

Backpack Adventures Series

Three Rivers, Three Nations

by

Marguerite Swilling

*Produced through the Partnership for
Environmental Education and Rural Health,
Texas A&M University*



Marguerite Swilling, author of the Backpack Adventure Series, has loved reading, writing and science all her life. From writing and directing an original play in sixth grade, she advanced to essay competitions in high school and published poetry at Texas A & M where she majored in English and minored in Earth Science. Although she is a certified secondary teacher, Mrs. Swilling has spent the past twenty-three years in the business world and has written and presented training seminars on a variety of topics. Mrs. Swilling lives in Georgetown, Texas with her husband and two daughters.

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An Introduction to Backpack Adventures:

Welcome to the coolest club in middle school! Of course, no one outside the club can know just what makes this group so different. The secret is in the backpack.

Roman Castillo, a young teenage technology whiz, developed a powerful mini-computer that can transport people through space and time. He controls the computer with a wireless keypad complete with a screen that displays the co-ordinates for the time and space travel destination. He shared his invention with his best friend, Travis, as well as four others.

Travis Allen, Roman's best friend since kindergarten, is the son of a veterinarian and loves animals, the outdoors and math. He wears western jeans and boots that highlight his long, lanky profile. He has a short temper except with his stepsister, Summer. He's very protective of Summer and doesn't like having her travel with the BPC as the group has nicknamed their awesome device.

Summer Martin, Travis' stepsister, is two years younger than Travis and Roman. Her bright blue eyes are as merry as her laugh and her blonde hair is cut short and sassy. She loves to read and has a great memory for history and geography. She uses a wheelchair due to a terrible, traffic accident when she was five. Travis and his aunt built a motorized chair for Summer, and she can participate in just about everything with her two best friends, Connie and K.T.

Connie Castillo, Roman's sister and Summer's best friend, has long, silky black hair and her dark brown eyes are framed by thick, black lashes. She loves her brother, but sometimes questions the use of the BPC. Quiet and reserved, she is a serious student. Science is her favorite subject and dance is

her favorite pastime. She and Summer have a mutual best friend named K.T.

K.T. Watson, is an only child who loves her best friends, Summer and Connie, like sisters. She wears her curly, jet-black hair in dozens of tiny, tight braids so she'll look more like her favorite athlete, Venus Williams. K.T. is full of energy and courageous. A natural leader, she often instigates the adventures with the BPC. She loves soccer and cheerleading. She helped form the Backpack Club and brought in its newest member: her neighbor, Jace.

Jace Long, classmate and neighbor to K.T., grew up in China and moved first to California and finally to Texas. He loves soccer like K.T., is a whiz at math like Travis, and is especially close to Summer. As the newest member to the Backpack Club, Jace is the most reluctant to use the BPC for travel, but he thinks it's a great tool for communicating between the members and is the first to try the device for help with homework.

1 Red Arrow had been worth the try. Perhaps it was
2 too much to expect to communicate with someone in
3 the past. Wearily, he picked up his history book and
4 began to read.

1 Jace threw the backpack over his shoulder and
2 checked the new keypad. Roman had added an
3 “Instant Return Button” after a couple of “accidental
4 activations” of the keypad. This would be Jace’s
5 first time to use it.

6 And the last time, he hoped silently. He looked
7 around the silent forest and thought for a moment
8 that Red Arrow was returning. But it was just the
9 shadow of a crow winging through the upper
10 branches, watching the forest floor.
11

12
13 Jace lay on his bed late that night, trying to
14 study, thinking instead of the events of the long day.
15 He couldn’t believe how the first soccer match of
16 the season had turned out. After leaving Red Arrow,
17 he had rushed to gather his cleats and grabbed an old
18 pair, too small to wear. He had to sit out the first ten
19 minutes while his mother went back to get the right
20 shoes. Dejay started the game and scored a point
21 right away. When Jace went in, he scored within
22 minutes thanks to an assist from Dejay. They ended
23 up winning, 3 to 0. Maybe Dejay was a difficult
24 person, Jace thought, but at least we can get along
25 on the soccer field.

26 Jace glanced up at the shelf that held his soccer
27 trophies. A flint-tipped arrow with a red shaft
28 leaned against the wall beside the awards. Jace
29 checked the screen of the new keypad for any
30 messages. His one voice message still registered as
31 “sent/not received.” Leaving the old keypad with

Three Rivers, Three Nations

1 “Don’t move!” barked a husky voice. Jace
2 squinted his eyes and strained to make out the figure
3 approaching him from the shadows. From his
4 vantage point—lying flat on his back on the ground—
5 he could tell only that the shape was human.

