

Scout Brooks vs. The Blobberous

The following is a work of fiction. All of the characters and events that take place were created from the authors' own imagination and any similarities between this or any other work is completely coincidental.

Scout Brooks vs. The Blobberous
A Product of The Infinite Doctrine

First Edition
2016

Products of The Infinite Doctrine

The Scout Brooks Story: The Freshman Invasion (2014)
Slimeborgs of the Behemoth: A Scout Brooks Story (2015)
Scout Brooks vs. The Blobberous (2016)
Scout Brooks 4 (Coming 2017)
October Runs Red (2015)
October's Shattered Graves (2015)
October's Unrest (2016)
The Hilliard Haunting (2015)

Follow:

[Facebook.com/theinfinitedoctrine](https://www.facebook.com/theinfinitedoctrine)

[Facebook.com/thescoutbrooksstory](https://www.facebook.com/thescoutbrooksstory)

For Marshall:

Between your infectious smile, your genuinely happy personality and the pure joy and love you have brought to your mother and I, we couldn't be more blessed to have a son like you. We love you so much, Marshall!

-Mom and Dad

PROLOGUE

Here We Go Again...

Ya'll know me! I'm Scout Brooks, man! You know, the kid who accidentally stumbled into the EIA – a secret government organization focused on neutralizing alien threats from distant worlds, and ran by my high school astronomy teacher, Professor Ed Nog?

Well, with the help of someone very close to me, I've been able to tell you my story – The Scout Brooks Story – school year by school year, mission by mission.

You've read about my encounters with the Frooginites, and I've told you about Lord Radar the Great and his Slimeborg army. Well, now it's time to tell you about The Blobberous. It proved to be my most difficult mission, and up until that point, produced the most casualties.

But let me start with spring break of my sophomore year, cause that's when the crap started to hit the fan...

Spring Break, Sophomore Year...

CHAPTER ONE

Turn on The Slap!

I.

I could feel the sweat dripping from the back of my neck and roving down my back at lightening speeds until it hit Crack City. The sweat traveled through the rugged butt crack territory and made its final resting place in the soft cotton of my boxers. My nerves were on fire; the gaseous bubbles in my stomach were singing a tune of fear and grossness. I had set out to pursue something great – something grand.

I'd mastered space travel, never flinched more than once when coming face to face with evil robots or aliens, put up living with my brother Mark – but this was the one thing that was making me more nervous than anything.

I adjusted the shift in my car to reverse, looked over my shoulder and out the back window and saw the coast was all clear. I was good to go. I adjusted the shift once more and then stepped on the gas, launching my car forward and into a row of orange traffic cones. I swung back around and looked forward and I continued to accelerate.

“What the crap are ya doin’, Scout!?” my driving instructor shouted at me from the passenger seat. He dropped his clipboard and braced himself on the dash of my car. “Slow down!”

“The brakes?” I nervously asked, swapping my foot from gas to brake and flattening the pedal against the floor. The car came to a sudden and abrupt stop and launched the instructor out of his seatbelt and sent him crashing through the front windshield.

He rolled on the pavement through all the broken glass and hopped right back up to his feet in one swift motion. I tried to catch my breath but I was having a hard time doing so. This was the third time this *exact* same thing had happened.

The instructor limped over to the drivers’ side of my car. “Well,” he said, “you’re getting better. Let’s call it quits for the day. *I’ll* drive you home.”

I unlocked the car door and stepped out.

“Scout!” the instructor yelled while reaching for the car. I turned around and noticed I forgot to put the darn thing in park! The car began to roll forward as the instructor leapt on top of the hood. He stood up and rode the car like a surfboard until it slowly went head-on into a tree.

The impact sent the instructor flying off the hood of the car and into a giant thorn bush. I closed my eyes tight and hoped this day would come to an end fast.

My instructor, Mr. Pealoft, drove me home after we swabbed up his bloody cuts and scrapes from the thorn bush and multiple car crashes. He dropped me off in front of my house and got out of my car. He handed me the keys and said “Don’t you dare drive that thing without me. Got it?”

“Got it,” I complied. Mr. Pealoft walked across the street and got into his own car and took off. I watched him drive down Goober Lane and turn the corner. He’d be back tomorrow for another lesson.

Driving was fun as all heck but I seemed to be having a more difficult time than my friends were. My good buddy, Chuck Taylor, was passing his in-cars with flying colors. My other friend, the now robotic Philclops, was doing good as well. The only thing I had going for me? I had my *own* car already!

My Uncle Jones bought it for me over the winter. He told me in private, “Every space hero needs a sweet, slick pair of wheels!” So he bought me a gray, 1988 Dodge Premise. I’d never heard of that kind of car before, but I guess it existed for about a week back in the late 1980s. It was considered a rare classic and I had one of only four functioning ones left in the world!

It was fully decked out with torn leather seats, sticky cup holders and a smell in the trunk that I couldn’t really find an origin for. I originally had some Hawaiian leis hanging up there

on the rearview mirror until captain of the varsity football team, Jeffrey Shuster, explained to me with a punch to the gut and a kick to my left shin that only girls did that. I wouldn't make that mistake again. So instead, I hooked my car up with a sweet clean linen air freshener. I wanted my Premise to smell like I just freshly extracted it from the laundry.

It was the middle of spring break and everything was going my way. After my cocky attitude created a Philclops, I decided to turn my life around and get my head back on right.

I felt so grown up. I had my own car, which I'd hopefully be able to drive all by myself by summer time. My mom got me a smart phone for Christmas, and I pumped it full of free candy smashing games, my favorite band, Iodine Eyes' entire 25 CD library, and of course downloaded *Frog Nog* – Professor Nog's app that he created specifically for members of the EIA. He was learning modern technology, so he'd update the app daily with news, information on our weapons and ships, etc.

I also got a part-time job to bring in some moola! After Jakon was out of the picture, a new guy bought out his comic book store and took it over. His name was Palmer Leafon – but we all just called him Palm. He was in his thirties, had shaggy brown hair with blonde highlights, wore sunglasses even when he was inside, and changed the name of the store to Palmer's Calmics.

He hired Chuck and I at the store after getting annoyed that we were in there so much. I started taking a shine to comics

myself after Chuck introduced me to *The Exo-Skeletons*, a comic series about a group of skeleton warriors from Medieval times. It was sweet.

It was getting close to four in the afternoon when I arrived at work. I walked though the front door and noticed that business was booming! Three middle school kids stood in the back looking at the new releases. I'd never seen this many people in there at once before. We were counting on word of mouth to bring people in, because I was certain that people wouldn't know what "Calemics" were.

Palm Leafon came walking out from the back room after hearing the front door chime when I walked in. He had his sunglasses on – a pair of white Ray bans – and was dressed in a pair of jeans and an unbuttoned mechanics shirt with 'Palm' written on the nametag. He always tried to appear as trendy as he could.

"Oh, Scout, it's just you," Palm said, not that excited to see me. "How'd your in-cars go this morning?"

"Eh, they've been better."

"Really?"

I thought about it. "Well, no. I guess they haven't been better. I'm terrible, dude."

"Well, not all of us were meant to drive, Scout. Some of us were just born backseat drivers. Like my Grams." Palm picked

up his coffee mug from the counter and took a sip. “Nothing worse than cold coffee, am I right?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never had it.”

“You’ve never had a hot cup of Joe?” Palm asked, stunned.

“No, man.”

“Well, today’s your day, brother. You’ll like the way I make it.”

In the back room, I watched as Palm brewed up a fresh pot of French Roast and poured me a cup. He added cream, a dash of sugar, some more sugar, and one final dash of sugar. He handed me the cup. “It’s hot, bro. Be careful.”

I leaned in and sniffed the drink. Hm, smelled pretty good. I took a small fragile sip and about a million fireworks exploded in my taste buds. This stuff was good!

