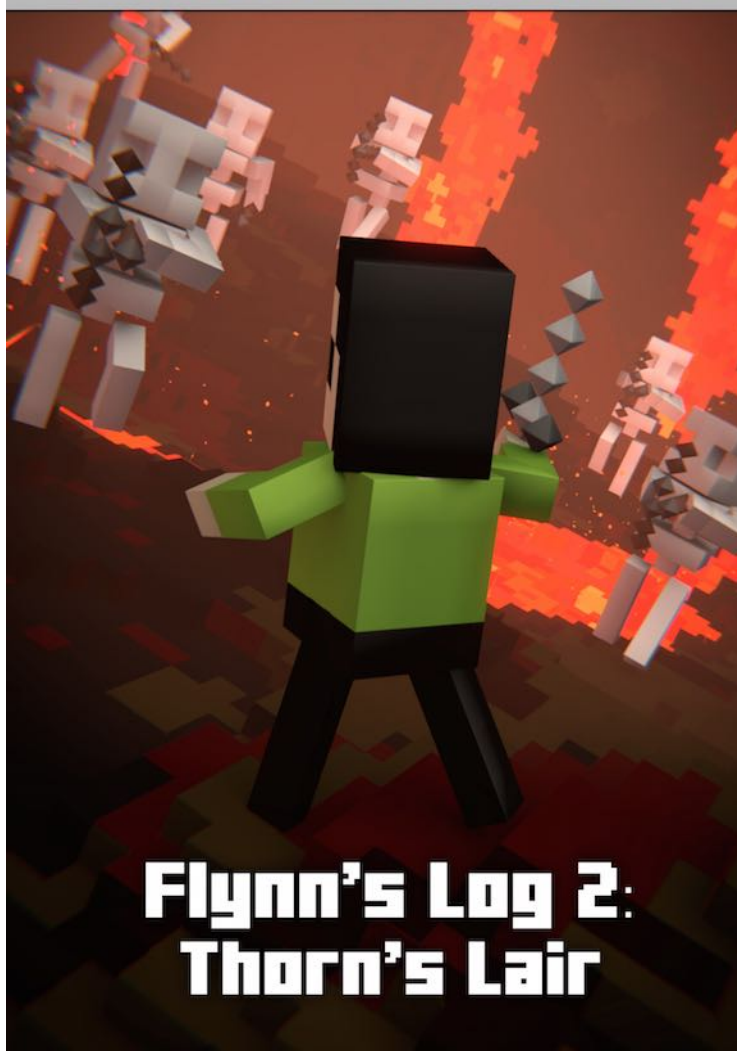


STONE MARSHALL



**Flynn's Log 2:
Thorn's Lair**

FLYNN'S LOG 2,

Thorn's Lair

By

STONE MARSHALL

Contributions by Nabru Marshall

Illustrations by Abraham Mast

Edited by Joni Wilson

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Dedication

To Nabru, for enthusiastic contributions to Flynn's
continuing story.

To the fans of Flynn's Log, thank you for your kind words
and encouragement.

