

# Gumshoes:

An illustration of three young detectives standing in a forest. On the left, a boy with spiky brown hair and glasses, wearing a red t-shirt and brown pants, has a brown backpack and is holding a red book. In the center, a girl with long blonde hair, wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt and blue pants, is holding a small black device. On the right, a boy with curly brown hair, wearing a red t-shirt and blue pants, is holding a small black device and has a thoughtful expression. In the background, there is a large tree with a wooden treehouse built in its branches. The scene is set in a lush green forest.

## *The Case of Madison's Father* by Russell Nohelty

GUMSHOES:  
The Case of  
Madison's Father

Russell Nohelty

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# Chapter 1

## Gumshoes Headquarters

Thirteen-year-old Stuart Greenbaum lay on his stomach in the grass across from Mrs. Pennybottom's house. Using his powerful binoculars, he stared past the white picket fence, watching her front door.

There was nothing Stuart loved in the world more than sleuthing. He longed to be like Dan Dash, the classic pulp comic detective with the bushy mustache and brown fedora. When Dan Dash walked into a room, he became the center of attention.

Someday, Stuart thought, that would be him. For now, he had to be content with standing in the periphery, the shadows, unnoticed by teachers and classmates alike. See, he was not particularly tall or athletic. He had no musical talent, and nobody ever wanted to cheat off his papers. Yes, by all accounts, Stuart was an average kid with a very weird hobby. But nothing would stop him from dreaming—or from wearing his Dan Dash footie pajamas while on the job.

Stuart turned on his walkie-talkie. "I'm so bored and tired. Can't crimes ever happen on my time? It's too early."

The walkie-talkie crackled to life, and a nasally, high-pitched voice responded to him. "The hen is nearing the basket."

"*Over*," Stuart said. "You're supposed to say *over*."

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“Don’t correct me, Stuart. I find this primitive technology well below my vast intellect. Anybody with a fourth grade education has access to a smartphone these days.”

“I like it old school, just like Dan Dash.”

“You and that stupid D——”

“Don’t call Dan Dash stupid. He’s the greatest detective of all time.”

“He’s a comic book character! I pity that you idolize a fictional character—especially one that uses such antiquated methods of investigation.”

Wait a minute, Stuart thought, the voice is getting closer. Stuart turned from his surveillance post to see the insurmountably awkward, exceptionally geeky, thirteen-year-old Timothy Jorgenson, Stuart’s business partner at the Gumshoes Detective Agency, best friend, and bane of his existence.

Timothy wore thick, Coke-bottle glasses and never combed his hair. His clothes were often stained with the residue from some botched experiment or failed compound. As a rule he preferred the gentle hum of a computer monitor to human interaction, and his love affair with science kept him indoors even on the year’s most beautiful day.

“You suck the fun out of everything!” Stuart said. “Well, is there anything you’d like to say for yourself?”

“Absolutely,” Timothy said. “I believe that our target is making his move.”

Stuart crouched down, hiding himself behind the oak tree that had stood across from Mrs. Pennybottom’s house longer than anyone could remember.

Stuart grabbed Timothy by his gangly left arm and pulled him to the ground. “You’re about as subtle as a freight train.”

They watched as a balding, slovenly, middle-aged man, dressed in an ill-fitting robe, snaked his way up to Mrs. Pennybottom’s front porch. As he slithered up the front stoop, he craned his neck around, on the lookout for potential observers. Once satisfied that his crime would go unnoticed, he snatched up the newspaper.

“I love this part,” Stuart said.

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Believing he had successfully masterminded the crime of the century, the man opened the newspaper with the slyest of grins on his face. But a blue paint bomb exploded from inside the paper, splattering all over his face and clothes.

As the man wiped the evidence off his face, doors around the block opened and guttural laughter exploded from every stoop. If he had not been covered in blue from head to toe, the man would have surely turned a vibrant shade of red.

The rumble of laughter died down, and the Pennybottom's front door opened. There stood Jill Pennybottom, chuckling under her breath. "Don't know anything about who's been stealing our paper, ay Bill?"

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Daylight broke as Stuart and Timothy stood on the front stoop of Mrs. Pennybottom's house, watching her dole out coins one by one at an excruciatingly slow pace.

"That's two dollars and fifty cents for each of you. Thanks so much, Gumshoes. You were worth every penny. I'll be sure to tell all my friends about you guys."

The Gumshoes yawned loudly as Mrs. Pennybottom patted them on the tops of their heads. "Thanks, Mrs. Pennybottom." Stuart and Timothy turned and walked down the path away from the house, counting their pittance.

"*Penny* is the operative word," Timothy said. "Those paint bombs cost five and a quarter times more than what we charged her. We're losing our shirts."

