Ms. Fox's Weekend

On Friday night, Ms. Fox was sitting around with her friends Em and BB playing a geography game and thumbing through the books they had checked out from the library earlier. After Em paused the game so BB could get more celery sticks, Ms. Fox noticed she had a text. She opened her Samsung LG phone (with a camera) and looked at the message. Disturbingly, it read:

1-800-GEO-YUCK

Deliver keys to Nissan

Or else!!!

She worriedly glanced at her friends returning from the kitchen discussing why they had never collaborated. They caught her look of concern as she texted back:

Or else what?

Who is this?

Almost immediately, ringtone after ringtone chimed indicating she had received numerous messages. As she read through the messages, with her friends peering over her shoulders, they learned that an individual, calling him or herself "Archenemy" had threatened to destroy all of the GPS satellites in the world unless Ms. Fox delivered the keys to her sweet ride, a 94 Nissan Sentra, to a set of latitude and longitude coordinates.

Ms. Fox shivered as she realized the enormity of this attack on geography. Em asked why she was so upset. And she explained what she had just read. Em was not sure what all of it meant. BB jumped in and explained, "Well Em, as you know, you have a GPS system in your cars, right?" Em nodded. BB went on, "GPS stands for global positioning system. It uses satellites to find a place's location by using latitude and longitude, which is an imaginary grid that covers the earth. By finding out how far away and what direction a place is from two very important lines, a place's absolute location can be found and told to others. The most important line for latitude, or north and south lines, is the Equator. The most important line for longitude, or east and west lines, is the Prime Meridian. A place's absolute location never changes and it is told in numbers (degrees) and directions. You'll recall from your 7th grade geography class, Em, that 79®N and 33®E means that place is 79 degrees NORTH of the Equator and 33 degrees EAST of the Prime Meridian."

Ms. Fox listened to this explanation and nodded. "Exactly BB. But it is even worse than that. GPS also gives a place's relative location, or the distance and direction it is from another place, usually where you are at. Describing what a place is next to and how to get to it from your position is usually how we find places. We would only be talking latitude and longitude if we were at sea, landing a rocket, or in a geography class. So this person is trying to destroy how we find places; which is…"

"ONE OF THE FIVE THEMES IN THE STUDY OF GEOGRAPHY!" they all shouted.

"That fiend! That dastardly fiend!" thundered Ms. Fox. BB and Em, being less elegant in their word choice, said things that cannot be repeated here.

"Well, what do we do?" asked Em.

"This villain is certainly NOT going to be rewarded with my sweet Nissan for trying to take the world geographically hostage!" Ms. Fox said, incredulously. "Let's think. We have the coordinates for the drop off. Maybe we can strike back somehow?"

BB said, "The messages told us that if we involved the authorities, Archenemy would go ahead and destroy the satellites. So that is out."

Em studied his hands while he thought. Then he spied one of the library books they had checked out in the corner of his eye. It was an atlas. "Archenemy is using geography for his evil designs, right? What if we hit Archenemy with geography right back? Like that idiom, 'fight fire with fire'?"

Ms. Fox and BB quickly looked at each other and knew right away that was exactly what they were going to do. But what would their exact plan be? They sat around the table with the library books, glad that they had checked out so many and began researching all night, stopping only briefly for limeades and limeade-induced bathroom breaks. They made exhaustive studies of every map they could find, looking for an opportunity. They studied physical maps, which show the how the land looks in an area. They studied political maps, which show how land is divided up by people and the borders and boundaries in an area. They studied several types of special purpose maps, such as historical maps, population maps, and climate maps. At 4 in the morning, BB said, "I have to remember that special purpose maps have something specific to tell the reader besides how a place looks or how it is divided up."

As the sunrise pierced the window, they looked at each other. Ms. Fox, "So do we have a plan? Do you see any flaws? I don't…and we have been over it a thousand times." BB and Em stared at the plan and both agreed that was how they should proceed. "OK," said Ms. Fox to Em, "Make the call and get the jet ready." Em did and they drove to the airfield. When they got out, they noticed the plane was being supplied with the gear they would need for the mission. BB was busy on his computer, making the necessary arrangements.

