

These story starters take place within Chance Fortune's universe.

Complete them your way!

WORLD OF CHANCE FORTUNE STORY STARTERS

RELUCTANT HERO?

"But I don't want to go to Burlington!" I said as I stomped my foot.

"You cut that out right now!" Dad said. He stood peering down at me, his lantern jaw clenched, his gloved fists on his hips. "We Atlases have been going to Burlington Academy for decades and you'll do the same."

"I don't want to be a superhero, Dad," I moaned.

"What?" Dad's eyes threatened to pop out of his mask. "What do you mean you don't want to be a superhero? You're an Atlas! Superheroing has been the family business since your great-grandfather Charles bulked up and put on his leopard-skin tights!"

"But that's not what I want to do with my life!"

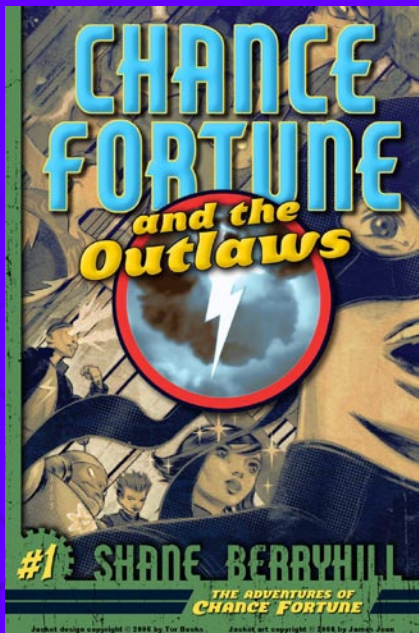
Dad threw his hands in the air. "Fine! I give up! Waste your talents if you want to."

"I'm not going to waste them."

"Oh yeah?" Dad asked. "Then please, tell me: If you don't want to be a superhero, what is it you plan to do with your abilities?"

Mimicking Dad's posture, I put my hands on my hips. I looked him directly in the eye and said...

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CHANCE MEETING

I've always dreamed about meeting a superhero. But being a normal kid, living in a normal town, the chances of that had always seemed pretty slim. Heroes were something we only saw on holo-tv or read about on the Internet. Or at least, that's what I'd always thought.

Then one day while walking home from school, I came across the greatest superhero of all. But the circumstances of our meeting weren't anything like I could've ever imagined.

I crossed the street and walked by the museum like I often do on my way home. Then suddenly, a loud explosion sounded and a large piece of the museum's outer wall disappeared in a cloud of dust and debris. Something too fast for my eyes to follow flew out of the cloud and crashed at my feet.

That's when I looked down and saw him—Alpha-man! He lay in a heap, bruised and battered. His red tights and blue cape were torn to ribbons.

"Too weak. Can hardly move," Alpha-man groaned.

He reached up, trying to hand me something.

"Here," he strained. "Take it."

I held out my hand and Alpha-man dropped a large, sparkling ruby into my palm.

"Get it to the DSA, the Department of Superhuman Affairs."

"He's still kicking, boss!" The shout had come from behind me. I turned my head to see two men dressed in costumes, one impossibly wide and one impossibly tall, striding out of the hole Alpha-man had made in the museum.

"Look, there's a kid with him!" the wide man said.

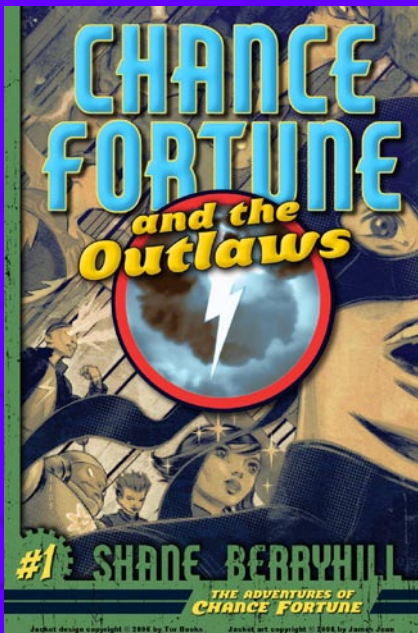
"And he's got the ruby!" the tall man shouted as he pointed at me.