Palm saw the smile on my face and he smiled back and gave me a high five. “Right on, brother.” He then motioned that I got a little above my lip.

I wiped the little bit off of my lips, scraping the rough stubble that was slowly starting to form. Philclops was able to grow his mustache back after it was singed off back in the winter, and I was now well on my way. My stash was coming in slowly but surely. It was a very light brown color, but it was definitely there. It made me so proud.

“Excuse me?” one of the middle school kids called out from over the counter. It was time to get to work. I carried my coffee out into the store to help the kid.

II.

“So I went out to help the kid and ended up spilling my whole cup of coffee on him! It was classic!” I said as I lay in bed, talking to Chuck on my cell phone.

“That’s classic, bro. What happened next?” Chuck said on the other line.

“I refilled my cup. I must have drank about four cups of coffee tonight.”

“It’s that good?”

“You need to try it. Have Palm brew you some tomorrow at work.”

“Cool, cool, will do.”

My phone buzzed and I pulled it away from my ear and looked at it. Mark was calling through. I programmed his incoming picture into my phone as his face photoshopped on a badger’s body.

“Chuck, Mark’s calling. I’ll hit you up tomorrow.”

“Sweet man, good luck with your in-cars in the morning!”

“Thanks, bro!” I swapped over to Mark’s call. “Hello?”

“Scout, thank God you answered!” Mark cried out in excitement. “Turn on The Slap, dude!”

“The radio station?” I questioned, reaching for my iPod.

“Yeah, just listen for the next five minutes and then I’ll call you back!”

“Okay. How’s everything going up there in Chickensaw?” I asked. I hadn’t heard from Mark in a couple weeks. He moved up to Chickensaw, about an hour north of King’s Town, and roomed with his agent, Radical Ricky Rosa.

“I’m living the dream, Scout-ness! Now listen! I’ll call you back.”

Mark hung up first, and I followed. I popped my ear buds in and turned on the FM radio on my iPod to 106.7. The radio DJ – generic in every possible way – was giving the weather report and then drove right back into the tunes.

“You’re listening to 106.7, The Slap! And now here’s local artist, Mark Badger, with his debut, ‘I Need Ya (To Live)’!” the DJ said very nasally and theatrical.

What followed started as a single acoustic guitar strumming a very delicate and soft riff. Mark’s vocals kicked in very lightly as he sung about needing some girl. The strumming picked up speed and finally the song introduced some drums. I listened carefully to Mark’s song and was very surprised as to how good

it was. It definitely had potential, and when Mark's singing picked up for the upbeat, drum-blasting chorus, I knew Mark had finally found his niche in the music world.

Three minutes later, the song ended and the goofy radio DJ came back on the air. "You were just slapped by local indie music legend, Mark Badger and his heartbreaker of a debut, 'I Need Ya (To Live)'! His E.P. is out now, streaming all over the place for free online and in insanely awesome tie-died packages at some of your local estabs!"

My cell phone buzzed again with another incoming call from Mark. I was proud of him.

III.

Morning came and I brewed a fresh pot of coffee before Mr. Pealoft came to pick me up for my in-car driving lesson. I topped off a travel mug that I found in one of our kitchen cabinets and added all the cream and sugar that Palm had showed me. I sipped the coffee as I stood on our front porch waiting for him.

Mr. Pealoft was there minutes later and within no time, I was driving us through King's Town – my coffee safely snuggled away in the cup holder.

"Okay, Scout," Mr. Pealoft began, "today we're going to work on how to put the car in park when we're not in it. And if there's

time after that, we'll maneuver through some cones or something."

"Cool," I said, reaching for my morning cup of Joe. I picked it up and noticed that I'd forgot to tighten the lid. I set the travel mug between my legs and with my free hand, began to twist it.

"Scout, stop being distracted!" Mr. Pealoft shouted, startling me. We hit a pothole in the middle of the road and the mug's lid popped off, sending steaming hot coffee splashing everywhere. I screamed as the coffee burned my cargo shorts.

"Christ, Scout!" Mr. Pealoft yelled as he dropped his clipboard and reached both hands for the steering wheel. Right then, my phone started ringing in my pocket. I looked down as we hit another pothole and more hot coffee splashed into Mr. Pealoft's eyes. "My eyes!"

He grabbed his face and sat back in his seat screaming in pain. I reached into my pocket to get my phone and –

SCREEEECHHH!

My Premise scrapped up against a parked car on the side of the street and then - THUD!

We came to a complete stop, head-on with a parked bulldozer. Mr. Pealoft scrubbed the coffee out of his eyes and caught his breath. I put the car in park, and nervously smiled. "Like that?"

I spent the afternoon in my bedroom and my car spent it at the shop. I had to call my mom at work to come and get me. We dropped the car off at Rusty's Auto Repair and then she drove me home before going back to work. I finally had a chance to look at my phone to see who was calling me earlier, and it was Professor Nog.

I called him back and he answered, "Scout? I tried calling earlier."

"I know. I was busy. What's up?"

"Dr. Hix Blossom will be here first thing in the morning for the annual audit. What are the chances you, Chuck and the Philclops can come here for the night and help us prepare?"

"I'm sure that'll be fine. I'll just tell my mom I'm spending the night at Chuck's."

"Alright. Just get here when you can. I'll call Chuck and Philclops to confirm. See ya soon, brotha."

I hung up with Nog. Originally I was going to invite my girlfriend, Mandy Lee, over to watch a movie – under mom's supervision of course – but the audit was a big deal. I called Mandy to see if she'd understand.

"Hey Mandy, how are you?" I asked when she answered.

"I'm good. I was just about to call you," she said.

"Is everything okay?"

“I have to cancel our date tonight. They asked me to pick up a shift starting at 5.”

“That’s fine, funnel-cakes, I need to cancel anyway too. Fort Nog’s is having our annual audit in the morning, and Nog asked for me to come in tonight to help with the preparation.”

“Okay,” she said. “Maybe we can just get together over the weekend before school starts back up.”

“I’d love to! Have a good night.”

“You too.”

We hung up with each other and I lay back on my bed and basked in the relaxed feeling that always enveloped me after a talk with Mandy.

We’d been dating for almost four months after making up at Bowling Buddies the night Mark was discovered by Radical Ricky Rosa. It was definitely a high school relationship though. Our moms, and sometimes her dad, would drive us to our dates, or have to be close by whenever we were at each other’s houses. We never thought about getting into any questionable situations, but that’s just parents for you - always looking out, and always being nosey.

Mandy got a job at Father Peanuts as a waitress after the first of the year. She barely made any money – aside from tips – so I’d pay for most of our dates. That’s what the man is supposed to do, right? But since I worked at Palmer’s Calmics, I barely made

enough to even use my 5% discount to my advantage, so most of our dates were just stay at home movie or game nights.

It didn't matter though, either way I got to spend time with Mandy and that's all that mattered. She made me feel so happy all the time. I could really see this mature into a real high school relationship.

IV.

After dinner – Steak-Ums and Ramen noodles - I changed my clothes, packed a bag and told my mom I was going to spend the night at Chuck's.

After about a twenty-minute walk, I arrived at the edge of the gravel driveway to Nog's farm. I traveled up the rocky surface to Nog's house. I looked over at the barn, which the workers did a fantastic job remodeling after Lord Radar's attack over Christmas break, and saw the two armed guards, Marco and Hastings, standing outside of it. I waved to them and they waved back before I made my way in through the side door to Nog's house.

I walked into the kitchen and saw Nog sitting at the table with Philcops. They had a laptop out in front of them and were working on Professor Nog's memoirs. He joked about writing them before, but now he was taking it serious. Once Nog found out that Philly had published a refurbished version of his first

book, *Dragon Wind*, he thought Phil would be the best choice to help him get his story out there to the masses. Nog certainly had some stories to tell over the years.

