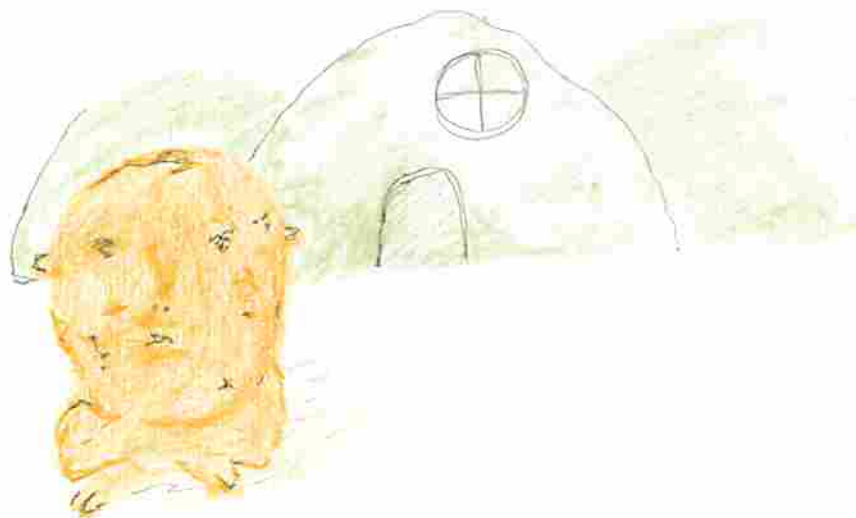
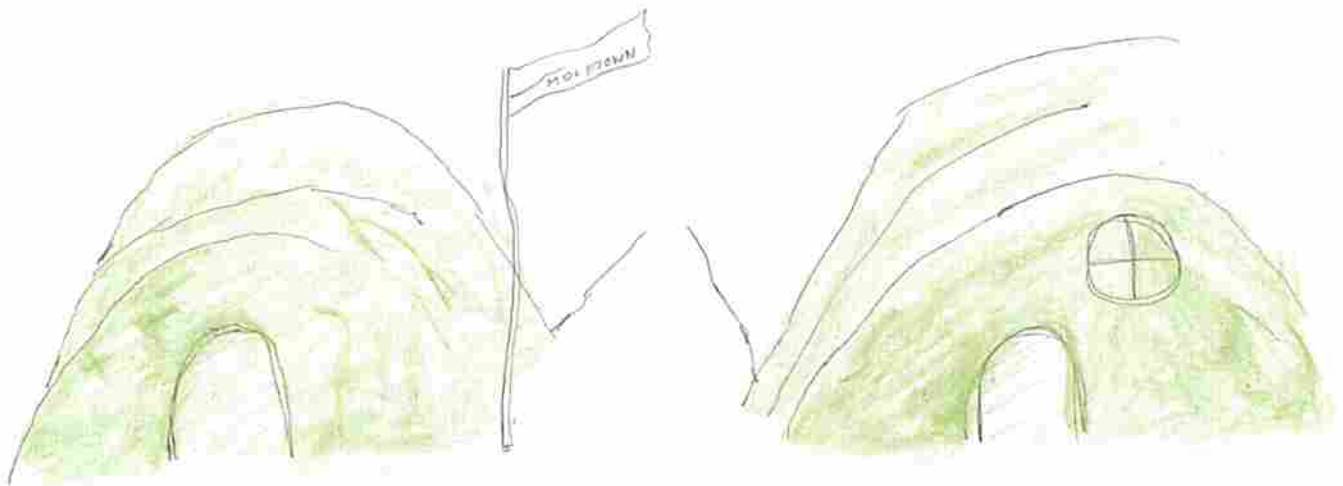