At that moment, a thin man whose skull was three sizes too big for his body stepped between the first two. "Get him!" Mr. Skull said. "I want that ruby!"

"Run, kid," Alpha-man whispered just before losing consciousness.

Looking at Mr. Wide and Mr. Tall, I decided I didn't have to be told twice. I closed my fist around the ruby and ran...

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THE BOOK

We entered the dusty old bookstore, and the woman working the front looked up from the book she was reading to peer at us with the greenest eyes I'd ever seen.

"Got any comics?" Joey asked.

"Golden Age originals," she said. "Third aisle on your left."

Joey smiled and took two quick steps.

"Wait," she commanded. Amazingly, Joey did. But I shouldn't have been surprised. The woman's voice carried a power you could almost feel on the air. "Use the page turner. I won't have grimy fingers soiling those masterpieces."

Usually, in this type of situation, Joey would say some smart remark, laugh, and stick out his tongue. But he did none of the above. He simply nodded and made his way toward the third aisle. Looking at those piercing, jade eyes, I could hardly blame him.

The woman leveled her gaze on me. "May I help you?"

"Uh, no thank you," I said and scurried away to hide among the rows of books.

I was delighted to find a section entitled **MAGICK**, even geeking-out at the archaic spelling of the word. I went down the aisle, mumbling the names I found on the books' well-worn spines under my breath. *Mythica Aracana*, *Necronomicron*, *The Book of Fate*. They went on and on. At last, I came to an especially large, leather-bound book that either had no name or was so old it had long ago worn away.

There was something alluring about it, though I couldn't say what exactly. I reached out and touched the spine only to jerk my hand away. The book felt warm—and alive—like a human body coursing with blood.

Shocked but filled with curiosity, I reached toward the book again. To my amazement, it leapt off the shelf into my hand!

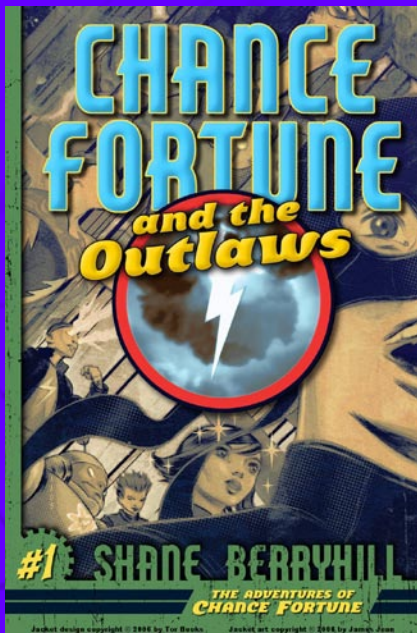
"Well, you must be special indeed!"

I turned to see the jade-eyed woman standing behind me, her arms folded over her chest.

"That book is extremely picky about who reads it."

"This book chooses its reader?" I asked in disbelief...

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STRANGE BEGINNINGS

We were on a fieldtrip at Bryson Labs the day I gained my superpowers. Though I was quickly getting the hang of using my crutches, Mrs. Smith thought I'd be better able to maneuver around the compound in my motorized wheelchair. So that's what I took.

I was angry at first. People are always making allowances for me because I have cerebral palsy. I can't do a lot of things other kids can, but that doesn't mean I should be treated like I'm stupid or helpless. Not that Mrs. Smith was doing that. But like my parents, she tends to be overprotective of me.