Nog checked his watch and looked at me. “You’re right on time, Scout,” he said.

“For what?”

“Principal Smidgeon is dropping his daughter off in just a few minutes. She’s going to start her EIA training tomorrow. I want you and Chuck to give her a tour of Fort Nog’s while the Philclops and I work on my memoirs.

“It’s just Philclops, Professor,” Phil corrected him. He hated when Nog added a ‘the’ before saying Philclops. It made him feel like more of a thing than a person. In Nog’s defense, Phil *was* part machine now. The general public would never know it though. Fort Nog’s doctors did a fine job with covering up all the mechanical parts. Fake skin covered his mechanical arm and state-of-the-art contacts covered up his laser eye.

“Either way,” Nog continued, “think you’re up to the task? Just give her the rundown and I’ll take care of the training tomorrow when Dr. Hix Blossom leaves.”

“Sure,” I reluctantly agreed. I’d never met Adia Smidgeon. She went to school in another district and was just finishing up her senior year. Smidgeon wanted his name to always be attached to the EIA, so he enlisted his daughter into the program.

As Philclops and Nog dove back into the memoirs, I helped myself to a cup of fresh coffee that I saw had been brewed before I arrived. After I enjoyed a cup or two, Chuck showed up, and not too long after that, Principal Smidgeon arrived with his daughter, Adia.

Smidgeon walked all of us out to the barn, and I couldn't stop from staring at Adia's butt. She was wearing a perfect pair of jean shorts that set my mind ablaze.

We arrived at the barn doors and Marco and Hastings greeted us.

"This is as far as I go, darling," Smidge said, giving his daughter a kiss on the forehead. I wish *I* could kiss that forehead. I shook off the thoughts I was having – I already had a girlfriend, the beautiful and smart Mandy Lee. Adia was different than Mandy though. She had long blonde hair, was athletically shaped, and smelled like a garden of delicious flowers. I shook off the thoughts again.

"We'll take good care of your daughter, Smidgeon," Marco said.

"Thank you gentlemen. I'll see you tomorrow, sweetie," he said to Adia. He turned and looked at Chuck and I, and I had never seen a more serious look on his face. "Don't...touch..."

Chuck and I gulped as Smidgeon walked away and back to his car.

“So, your name is Adia?” Marco asked.

“Yes, sir,” she said. “I was named after that Sarah Mclachlan song from the 90s.”

“Ah, the 90s,” Marco said, “the last great decade.”

Marco and Hastings held their guns down to their sides and moved out of the way. Hastings pulled the barn doors open and Chuck and I led Adia inside.

We first walked over to the Frog Hopper, which sat idle in the center of the barn. It was considered after-hours, so there weren't many Fort Nog employees in there this time of night.

As I went to flip on the lights for the barn, I noticed out of the corner of my eye that Chuck was shuffling up the sleeves on his t-shirt to reveal his biceps. Chuck had lost some weight in his gut, but didn't gain any muscles in his arms. He then started to flex as Adia looked in his direction.

“Oh wow, impressive,” Adia said. Oh, no! Not on my watch! I dashed over to them and lifted up my shirt to reveal my flat stomach.

“Check it out, Adia. One of these days, you'll be able to wash your clothes on these washboard abs.”

A look of confusion and disgust crossed her face.

“Washboard? What are you talking about?”

“If you were impressed by Chuck's muscles, then you must be drooling over -”

“Muscles? I was talking about *that!*” Adia raised her voice and pointed past Chuck to the Frog Hopper. Defeated and feeling a little sick, I lowered my shirt and Chuck rolled back down his sleeves. She shook her head in disgust and walked over to the Frog Hopper alone.

I punched Chuck in the arm. “What are you doing?”

“What are *you* doing? You already have a girlfriend!” he came back with.

It was going to be a long night.

CHAPTER TWO

That Awkward Moment When...

I.

I rustled myself out a long nights sleep. It was 6am and coffee was sounding great. I'd been restless all night and dreamed horrifying dreams of blowing it with Adia. The previous night was a train-wreck. After I showed her my abs and Chuck donned his non-existent guns, we showed her the inside of the Frog Hopper. She was impressed with the ship until I accidentally ejected the pilots' seat and it crashed through the ceiling of the Hopper and roof of the barn. Marco and Hastings came rushing into Fort Nog's shouting "IT'S ON!" thinking there was some sort of attack. They were disappointed when they realized I had just goofed up.

Then things got uncomfortable when Chuck and I showed Adia 'The Dungeon of Stuff' – a large room on the bottom level of Fort Nog's where we kept a whole bunch of artifacts from our missions, as well as detailed files regarding space and alien stuff. For example, this is where we kept the European Sphere Spear that Blorf had given me on Bethani. It was stored away in a glass box all by itself. Then, in a separate glass box, was the vile of dark blue goo that we'd intercepted at the space café.

So anyway, when we were down there, I tripped over the metal sewer drain in the center of the floor and fell forward, crashing my face directing into Chuck's butt. It was so embarrassing.

Then to round out the tour, and make things even worse, Chuck's pants just up and fell down with no explanation in the elevator! He thought he'd save some embarrassment by nervously saying "Going down?" Get it...pants...elevator...that really happened.

Both of our faces were flushed with warm redness by the time we parted ways with her for the night. It was a rough start with Adia, but hopefully it was nothing that we couldn't rebound from.

Chuck, Phil and I had stayed in one of Nog's extra bedrooms on the second floor of his house. Chuck and I shared the bed – which was a twin, so it was weird – and Phil opted for the floor. He didn't use any kind of pillows or blankets though, so I thought he would be uncomfortable. Turns out, he looked to be getting the best sleep out of all of us.

I reached over and grabbed my phone from the nightstand and saw that I had a text from Mandy. It said: 'Miss you' with a little smiley face after it. With all this Adia business, I kept forgetting about Mandy. I know it wasn't right to be attracted to Adia, seeing as how I was permanently stuck with Mandy for eternity, but it's normal right? I mean for a 15-year-old dude? I mean, for

crying out loud, I was attracted to the faceless mannequins at the mall!

I texted her back with pretty much the same exact thing, and then my coffee craving really started to kick in. I wondered if Nog would mind if I brewed a fresh pot.

II.

I quietly tiptoed down the creaky wooden staircase and into the living room. I slowly passed the mounted laser guns on the wall, the giant box TV in the corner, and the puke-green colored sofa sitting off-center in the middle of the room.

I started taking giant sly steps and let my hands dangle up high like a T-Rex, almost like the Grinch when he was stealing Christmas. I amused myself. If anyone could see me now, they'd be cracking up!

I took a few more giant tiptoe steps into the kitchen, not realizing that Nog, Farrow and Dr. Hix Blossom were all sitting around the kitchen table looking at me. I stopped dead in my tracks and felt an all too familiar heat wave nervously flush through my face.

“Were you walking like that the whole time?” Nog questioned me with a glass of orange juice in his hand. I didn't know what to say. “What's wrong with ya?” he added.

“Scout! Nice to see you again,” Dr. Hix Blossom said, standing to his feet and extending his hand. He looked sharp with his slicked back hair and dark blue suit.

“You too, sir,” I said, shaking back. “How have you been?”

“Crappy. My wife left me, I almost lost my job with the government because of some gambling thing – I lost a lot of respect with my fellow employees. I’m looking to make up a lot of ground with a quick, swift and flawless audit here at Fort Nog’s. I could use the break, if ya know what I mean.”

“I feel ya, brotha.” I tried to sympathize with him, but I couldn’t. I didn’t have enough life experience yet.

I pulled up a seat at the table as Hix sat back down.