Randolph Mole and the Mysterious Smoke Monster

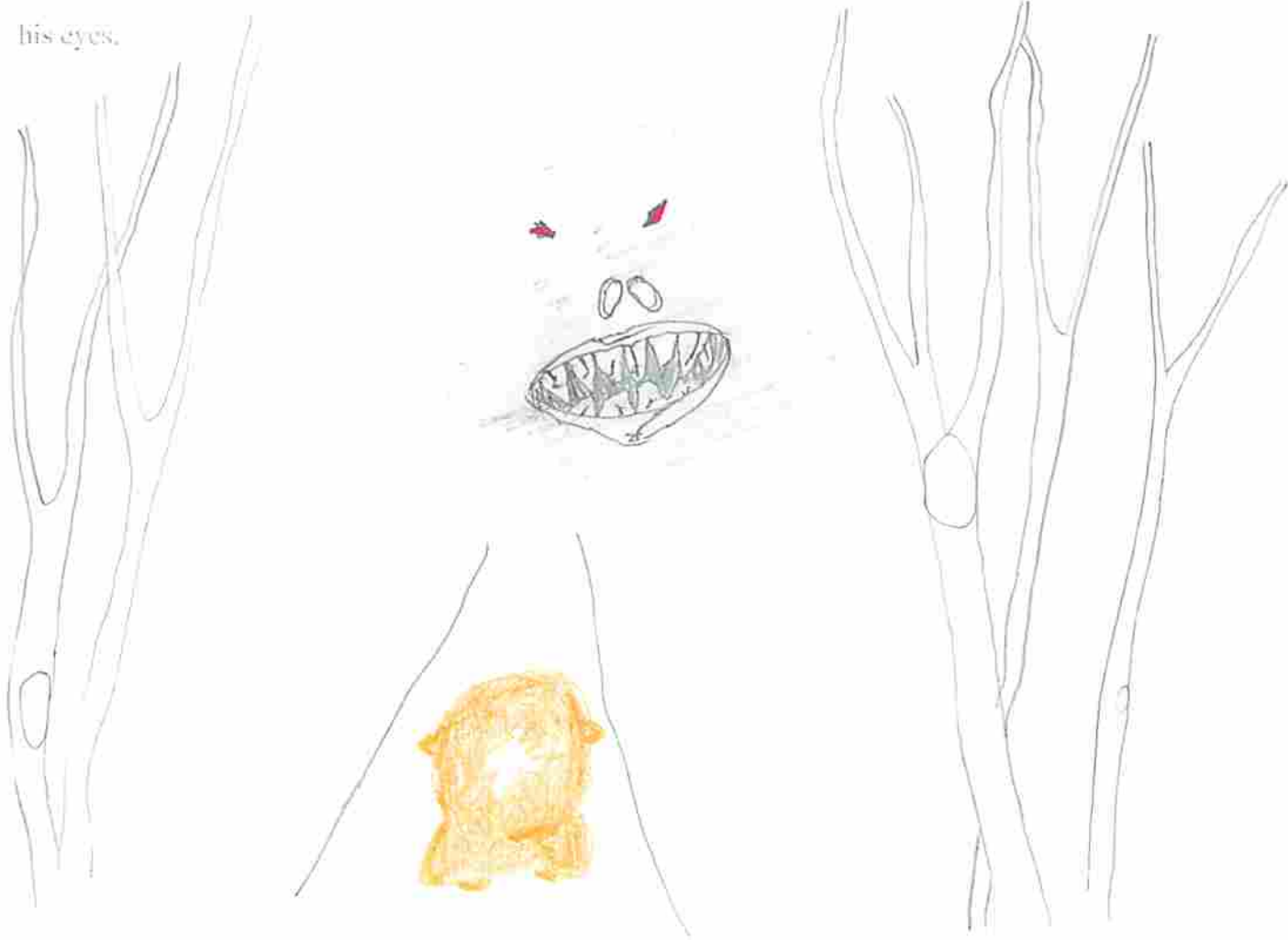
By Ari Marcantonio



There is a land, over many mountains, not so many valleys and a few rivers, where the Molepeople live. This place is known humbly and quaintly as Moletown. Moletown is a fantastic place with great green meadows and crystal clear streams. There is enough food for everyone and all of the Molepeople live in harmony with each other and the land and no one wants for anything. But Moletown was not always so nice...