6 Jace closed his eyes and relaxed upon the forest
7 floor, his head cushioned by the carpet of leaves.
8 His body ached from the abrupt fall he had taken.
9 His brain felt fuzzy.

10 My body feels a lot older than thirteen, he
11 thought groggily. Where am I? What happened?
12 With closed eyes, he shook his head back and forth
13 rapidly, then patted the ground beside him blindly to
14 feel for his ever-present backpack.

15 “I said, don’t move! Now be still or I’ll kill
16 you!”

17 Jace’s almond-shaped eyes popped open. He
18 froze. Five inches from his nose was the business
19 end of a flint arrow. His eyes followed the shaft of
20 the weapon up to the owner: a dark-skinned,
21 muscular youth wearing deerskin breeches adorned
22 with colorful beadwork. A single brown and white
23 feather hung in his long ink-black braid. Bright red
24 paint was smeared in a broad band across his face
25 from ear to ear. He scowled at Jace.

26 “I have no weapon,” Jace managed to murmur.
27 “Please don’t point that thing at me.”

28 The young man shook his head and smirked.
29 “You think I’m stupid, do you, Rainbow Rider?

1 What kind of being falls from the sky in a rainbow
2 cloud and does not carry a weapon? My friend has
3 found your medicine bag, but he's afraid to touch
4 it."

5 As Jace's mind cleared, he realized something
6 had gone terribly wrong. At the mention of his
7 backpack, he felt sudden panic. He struggled to
8 remember what had happened. His instincts were
9 screaming "run," but his body lay helpless on the
10 ground. Take a deep breath and think, he told
11 himself. Think *fast*.

12 He had to have that bag and yet he couldn't
13 appear interested in it. He realized, painfully, the
14 keypad that remotely controlled the small but
15 powerful computer in his backpack was at this
16 moment stuck in the back waistband of the soccer
17 shorts he was wearing. Obviously, his captors had
18 already witnessed how the backpack computer
19 transported people. The distinctive rainbow light
20 had accompanied his sudden appearance in the
21 dense forest—not a natural phenomenon.

22 "Your friend is right, you shouldn't touch my
23 bag. Only I can control it." And even that is
24 questionable, Jace thought ruefully. From the corner
25 of his eye, Jace could see his bag lying a foot away
26 from his left leg, propped against a massive log. A
27 large black bird perched on a rotting branch that
28 protruded from the trunk like a withered,
29 outstretched arm. But where was the warrior's
30 friend? Was he behind the log? Would he suddenly
31 appear with a tomahawk?

1 "Take me or I'll kill you, too!" Red Arrow
2 raised a wicked looking eight-inch knife to Jace's
3 throat.

4 "Red Arrow, if I take you there, you'll be killed
5 either by the soldiers or the sickness. You can't stay
6 here either. I didn't cause this disease. I'll help you
7 if I can." Jace's voice remained calm even though
8 his heart was pounding.

9 Red Arrow's eyes regained their former calm
10 and he took several deep breaths. Slowly, he
11 regained his composure.

12 "I cannot break my word like the stinking
13 English. I told my mother you could return to your
14 people. Go now! I do not need your help!" Red
15 Arrow released his grip on Jace and sheathed his
16 knife. He took an arrow from his quiver and handed
17 it to Jace.

18 "An honest token of our friendship," he said
19 solemnly. He handed Jace's bag and keypad back to
20 him.

21 "But I have nothing to give you in return," Jace
22 responded. "Wait! I have my old keypad. Here,
23 take it. It has no rainbow light, but it may let us talk
24 after I return home. I'm not sure if it'll work,
25 though."

26 Jace handed the keypad to Red Arrow who
27 attached it to the shoulder strap of his bag. Red
28 Arrow smiled at Jace, then fled into the forest. Jace
29 watched him for a moment then lost him in the deep
30 shadows of the great trees.

1 “Leave the deer by the door. The women will
2 prepare the meat.”

3 Jace dragged the sled to the doorway, keeping
4 his eyes downcast and looking only at his feet. He
5 could smell a putrid odor as he neared the
6 longhouse.