Stuart agreed. "We're going to have to get a job to finance our job, Tim. At least we have some time before we go to school."

"I think you're mistaken," Timothy said. "While we thought the perpetrator would make his move at a quarter after five, his actual crime wasn't committed until six thirty."

Stuart panicked. "So you're saying our bus should be coming——"

"In roughly thirty seconds," Timothy said.

Stuart looked toward the end of the street and saw the bright-yellow school bus screech to a stop. He watched one of his classmates shuffle onto the bus. Then



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he turned and sprinted in the opposite direction.

Timothy shouted after him. “You’re going in the wrong direction.”

Stuart did not break stride. “Thanks, genius. I’m not ready. I’m still in my pj’s.”

“The bus just pulled away!”

As Timothy caught up to Stuart, the bus turned up a cul-de-sac, headed toward another group of middle schoolers.

“If you hurry up, we’ll catch it before it comes back around,” Stuart shouted over his shoulder.

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Stuart stopped to catch his breath in front of a large, gnarled oak tree. The tree was the tallest in the neighborhood and grew in Timothy’s yard. From the top of the tree, one got a panoramic view of the entire neighborhood—from Mr. James’s ill-advised morning yoga routine to Mrs. Rigglemeyer’s prize-winning begonias. Now, at the highest point of the massive oak was the largest tree house in five counties, as observed by the *East Willow Chronicle*.

The tree house, Timothy’s reward for perfect report cards from ages three through ten, had taken six months to build. It had not only every modern convenience but also every possible device any able-bodied genius would need to solve crimes.

Security had been the biggest challenge to the design of the tree house. With all the costly equipment inside those walls, Timothy and Stuart wanted insurance against any unauthorized individuals who might attempt to access Gumshoes headquarters.

Timothy reached into his book bag and pulled out a little remote control. This was Timothy’s ingenious solution to the security question. He pressed the button. A ladder came down, and they climbed up. He pressed the button a second time and the ladder retracted, securing the entrance to the tree house. Only two remotes existed, and they were exclusively controlled by the members of the Gumshoes Detective Agency.

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After climbing the ladder, Stuart and Timothy walked through the front door, which was emblazoned with the words “AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY!!!” For the most part, no one else really wanted to enter anyway, so there was not much need for such a stern warning. Nobody, of course, except Stuart's mother, who tried to sneak in at least once a week with snacks or some other half-baked excuse to check in on her son.

Large openings ran along the entire length of each wall and allowed the Gumshoes detectives to view any crime within a ten-block radius. Each opening was equipped with a powerful telescope. The telescopes could see even a small object—such as a hummingbird's eye—from two thousand feet away.

The room was split down the center lengthwise by a wooden counter. Each side of the room was a haven for one of the inhabitants. The left side housed a small kitchen—complete with a fully stocked stack fridge, a huge TV, an assortment of video games, and stacks of old Dan Dash comic books piled to the ceiling. This was Stuart's sanctum.

The right side of the room was the antithesis of the left. It was Timothy's domain. A row of computer monitors sat along the counter and blocked Timothy's view of Stuart's squalor. Timothy tried, as much as possible, to create a laboratory that would be devoid of Stuart's disgusting and slovenly behavior. Unfortunately, he rarely succeeded.

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Stuart dug through his massive clothing pile, throwing clothes skyward as he searched for anything that did not smell like rancid milk. In his frantic rush to meet the bus, Stuart threw on the first haphazard outfit he could find: an oversized shirt with a big smiley face, green shorts, a running shoe, and a dress shoe.

Timothy chuckled. “This doesn't work.”

Stuart tore off his clothes and tried on another outfit. Timothy ran over to the opening that was opposite the door and began tracking the bus.

“The bus is almost here,” Timothy said. “Please hurry up. We can't be tardy.”

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“Just give me thirty more seconds,” Stuart said.

Timothy turned around to scoff at Stuart, but much to his surprise, Stuart now wore an acceptable outfit and had even run a brush through his hair. Stuart threw on his backpack. “Well, are you just going to stand there or are you going to hop to?”

“I do so hate this part,” Timothy said.

“Quit being a baby.” Stuart hopped onto the ledge next to Timothy.

The zip line, which ran from the balcony to the street below, was the result of a moment of sheer brilliance, Stuart had often proclaimed. He had sold the idea as a method of quickly stopping perpetrators in their tracks; however, he only ever used it to cram in an extra three minutes of sleep before dinner.

Timothy had protested the use of the zip line since its installation and only agreed to use it in the direst of circumstances. Certainly, tardiness to school was the direst circumstance Timothy could imagine—short of receiving any grade lower than an A.