One day, many years ago Randolph the Moleperson was playing in the forest outside of Moletown. Randolph was a very young mole and had only recently begun to explore the forest. He had only been out for a few minutes when he heard a great wooshing. He looked up and saw a terrifying monster glaring down at him. The creature was unlike anything Randolph had seen before. It looked like a big black cloud with jagged white teeth, and sharp red eyes. Randolph was not the most courageous Moleperson and the monster frightened him. He ran as quickly as he could back to Moletown, made his way swiftly into his house, bolted the door, got into his bed and shut his eyes.



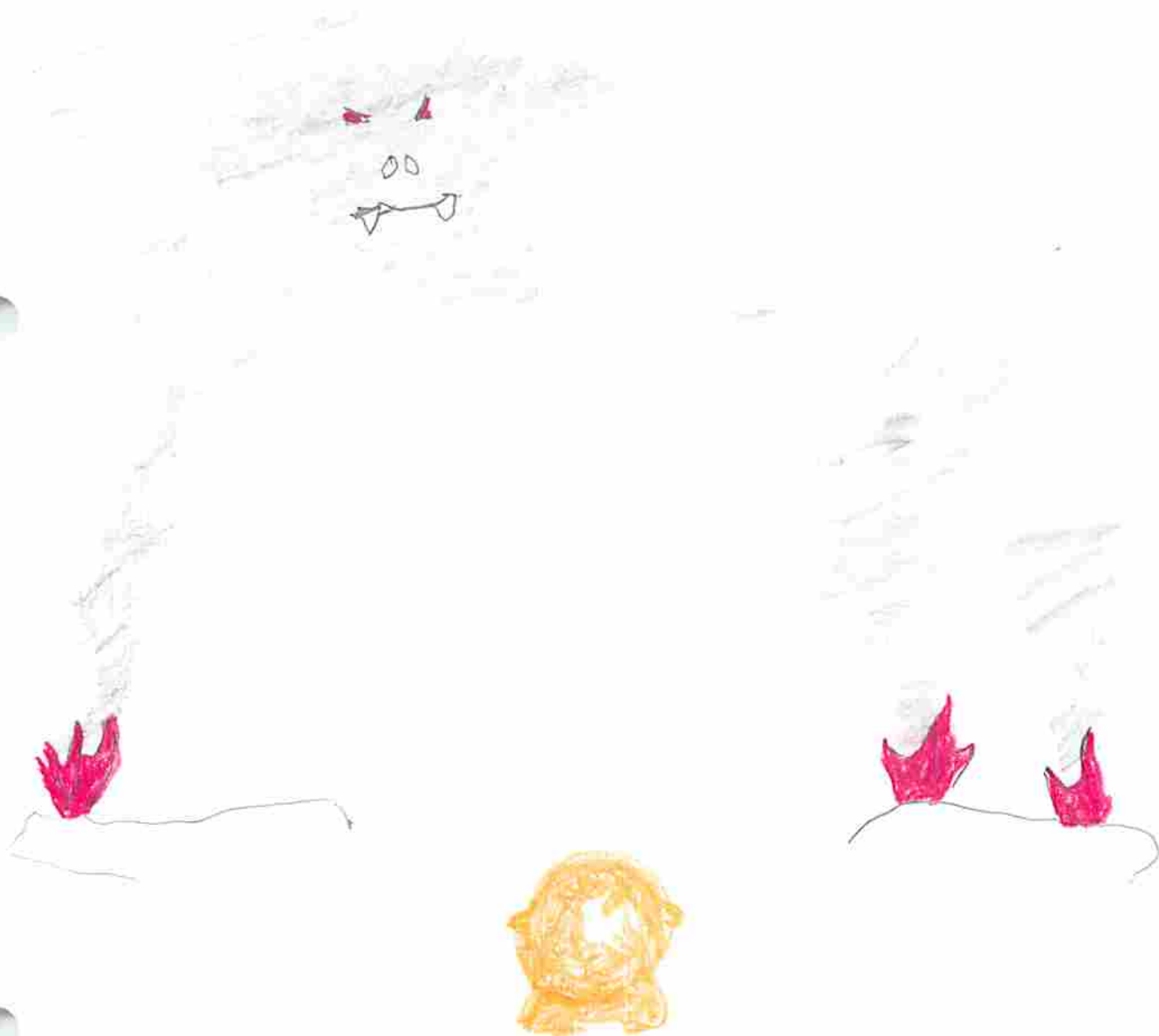
But Randolph could not hide from the monster, he started to get scared of the dark and had to open his eyes, and when he did he saw the monster again, right outside his window.

