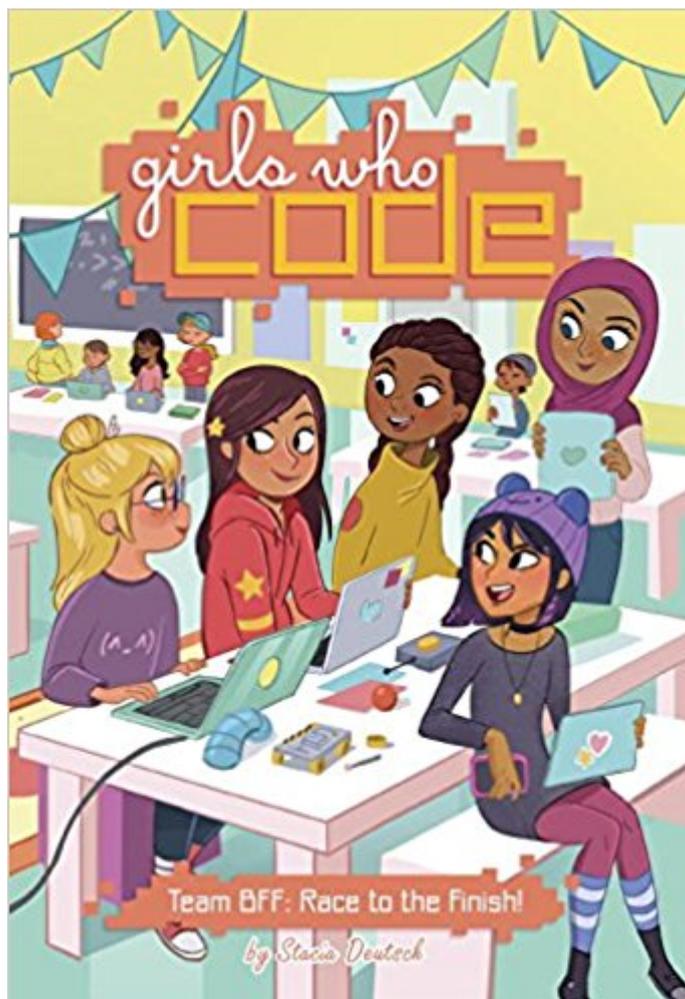


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Team BFF: Race To The Finish! #2 (Girls Who Code)



Synopsis

Perfect for fans of The Babysitters Club and anyone interested in computer science, this series is published in partnership with the organization Girls Who Code! Sophia and her coding club BFFs have the best time together. Sure, they work on coding projects, but mostly they gossip about crushes, eat cookies, and do totally silly impersonations. Now they're about to participate in their first hackathon--a full day of coding and meeting other coders--so it's time to step up their game! Just when Sophia and her friends think their hackathon project is ready for the big time, a change of plans threatens to tear their group apart. Will they have each other's backs, or are they destined for an epic fail? They know that coding is all about teamwork and problem-solving--maybe friendship is, too!

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Customer Reviews

Stacia Deutsch is the author of more than fifty children's books, including the award-winning chapter book series Blast to the Past. She also wrote the tween novel Mean Ghouls, as well as books for the Nancy Drew, Clue Crew, and The Boxcar Children series. Stacia has been on the New York Times Bestseller list for the novelizations of the Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs and The Smurfs movies. Visit her website at: www.StaciaDeutsch.com

Chapter One

“Touchdown!” I mouthed, holding my camera steadily in place. Coach Tilton pumped his fist excitedly downfield, and I let the viewfinder stay on him for a few seconds. The towering oak trees that surrounded the Halverston Middle School athletic field were just beginning to turn color, and the air was crisp and cool. Perfect football weather.

“Did you get that?” Tyson called over to me. I was in charge of filming the play from across the field, and Tyson Phillips, the other student manager, was getting the close-up. I made sure the mic was off and adjusted the strap on my camera.

“Like you even need to ask!”

We liked to compare video footage and make sure we’d gotten everything Coach wanted. People thought being a manager meant standing around, telling the players what to do, or filling the coolers with water bottles, but it was actually hard work—especially when Coach Tilton was in charge.

Tyson was lying on his stomach, getting one last shot. The football players were piling up on one another as if it were the first touchdown they’d ever scored—and this was just practice. I sprinted over to Tyson and nudged his giant foot with my sneaker as he rolled over.

“Show me what you got, superstar,” he said, squinting up at me.