The coordinates they had been given was 55®E, 4®S. They flew to the coordinates and noticed clear blue waters and clean sandy beaches. The surroundings were far too gorgeous for why they were there. "Is everything ready?" Ms. Fox asked BB.

He nodded and grinned, "I think we have some tricks up our sleeve now!" He handed her a device.

“This does everything, right?” she asked.

He showed her as he explained, “You bet. Just turn this knob, shake it like it’s a Polaroid picture, and hit the button. Then it is Archenemy’s Kryptonite.”

“I just want to make sure. In addition to that, it can pull up any map I want and any part of a map I want?”

“Sure can.”

She pressed, “It can show the map key?”

BB answered, “The part of a map that gives the information needed to understand it? Yup.” He showed her.

“Scale?”

“The part of the map that shows distance? Yes, right here.” He showed her.

“Compass Rose?”

“The part of the map that shows direction? Yeppers.” He showed her.

“The Cardinal Directions?”

“North, East, South, and West? On any good map that should be with the compass rose.” BB waved his hand as if it wasn’t worth demonstrating.

Ms. Fox agreed. “I have one more question. I have been asking you about small stuff. What about big stuff, like a whole hemisphere?”

BB looked at her, put his hand on her shoulder to assure her, and asked, “You mean half of a sphere, like the earth? Sure. Just hit this…button.” He showed her. She was impressed with the versatility of the device.

Ms. Fox separated from BB and Em long before the drop off. She sensed she was being watched. As she approached the drop off, she noticed that there was another message on her phone. It read:

1-800-GEO-YUCK

Lack of trust means

New coordinates.

70®W, 48®S

Then, she saw that the drop off location exploded. She understood then that she was dealing with a mad man. She contacted BB and Em and they jumped back on the plane. When they reached that destination, there was yet another text giving another drop off:

1-800-GEO-YUCK

It is fun watching

You scramble.

Get here before

6PM local time.

54 ®N, 23®E

They scrambled to meet the deadline and landed in the chilly and wet weather. As they looked outside at the dreary landscape, they exchanged looks of concern. They were determined this was going to be the place of confrontation. They were tired of being toyed with and Ms. Fox had to work on Monday. BB worked furiously on his keyboard, then handed Ms. Fox a jump drive, asking, “Do you have the device?” She checked to make sure and answered that she did. As they left the plane, they looked at each other one last time before fulfilling their part of the plan.

Ms. Fox approached the drop off site. From a distance, she noticed a box on top of a tree stump. When she walked nearer, she noticed that it said:

Dear Ms. Fox,

Place the key to your sweet Nissan in the box.

No funny business or you will never be able to find another restaurant address again.

Geo Stinks,

A.E.

She quickly inhaled when she read the harsh closing sentiment. She dropped the key in the box and walked away, visibly pained. When she reached the car BB had arranged, she got in and pressed on her ear. “Do you think that went well?” she asked the empty car.

In her ear, she heard the dulcet tones of BB’s voice and the strange blended accent of Em. “It went off without a hitch from where we were watching….wait…Ms. Fox, someone is retrieving the box. Em will send you the coordinates of the vehicle we are tracking.”

“Smart move placing that GPS locator in the key, BB. Now I know why I keep you around” chided Em.

Ms. Fox interrupted the conversation, “Ah gentlemen, let’s bring Geographic justice to this scoundrel. He has ruined my plans. I had planned on us spending all weekend watching documentaries on PBS.org. It was going to be a surprise.” When BB and Em heard how they were prevented from a weekend of edutainment, they once again used language that is inappropriate to report. Ugly things were said about Archenemy’s mother. Now their beef was personal.

