



Brainwashed: Crime Travelers Spy School Mystery & International Adventure Series Book 1

Paul Aertker

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Rooftop rappelling is just the tip of the action iceberg in this high-energy adventure that thoughtfully addresses global issues.

A mysterious rash of kidnappings spells trouble for the New Resistance, a global team led by an elite corps of teenage investigators. The first title in the Crime Travelers series, an international adventure series for middle and upper grades, Paul Aertker's *Brainwashed* is a work of continuous action and excitement as the spy kids embark on a dangerous undercover mission that leads them through the streets of Paris in a conspiracy that grows more tangled even as it unravels.

When thirteen-year-old Lucas Benes discovers an abandoned baby in a shopping cart, he has no idea that she'll soon be joining him in apprehending the nefarious Siba Günerro and her band of misfit, brainwashed henchmen. As Lucas, his fellow operatives, and a diapered infant race from the New Resistance headquarters in Las Vegas all the way to France, Madame Günerro and her not-so Good Company are there to meet them in full force.

From the Eiffel Tower to the banks of the Seine, there is a fascinating attention to detail that brings the sights, sounds, and ambience of Paris into vivid focus—the scent of fresh baking bread wafting from corner cafés, rough cobblestones underfoot, and chilling catacombs.

The young agents are multicultural, multilingual, and multitalented, and colorful accents, clothing, and personalities add to the diversity. Teens will find Lucas, newly promoted and unsure of himself, an easily relatable figure. A fan of “useless math” with a remarkable memory for maps but still struggling to find his place in the agency, Lucas is a sympathetic mix of confidence and insecurity.

While the New Resistance teens are a distinctly global group, with maps and country-of-origin data available for key players, they are also typical kids who like gummy bears, soda, pizza, and joking around, and they frequently make questionable decisions based on kid logic. Humorous dialogue, such as “You’re trying to trick me into thinking that you’re trying to trick me, when in reality you’re trying to trick me into thinking that you’re not tricking me,” and over-the-top madcap scenarios add levity and comic relief to an otherwise suspenseful thriller.

Rooftop rappelling is just the tip of the action iceberg in this high-energy adventure that maintains a fast pace throughout with multiple abductions and rescues, crashes, street fights, and more. While there are plenty of stunts typical of the kid spy genre—from a creepy, supervil villain to motorcycle chases and private luxury aircraft—there is also a decidedly serious, real-life element. Notably, statistics from the United Nations International Labour Organization are factual, and current issues, including around child labor, child brides, and human trafficking, are addressed throughout.

Full of exotic locals and locales, the international stage is set, and Paul Aertker's *Brainwashed* leaves the door wide

open for future installments in the Crime Travelers series. Middle and high school grades will appreciate the clever mix of world facts, fun, and fantastic fiction.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (April 17, 2018)

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