“Nog, here,” Hix continued, “was just explaining to me that The Philclops is helping him write his memoirs.”

“All good men write memoirs,” Nog said, rubbing a smudge out of his glasses and then putting them back on. “I’m just one of them.”

“Have you decided on a title yet?” Farrow chimed in. I felt so grown up sitting at this table, listening to the three adults talk about stuff.

“I haven’t decided yet, but I promise you, it’ll be memorable. People will remember it forever...just like my story,” Nog said.

“We’ve had some times, haven’t we Ed,” Farrow smiled.

“Sure.”

I figured I'd toss in my two cents and act like an adult. I stood up, "I'm gonna brew some Joe. Who wants a fresh cup?"

"No, Scout! No coffee! Not with Dr. Hix around here," Nog panicked. Farrow put his hand to his chest and caught his breath. Hix choked on his orange juice and some dribbled out onto the table. He grabbed his napkin and patted his lips dry. Jeez, they acted like I said I wanted to ignite some thrusters inside this beast or something.

"Why?" I asked.

"I'm allergic, Scout," Hix said, straightening his tie from the choking ordeal. "You don't want me to start sneezing up blood or anything, do you?"

"Of course not."

"I'd appreciate it if you waited until I was out of the house before you brew that Joe, bro."

I shook my head, still nervous from them all raising their voices at me. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Chuck and Phil enter the kitchen.

"What's for breakfast?" Phil asked. "I hope it's hot cakes."

"You boys are free to use the kitchen for breakfast," Nog said standing up and adjusting his tie. "Farrow and I are going to take Dr. Hix into Fort Nog's so he can prepare for the audit. Eat a quick meal and meet us out there with Adia in about twenty minutes."

We all said “Ok” as Hix dropped his napkin to the floor by mistake.

“Let me get that for you,” Nog said, bending his fragile body over to pick the item up. We heard his back crack in about six different places, followed by a pretty obvious extended puttering sound. Nog stood back up fast, without the napkin, and the entire room got quiet. We all knew what just happened, but no one wanted to call the old man out. Expect Phil...

“That awkward moment when Nog farted...” Phil said.

The entire room exploded in laughter.

III.

Philclops threw some bacon on the stove and Chuck started the scrambling of the eggs. I told them that I’d go upstairs and get Adia for some breakfast. I crept up the stairs and down the hallway, normally this time in case someone was watching, and knocked on the closed door at the end of the hall.

“One second!” Adia called out from inside the room.

“Okay, I’ll just wait here,” I said, not sure if I should have said anything at all. A few moments later, Adia opened the door. She looked awesome – long blonde hair, jean shorts again, white tank top – she was all of my dreams combined into one thing.

She smiled, “Is that breakfast I smell?”

“Yeah, eggs and bacon. I mean, bacon and eggs. I mean...” I trailed off and Adia waited for me to correct myself again, but I didn’t. I wasn’t even wrong to begin with! What was going on with me?

“Okay...let’s eat then,” she said.

The four of us sat around the kitchen table as we ate. No one said much – it was kind of awkward. A girl in our midst seemed to throw off the balance of the universe. The only sounds were of forks clinking on plates, or slurping sips of orange juice and coffee. Chuck and I were the only ones drinking the dark stuff.

Marco came in through the back door with his laser gun slung over this shoulder, and grabbed a sloppy piece of bacon off the plate in the middle of the table. He slurped it up like spaghetti. “Needs salt.”

“The bacon needs salt?” Phil asked, kind of annoyed.

“Yeah, and lots of it. Salt fixes everything,” Marco said. “Hey, you got a problem, put some salt on it! I’m telling you!”

“I can’t even think of a single instance in which that’d be right, Marco,” Phil said.

Marco picked up and slurped another slice of bacon. “Nog’s waiting for ya’s.”

Marco led us out through the yard, across the driveway and to the barn. It was a colder morning than it'd been lately. The sun was just out of reach behind the clouds, and the spring birds sung sweet tunes of, well, spring.

Hastings stood by the barn entrance and opened the doors for us. Marco continued to lead the four of us in. When we entered, we saw Farrow sitting behind a small desk with some sort of logbook laid out in front of him. Professor Nog and Dr. Hix stood behind him. This was new.

“Sign your names, please,” Farrow said, handing me a pen.

“Why?” I asked.

“This is the first change that I'm making here at Fort Nog's,” Dr. Hix announced, holding his clipboard tightly against his side. “All visitors or employees coming in, or out, of Fort Nog's, has to sign the sheets. That way we know at all times who's in this place. We can keep track of people this way.”

“Radar and Jakon were a huge security breach back in December,” Nog added. “We can't have that again.”

I signed my name on the log sheet, as did Chuck, Phil and Adia. I saw that Nog and Hix had already signed in above us.

“Now, we can begin,” Hix said.

IV.

We followed Nog and Hix through the entire fort, room by room, as Hix addressed concerns here and there, noticed harmless leaks from the pipes along the ceiling, asked what certain things were or were used for, and questioned the security systems.

I kept shooting Adia glances every time I could get away with it. I liked looking at her, and I think I was going to like working with her. After the audit, her training could begin, and I was hoping to be her mentor.

“What the heck is that stuff?” Hix said out loud, interrupting my latest Adia daydream. We all looked into the corner of the room and saw mildew on the wall.

“Just a little ‘dew’,” Nog said, jogging over to it, his white lab coat flapping as he dashed. He rubbed it out with the sleeve of his coat. “See, it’s not even there anymore.”

Hix smiled and nodded and made a giant check mark in the correct box on the papers. “Good save, Ed. Good save.”

We all stood around as Hix marked up his papers a little more. Adia was growing impatient and decided to speak up.

“How many artifacts have you guys collected over the years?” she asked. “My dad was never really sure.”

“A lot, darling,” Nog said. “We can always go down to the Dungeon of Stuff now if you want?”

“Yeah, Ed, let’s do that. Just get that out of the way now,” Hix said.

The six of us rode the elevator down to the Dungeon of Stuff. We walked into a large open room that narrowed into a hallway lined with glass boxes on either side of it.

In the open room portion of the Dungeon, there were long tables with trash all over them; crumbled papers, pen caps, ink cartridges, soda cans, random strips of fish jerky, etc.

“What’s the meaning of all this crap, Nog?” Hix shouted.

“Darn it, Maxwell!” Nog shouted out. He was referring to Maxwell Ferguson – a really scruffy, dirty employee who was ironically in charge of keeping the place clean. Nog walked back to the wall near the elevator and pressed and held down the intercom button. “Maxwell Ferguson, report to the Dungeon of Stuff, please!”

Nog sounded irritated.

“This is disappointing, Ed. It’s a disaster down here,” Hix said, taking notes.

“Wait, don’t jot stuff down just yet, Hix! I’ll get this mess all picked up! We can’t afford a bad audit!”

“This audit *was* going flawlessly, Nog. I can’t imagine a more disgusting way to make me mad. The boys in Washington are

going to throw a fit! This is suppose to be the cleanest room in the whole Fork!”

“Fork?” Adia leaned in and whispered to me.

I whispered back, “He meant Fort. He just stumbled over his words.”

Philclops leaned into the whisper session. “You guys whispering?”

Adia walked away, shaking her head. I shot Phil an angry look. Adia and I were bonding, and he ruined it! I couldn’t believe my friends were messing everything up for me.

A door against the wall, with the word ‘Break room’ tagged above it, opened and Maxwell walked out from inside it, holding a Styrofoam cup in his hand. “You called, Professor?”

This guy was a complete mess. He had a curly black afro (he was white by the way), had a matted and gross black beard and mustache combo with gray highlights. He smelled like a rotten apple core, and under his mandatory white lab coat, he was wearing a red V-neck shirt with a silver chain laying on top of his exposed, bushy chest hairs.