Stuart patted Timothy on the back as he pushed him up to the ledge. “Hold on tight, buddy. Don’t be afraid to really wrap on.”

Stuart grabbed hold of the zip line. Timothy grumbled and wrapped his arms around his friend’s chest, legs, and waist so tightly that Stuart lost a little feeling in his midsection.

“You ready?” Stuart asked.

“N-o-o-o!” Timothy said.

But Stuart didn’t care. He pushed off from the window, and they sped down to the street below just as the bus rounded the corner.

Stuart laughed as the breeze flowed through his hair. “See, this isn’t so bad!”

Timothy squeezed Stuart tighter. “Speak for yourself!”

They were halfway down when the school bus stopped dead in the path of the zip line. Stuart kicked his legs, trying valiantly to fight gravity and slow himself. “Oh no. Oh no. This is not good——”

*Bam!* They slammed right into the side of the bus. Timothy lost his grip on Stuart and fell to the ground in a heap. Stuart, stuck to the bus for a brief second,

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peaked into the nearest window when he heard the cacophony of laughter directed at him. His humiliation was complete when gravity pulled him down off the bus. He landed right on top of Timothy.

"That could have gone better," Stuart said.

"Agreed," Timothy said.

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The school bus door swung open. Mrs. Haggerty sat in the driver's seat, smiling at them. Her teeth looked like they had been replaced by little flecks of baked beans, and the sight of them caused Stuart to gag every time he saw her.

"You scratched my bus, peanuts," said Mrs. Haggerty. "I love this bus more 'n my own flesh 'n blood. So imagine how much more I'm lik'n you two."

"We'll be more careful next time, Mrs. Haggerty," Stuart and Timothy said in unison. "We promise."

"Just sit down 'n shut your traps," she said.

Stuart and Timothy made their way through the bus to a chorus of chuckles and boos from every face they passed. Every time they attempted to sit down, a disapproving scowl or a threatening glare forced them to continue their shameful march. Finally, they found an open seat toward the back of the bus and slid into it, hoping to disappear from sight. Mrs. Haggerty shot daggers at them as she popped the clutch and drove away.

Their efforts at invisibility proved unsuccessful, however, as they heard the familiar, gruff voice of the monstrous figure lumbering toward them. The powerful footsteps shook the entire bus with every step. Stuart and Timothy shivered as they hoped against hope that it would pass them unnoticed.

"Hey, nerds!" The words echoed through every nook and cranny on the bus. "Nice show you two dorks put on."

"Oh no," Stuart said. "Chet."

"Maybe he'll go away," Timothy said.

But they would have no such luck. The monstrous figure stopped inches from their faces. His enormous shadow blotted out the sun. As the monstrosity sank

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down to address them, drool fell off its chin and splashed in a puddle at Stuart's feet. Next to Stuart, Timothy stiffened as the foul stench of Chet's breath reached him. The shadowy, red-haired mass moved into the light and fixed its beady eyes on Stuart. Chet Oliver was the worst nightmare of anybody attending East Willow Middle School and the oldest eighth grader in the history of the school by several years. It was rumored that he had been held back five times because the high school principal feared for his life in Chet's presence.

"I thought maybe, after I'd promised to pound you into the dirt, you babies would be too chicken to ride the bus today," Chet said.

Stuart puffed out his chest in an attempt to act tough but his voice cracked. "Just move on, Chet. There's nothing to see here."

"Baby got a backbone? That's a laugh! Everybody laugh!" The entire bus erupted into laughter. "I brought something for you dweebs."

Chet reached into his pocket and held up a rotten egg with his left hand. The pungent smell wafted through the entire bus. Twin girls in the front row choked back vomit, and other students desperately tried to open their windows.

"I swiped it from my mom's this morning," Chet said.

"Hmm, it seems rancid," Tim said. "Your mother should read the expiration date on her food more carefully. I'm actually quite surprised you haven't eaten it yourself by now, given your sizable girth and lack of a refined palette."

"Tim, shut it," Stuart whispered.

"Why? It's true, Stuart. He's a very large boy, or man, or boy-man, and the fact he hasn't already consumed available food is quite a testament to his will. Are you on a new diet, Chet?"

Chet fumed. "What did you say, runt?"

Stuart held his arms over his face, protecting himself from the inevitable blow that could render him unconscious until he turned eighteen. "He's going to kill us. Chet, buddy, he's just kidding. You know Tim. Such a kidder. Right, Tim?"

Chet scoffed and raised his massive left hand over his head. He slammed the egg over Stuart's head, mashing it deep into his hair follicles. The egg dripped

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down, covering his clothing and enveloping Stuart in its horrific stench from head to toe. "Awesome."