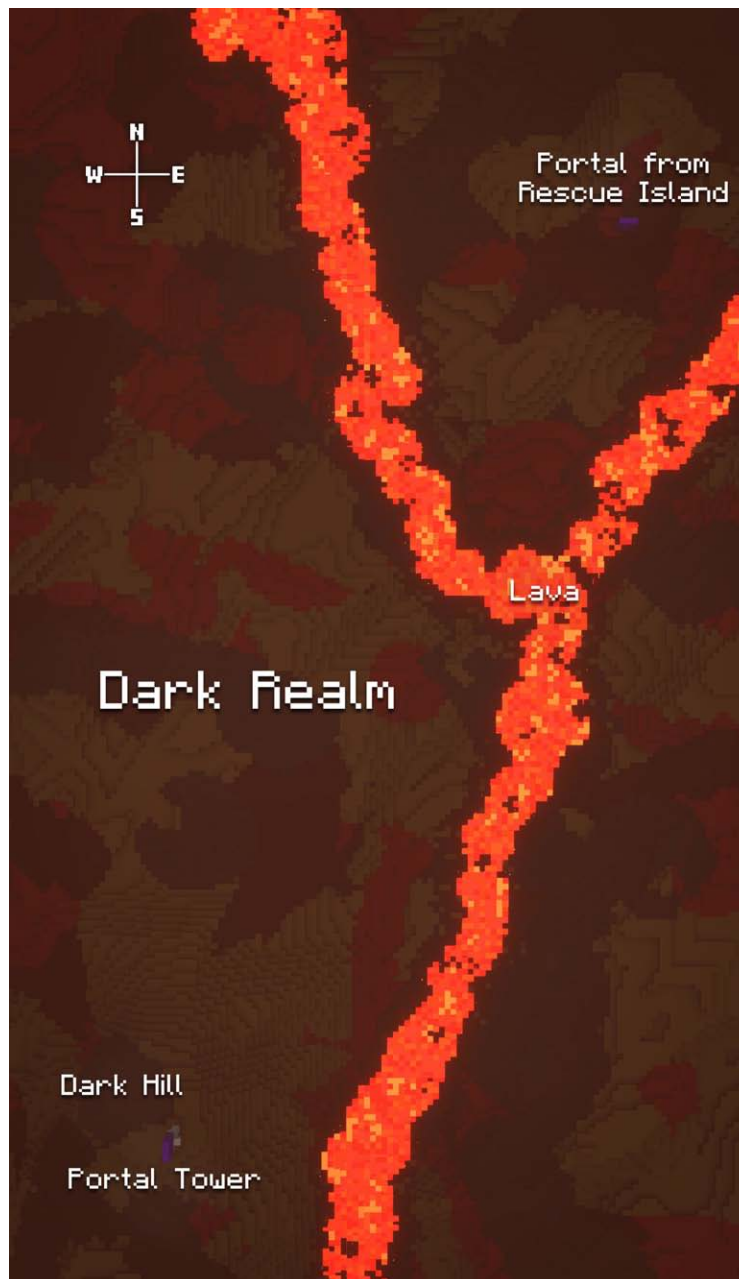
To my dear Karissa for your enduring support and
comforting kisses.

FLYNN'S LOG 2, THORN'S LAIR

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MAP OF THE DARK REALM



MAP OF ARCADE VILLAGE



MAP OF TREACHEROUS MOUNTAINS



LOG ENTRY 1

The Portal

THERE IS A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING. This is my first time in a portal; I'm trying to save my life. Trapped by advancing pixel-popping bit-busters, I stepped into this portal as my only way out, and I have no idea where it's taking me.

I search my memory; I need to understand portals. My memory is hazy, still limited to very basic information. I remember little from before waking up in this digital game world. Portals are doorways connecting digital realms. When a portal is built in one realm, it links to a corresponding portal in another. By default, portals are not active. To activate a portal it must be ignited, "lit" with a spark. If it's not lit, it's just a big obsidian doorway. You step in one side and out the other. The portal I stepped into was lit.

Some portals are two-way transporters. A character enters a

portal in one world and exits in the other. If you go in and keep it lit, you can return. Portals are mostly for players to use. Normal creatures and villagers don't often use them. However, there are lots of abnormal things happening in this game.

There is a random element to portals. When they are first built, it's not always clear where the corresponding portal will appear in the other digital domain.

I stepped into this portal to avoid being blown to bits, literally. The game is changing. Creatures are evolving and becoming new, more powerful mobs. Now I am hurtling through a vortex of light toward a glowing ring of fire. As I look around, I have the sensation of moving at the speed of light, or faster. But I don't feel movement. I guess I expect to feel like I'm on a roller coaster, with air rushing by and a funny feeling in my stomach. The lack of a feeling of movement is the strangest part of being in a portal. And the sound—I hear a metallic high-pitch screech getting louder the closer I get to the fire, which is approaching very fast!

I realize my body isn't moving at all. I'm digitally frozen in a running position. The same position I was in when I entered the portal, one arm and leg forward, the others

back. Weird. Wait, what's that? Too FAST!

Thud! I hit the ground. My front leg feels the impact, but my body isn't ready to resume running, and I crash face down in the dark and red dirt. "Ooff!" I turn my head to survey the scene. It's very dark here. The ground is sinister, glowing with lava in the distance. This is the scariest place I can possibly imagine.

A vague recollection of this place streams into my memory. Mentioning it is like mentioning Lord Voldemort: nobody says its name! I'll call it the dark domain. I am terrified. Why didn't I stay on the other side of the portal and fight those pixel-popping polygon pawns?