Tyson was in ninth grade, and at first I’d been a little nervous around him. But he was really funny and down-to-earth. Sometimes I forgot he was three years older than me.

I knelt down beside him, and we quickly looked at the playback. We had to be fast if we didn’t want to miss anything—or get mowed down by the players.

“Nice work, Soph,” Tyson said, nodding appreciatively.

“You’ve got a good eye.”

“Thanks,” I said, feeling proud.

“For a middle schooler.” He winked, and I crossed my arms and sighed. I should have known he’d tease me. I didn’t really mind, though.

Since I was only in sixth grade, it was a big deal that Coach had given me the job alongside a high-school freshman. Coach usually only picked seventh- or eighth-graders to co-manage the high school football team along with a high schooler. But I’d lobbied hard for it—I was curious what it’d be like to be a manager—plus, I was good at being in charge.

I’d been playing sports since I was little, I was a hard worker, and I think I’d impressed Coach with my ideas for keeping the team organized. Honestly, it didn’t feel that different from taking care of my three little sisters, Lola, Pearl, and Rosie. Not that I’d tell the guys that.

I shielded my eyes from the sun and looked back toward Coach as he yelled at the players to run faster. But a flash on the nearby soccer field caught my eye. A supercute, athletic, smiling kind of flash named Sammy Cooper, a boy I’d known since we crashed into each

other playing soccer back in kindergarten and who happened to be in coding club with me. His cleat made contact with the ball, and whoosh! it sailed across the field, sending the midfielders scrambling. "Amazing," I muttered, nodding. It wasn't easy to impress me, but Sammy had serious skills. And even though he was Focused with a capital F, he had a huge smile plastered on his face. I swear I never saw him not smiling. Except apparently he wasn't that focused, because he turned and looked in my direction. Unless he also had supersonic hearing, there was no way he'd heard me compliment him, but still, I quickly averted my eyes. I didn't want him to think I was staring at him. Because I wasn't. Okay, maybe just a little. I realized that my heart was thumping, and I willed it to calm down. Clearing my throat, I turned to Tyson. "Feels like practice is going on forever today," I said. "Yeah, Coach seems pretty set on wearing the guys out." Tyson pulled a microfiber cloth from his pocket and wiped his camera lens. It was pretty funny how obsessive he was about keeping the glass clean. "Hey, I can stay late, if you want to go," he said. "I'll have to upload these videos at the computer lab, anyway. I can upload yours, too, if you want." "You sure?" I usually felt 100 percent focused at football practice, but I was kind of preoccupied today. "Coach wants the footage tonight, Tyson. Not next year," I said with a teasing grin. "I've gotten a lot better in the lab, Soph. I only had to call the service desk twice last time." I raised an eyebrow. He sighed. "Okay, fine, three times." "You can always call me, you know," I reminded him. "One day you won't have a computer pro like me around. You should take full advantage of my genius while you can." Tyson chuckled and nodded. "Very true." He couldn't deny that I was better at the tech side of our job. I walked over to Coach during the next water break and took a deep breath. "Coach, I was wondering if I could." "Sophia." Coach cut me off, his hand on my shoulder. His voice was deep and booming. "We're going to do another practice run. I need you to take notes on what you see. You're my second set of eyes." He patted my back like he did to the players when they needed a pep talk, and then strode across the field while shouting to the quarterback, "Blake, pull back to the twenty-yard line!" Sigh. That did not go like I'd hoped. I jogged over to Tyson, who was rearranging cones. Never a break for us managers. "No luck." "Aw, man." Tyson shook his head. "Too bad." He looked over