7 Red Arrow turned to his mother. “Here is my
8 first big game kill. I have even brought a captive
9 who...” he paused, choosing his words carefully.
10 “Who transported the game to my home. He is
11 released now to return to his own people. Come, I
12 will lead you to the forest path.”

13 Red Arrow ran quickly toward the forest and
14 Jace hesitated only a moment before running after
15 him. Jace didn’t want to be left alone in the dying
16 village.

17 “Hey, wait up!” Jace called as Red Arrow
18 entered the edge of the forest. The pathway was
19 empty, as if Red Arrow had disappeared, and Jace
20 felt a burst of panic. Without warning, Red Arrow
21 grabbed Jace’s shoulder from behind.

22 “Ugh!” Jace sputtered.

23 Red Arrow’s face was inches from Jace’s and
24 his eyes were on fire. Jace could see angry tears
25 pooling on Red Arrow’s thick dark lashes and his
26 breath was hot and rapid. He huffed as if winded.

27 “I do not know exactly where my father is, but I
28 do know where Fort Pitt is. Take me inside Fort Pitt
29 now on the rainbow light. I want to kill Ecuyer!”

30 “What? I can’t take you there!”

1 The flickering sunlight that filtered through the
2 thick canopy of leaves played havoc with Jace’s
3 eyesight. Shadows darted and danced like living
4 beings. Birdcalls filled the hot, humid air. The
5 lichen on the towering hardwood trees and the
6 decaying humus on the forest floor confirmed Jace’s
7 suspicion that he was in an ancient grove. His nose
8 itched and he hoped the moldy smell of the ground
9 didn’t bring on an asthma attack. I need to sit up,
10 Jace thought. I need water, too.

11 “May I sit up?” Jace queried.

12 His captor nodded. “I’ll kill you like I killed
13 that deer there if you move too fast.” He pointed the
14 arrow towards Jace’s right. About thirty feet away
15 lay a two-hundred-pound buck with twelve point
16 antlers. Two arrows stuck out from his side just
17 behind his left foreleg. His glassy eyes looked like
18 black marbles and his tongue lolled from between
19 yellowed teeth. His neck had been slit and dark
20 blood stained last autumn’s fallen leaves.

21 Jace sat upright slowly and felt blessed relief at
22 the spot where the keypad had dug into his back.
23 This keypad, about the size of a TV remote control,
24 held the answer to how he had gone from being
25 alone in his bedroom doing history homework
26 before his first soccer match to his current
27 predicament.

28 Jace brought his knees toward his chest and
29 rested his aching head on them as he rubbed his
30 straight, close-cropped black hair. Suddenly, he

1 remembered what had happened and his fear
2 multiplied.

3
4 *****

5 Jace had hurriedly put on his last sock. He
6 had changed into his green soccer uniform as soon
7 as he arrived home, anxious to go to the first match
8 of the fall season. It was the first year he would be
9 team captain.

10 He was also excited because he had just been
11 given a new keypad control device at the Backpack
12 Club meeting. This unofficial middle school club
13 was made up of four friends and two of their
14 siblings.

15 Jace was the newest member. His neighbor,
16 K.T. and her best friends, Connie and Summer were
17 eighth graders like Jace. Connie's brother, Roman,
18 and Summer's brother, Travis, were the founders of
19 the club and two years older than Jace.

20 Roman had developed a super-powerful mini-
21 computer, controlled remotely with a keypad device.
22 The BPC, as they dubbed it, could transport people
23 through space and time. Roman and his best friend,
24 Travis, had shared the device with their sisters and
25 K.T. and eventually with Jace. Roman was a
26 technophile who kept improving his invention with
27 new gadgets like GPS and a universal language
28 translator.

29 Now Jace held the latest version of the keypad
30 device: a scanner had been added to the bottom of
31 the case so that text and images could be uploaded

1 "Some, like Little Turtle, barely get sick at all. I
2 am teaching her the old Songs so she can become a
3 storyteller someday. Most of the tribe has gone to
4 join the Delaware south of the Monongahela. Only
5 the sick and dying are here now. When all are well,
6 I'll lead them to join the others."

7 "Then I shall go now to find my father and fight
8 the English!"

9 "The English have their own suffering. We see
10 them carrying their dead into the forest where they
11 burn them. The south wind carries the wretched
12 smoke of funeral pyres into the village. Dark Cloud
13 told me when he first arrived that one of the men
14 who brought the blankets looked ill, but he did not
15 know for sure."