Of the many dangerous creatures in the light domain, none bother me as much as creatures on the dark side of the portal. Take zombies, for example: in the light domain they are dangerous if they get near you. But they are slow-moving and only spawn at night. Here, in the dark domain there is no day or night. This realm is nocturnal. Here, danger never sleeps.

Terror seems to be good for my memory. I remember aggressive fireball shooting creatures that only exist only here. The last thing I need is to get hit by a fireball. I don't

know any way of staying safe in here. Does silence makes any difference? Even if I could build a house, it wouldn't be safe. Doors burn and beds explode. This place is like Bizarro world.

My ears are ringing from the explosion of the portal. Crash, the sound of broken glass. Still lying on the ground, I turn around to see the purple center of the portal shatter. The once-lit portal is now dark.

Without flint and steel to relight it, my returning doorway is gone. The explosion on the other side blew the portal! I'm stuck here!

The shattering of the portal made enough noise to alert everything around. Now what? Which way is safe? Wait! I'm smarter than this. Before moving to a safer place I need to draw a map to help me find this portal later. If there is any possibility of returning to Rescue Island it will be through this portal, assuming I can relight it. I look around for landmarks to add to my map.

Shhlew, a ball of lava crashes next to me, fire explodes everywhere. What is that? This place is changing! I run the opposite way, toward glowing lava surrounded by darkness.

What do I have with me? I check my inventory. Plenty!

Crash! Lava crashes on my heels, scorching me. *Yikes, that's hot!* I dodge right, feel a tingle, I stop. A lava ball just misses my head.

That tingle saved me from becoming burnt toast! I need to let go of my fear and let my internal programming take over. The tingling and instinctive reactions helped me before, in the light domain, maybe they work here too?

My instincts are ahead of me and it's a good thing too, because my mind is frozen in terror at what I see.

Flying toward me is a huge, hideous, mini-winged creature! It sees me with its single, wide eye and is zooming toward me. That's not right! It looks like a flying demon, but since it's digital I'll call it a daemon. An arrow flies; I didn't realize I had grabbed my bow. My arrow finds its mark, the flying lava-breather whines and cries. Another arrow flies, poof! The one-eyed daemon disappears.

I scan the area. I see one thing that registers in the darkness, a tall tower in the distance, lit with torches and surrounded by eternal flame. That's where I need to go, but first I need to make a quick map locating the darkened portal. Where is

the portal? I lost it in the running, dodging, and battling.

Khan, Zana, Citadel Fort, all gone without the portal. The thought of being completely on my own in this dark domain unnerves me.

One of the scariest thoughts possible pops into existence. I expect to see dangerous zombie-like creatures with swords, but what appears is much scarier: a freakishly scary-looking evil clown, the jester of the dark world. I would never admit this to my friends, but clowns freak me out in real life. This clown, here in the dark world, this jestilian with its dark clothing, white skin, and bright orange hair, is the spookiest thing I can possibly imagine. If it were armed with only bad jokes, maybe I'd have a chance at survival, but it's wielding a ninja sword!

The jestilian is in the distance but seems aware of my location. I have to work quickly. I make a quick sketch of the area. I know the portal is near here, but I'm not sure where. I'll mark this location; some kind of landmark will help my search for the return portal, if I survive. That's a big *if*. I grab a block of sand and place it in stark contrast to the red ground. I plant a torch in the sand and run.

Running at full speed I sense something strangely familiar

about the distant tower. It's tall—tall enough to be a landmark from a great distance. The torches make it clearly visible. It's a trap or a beacon.

Traps are rare. Creatures don't build them, but creatures are becoming more aggressive. Something is changing in this game. Zana is intelligent. Verve was like no other ocelot. Thorn is much more intelligent than any creature in this place. I remember the tripwire trap that opened up a lava flow from above, nearly roasting me. It's as if the creature programming is becoming more aggressive. Maybe these creatures built a trap, and I am running right into it.

I slow my pace. It's time for a plan.



LOG ENTRY 2

The Tower

THE TOWER LOOMS ABOVE THE SURROUNDINGS. It sits atop the peak of a red, blocky mountain, surrounded by flowing lava and an eternal flame. A small, dark hill sits on one side a short distance away from the tower. Lava flows downhill on the other side. I move toward the dark hill, trying to avoid detection. Near the base of the tower in the distance, it looks like the ground is a moving sea of glowing orange lava.