at the players across the field. "Looks like it's gonna be a long afternoon." I sighed. "Yep. Thanks for offering, anyway." I grabbed a scorepad and headed to the sidelines. I could see where Coach was coming from. And it felt pretty good to know how much he relied on me. But I didn't want to be a second set of eyes. I wanted to be first in line for my mom's attention. We'd planned a family dinner tonight, and I needed to talk to my mom before she went to work and Abuela and Pearl got home from dance class. My mom was a nurse at the hospital, so I usually didn't see her before I left for school in the morning. We texted a lot, but it wasn't the same as talking in person, and I had a LOT to tell her. The second the football team headed to the lockers, Tyson and I scrambled to put the equipment away. The football field was always a total disaster after practices—there were football bins and cones strewn everywhere. "Yo, we got this!" one of the guys called over to me. He and another player picked up a training net and started toward the shed. "Cool, thanks!" I answered. Usually a few of the players helped put away some of the stuff, but it was part of our job as managers to make sure the field was spotless. When training first started back in the summer, some of the guys had been pretty unhappy to see a sixth-grade student manager. I knew that I had to go out there and work as hard as Tyson. So that's what I did. And it wasn't long before I felt like the team really did accept me. They didn't treat me any differently than they did Tyson. And if they did . . . they'd hear about it. The equipment shed was hot and smelled like a combo of plastic, leather, and sweat. Pretty gross, but by now, we were all used to it. "Where do these flags go again?" Tyson asked me, waving one around. I gave him a pained look. At the beginning of the season, I'd created a detailed system (my specialty). My friends liked to call me the Queen of Organization. Honestly, it was the only way to survive in a house with three little sisters, my parents, and Abuela. "In the bins," I directed, nodding in their direction. Seriously, the guy could recite a play-by-play of every game for the past three seasons, but give him a color-coded organization chart, and he was a lost puppy. "Balls go on the shelf, and cones in that box." I checked my phone—my dad had given me his old one. It was kind of slow but worked for e-mails and texts. It wasn't too late. If I hurried, I might still get a chance to talk to my mom before the rest of my family got her attention. Because once they did . . . I didn't stand a chance. *** "Mom!" I shouted as soon as I opened the front door. "Your favorite child is home!" I dropped my backpack by the coatrack, hung up my jacket, and took my shoes off. The smell of lime and cilantro made my stomach rumble. "Hola, niñita!" my mom said when I

walked into the kitchen. She was wearing jeans and a T-shirt instead of her scrubs. That meant she wasn't leaving right away. "I gave her a hug. "Hi, Mom." She hugged me back. "Your hair smells like football field grass," she said, scrunching her nose. She was chopping up avocado. "My special menu," she explained, gesturing toward the bowl of steaming basmati rice and a plate of chargrilled chicken. Mom's special menu was a way for us all to pick what we wanted, whether it was a tortilla filled with rice, chicken, and the fixings, or just rice and toppings with chips. "Want to do the chips and salsa?" "I was hoping you'd give me a job the minute I walked in." I said, rolling my eyes. I ripped open a bag of chips and put a handful on each of our plates except Lola's. She liked to do it herself. My mom gave me a devilish smile. "You'll get really excited later when I ask you to load the dishwasher," she said with a wink. "So what's new, sweetie?" She scooped out another avocado. "You said you had something you wanted to talk about when you texted me. How was practice?" "I thought about Sammy's ruffled soccer shirt and huge smile. Had he been looking at me or just in my general direction?" My mom waggled her fingers in front of my face. "Are you okay, Soph?" "Huh?" I said, giving my head a little shake. Definitely too much Sammy on my brain. "Oh yeah, so yesterday at my grandmother bellowed as she barged into the kitchen. She wasn't a big person, but she had a way of taking up a lot of space. She and my mom had the same dark hair and bright green eyes, and they weren't that tall. People often thought they were sisters; no one ever guessed that Abuela was almost seventy years old. I had the same dark hair and take-charge attitude, but I got my height and brown eyes from my dad. Abuela noticed the block of cheese sitting on the counter and immediately started rummaging around the cupboard for the grater. "I'm glad you saved something for me to do when I got back," she said, unwrapping the cheese. "Pearl's dance lesson ended late today. Those little girls just want to move!" She shimmied as she grated the cheese. I tried not to laugh at her silly dance moves. She wore loud clothes—long, colorful ponchos and chunky jewelry—and always wanted to hear about what was going on at school. I loved her, but she could be kind of chatty, and sometimes I just wanted my mom to myself. I emptied a jar of salsa into a bowl and was about to tell Mom all about coding club when I realized something strange: The house was eerily quiet. "Where is everybody?" I asked, sneaking a chip and dipping it in salsa. "Pearl's playing with her dolls in her room," Abuela said, raising her

eyebrows. “The dolls are all in ballet class, and she is pretending to be their teacher.” Dad got home early and took Rosie to the park. Mom chimed in, taking silverware out of the drawer and setting it on the counter. “And Lola’s in her room, drawing. Lola spent a lot of time drawing. She was smart and creative, but she didn’t always look at you when you were talking, and she got fidgety easily. My parents said she was on the autism spectrum, but she was just Lola to me: my spunky, brave, eight-year-old little sister.”

“Okay, Mom, so listen,” I said, taking a deep breath. “Remember how I told you about the hackathon this weekend?”

“So much had happened in the last month of coding club. I hadn’t been able to catch Mom up on everything.”