16 "There's been no other word from the
17 powwow?"

18 "None. But Fort Pitt still stands."

19 Jace had remained quiet through all the
20 discussion. He felt even more anxious to leave now
21 that it sounded like there was an epidemic of some
22 monster pimple outbreaks that killed a bunch of
23 people! He thought back to his last physical exam
24 before soccer camp. He'd complained about the
25 vaccinations he had to update. He'd never complain
26 again!

27 "Where do you want me to put the deer, Red
28 Arrow?" Jace asked softly.

29 Red Arrow turned now to Jace. He seemed to
30 have grown older since they arrived at the village.
31 Disappointment and sorrow filled his eyes.

1 chiefs. Cornstalk, Blue Jacket, Black Hoof, Turtle's
2 Heart—many chiefs would be there. The English
3 wanted to parley. Your father left me in charge here
4 and took your uncle, Dark Cloud, and the ten other
5 braves with him. Dark Cloud brought back a
6 message three weeks ago. The English captain,
7 Ecuyer, had presented them with woven blankets as
8 tokens of peace. They debated whether to make
9 peace or attack. Many hours they talked.”

10 She continued, “Dark Cloud intended to go
11 right back to the powwow, but he was overcome
12 with malaise, too tired to travel. He fell ill with
13 fever which broke two days later, but left him
14 covered with an ugly red rash.”

15 Red Arrow's mother paused and swallowed
16 hard, her eyes squeezed shut in pain. Jace could not
17 tell if talking was painful for her or if the memory of
18 what she was telling them hurt so badly.

19 “Where is he, mother? Has he returned to the
20 powwow?” asked Red Arrow anxiously. “If he's
21 still here, I'll go with him to find Father!”

22 “Dark Cloud died last week, my son. I know
23 how much you loved your father's youngest brother.
24 Do not grieve. Death was a kindness for him after
25 all he suffered. Many others have taken sick. Some
26 get better, as I did. Some...”

27 Star Weaver paused as the little girl they had
28 seen earlier stuck her head out from behind her skirt.
29 She had only one scab on her cheek and it was
30 almost healed. Star Weaver gently lifted the little
31 girl's tangled hair from her eyes.

1 and displayed on the new digital color screen.
2 Simply sweep the scanner over what you wanted to
3 store and that information would be visible on the
4 larger screen at the top, Roman proudly explained.
5 No more typing in coordinates.

6 Jace unclipped the old keypad and dropped it
7 into his backpack. He flipped open the American
8 history book. Even though he had lived in Texas for
9 three years now, he had grown up in China and then
10 lived briefly in California. History was by far his
11 worst subject—he could never seem to score higher
12 than 95 in a six-week period. This new keypad
13 might help him study better.

14 He seldom used the backpack computer to
15 travel through space and time. The few instances he
16 had done so—to China and to India—were not
17 pleasant.

18 Jace preferred to use the communication
19 capabilities to keep in touch with the rest of the club.

20 He had selected a passage under the heading
21 “Pontiac's Rebellion” and whisked the device over
22 the page. The bright color screen glowed with the
23 words he had just scanned and Jace smiled gleefully.
24 The new memory chip Roman had installed could
25 hold the entire textbook and more!

26 Boom! Boom! Boom!

27 Jace bounded off the bed as his bedroom door
28 flew open. He stashed the keypad device into the
29 back waistband of his soccer shorts and leapt to the
30 end of the bed, trying to block the view of his book
31 and the open backpack. All that stood between the

1 intruder and the truth about the backpack was Jace's
2 thin and wiry body.

3 "Yo, Jace," hollered Dejay. "Yo' mama said
4 you were in here studying. What's up with that?
5 We gotta game to go to."

6 Dejay Powers was a burly fourteen year old
7 who had moved with his mother from Los Angeles
8 at the end of the last school year. His mom said she
9 wanted "to extract Dejay from the gang influences to
10 which he was falling prey." Jace thought Mrs.
11 Powers was actually saving the gang members from
12 Dejay.

13 She had signed Dejay up for the summer
14 recreational soccer league where he met and
15 befriended Jace, much to Jace's dismay.

16 To add insult to injury, Dejay was on the same
17 eighth grade team at school and had already ruined
18 the start of school. Dejay came to school on the first
19 day though he was running a fever, blowing his nose
20 and sneezing all over everybody.

