no more questions!” Ruben barked.