I reach the hill. Feeling safe here, I take a better look. It's not a sea of lava surrounding the tower, but rather a swarm of unfamiliar hostile cubes, vigorously bouncing. I can't imagine angering these vicious cube creatures; their movements are scarily aggressive. The bouncy motion of each creature is random. It looks like a madhouse of anger.

Beyond the cubes, I see more danger: a pack of ninja sword-wielding jestilians. They are a terrible combination

of freaky, offputtingly bizarre, and quick with a sword.

From the hill, I see the tower more clearly. It's a very light color, much lighter than anything that forms naturally in the dark domain. The tower was crafted from stone. This is something built by someone, or something, from another domain. But the thing that really catches my attention and gives me hope is the structure attached to the side of the tower. A ladder extends from the base up as far as I can see. The top of the tower is out of sight.

My spirits rise. I just need to defeat a hundred of those bouncy cubes, avoid all the joking jesters, and then climb the tower and hope it takes me somewhere safe. Once I'm on the ladder I should be safe from creature attack; I can't think of any creatures that climb ladders.

Plan A is to charge into the heart of the vigor cubes with my sword out, slashing and hoping my armor holds up until I reach the ladder. That seems like a death wish.

Plan B is a distance attack. I can launch arrows at the formidable mob, taking out the cubes one at a time, but I don't have nearly enough arrows.

I choose plan C: chaos.

I let an arrow fly, arching high before turning toward its target. Poof! Cackle! The jestilians are angry! Their eyes express a strange combination of fury and sadness. One of their own, dead; they want vengeance. They turn their aggression on the first thing they see, bouncing vigor cubes.

A jestilian ninja sword slices the cube closest to it, which splits into four smaller cubes. The cubes return the attack; melee ensues. Clowns cackle in assault, then cry in defeat. Cubes attack, divide and divide again, growing in number exponentially. It's as if fighting them makes them more dangerous. The battle moves away from the base of the tower as the cubes surround the furious jestilians. It's a madhouse, and my opportunity to capitalize on the distraction.

The ladder is a formidable distance from my safe observation point. Even at full sprint I'll be in the open long enough to be noticed. If I'm found out early, the distraction won't hold and the entire angry crowd will be on top of me. It's not likely that I'll get another opportunity to take advantage of total distraction. This is my chance to make it.

I psyche myself up, and dart toward the ladder.

My super digital sense takes over, and I see what happens before it happens. The nearest sword-swinging simpleton glimpses me, and opens its mouth to cackle its alert, but not before my arrow finds its mark, poof! Still at full pace another arrow flies, this time at the most distant jestilian, poof! The two-legged swordsmen turn toward their fallen comrade; their backs now face me. That was a perfect distraction!

I reach the edge of the melee, halfway to the ladder. Slash, slash; plop, plop, plop, a cube divides and turns its attack toward me, but I'm already several steps away slashing another cube and then another.

A lava ball nearly hits me from behind; everything glows red. A digital demon, a daemon, was hiding and watching. Waiting. The flying cycloptic daemon must have been watching the melee below. I've got to destroy it or it will kill me before I reach the ladder. I don't think; my body reacts. At full sprint I jump, rotate in mid-air, launch two arrows at the flying foe, complete the turn, and land, not missing a step. I hear a scream: my arrows found their mark, poof, gone.

My armor is gone. I've taken damage. My digital body shakes severely. Red is all I see. The ladder is blurred red; the moving sea in front of me blends into my vision. I am going to black out.

My instincts take over. As I fall to the dark earth, my hand moves on its own, raising food to my face, where my mouth should be. The red glow, which had been fogging my vision, dims. Without breaking stride I bounce back up, leap powerfully, and land on the ladder several rungs higher than I've ever leapt before.

When my mind finally recovers from the pain and alarm, I am well above the melee below, climbing toward the dark sky. The mob beneath is angry and loud. My body climbs while my eyes scan the sky for balls of magma. I'm not as safe as I thought I'd be on the ladder.

Emotion floods my mind as I climb. "I'm alive!" I cry with joy. The danger below shrinks in the distance. My mind wanders as I climb. How high does this go? Where does it lead? If I climb much higher I'll hit the limit of this realm. Could this ladder somehow climb to the light domain? Impossible.