In hindsight, I guess I should be thanking her. If the energy field present in Bryson Labs hadn't been slowly draining my chair's battery, I would've made it out of that room.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Like I said, we were at Bryson Labs. Dr. Bryson was there, showing us the new Tachyon Field Generator he'd developed. Some scientists think that tachyons are faster-than-light particles, but the truth is no one really knows much about them.

That's why it scared us all—Dr. Bryson included—when alarms began to sound.

"Danger. Danger," a computerized voice said from speakers mounted along the walls. "Tachyon Field Generator overloading. Quarantine security protocol initiated."

Steel blast shields began dropping from the ceiling to cover the room's doors and windows.

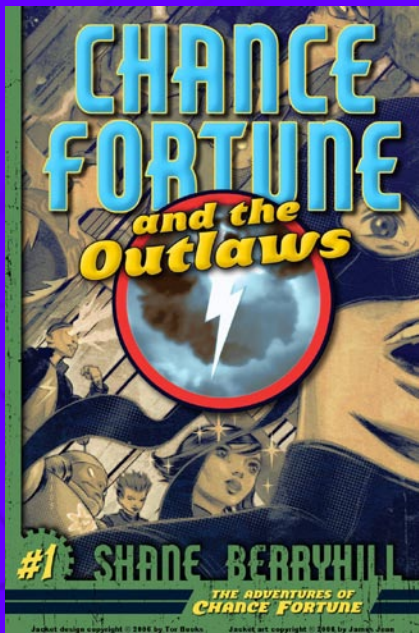
"Run!" Dr. Bryson yelled. He, Mrs. Smith, and the other students ran for the doors. They made it out, but in the panic, I was forgotten about. I pushed down on my chair's directional lever as hard as I could, but a snail's pace was the best the chair could do.

The last thing I saw before the blast doors clanged shut was Mrs. Smith's terror-stricken face. I was left alone with the overloading Tachyon Field Generator.

"Quarantine complete," the computerized voice said. "Tachyon Field Generator collapse in three seconds. Two seconds. One—"

The generator exploded and I was engulfed in a field of strange, multi-colored energy...

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APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING

I finished trimming Mr. Masters' hedges and wiped the sweat of a job well done from my forehead.

"Excellent, my young friend," Mr. Masters said. I joined him on the front porch. He always sat there in his rocker, chatting it up with me as I worked. Well, he did most of the talking, recounting misadventures of his youth involving drive-ins, bobbysocks, and classic cars. He was a sweet old man, and I loved to hear his stories. When mom asked me to do some chores around his house for him, I was more than happy to help.

Mr. Masters gestured to a pitcher of pulpy pink lemonade and an empty glass sitting on a table beside him.

"Yes, sir," I said. "Please."

Mr. Masterson reached out, his brown-spotted hands trembling as he took hold of the pitcher and poured my drink. He handed me the glass and I swallowed its contents in three gulps.

"Now for your payment," he said.

"Oh, you don't have to, Mr. Masters."

"Nonsense," he said as he reached for his cane. "I insist." He raised himself from the rocker only to fall back.

"I'm afraid," he panted, "I'm a little tired just now. Would you mind going inside and getting my wallet for me?"

He had no reason not to trust me. I'd been doing yard work for him for months. "I don't mind a bit, sir."

"Thank you. It's in my bedroom closet. Second shelf on the right."

I'd never been in Mr. Masters' house before. But every house on the block was laid out the same, so I had no trouble finding his bedroom. I looked in the closet, but didn't see his wallet anywhere. Thinking it might have slipped behind one of the many boxes stacked on the shelf, I began moving them around. I lifted the last box and heard a sound like the doors in those science fiction shows make when they open and close. I looked up and could hardly believe my eyes.

The back of Mr. Masters' closet had disappeared. In its place stood an entrance to another room full of strange scientific devices. They bore labels with names like Disintegrator Ray, Mind Controller, and Destructo-bot.

"I really wish you hadn't found that."

I turned and saw Mr. Masters standing in his bedroom doorway, leaning on his cane...

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