“A hackathon? What’s that?” Abuela asked. She was from Puerto Rico, and sometimes her accent was pretty strong, especially with words she didn’t know.

“Hackathon, Abuela,” I corrected. “It’s like a supercool marathon day of coding. I’d watched some videos of hackathons, and everyone looked so into it—focused and competitive. Plus, there were usually awesome adult coders—like mentors—to help you. That was when I knew: I, Sophia Torres, had to be a part of something like that.”

“Ah, hack-a-thon,” Abuela repeated slowly. Her eyebrows furrowed. “What does a marathon day of coding mean?”

I was glad Abuela was interested, but how do you explain computer science to someone who has trouble using the TV remote? And my time with Mom was limited.

I explained as simply as I could. “You know how I mentioned coding club to you?”

Abuela nodded. “Well, the hackathon is an event this Saturday at the community center that I’m going to with my friends from coding club. We have to come up with a coding project, and there’ll be kids from other schools there, too.”

Mrs. Clark had told us that if one of the teams from our coding club got the top prize, she would take them out for ice cream. We’d been super excited about the hackathon, anyway, but now we wanted to do it even more. Plus, Sammy’s team was going to be there, too, and I couldn’t let them get a prize and not us.

“Sounds great, sweetie,” Mom replied, but I wasn’t sure she was really listening—she was warming tortillas in the oven, and the buzzer was ringing.

“I wonder if they’re warm enough,” she said to herself, peering in the oven.

“Sí, sounds fun!” Abuela said, but I knew she had no idea what I was talking about. She glanced over at my mom and the oven.

“Another minute, mamá.”

“Mom!” I snapped my fingers. “This is important!”

Abuela made a clicking sound with her tongue. “Tsk. Do not snap

the fingers at your mama, Sophia. Very disrespectful. I blew out my breath.

"Sorry." I sat down at one of the stools at our small kitchen island. "Mrs. Clark asked us all to sign up for the hackathon at coding club last week." I said, thinking about how when Mrs. Clark brought in the permission forms, my friend Lucy had the biggest smile I'd ever seen from her, and that she was saying a lot. Lucy Morrison was the bubbliest person I knew. "My coding group is going as a team. Dad filled out the paperwork." "Great, honey." Mom took the tortilla platter out of the oven and put it on the kitchen table. "Who's in your group again?" "Lucy; Maya Chung; and the new girl, Erin Roberts—you know, the seventh-grader who moved here this year." I thought about how Mrs. Clark had decided the four of us should be a "permanent group" after the first week of coding club because we worked so well together. We'd become close outside coding club, too, and I couldn't imagine school without them now. Mom patted my hand.

"I'm so happy you and Lucy are getting along again, Soph." "Yeah, me too." Lucy and I had been BFFs for years, but we'd drifted apart last year when I thought she didn't want to be friends anymore. Turned out it was a big misunderstanding, and now we were BFFs again. "So, anyway," I went on. "First we have to come up with a plan for what to code at the hackathon, so my friends are coming over later to work on it." "That's fine, Sophia." Mom said. She gave me a stern look. "But in the future, you should ask me first before you invite people over." Abuela was nodding behind her. I didn't like having them gang up on me. "I tried, Mom, but you were busy." The words rushed out before I could stop them. I gave my mom my best don't-be-mad-at-me face. "But next time I'll ask." My mom's expression relaxed. "I am glad you're enjoying the club." "Me too." I said, sitting down at the table. Abuela walked over to the stairs. "Pearl, Lola—dinnertime!" I crunched on a chip. "You'll be able to come to the hackathon, right, Mom?" Mrs. Clark said parents can come at the end to see our coding projects. Mom had been busy with my little sisters these days and had missed the last three football games I'd helped oversee. I didn't usually mind, but I really hoped she could be at the hackathon. We were working hard, and I wanted her to see how cool coding was. "I'd love to, sweetie. I'll check my schedule." Boom! Boom! Boom! My sisters sounded like a herd of elephants running down the stairs. Pearl came in first, throwing herself into