Then I see the last torch above. The end is in sight. As I

near, I see a small platform on top of this tower.

Climbing, I near a heavenly sight. Perched precariously atop this tower is a glowing portal! The portal is dangerously accessible from the ladder. The exit side of the portal steps out to certain death. Who would build such a hazardous portal?

I climb the last rung and carefully inch my way onto the tiny platform. I hope the other side of this portal opens up somewhere in the light domain. Even though I don't know where I will come out, but I prefer anything to this place.

It seems someone intentionally made this a one-way portal. No return. Why? What's on the other side? There's only one way to find out. I step through the portal.



LOG ENTRY 3

The Exit

I AM NOT GOING TO FALL OUT OF THIS PORTAL like i did last time is my last thought before stepping in to the portal. I move through the vortex and plop out the other side. This time I don't fall flat on my face. *I'm getting better at this.*

My eyes adjust quickly. I'm relieved that the floor is solid. I was afraid the precarious design of the dark side of this portal might be reciprocated here. I'm happy it wasn't.

I am in a small, dim, quiet room. Even in this low light I feel more alive. The blackness of the dark domain drained life from my soul. I am surrounded by four simple wood walls, which enclose the portal with just enough room to stretch out my arms. This room is the size of a closet.

Wood-plank floor and ceiling with a single door. It's as if the portal is hidden in this tiny space.

My attitude changes in this light domain. My thoughts are

not occupied with escape. I think of living. I can't stay in this small space forever. I already know where the portal goes; I don't want to go back there. Hesitantly, I open the door.

The door opens into a typical village house, bright with daylight flowing in through the windows. I scan the space; this portal room is a closet in a corner. Four windows, a doorway on one wall of the house, and a single day-dwelling villager standing in a corner near the door.

"Hello, Flynn," he says. I'm only slightly startled. I've seen so much weird stuff lately; even though this villager knows my name, it doesn't faze me.

"Do I know you?" I ask.

The villager's smile fades. I didn't notice his smile until it was gone. "I put too much weight on being the friend of a player. You must have digital friends all over this game world. I'm sensitive to friendships. I'm sorry, Flynn, I expect too much. Maybe we're not friends at all," he turns toward the door.

I can't let him leave! "Whoa. Wait, I didn't mean anything. Just pause, please," I say. I'm not sure what's going on. This

guy is *not* a normal villager. Villagers have jobs to do. Basically they trade with players and have very little personality, let alone needs. "I don't know where to start. I am very happy to be recognized, I just don't know how that's possible." What do I say here? Does this guy have answers? Is this guy emotionally stable? He's a digital mob; any program that is mobile is a mob. Mobs don't have emotions!

"Flynn, you're the most recognizable player in this village —"

"Please," I cut him off. "Can we start with the basics? You seem to know me, but who are you?"

"I'll be going now, player!" he whines, as he opens the door to leave, sulking.

Do I trust this guy? Seriously, it's like he has low self-esteem. How is that even possible? "Can I share a story with you before you leave?"

He spins around, his smile returns to his face. That seems to have worked, now how much of the story do I need to share? What will get this mob to open up and give me the

information I need? "Is there somewhere we can talk?"

"Let's go to the arcade," he says. But the problem remains; I still don't know who he is. I follow him out the door.

Outside, I look around. It's daylight, the sun is to my right, but I have no idea if it's setting or rising. Mountains in the distance surround a flat prairie that stretches in every direction. This village is in the middle of the prairie. It's nice, small, with only a few dozen homes. A number of villagers are standing around. Maybe I can learn my new friend's name if I can get him to introduce me to some of these villagers. "Will you introduce me to your friends?" I ask.

"Flynn, these are dumb mobs," he says. "They'll trade with you, but don't expect much conversation."

That ruse didn't work, but if these villagers are dumb mobs then what is this guy?

We walk up the wide path that runs toward the sun, village homes on either side. This is as close to a road as there is in the village. We approach a modern building with lots of windows; I dig this place. It's much more stylish than the

simple village home that houses the portal.