21 He insisted on sitting by Jace at lunch and
22 complained the whole time of a bad headache.

23 Jace, who had never missed a day of school,
24 came down with the same symptoms two days later
25 and his mother kept him home because he might
26 have a contagious virus. Jace blamed Dejay for his
27 ruined, perfect attendance record.

28 When Jace returned to school, he joked with
29 K.T. in the hall that Dejay was a bioterrorist. The
30 eighth grade counselor overheard Jace and called
31 him into her office—the first time in his life he had

1 They walked between two rows of houses and
2 stopped in front of the largest house, a structure
3 about 12 feet by 20 feet. The little girl had run into
4 this house. As Jace set the heavy game sled down, a
5 woman appeared in the doorway. Her face was
6 hidden by the shadow of the bearskin curtain that
7 served as a door.

8 She was slender and wore a long deerskin skirt.
9 Beaded moccasins protected her feet and her long
10 hair hung down in two thick braids, the dark hair
11 streaked with narrow lines of gray. A short tunic
12 dyed a bright red barely covered her upper body and
13 her arms were bare.

14 Her arms caught Jace's eye. Her skin was
15 covered with scabby sores and pus-filled blisters.
16 She held her hand up, palm forward, and it seemed
17 even her palm had crusty patches.

18 "Stop, Red Arrow, come no further." The
19 woman moved out of the shadows. The evening
20 sunlight poured over her face, revealing beauty that
21 pock marked skin could not destroy. The blisters on
22 her face had already healed, leaving deep scars.

23 Red Arrow stood, fists clenched. His face was
24 a chiseled mask, betraying no emotion. Jace only
25 hoped his own face did not betray the horror of
26 seeing this pitiful woman.

27 "What happened, Mother?" asked Red Arrow
28 with a slight quiver in his voice. "Where are the
29 others?"

30 "The day after you left, we received a message
31 from Pontiac calling a powwow of all the tribal

1 Jace began to type, talking out loud, “O-hi-o,
2 Al-le-ghe-ny, Mo-non-ga-he-la...”

3
4
5 Jace and Red Arrow stood on a low ridge
6 facing a small village of about a dozen bark-covered
7 longhouses. All was quiet and still. The
8 Monongahela, brown and broad, flowed beyond the
9 farthest wigwam. The top of Fort Pitt could be seen
10 in the distance to the right just past a wide swath of
11 forest. Apprehension clouded Red Arrow’s face as
12 he viewed his village. It was early evening—a time
13 for preparing food and visiting, yet no one was
14 visible.

15 Caw! Caw! Caw!

16 Jace jumped at the sound of Black Beak’s cry.
17 The bird had traveled with the boys as they
18 journeyed using the BPC. He now flew to the
19 highest branches of the trees surrounding the village
20 clearing.

21 Red Arrow tore his gaze away from the
22 longhouses and followed Black Beak’s flight. He
23 turned to Jace with a dark expression.

24 “If your magic rainbow light has caused any
25 harm to my family...”

26 “There’s nothing bad in my backpack! I have
27 no weapons! Your family’s probably all inside.”

28 As if to confirm Jace’s words, a small girl ran
29 from one longhouse to another. Red Arrow prodded
30 Jace with the end of his bow. Jace lifted the game
31 sled and began the short descent to the village.

1 ever been in any trouble at school. Jace received a
2 stern lecture: since 9/11/01 and all the mail trouble
3 that October, no jokes could be made about bio-
4 terrorism, or in fact, any terrorism. He had detention
5 the next lunch period for calling names. Another
6 first!

7 Since then, Jace had been avoiding Dejay,
8 determined not to let him ruin his other two records:
9 leading soccer scorer and straight-“A” student.

10 “Hey, Deej,” Jace said, keeping his body
11 between Dejay and the bed. “Didn’t know you were
12 going to escort me to the game.”

13 Dejay shifted from left to right and back, trying
14 to move past Jace and sit on the bed. He had been
15 curious to see Jace’s room ever since Jace had let
16 slip how many soccer trophies he had won.

17 “Naw, my mom’s working late. She asked your
18 mom if I could go with you,” he explained. “So this
19 is the bedroom-study hall of the legendary straight-
20 “A” Jace. Lookie at all the trophies!” Dejay
21 snickered as he pointed to the rows of soccer awards
22 lining Jace’s bedroom walls.