“Huh?!” Maxwell exclaimed out of nowhere. He was, by nature, a confused human being.

“Nog,” Hix began as his eyes widened upon seeing Maxwell, “what is *this*?!” Hix pointed directly at Maxwell.

“This is Maxwell Ferguson, sir. He’s the one who messed up this audit. If you have anger, take it out on him!” Nog shouted.

“I don’t have anger, Nog,” Hix said. “Just aggressive disappointment.” He took a deep breath and gathered his thoughts. “Kids, go sit in the break room while I finish up down here. Scout, you stay with us. Maxwell, pick this crap up.”

Chuck, Phil and Adia walked into the break room and I followed Nog and Hix towards the narrow hallway. I looked back over my shoulder and I saw Maxwell set his Styrofoam cup on the table as he started to pick up all the loose trash.

“I’m hoping I’m impressed by your artifacts Nog,” Hix said. “You need a good rebound right about now.”

Nog started sweating nervously and loosened his tie.

We started on the left side of the hallway and looked in each glass showcase box. A lot of the artifacts were things that Nog and Farrow had collected before I was even involved with the EIA.

There was a stone, bright red in color, which was recovered on one of Nog’s earlier missions. There was a Frooginite helmet, a laser weapon of some kind and a few other interesting things before we hit the stuff that I knew of.

“This is interesting,” Hix said, tapping on the glass to the European Sphere Spear. “What is this?”

“That,” I said, “is a Sphere Spear from the planet Bethani. It was given to me by one of the native creatures of the planet, the Norfits. His name was Blorf. We helped save his life at the time - so he gave this to me as a gift. It has powers and abilities, but we’re still not sure exactly how to use it.”

“I like the purple sphere on top,” Hix said. “It’s pretty cool.”

Dr. Hix Blossom then turned around and faced the other wall of glass showcase boxes. He leaned in close to look at the next item – the vile of dark blue goo we picked up at the space café.

“Ah, I remember this stuff. Refresh my memory, Scout.”

“Upon heading towards the Behemoth over Christmas break, we stumbled upon a space café. We stopped in to investigate, and somehow got caught up in a deal-gone-wrong. The alien that worked there told us to stash this stuff as two other brute aliens came in looking for it. A fight broke out and we escaped with the goo before the whole place exploded.”

“Do we know what this blue goo does yet, Nog?” Hix asked.

“No. We don’t even know what kind of experiments to do on it yet. I’ll probably bust out some test tubes soon though.”

“Cool. It’s a very mysterious item,” Hix said.

We then moved onto the next glass box – which was empty. We looked around but couldn’t think of what was supposed to be in there. Maybe nothing? None of us could remember.

“Hey Maxwell, come here a minute,” Nog called. Maxwell grabbed his cup off the table and walked down the narrow hallway towards us, taking a sip.

“What goes in this box, son?” Hix asked.

“Oh, um, I don’t see a thing even in there,” he said. We were all stunned by his stupidity.

“Of course not, ya boob!” Nog said and slapped Maxwell across the back of the head.

“Ow, Nog. God...” Maxwell said, rubbing the back of his head with one hand, and taking another sip from his cup with the other.

Hix suddenly gagged and coughed.

“You okay, my brotha?” Nog asked, softly patting Hix on the back.

“Yeah,” he said, “just caught a gag.” Hix sniffed the air and his eyes started to water. “I don’t feel so well – it just came over me.”

“You should sit down, Hix,” I said, coming to his aid. “Do you need some water?”

“Or some coffee? This stuff will wake you up, bro,” Maxwell said holding out his Styrofoam cup full of coffee. I knew something smelled good down here!

“That’s...coffee?” Hix said as he stared into the ominous blackness of the drink. “My God, Maxwell, what have you done!”

Hix dropped his clipboard and hunched over, coughing.

“Darn it, Maxwell!” Nog said and slapped his across the back of the head again. The impact made Maxwell drop his cup, and the dark roast splashed and spilled everywhere. Some of it even splashed onto Hix’s suit pants.

“No! Get it away from me!” Hix yelled. All the coughing and commotion brought Chuck, Phil and Adia out of the break room. They rushed to the narrow hallway and watched as Hix began to swell in the face, neck, ears and fingers; it was a weird combination of swelling. I think I even saw his neck leaking...

“Oh my God!” I heard Adia scream as she covered her eyes. Hix leaned back and let out at gigantic sneeze – like, world record breaking. The sheer force of the thing launched Hix back into the glass box that held the dark blue goo. The glass showcase shattered and the vile hit the floor, also shattering. The blue goo oozed out onto the floor, and immediately showed a chemical reaction when exposed to our air. The goo began to pulsate and then grew three times its size really fast.

“Everyone get back!” Nog shouted and forced us kids back into the open room. Maxwell stood there and panicked. Hix sneezed again and launched himself back into the wall. The blue goo shot up into the air and mashed up against Hix’s chest.

“Maxwell, get out of there!” Nog shouted, but he remained still, frozen in fear. I raced back down the hall and grabbed Maxwell by his lab coat and pulled him to safety.

We watched from a distance as the blue goo slowly engulfed Hix’s entire body until there was none of him left to see. The gooey shape, formally of Dr. Hix Blossom, was wiggling like Jell-O. The body collapsed to the floor where the goo then started to slither towards us.

“Move!” I yelled as I herded the group back towards the elevator door.

The squirmy, gooey nightmare blob slithered out into the open room in our direction and stopped over the metal sewer drain in the center of the floor. It started to melt or something, as the goo became more of a liquid, and drained itself down into the pipes, leaving behind absolutely no sign of it.

After the screaming stopped, it left the Dungeon of Stuff in an eerie and silent state. There was nothing to be said. Everyone was shocked and stunned and horrified. Did we all just witness that? No one knew what to say...except Phil:

“That awkward moment when Hix goes down the drain...”

6 months later...

CHAPTER THREE

It Was a BMV Conspiracy

I.

There are two lies that the world tells about the moon. The first lie is that it's made of cheese. That's just ridiculous. I mean really? Cheese? C'mon, guy...

The second lie is that it's a vast, vacant dust land that has no life. Well, the vast and vacant dust land part is true, but the 'no life' assumption is wrong. There *is* life on the moon, and The Fellas and I were right smack dab in the middle of an altercation there.

It was suppose to be a simple mission. We intercepted a distress call from the moon about a downed alien spacecraft. We were just going there to investigate the crash, see if there were any cool artifacts to take, and check on survivors. Sounded like a perfect third space mission for me.

Well, once we landed the Frog Hopper in Capella, a thirty-mile long crater in the Capella Valley, we immediately saw the crash site. There was a ship, purple and yellow in color, about the size of The Frog Hopper, sticking straight out of the surface, nose first.

When we approached the ship on foot, dressed securely in some high tech space suits, with our dark blue uniforms on underneath (remember, we were official now), we noticed that there were two aliens inside the ship, still strapped into the pilot and co-pilot seats.

“Are you guys okay?” I called into them, my voice echoing out of a speaker on the outside of my helmet.

The two creatures looked at each other, and then back at me and nodded. They were unlike any aliens I’d seen before. They were smaller than the Frooginities, not skinny and green like the Norfits, and certainly not robots like the Slimeborgs. They were about our height, a little over five foot, wore black armored suits and yellow helmets with clear visors. They had two large black eyes, narrow noses, and mouths that appeared to have various feelers or antenna-like whiskers hanging from above them, giving them an organic mustache-type appearance.

“Let us get you out of there,” I said as my team and I started to walk around their ship, looking for a way in.

Chuck and Phil walked around to the other side of the ship and examined any possible entryway. Adia wandered behind it and faced the undercarriage of the craft. And me? Well, I started to climb it.