Mom *¡c!*s arms. She was little but fast. *¡*“Mama! Watch! *¡* She spun around in a circle. *¡*“See how good I dance? *¡* *¡* *¡* *¡*“Amazing, *¡* my mom gushed, clapping. *¡*“But it *¡*s time for dinner, sweet pea. *¡* *¡* Pearl took her usual seat at the table, next to Abuela. She was still wearing her pink leotard, and her curly long hair was pulled back in a ponytail. *¡*“I *¡*m going to put on a show for you tonight, Abuela, *¡* she said, wiggling back and forth. *¡* Abuela winked. *¡*“I can *¡*t wait to see it, mi amor. Now, here, have some rice, *¡* she urged, putting a big spoonful on her plate. My sisters went to bed early, so they started eating right away while Mom finished getting things ready. *¡* Lola was usually pretty quiet unless she was talking about her favorite subject: dogs. Once she started telling you about them, she *¡*d go on forever. She was already sitting down, looking out the kitchen window. *¡*“Daddy! *¡* she burst out suddenly. *¡* Two seconds later, the door that led to the garage opened, and my dad entered with my youngest sister, two-year-old Rosie, toddling beside him. *¡*“Sophia! *¡* Rosie shouted, half running to me. She wrapped her little arms around my neck. *¡*“Missed you! *¡* *¡* *¡*“I missed you, too, *¡* I said, kissing her pink cheeks and tickling her tummy as she giggled. *¡*“Perfect timing, *¡* Mom said, filling the girls *¡* cups with milk. *¡*“Everything *¡*s ready. *¡* *¡* Dad gave Lola and me each a peck on top of our heads. *¡*“How *¡*re my girls? *¡* he asked, mussing up my hair. *¡* *¡*“Hungry, *¡* I declared. Mom liked for us to wait until everyone was at the table before we said grace, but the food just smelled so good, I couldn't help myself. I piled a tortilla with chicken, cheese, avocado, and salsa, rolled it up, and took a huge bite. *¡* Dad chuckled. *¡*“Looks like you weren't kidding, Soph. *¡* He leaned in to give Mom a quick kiss. *¡*“Yuck! *¡* Lola put a hand over her eyes. *¡*“Gross! *¡* *¡*“Someday you *¡*ll like kisses. *¡* Mom made a loud smooching sound. *¡*“Someday you might even want to give one to someone. *¡* *¡* *¡*“Ewww! *¡* Lola and Pearl shrieked together, and Lola stuck out her tongue in disgust. *¡* A few minutes later, everyone was finally sitting together at the table. It was a typical dinner at Casa Torres. Rosie was dropping shredded cheese all over the floor. Pearl was talking about ballet class with her mouth open. Abuela was trying to coax Lola into eating more chicken, and Mom and Dad were eating and chatting about work. *¡* I took another bite of my burrito and frowned. My friends would be here soon, and my one-on-one time with Mom had disappeared as fast as the warm tortillas. *¡*“Chip, pwease! *¡* Rosie said, raising both her hands. Sighing, I put one chip on her plate and three on mine. *¡*“You can have another one if you

don't drop it." I told her. She stuck out her bottom lip. "Okay, fine." I said, giving her two more chips. She grinned, and I smiled back at her. On the bright side, at least I had been able to tell my mom about the hackathon. And when she came to see it, I could finally show her what coding club was all about! *** We had just finished dinner when Pearl started yawning, Lola spilled her milk, and Rosie put her head down on the table. "The girls are exhausted," Mom said, getting up. "I'll take them up and get them ready for their baths." Abuela rose, too. "I will help, mija, so you can get to work on time." Mom gave her a grateful look. Mom scooped up Rosie from her chair and kissed the top of her head. "Who's ready for some bubbles?" "Vamos, chiquitas!" Abuela commanded as she herded Lola and Pearl out of the kitchen. Dad carried his dinner plate to the sink and sighed. "Those girls," he said, shaking his head. "It's nonstop energy, isn't it?" It was amazing how quiet it got once my sisters, Mom, and Abuela left the room. "Yeah," I agreed, enjoying the calm. "Music?" Dad asked me, turning on the old-school radio we had on the counter. I grinned. "Only if we play what I like." He found my favorite pop station, and we hummed along to the song. We were halfway through loading the dishwasher when the doorbell rang. Dad's forehead wrinkled. "I wonder who that is, this time of night." He glanced at his watch. "Probably someone selling something." "Yeah," I said. Then, suddenly, I remembered my plans. "Oh! It's my friends!" Dad raised an eyebrow. "On a school night?" "We're not just hanging out, Dad, we're working on something for coding club. I told Mom they were coming, and she said it was fine." "Okay, go ahead," he said, putting the silverware in the cutlery basket. "I'll take care of the rest." "Thanks, Dad!" I exclaimed, rushing to the door. Ring ring ring ring ring There was only one person impatient enough to ring the bell that many times.

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