23 “Dejay, it’s a mess in here. You’ve, ah, we’ve
24 got to go now to make the game.” Jace stumbled
25 over his words, anxious to lead Dejay out of the
26 room.

27 “What? You don’t want me in here? Is that a
28 fact?”

29 Dejay stuck his chest in Jace’s face, daring
30 Jace to stop his forward movement. Jace planted his
31 feet and pressed his lips together in determination.

1 Just then, Jace's mother called out to the boys to
2 come downstairs.

3 "Beatcha!" Dejay said as he gave Jace a rough
4 shove and ran back down the stairs. Jace reeled and
5 fell backwards, tripping over the sheets at the end of
6 his bed. His hand reached out to break his fall and
7 he felt the edge of his backpack as he crashed to the
8 floor in a whirl of rainbow light.

9
10 *****

11 As Jace sat remembering, his captor had slowly
12 edged all the way around him, looking for weapons.
13 Jace's hand went to his back as he freed the keypad
14 from his waistband. Instantly, he felt the arrow tip
15 at the back of his skull behind his left ear.

16 "This shaft will go through you, Rainbow
17 Rider, and skewer your head like a frog on a stick.
18 Drop your weapon, but tell me, little frog, which
19 river is your home? The Allegheny, the
20 Monongahela or the Ohio?"

21 "I told you I don't have a weapon!" Jace
22 carefully placed the keypad next to the backpack.
23 "My name is Jace, not Rainbow Rider. And I'm not
24 a frog. I'm a human being. Just like you. Who are
25 you, anyway?"

26 "My name is Red Arrow. I'm a Lenape
27 warrior, a great hunter, and the oldest son of our
28 tribe's storyteller, Star Weaver. My mother is the
29 eldest daughter of a tribal chief. Our village is on
30 the banks of the Monongahela."

1 strong he would seem if he could "fly" with the deer
2 and Red Arrow.

3 Then he realized he would need the co-
4 ordinates and his confidence sank. How could he
5 tell where the village would be? Something Red
6 Arrow had said kept nagging him like a pestering
7 gnat. What was it?

8 "How could you lift all of us on a rainbow?"
9 asked Red Arrow. Even Pontiac cannot fly like an
10 eagle across rivers and forests."

11 "That's it!" Jace cried, "Pontiac! I was, um,
12 reading about him in my history book when Dejay
13 pushed me and I fell on the keypad."

14 "What?" Red Arrow yelled with exasperation.
15 "I think you're stalling. It's time to get moving
16 again!"

17 "Please, Red Arrow, let me show you how it
18 works. Haven't you always wanted to fly like Black
19 Beak? It's not dangerous! I'll go with you!" Jace
20 took a deep breath and tried a daring taunt. "I rode
21 the rainbow light, but perhaps you're too
22 frightened."

23 Red Arrow glared at Jace. He thrust his hand
24 into the backpack and examined the keypad up
25 close. On the screen a portrait of Pontiac glowed in
26 digital color. Red Arrow's work-hardened fingers
27 gently tapped the screen. He looked up at Jace and
28 answered the dare:

29 "Take me to the village on the point where the
30 three rivers meet."

1 and the French fought a war. We helped the French.
2 They lost so- we lost.” Red Arrow looked sad. “My
3 grandfather died in that war.”

4 “I’m sorry. I bet you miss him. My
5 grandfather died two years ago.”

6 Red Arrow shrugged, unwilling to give in to
7 emotion. “The English destroyed Fort Duquesne
8 and built a new fort, Fort Pitt, in its place. The
9 English do not give gifts - they take back their
10 promises too.”

11 Red Arrow’s face grew animated. “Now many
12 tribes have united to fight the English and drive
13 them from our lands. Under the leadership of the
14 great Shawnee chief, Pontiac, we have already
15 destroyed nine forts. Soon Fort Pitt will fall.”

16 Jace took a swig from the water skin and
17 handed it back to Red Arrow.

18 “How much farther is it to the village?”

19 “We’re halfway there.”

20 Jace’s shoulders slumped with the thought of
21 another hour in the jungle-like forest. Suddenly he
22 had an idea.

23 “What if I could get us there in an instant?”

24 “What do you mean?” Red Arrow frowned at
25 Jace with suspicion.

26 “You saw me just *appear* in the forest in the
27 rainbow light, right?”