He thought he must be imagining things and decided he would close his eyes one more time and so he did. He closed his eyes and counted 1...2...3...

And when he opened them the monster was gone. "Ha, how about that" thought Randolph. "That wasn't so bad".



Randolph resolved to get out of bed and talk to his parents about the monster, but when he opened the door from his room it opened into the outdoors. All of Moletown, including Randolph's house (except his room, which for some inexplicable reason was left completely intact) lay in ruins. Everything had been crushed and there were fires all over. The sky was black with smoke, but Randolph could still make out the monster, hovering above him with the same frightening grin as always.



One Week Later..

The council of Moletown decided to hold an emergency meeting to discuss how to deal with the monster.

Edwin mole thought that they should "Blast it clean into the stratosphere", but the Molepeople are peaceful and don't have any weapons and even if they did they would never even consider using them.

Thomas the tiny mole thought that they should "Build a gigantic castle of ice cream", in the hopes that the monster would eat it all and get sick. But this too was outside of the Molepeople's resources.

Then Ira the Blatantly Irrational Mole stood up and said that he had an idea. He said that it would not work if any of them knew exactly what it was and that he needed two long ropes, a kite, a length of fishing wire, six jars, four hundred and sixty hot dogs with mustard but no ketchup and a spatula.



One Day Later...

As you may have imagined, Ira the Blatantly Irrational Mole's plan was not successful and the council held another meeting to discuss other solutions.

Randolph loved Moletown and he would do anything to save it, but the monster scared him. It scared him so bad that he couldn't go outside with his eyes open. Randolph already had a big red hump on his head from walking out his front door and directly into a tree. He couldn't go on like this. He had to conquer his fear of the Smoke Monster.



One night Randolph was fast asleep and had a dream. In his dream he was walking through a forest, much like the one where he first saw the smoke monster, when he saw a wizard. The wizard waved and told him to come closer.

"Hello," said Randolph.

(In English Accent) "Hello, my name is Frambles The Imperial Wizard. I am the ruler of this land."

"Where exactly is 'this land'?" asked Randolph.

"Why this is the great land of Pontombious."

"Oh," replied Randolph.

"You have been afraid, haven't you Randolph?"

"Yeah, but it's creepy that you know my name."

"That will happen," replied the wizard. "But I am here to help you. Take this emerald and put it in your right boot. It will give you what you seek."

"Thanks Frambles The Imperial Wizard."

"No probz dude," replied Frambles.

Frambles high-tailed Randolph and then disappeared in a puff of blue smoke.