I maneuvered my way up the windshield of the ship and grabbed a hold of a handle that appeared to be on a hatch or something – possibly a good way into the ship. I shuffled up a

little bit more to get a better grip on the handle, and felt the spacecraft move. It started to feel unstable, sticking out of the moons surface like it was. I stopped moving, and immediately got nervous.

“Don’t move, Scout! You’re making it worse!” Chuck yelled.

“What do I do?” I yelled back.

“Why did you climb it anyway?” Chuck asked.

I heard Phil laugh.

“Stop laughing, Phil! This isn’t funny!”

The ship started to creak, and then slowly shift in the dusty surface. It was starting to teeter and lean. Oh my God...Adia. If this thing fell, it would crush her for sure.

“Adia, it’s going down!” I yelled. There was a loud cracking sound that echoed throughout the crater, and then the ship started to fall backwards.

“It’s up to me, now!” I heard Chuck say, acting heroically. As I rode the spaceship down, I watched Chuck make a slow motion, no-gravity dash for Adia. He leapt at her to tackle her out of the way in the most epic fashion he could think of, but the lack of gravity lifted him too high into the atmosphere and he drifted over top of Adia and several yards away, kicking and flailing his arms.

“I got her,” Philclops said as he removed his glove that covered the hand on his mechanical arm. He aimed his arm at

Adia and shot his hand out like a grappling hook. His metal hand gripped onto Adia's arm, and he then retracted it back towards him, pulling her to safety just as the alien spacecraft crashed into the surface of the moon, sending moon dust everywhere. I remained on the top of the ship as the hatch opened by itself during the impact.

I climbed through the hatch and down into the bus-sized ship. The two aliens un-strapped themselves from their seats and approached me.

“You came to our aid, Earthling,” one of them said, and I smiled.

“Of course. That's what we do,” I said. I then heard a banging sound come from behind me, and I turned around to see a metal crate on the floor that was shaking all around and there was muffled screaming coming from inside. Was someone in there?

I looked back at the aliens. “Big mistake...” they said.

Minutes later, the two aliens had the four of us tied-up and sitting in the moon dust against their ship. They dragged the metal crate out of the back of the ship and opened it up. An alien popped out from inside of it, a tall skinny one. It was yellow and scaly and its' face closely resembled a humans face. It hopped out of the crate and started to run away.

One of the aliens lifted its ray gun at the fleeing creature and pulled the trigger. A spiraling beam shot out and connected with the yellow creature, knocking it to the ground face first.

“Look, bros, we don’t want any trouble,” I said.

“Shut up, Earthling,” one of them said, aiming the ray gun at me. “You guys showed up in the wrong place, at the wrong time.”

“We come in peace,” Phil said.

“Well that’s nice. We don’t.” The alien clicked a button on a computer pad attached to his arm and we watched as yet another ship shed its invisible cloaking device right in front of us. It was small and black, slick and pretty sweet looking – like the Mustang of space cruisers.

“We should kill you right here, right now,” one of them said, “but it’d be more fun to wait until your air supply ran out.”

“Is that guy okay?” Adia asked, nodding in the downed creatures direction.

“When he wakes up, he’ll realize that he’s stranded here too. We disabled his ship. He’ll be stuck on this moon with your corpses for all eternity. He’s scum anyway – nothing but filth that needs exterminated. They all are.”

The two aliens walked towards their ship. Phil was nudged close up against me, and I felt him squirming. I looked at him.

“Are you okay?” I asked him quietly. He smiled and winked at me. When his eye opened back up, it was glowing red. He looked in the aliens direction and a red laser beam shot out of his eye like a laser pointer, and burned a hole through the back of one of the aliens necks. The other one turned around and Phil gave him a taste as well, burning a hole directly through his forehead.

As the two aliens hit the dust, Phil turned off his eye laser by blinking again.

“Awesome, bro!” I yelled. Chuck and Adia celebrated too.

“Philclops knows what’s up!” Phil said, referring to himself in the third-person.

We were all able to wiggle out of our ropes and we immediately rushed to the yellow creatures side. I rolled him over onto his back and gave him a couple slaps to the face. The creature slowly opened his eyes and sat up fast. He saw the other two aliens dead on the ground and smiled.

“Thank you, Earthlings,” he said, looking around at all of us. He seemed genuinely appreciative. “You all saved my life.”

“It’s what we do,” I said. “My name is Scout Brooks. This is my team: Chuck, Philclops and Adia Smidgeon.”

“It’s nice to meet all of you. I’m Flak. I live on a planet called Septune Five in the Andromeda galaxy. Are you familiar with it?”

“Not too familiar...” I said. “What happened here?”

“I was out for a cruise, and didn’t realize that these guys were following me. They shot me down over this moon and I crashed. I sent out an SOS, but before anyone could come, they jumped my ship and threw me into that crate. It’s a miracle that they didn’t kill me. Their species is very hateful towards us Septunians.”

“Why?” Adia asked.

“Our planet is very rich in Orinium – it’s a very expensive and sought after mineral buried in our mines. The Grims have been trying to obtain the stuff for generations,” Flak said. “They frequently attack our planet and kill the innocent just to steal the Orinium.”

“That’s terrible!” Adia said.

Flak looked around. “I should get home, my family will probably start to worry.”

“The Grims said that they disabled your ship,” Chuck said.

“That’s fine, I’ll just take theirs – they won’t be needing it.” Flak stood up and dusted himself off. “I want to give you something, Scout. Hold tight.”

Flak went back into his ship and came out with a small satchel. He opened it and pulled out a tiny, gold marble. He handed it to me. “This is a piece of Orinium. I want your team to have it as a way of saying thank you.”

“Thank you, Flak,” I said. I loved getting things from aliens. Some of them were so cool!

“Maybe I’ll see you around the universe someday, Scout,” he said as he nodded gratefully. Flak quickly retreated to the Grims’ ship and fired it up. He ignited the thrusters and blasted away back into space. We decided to pack up and do the same. Our job here was done.

As we were climbing back aboard The Frog Hopper, Professor Nog’s voice sounded off in my head.

Scout, are you guys on your way back yet?

“Yeah, were firing up the Hopper now. Is everything okay?”

Not quite. We have a visitor...

II.

I killed the engines of The Frog Hopper and it sat quietly in the center of Nog’s barn. Chuck, Phil, Adia and I walked down the ramp on the back of the ship and into the barn where we removed our space helmets. Nog and Farrow were standing there to greet us, and along with them was someone I didn’t recognize.

It was a man, probably in his early forties, wearing a black suit, covered by a long brown trench coat. He wore a matching fedora and removed his sunglasses to introduce himself to us.

“The name’s Raggs – Detective Rickert Raggs at your service,” he said extending his hand.

I shook back, and Nog introduced us. “That’s Scout Brooks and the rest of The Fellas I was telling you about – Chuck Taylor, The Philclops...Philly...Phillips....whatever...Easton and this darling young woman is Adia Smidgeon.”

“It’s nice to meet you all. Professor Nog has told me much about you.”

“What’s the dealio?” I asked, knowing everyone else was wondering the same thing.

Raggs looked at Nog. “Do you have someplace here that I can speak with everyone?”

“That would be The Secret Room. Follow me.” Nog led us all down the elevator and to The Secret Room.

Once there, we all sat around the executive table, and Detective Raggs removed his coat and hat. “I’m from Washington, and was hired by the higher-ups that fund this here Fort Nog’s. I am investigating the disappearance of a well known scientist, one Dr. Hikolas Blossom.”

Oh crap...Nog told us to never speak a word of what happened to Hix. Wait...“Hikolas?” I chuckled.

“That was his first name, yes. You may just know him as Hix or something more generic like that. That’s what his buddies called him,” Raggs explained.