Dubstep music greets us as we enter the modern building. I'm so happy to hear music! The space is light and open. Modern furniture surrounds glowing tables and cool arcade games that look like they are powered by circuits. Circuits are powerful in this world; they can activate and control mechanisms. Whoever made these video games is brilliant. Against one wall is a squared-off soda bar. I feel like I'm home. This place is perfect!

The villager walks to the other side of the bar. "I've been busy while you were gone. I made lots of potions; you name it, I have it."

"I would give anything for a sparkling water right now," I say, "I love the way it makes my nose tingle. I don't imagine you can make that."

"Flynn, I've been working on integrating the mod you hacked. I know, you always say to keep hack integrations hidden. This is hidden. It makes a fizzy drink! The process takes a few steps; give me a minute," he explains, as he works behind the bar.

"What do you mean, I hacked a mod that you integrated?"

What is going on?" I am stunned.

"Flynn, are you feeling ok?" he asks. "Here, drink this. You'll be pleasantly surprised, I think," handing me a bottle of bubbly liquid.

It's amazing. This digital juice is incredible! "We need to talk," I start. It's time to sort things out. This guy has information I need, and I need it now. "Please don't react until I finish. I upset you earlier and I don't want to do that again. I don't remember much of anything before entering this pixelated place. Right now, you hold the key to who I am. You are the most important person in my world at this moment." Well, I laid it out there. I hope I can trust this guy. He could make up any story he wants to right now and I wouldn't know if it's fact or fiction.

His demeanor changes, he seems sincere. He looks into my eyes, as if gazing into my digital soul and says, "Flynn. You must remember me. You created me."



THANKS FOR READING!

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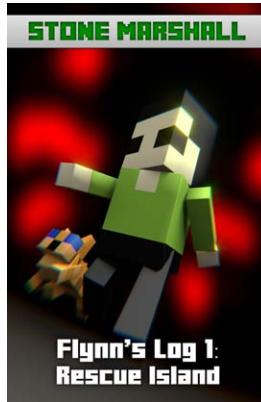
Thank you

THE SERIES: FLYNN'S LOG

In the near future, video games begin to change and evolve into a digital world. Random bits of data create a virtual intelligence that takes over the digital world. A digital crisis is born, bringing the real world to a halt. The only person who can save the world is Flynn, but he needs help from his friends, the Hackers.

Flynn's Log 1: Rescue Island

THE WORLD IS IN TROUBLE and needs a hero. Flynn, a video game expert, enters the digital domain, but something goes terribly wrong.



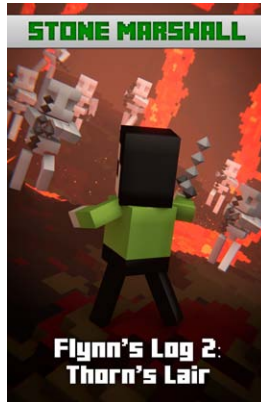
Flynn gets stuck inside the game! His memory is gone and the dangers he faces are real.

The game world evolves introducing new dangers and creatures that Flynn has never seen before. An intelligent creature comes to his aid, but can Flynn trust this digital creature?

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Flynn's Log 2: Thorn's Lair

STUCK IN A VIDEO GAME and facing real danger, Flynn takes his only option. He steps through a portal.



Flynn discovers why he is in the game and learns how to exit, but it's not a simple journey. To fulfill his destiny he must face grave danger.

With the help of his friends both digital and physical, will Flynn get out?

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Flynn's Log 3: The Ultimate Form of Life

FLYNN MUST FULFILL HIS DESTINY and connect the digital and physical worlds!



Inside his digital game-world prison, Flynn faces a true crisis; what is real? Is his ultra-digital body more real than his physical body? What would it be like to stay in his digital world forever? Flynn's journey continues with his friends, but his true struggle is internal. He's forgotten what it's like to be physical. Will Flynn stay in the digital world or will he return to his physical body? What would you do?

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Flynn's Log 4

To Be Continued . . .



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

STONE MARSHALL likes comics, games, running, the Ramones, and travel.

Stone reads stories with his son at bedtime. Sometimes, when they finish a book before falling asleep, Stone fills the time by creating great stories starring his son, Nabru. It is a wonderful time to share lessons about life and relationships.

In turn, Nabru becomes involved in the incredible adventures, adding his thoughts and perspectives. The ideas and stories of Nabru are the seeds of the amazing books that have become this series.