28 Red Arrow nodded slightly.

29 “Well, I can move from place to place using my
30 bag. *And...* I can take anything and anyone I’m
31 touching with me.” Jace smiled as he thought of how

1 Jace stood up slowly. He was about the same
2 height as Red Arrow. Jace’s mind was clear now,
3 but his back still hurt where he fell on the keypad.
4 He could hear running water, like a river. It
5 reminded him of his thirst.

6 “Is that the Mononga—whatever that I hear?”
7 Jace asked. “I sure could use a drink of water!”

8 “*Mo-non-ga-he-la*,” Red Arrow pronounced
9 slowly. “The river you hear is the Allegheny. These
10 two rivers come together south of here and form the
11 Ohio.” He tossed a small container made of skin to
12 Jace who caught the jiggly bag just before it hit his
13 face.

14 Jace pulled out the wooden stopper and smelled
15 the liquid inside. No smell. He cautiously took a
16 sip and tasted fresh, clean water. Greedily, he
17 gulped another mouthful and pushed the stopper
18 back in place.

19 “Thanks!” Jace tossed the bag back to Red
20 Arrow who had returned the arrow to his quiver and
21 hung the bow across his back. Red Arrow picked up
22 an intricately beaded bag with a shoulder strap
23 covered in tiny red and white beads.

24 “Your bag is beautiful,” commented Jace.

25 “This is my *parfleche*. I use it to carry my food
26 while I travel.”

27 Jace glanced at his backpack. “Well, could I
28 have my pear flash?”

29 Red Arrow picked up Jace’s backpack and
30 dropped the keypad inside.

1 “No,” he replied as he swung the backpack over
2 his arm. “You’ll be carrying the deer back to our
3 village.”

4 “There’s no way I can lift that monster!” Jace
5 exclaimed.

6 “I can lift him. But then again, I’m Lenape.
7 You can build a sled. Like the women. I’ll teach
8 you.”

9 Red Arrow worked swiftly and showed Jace
10 how to make a game sled from two thin saplings and
11 the twisted branches of the prickly bushes that made
12 up the crowded forest undergrowth. They rolled the
13 heavy carcass of the deer onto the sled.

14 “My father and uncle would normally be here
15 to help me,” explained Red Arrow, “but this is the
16 end of my passage to manhood. I’ve been away for
17 four weeks now and the last task I had to fulfill was
18 my first solo big game kill.”

19 “Wait a minute! I thought you said you had a
20 friend with you. The one who’s afraid of my
21 medicine bag—uh, my backpack.” Jace didn’t like
22 to think that Red Arrow had tricked him.

23 “That’s my friend,” Red Arrow said with a
24 smile as he pointed to the large black crow that eyed
25 Jace warily. Red Arrow clicked his tongue and
26 whistled and the crow flew swiftly to his shoulder.
27 The teen deftly flicked a tiny piece of dried meat
28 into the crow’s beak. Jace stood gawking at the pair.

29 “I suppose I can trust you since Black Beak
30 hasn’t pecked your eyes out...yet. I raised him from

1 a chick and he’s my guardian. He can sense
2 danger.”

3 Red Arrow gently lifted the bird onto his
4 outstretched fingers and hoisted him into the air.
5 The crow circled once and landed on a low branch
6 nearby.

7 “Let’s go!” commanded Red Arrow.

8 The two boys struggled through the dense
9 forest along a narrow game trail, Jace in front
10 pulling the game sled, and Red Arrow in back,
11 loaded down with all the other bags. They walked
12 for an hour in silence until Red Arrow announced a
13 water break. He drank first from the skin canteen.

14 Jace, dripped with sweat. His feet were sore
15 from trudging along in just his socks. He swatted a
16 fly from his face and scratched mosquito bites on his
17 legs. Jace studied Red Arrow’s calm visage. He
18 didn’t look much older than Jace. “How old are
19 you?”

20 “Fourteen years in the way you count the
21 moons.”

22 “What do you mean? How do you know about
23 my ways?” Jace was curious about this talented boy
24 just a year older than he. His fear had been replaced
25 by respect. Plus, he needed to learn more so he
26 could retrieve his backpack and keypad.

27 “When I was very little, the French soldiers had a
28 fort near our village, at the point where the three
29 rivers meet. Fort Duquesne they called it. The
30 French were our friends, especially the fur trappers.
31 They gave us gifts and treated us well. The English