“What is it you want to know, Detective?” Nog said, squirming about anxiously in his seat.

“Dr. Hix has been missing for the better part of six months now, and the last place his GPS took him was right here at Fort Nog’s. He hasn’t been seen since.”

“Well, I don’t know why you would assume he came here, Detective,” Nog chuckled nervously.

Raggs stared at the old Professor. “I’m not assuming anything, Professor. It’s a fact – I only deal in facts. His GPS coordinates took him here, I just said that. We know he was here to perform the annual audit. He was never heard from again.”

We all sat around quietly, knowing what really happened to Hix, but unable to say anything about it. This was intense. Raggs continued: “I’m assuming at least *someone* here saw him then?”

No one said anything. I felt like we were all making it obvious that something fishy had happened, so I tried to change the subject.

“Well, the new school year starts tomorrow, Detective. We need to get going home. It’s been a long day.”

Raggs stared at me. “In the middle of my questioning, you suggest leaving? That seems a little...suspicious. Nog? Would you agree?”

“I would,” Nog agreed. “I don’t know what these kids are up to these days. Kids, huh? A lot has changed since we were younglings, right Detective?”

“Don’t put me in your age group, Professor. I’m at least thirty years younger than you – and more handsome. I have a fashion sense and don’t wear ugly red ties,” Raggs said. He stood up and put his coat back on, and then topped his head off with his fedora. “You may have won the battle today, but the war is far from over. Trust me, I’ll be seeing you *all* around.”

Raggs removed himself from the table and left The Secret Room. Once the door to the room was shut, Nog stood up and spoke:

“We’re sticking to the original story. Hix came here, preformed the audit, and left. We haven’t seen him since.”

“We should have just reported the incident like I pleaded when it happened, Professor,” Adia said with an attitude.

“Well, we didn’t. I felt that it was a better idea to not tell anyone that Hix was consumed by space goo and turned into a hideous alien blob. That happened on my watch, in *my* facility, on *my* time, in *my* place. We’d be shut down for sure if people knew the truth.”

“But it was an accident,” Adia said.

“Yes, and I fired Maxwell because of it. Problem solved.”

“Problem not solved! A man in missing, dead or transformed because of what happened here!” Adia stood up. I could see she was angry about keeping the secret. “I need to leave.”

“Good call,” Chuck said standing up and putting his hand on Adia’s shoulder. “We’ll all leave. Wanna grab lunch?”

A look of disgust came over Adia’s face. “My God, no.”

“It’s cool. We’re cool.” Chuck removed his hand. Adia was the first to leave the room. Chuck was next and Phil followed him. Nog and I remained.

“What are we going to do, Nog?” I asked.

“We might need to bail, brotha, I don’t know yet. Let’s just keep our cool for a bit and maybe Ragg’s will just get bored and leave.” Nog stood up and cleared his throat. “Before you leave, Scout, will you take that Orinium down to The Dungeon of Stuff?”

“Sure.”

III.

I took the elevator down to the dungeon and held the Orinium in my hand. It was so small that I was able to pinch it between my fingers. I walked up to an empty glass showcase box and opened it from the top. I set the tiny gold marble of Orinium inside and latched the top shut again.

“Psst. Hey, you. Hey, Scout,” I heard a somewhat familiar voice whisper from behind me. I turned around but didn’t see anyone.

“Hello?” I called out.

“Right here. In the sphere.”

I looked at the European Sphere Spear behind its glass box and noticed the purple sphere on top was glowing. I walked closer and leaned in and I saw Blorf’s face hovering inside the orb like he was some sort of mystical God. “Blorf?”

“Yeah, it’s me. I’m back, Scout.”

“How do you keep coming back from the dead?”

“Well, I once told you about my regeneration abilities. Well, that ran out. I’m dead now, officially. But I was able to compact my spirit into an item from my past that meant a lot to me. That would be this sphere spear. My Great Father gave me this spear once – sort of like a hand-me-down heirloom.”

I watched as Blorf’s ghostly appearance in the purple orb started to creep me out. “You’re dead?”

“That’s what I said, man; dead as a doornail. But I live on...in here...forever.”

“Awesome,” I said, unlatching the top of the case and pulling out the spear. “I have to introduce you to Professor Nog! He’s the brains behind our organization.”

“Sweet deal, bro. Introduce me to everyone!” Blorf’s spirit exclaimed.

After I introduced Blorf to Nog and Farrow, good old Nog passed out from being creeped out. He saw Blorf as more of a ghost than an alien, and that rubbed him the wrong way. Who knew Nog was scared of ghosts? I put Blorf back in the showcase and told him I’d be back soon to check in on him and then I left for the day.

I walked out of the barn and Marco gave me an inappropriate pat on the butt as I walked to my Dodge Premise. I walked up along the side of it and ran my fingers through the giant scrape on the entire passenger side. How did I get that giant scrape, you ask?

Well, the day I took my actual drivers test, I somehow passed. I always thought that since I had launched Mr. Pealoft through the windshield so many times, he just wanted to get rid of me all together. It was probably some sort of BMV conspiracy. Well anyway, I was backing my car up all by myself from the parking lot and scraped the car next to me the entire way. I panicked when I looked into the other car and saw Mr. Pealoft sitting in there eating an omelet sandwich on his lunch break. He slowly looked over and gave me the look of death.

Mr. Pealoft, being as uncool as a driving instructor could be, called the cops on me and I ended up getting a sixty-five dollar

ticket in my first four seconds of driving alone. That wasn't a good start, but I am happy to say that I have yet to get a second ticket. I had become a pretty good driver I thought.

I sat in my Premise and started the sickly engine and had forgot how loud I had the radio on. It was set to 106.7 The Slap! And wouldn't you know, Mark's song was playing again. It had become very overplayed on this radio station to the point where I would just turn it off or pop in an Iodine Eye's CD or something. I was proud of Mark, but annoyed with him at the same time. He was living it up like a king in Chickensaw, being waited on hand and foot by Radical Ricky Rosa. They made such an annoying team.

But either way, Mark was getting gigs all over the state and starting to get attention for his tunes. So, ya know, good for him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Trouble in the Girls Locker Room

I.

The next morning, Chuck, Phil and I carpoled to school – I drove. It was the first day of our junior year, and we were looking to kick things off right. I had worked on my mustache all year long and finally had something to show for it. It wasn't anything like Phil's, but it was a very lightly shaded upper lip. The hairs were there, just not obvious enough yet; nothing that the naked eye could see. Phil said that would come in time.

Before my first class actually started, I met up with Mandy in the library. We stuffed ourselves in between the autobiographies and cookbooks for a small little make-out session. Mandy was the first girl I ever laid lips on, and I laid them down hard – lip-to-lip – locked and loaded. Ya know what I mean?

“It's good to see you, funnel cakes,” I said as I looked into her eyes. She had grown up a lot. Working at Father Peanuts had only matured her, and I noticed other things were getting matured as well. Sometimes it made it hard to think straight – I just wished people could understand that, but no one gets me.

Mandy smiled, “How's Nog doing?”

“He's, well, you know. He's as Nog as he can be.”

“How’s the rest of the team? How’re The Fellas?”

“Good. Phil’s recovered nicely – his mom still doesn’t suspect anything mechanical going on with him, so that’s good. Chuck and I are doing better. He said I’ve grown up a lot, so we don’t argue as much as we did last year.”

Mandy smiled and her eyes wandered off. “And how’s that girl...Adia, is it?”

Mandy knew what her name was. I didn’t understand why she always played it off like she forgot. Adia was a very memorable girl – who could forget her? I know I couldn’t. Not once. Beats me as to why Mandy constantly forgot.

“She’s great! We went to the moon together – that was her first non-simulated mission. She did a good job!”

Mandy nodded without saying a word.

