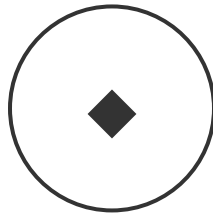


INTERPRETERS OF THE REALM



Andico

BOOK FOUR

Chapter One — My Brain Tumor

A free sample chapter

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Andico Rodriguez' Journal

Chapter 1 – My Brain Tumor

I didn't have time to write in my journal until now, so I may not remember everything that went on. I'll write down as many details as I can remember. If there's too much nitpicky detail – sorry!

By the time I left my grandfather's place, I had almost constant headaches and dizziness. My grandfather remembers everything that happened before I left but I couldn't concentrate on much. Brain tumors suck.

I'd written a lot of messages to my parents and my grandfather in my original journal on the flight to Denver. The cleanup unit got that one. Cleanup units suck.

It's after midnight, there's no one else around and there aren't any cleanup units either so I'm going to keep writing for a while.

I felt pretty good yesterday when I left Colorado Springs. I said goodbye to my grandfather as though it was the last time I would ever see him. Maybe it was.

When I got to Denver, I had a headache like a knife through my brain. I sat and listened to Gwynneth doing her imitations and listened to Patrice talk about airplane cockpits and her vast knowledge of flight. I tried to laugh at Gwynneth and not to laugh at Patrice.

My headache went away after I sat still for a while. The doctors said that would happen but that it didn't mean the tumor was going away. I decided to show off a little by doing some gymnastics.

We challenge each other to flip-overs at the Olympic Training Center. We're not supposed to but we do flips and back flips over things for fun. My favorite flip-over -- and one I had to work on for a very long time before I ever tried it with a live person -- was to do a back flip over someone.

I pointed to an old lady who was sipping coffee. Then I stood exactly three and one-half steps behind her, facing away from her. The perfect position for doing a back flip right over her and her chair.

With a back flip, you end up facing the direction you came from, which meant I was facing the lady I'd flipped over. Her eyes bugged out, she said, "Oh my!" and she dropped her coffee on the floor. I like to see the bug-eyed look on the face of the person I've flipped over. That's why I do a back flip instead of a forward one like some of the kids do.

I felt bad that the coffee ended up all over her shoes, her support hose, and part of her bag. I grabbed the napkin from her hand and got off as much of it as I could. Then I bought her another jumbo cup of coffee and we talked for a while.

"I'm Bee Johnson," she said. She shook hands gingerly with me so she wouldn't slop hot coffee on her shoes again.

“I’m Andico Rodriguez.” I thought my granddad would like Bee even though he hasn’t dated since I’ve lived with him.

“Where did you learn that?” she asked, wiping a dot of coffee off one knee. She was talking to me so I’d know she wasn’t mad at me. Since I had my Olympic Training Center jacket on, the answer wasn’t a secret.

“I’m studying gymnastics at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs.” I pointed at the logo on my jacket. “Back flips are easy.”

She tried to take a sip of her new cup of coffee, but it was still too hot and little wisps of steam went right up her nose. “So you’re on the US Olympic Team.”

Uh oh! I’d given her the wrong idea. “Not yet. I hope I will be in a couple of years, but right now, I’m an alternate on the Junior Olympics national team. My coach says I have a lot of potential.”

Then I thought about my monster of a brain tumor and I think she could tell there was something wrong.

I don’t want pity, though, so I grinned, wiggled my eyebrows like a couple of warring caterpillars and asked, “Can I show you anything else? A handstand flip? A flip with a twist?”

Her shoulders shook as she laughed and said, “This coffee’s a little too hot to dump on my feet right now. I’ll pass.”

She tried to sip the coffee again, but winced when it burned her tongue. “Are you going to do gymnastics for a living or are you studying something else at school?”

“I want to do gymnastics for as long as I can, but that’s not very long, I’m afraid. Then I want to be an astronomer like my grandfather.” Gwynneth was doing an imitation of a swan, I think, and I kind of wanted to watch her.

“Really. What do astronomers do?” she said, picking some fuzz off the rim of her cup.

“My grandfather designs computer simulations for astronaut training in celestial navigation. When you travel as far away as the Big Dipper, for instance, the Little Dipper will look very different from there than it does from Earth. Astronauts will use dynamic celestial navigation, as he calls it, to find their way around the universe when we get faster spaceships.” I wondered if she understood what I was talking about since her eyes had glazed over a little.

“What’s your grandfather’s name?” She giggled and a drip of coffee landed on the newspaper of the guy next to her.

“Roberto Rodriguez,” I said.

She laughed. “I thought so. I met him years ago at a science conference. I was a high school science teacher back then and was always fascinated by astronomy. Your grandfather was very interested in 3D astronomy at the time and now he works on it full-time. How exciting!” The guy next to us shook his paper to let us know we were bothering him and the big drop of coffee jiggled.

She was probably bored by my long explanation of my grandfather’s work since she knows a lot about science. She’d be perfect for him if he’d start dating again. “He shows me all of his new training programs for astronauts and I’m really good at finding my way around the universe.” I felt like a big liar. I wasn’t going to study astronomy when my gymnastics career was over. It was over now and I was going to die.

“Do you want to be an astronaut someday?” she asked, dabbing at the back of the guy’s newspaper with a napkin.

“No. I think I’d rather teach astronomy than fly around. To travel far enough away so that you’d see the 3D effect would take years and years. It would be pretty boring.”

“Well, Andico, I can’t imagine you in a boring profession. Not ever.” She smiled and I went over to watch Gwynneth doing some more imitations.

When I got there, she was pretending to be Hudson, punching away at her pretend tablet with a serious “I’m so smart” look on her face like his. I wonder if he ever laughs at anything.

When Hudson got suspicious and looked up, she pretended she was reading a book and adjusting make-believe glasses on her nose. Hudson couldn’t tell that she’d been imitating him.

I wanted to tell some jokes since I know a lot of them. I could remember a few punch lines, but not any of the beginnings. Punch lines aren’t very funny without the setup.

I remembered a riddle where the answer was “fine feathered friends and furry features”, but I have no idea what the question was.

My head was throbbing again so I was having trouble remembering things. It was a sharp pain from my right eye to the back of my head and it made my stomach queasy.

I tried to remember the story part of a joke where the punch line was “And that’s the right way to get on a horse.” That’s one of my grandfather’s favorite jokes so I’ve heard it millions of times, but I couldn’t remember how it goes.

The doctors said the tumor was right in the middle of my brain and had fingers all through my brain so there was no way to remove it. “I’m sorry, son, but it’s the fast-growing

kind. The stress of chemo or some of our other therapies might cause parts of the tumor to burst since there are pockets of blood in it.” Kind of gross. Sorry.

Some people were meant to live long lives. I think my grandfather will live to at least 100 before he dies. He’s 62 now and since he rides bike and hikes a lot, he’ll live a long time.

While I was sitting in the airport, I didn’t think I would make it to fourteen.

I’d like to see my parents and my brothers and sisters again, but it doesn’t look like that’s going to happen.

As soon as I got on the plane, I fell asleep. I had a window seat and I don’t think I was anywhere near the other kids. I couldn’t see them anyway. An incredible crack and jolt woke me up. Then everyone was shrieking and the plane was going down.