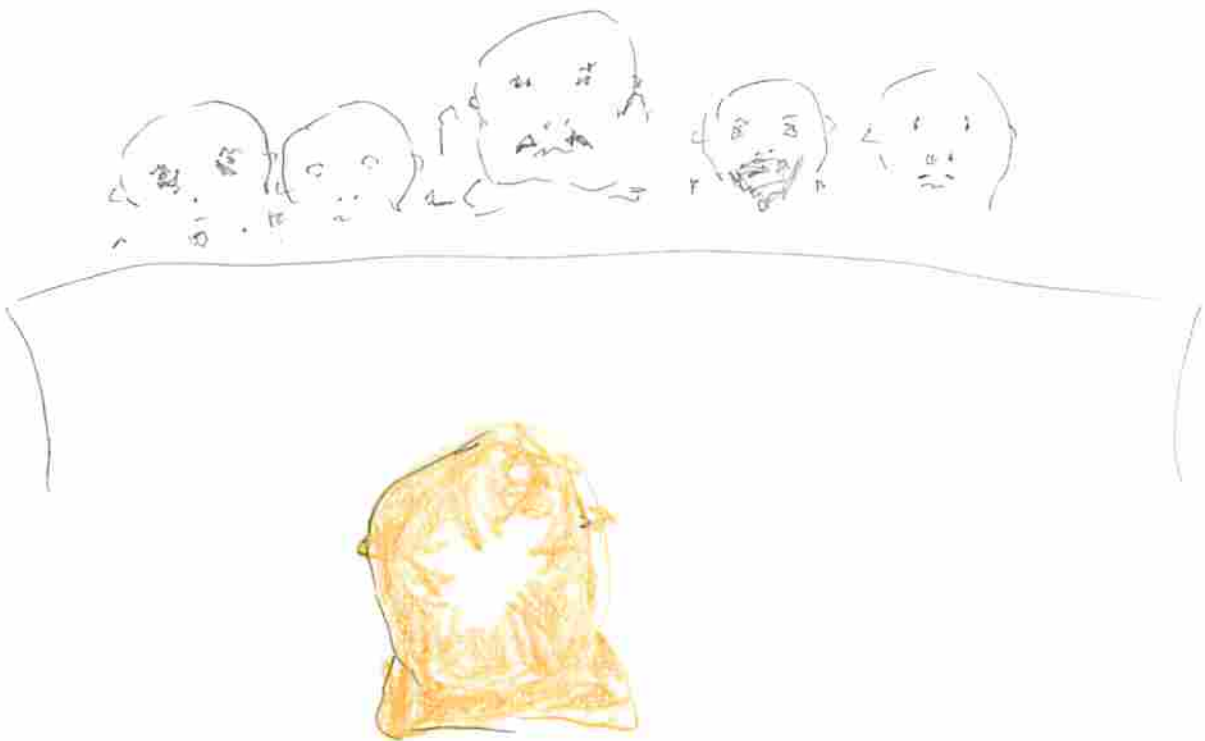
Randolph woke up immediately, and sure enough, clutched tightly in his right hand was the emerald. Randolph slept soundly for the rest of the night.



The next day Randolph went to the council which had been discussing the matter for the past two months and was fresh out of ideas. A few brave moles had formed and tested plans, but none had returned from the Smoke Monster's den, which was the Old Mole Temple.

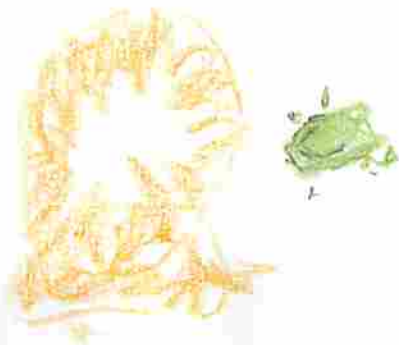
"I know what to do, leave it to me," exclaimed Randolph.

Randolph ran to the Old Mole Temple and before he opened the door he tucked the Wizard's emerald into his pocket.



Randolph burst open the door and screamed at the top of his lungs, "Show yourself you rotten beast!"

Suddenly the smoke monster appeared. It spit big plumes of fire out of its nostrils, but Randolph was not afraid. He stood strong and held his ground. The Monster began to charge at Randolph and just as it was getting close, Randolph's right boot began to swell and grow until it was ten times the size of the boy himself. The boot glowed with a radiant emerald sheen. It arched back and kicked the monster square in the face. He fell and did not rise.



Randolph returned to Moletown and told the Molepeople of his victory. Everyone was very happy and congratulated Randolph and patted him on the back. Randolph had not only defeated the Monster and saved Moletown, but he had conquered his fear of Smoke Monsters. Randolph mole and all of the other moles lived happily ever after.



AWESOME!
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