Ms. Fox received the transmission of coordinates and started her vehicle. She trusted BB and Em to make sure that Archenemy did not slip away. She instinctively placed her hand on the device and started the car. Heading toward 48⁰N, 28⁰E, she noticed the weather warm and the skies clear. She drove along broken down, winding roads through a rural area. She stopped short of her final destination, leaving her car at a lonely farmhouse. She crept, Geo-ninja style, up the tall hill, upon which was a dark, angry building. She saw a brief shot of bright red light and looked for the source. She waved silently to Em and BB. BB used sign language to detail the situation. BB and Em had already devised a plan to enter the old castle. “Follow us,” he motioned.

The trio scaled the first wall with grappling hooks and rope. As they fell to the ground, they noticed two guards walking upon them. Ms. Fox said to one of the guards as she pointed into the distance, “OH NO! Did you HEAR that?” The guard looked and Em stepped up from behind and bonked the guard on the head. At the same time, BB had unleashed some Geo Fu on the other guard. Both were knocked unconscious before they had a chance to alert anyone else.

Quickly they moved into the building, scanning for more guards. They walked down empty hallways, trying to cover the sound of their steps, until they reached the doors of a laboratory. BB used a card to short circuit the security system and they walked onto a catwalk that circled a huge bowl-shaped room underneath. As she peered down, she made out a shadowy figure running from one computer to another as he rubbed his hands together, laughing maniacally. He occasionally muttered, “I have it! I have that sweet ride! It’s my Nissan now, Ms. Pox! Nyah!”

Ms. Fox thought he seemed familiar. Em and BB thought he seemed wack. Wack of the wikkiest kind. They looked at each other and knew it was time. Ms. Fox pulled out the device, turned the knob, and shouted, “ARCHENEMY, I KNOW YOU ARE DOWN THERE! DID YOU ACTUALLY THINK YOU COULD GET AWAY WITH ATTACKING ONE OF THE FIVE THEMES OF GEOGRAPHY? WELL HERE IS YOUR REAL REWARD…OH, BY THE WAY…THAT KEY WON’T WORK…I HAD A LOCKSMITH CHANGE THE LOCK. IT IS A USELESS KEY. BUT WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO EXPERIENCE IS NOT.” She pressed the button on the device. Suddenly from everywhere, a booming voice began speaking. Everyone’s body felt the vibration of the sound. The words that were spoken appeared in a huge image that projected in several places in the laboratory. All of the computer screens showed the same images. Over and over the voice repeated as images reinforced:

GEOGRAPHY IS THE STUDY OF THE EARTH AND THE PEOPLE ON IT!

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY IS THE STUDY OF THE LANDFORMS, WATER FEATURES, AND ATMOSPHERE

OF THE EARTH AND HOW IT CHANGES OVER TIME!

CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY IS THE STUDY OF GROUPS OF PEOPLE, WHERE THEY LIVE, AND

HOW THEY INTERACT WITH THE ENVIRONMENT!

The shadowy figure attempted to cover his eyes and ears at the same time. He screamed in agony and jumped for a hole in the wall. Before Em could parkour down, he vanished.

“I missed him!” Em said with a dejected tone.

Ms. Fox stepped forward and clapped her hand on his back. “No, Em, WE missed him. We should have planned for a devious escape hatch. But we saved the satellites and one of the themes of geography.”

Em showed his pearly whites. He could never stay in a bad mood around Ms. Fox’s positivity. “Yeah. And we won’t back down from that chump. I got no love for him.”

BB shouted from a few meters away, “Hey! Come here! You have to see this!”

Em and Ms. Fox ran over. They look down and saw a room sunken into the base of the laboratory. Every inch of it was covered in pictures of Ms. Fox teaching and maps that had their keys cut out. On the floor were strewn dozens of geography books, National Geographics, and atlases that had been defaced and abused.

Em and BB had to catch Ms. Fox as her legs buckled from the horror. She looked at her close friends and managed to croak, “I don’t think that is the last we have seen of Archenemy, do you?”