The warning bell sounded throughout the school and left us with two minutes to get to our classrooms.

“What’s your first class?” I asked.

“Home Economics. You?”

“Astronomy 3000,” I smiled.

“Good luck, Scout,” she said.

“Thanks, ‘cakes’,” I leaned in to kiss her on the lips and she turned to the side and I lip-smacked her cheek. Cheek kiss? Eh, still a kiss!

Mandy walked away just as my cell phone buzzed in my pocket. I remained between the autobiographies and cookbooks for a moment as I pulled my phone out and saw it was an update from my Frog Nog app. I opened the app and noticed that Marco had sent out a memo to The Fellas. It read:

Fellas – good luck at school. Scout, knock ‘em dead!
Chuck, stay away from the flagpoles. Phil, salt your
bacon like a man!

-Marco

Speaking of bacon, our lunch period came quick and I was fortunate enough to share it, once again, with Chuck and Phil. Lamar even sat at our table with us this time. It was nice to have the gang all back together, now featuring Lamar.

I was sipping a Capri Sun and eating a spam and cheese sandwich as Lamar told us what he’d been up to all summer, aside from still rocking that 90s flat top hair-do.

“I started my own poop business,” he said out of the blue. We all looked at him, slightly confused.

“Can you expand on that a little, Lamar?” I asked.

“Yeah boi, it’s a dog poop business!” he said. “I call it Crapper Johns. Take a look at my biznack card!”

Lamar dealt us his business cards like he was a dealer at a blackjack table. I picked it up and looked at it. ‘Crapper Johns’ was in bold letters at the top. A poop emoticon was underneath that along with his slogan: “You have 2 options. Number 1, call me. Or number 2...”

“Why did you call it Crapper Johns?” Chuck asked.

“Cause it sounded like crap,” was Lamar’s response.

“Is this local?” I asked.

“Yeah – I go all over King’s Town, scooping the poop for a measly \$5! Ya can’t beat it, boi!”

“I guess not,” I said and I flicked the card back down onto the table. A hand rested on my shoulder and patted it a couple times. I looked up and saw Professor Nog standing there.

“Mr. Brooks, will you come with me for a minute. We need to discuss your midterm,” he said.

“Midterm?” Phil laughed. “It’s the first day of school, Nog.”

Phil wasn’t the best at picking up on subtlety. This was obviously Nog trying to secretly get me aside for some ‘business’.

“Philly,” I said, “I think this is something that needs attended too.” I winked at him, hoping he’d catch on.

Chuck knew right away and stood up. “I’ll come with ya.”

“That’s not necessary Mr. Taylor. I only need Scout,” Nog said.

“We’ll all go!” Phil said standing up as well.

“Yeah, boi!” Lamar stood up.

“Not you, Lamar,” Nog said. “The rest of ya’s, come with me. I have midterms to discuss.”

I stood up and shrugged at Lamar. “Sorry, bro.”

Lamar calmly sat back down and his excited smile disappeared. In that uncomfortable moment, we followed Nog and left Lamar alone at the table. I’m not going to lie - it was hard to watch.

II.

We ended up in Nog’s classroom. It was the same as ever; decorated with space pictures, planet names written on the board, large metal door in the back of the room...

We gathered around Nog’s desk as he took a seat.

“What’s this all about?” I asked.

“It’s about Raggs,” Nog said.

“That detective?” Chuck asked.

“Yessir. He left a message on my voicemail this morning, and said he’d be in around one o’clock to pull all three of you down

to the principals office to ask you some one-on-one questions about Hix Blobson.”

“He’s going to attack us at school now?” I asked.

“No one’s attacking anyone, Scout. He’s just coming to ask you guy’s questions. But I can’t have that. So I’m going to play a little child-like game of ‘mixin’ it up’. He can’t question ya’s if he can’t find ya’s.”

I nodded along, trying to figure out what Nog was talking about. He continued:

“I’m going to write notes for each of you to attend different classes next period. They’ll each be signed by me, Professor Ed Nog, so you know they’ll be official. I already have them pre-written.”

Nog reached into his desk and pulled out three white slips of paper. He handed one to Chuck and said, “You’ll be in calculus, room 700, instead of government.” He then handed a slip to Phil, “You’ll be in detention.”

“Detention? What did I do?” Phil whined.

“Nothing, Phil,” Nog said, “you won’t actually *have* detention. You’ll just be there instead of Spanish 101 so Raggs can’t track you down. And Scout, you’ll be in gym.”

“Gym?” I pondered as I accepted the white slip. Me? Scout Brooks? Indulging in the physical arts?

“Yes, gym. Now ya better get moving. You have five minutes before next period starts.”

“Nog, I don’t even have a gym uniform!” I panicked.

“I got’chu covered, brotha,” Nog said. He reached into his briefcase, which was leaning up against the wall behind him, and pulled out a stained, white shirt and *very* short maroon shorts. “This is the official gym uniform I wore when I attended this school back in the day. There’s a lot of history in the uniform, Scout. A lot...”

I grabbed the clothes from Nog and winced. He really wanted me to wear a centuries old, used gym uniform?

“Now go, fellas. You now have four minutes.”

III.

As I pulled the shorts up over my boxers, I looked around the boys’ locker room and saw everyone else wearing normal gym uniforms. The school had changed colors since Nog’s era, so I was the only one in stained-white and maroon. Everyone else had blue gym shorts and gray athletic tees.

Some of the guys were laughing at me, but I tried to convince myself that they weren’t.

“Hey, Scout,” someone said. I looked up and saw Jeffrey Shuster approaching me with a basketball in his hands. “You’re not even in this class.”

“I have a note,” I said and lifted the white slip.

Jeffrey grabbed it and tried to read Nog’s scratchy handwriting. He laughed and tossed it to the ground and stomped on it. “What note?”

His childish comment got a rise out of the other boys.

“I’ll see you on the floor, Brooks,” Jeffrey said. “I’ll sink a three-pointer on ya, just like I sank your girlfriend last night.”

I stood up fast. “How dare you talk about Adia like that!”

“Adia? Who’s that?” Jeffrey laughed. “You mean, Mandy, you stupid idiot!”

Oh crap, that’s right. *Mandy* was my girlfriend. Then why was I always thinking about Adia, or some other girl? This couldn’t have been normal. I was probably coming down with something.

“He doesn’t even know his own girlfriends name!” another boy cried out as the entire locker room erupted in laughter. I was never going to live this down. Hopefully Mandy wouldn’t find out about this.

The locker room cleared out and I remained for a moment to regain my composure. I entered the gym like a sports star. The students had all formed a circle and I saw the buffed up, wrestler-

style teacher in the middle of it. Beyond the circle was the varsity girls volleyball team – sweating. Their coach blew the whistle and said “Good practice girls! Now shower up!”

As I approached the circle with my note in hand, the girls volleyball team rushed by me and I got quick sniffs of perfume and sweat. I turned and watched them from behind as they all ran through the locker room door. My God – if I could only see inside that room.

“Who the heck are you?” the gym teacher, Mr. Ripped, called out, snapping me out of my tight-shorts scoping daze. I turned and faced the circle. Everyone’s eyes were on me.

“Uh, Scout Brooks, sir. I have a note.” I approached the circle, which refused to break for me, so I had to shimmy in between a couple of the kids. I handed the note to Mr. Ripped.

He grabbed it from me forcefully and read it. “Ha! What makes Nog think an astronomy teacher has authority over a gym teacher?”

“Scout!” Mr. Ripped yelled unnecessarily loud and handed me back the note, “Get’cho regular clothes back on. I’m sending you back where you belong – art class.”

“You can’t do that, Mr. Ripped, I was sent here by-”

“Nog. I know,” Mr. Ripped said. “That’s not going to make me change my mind. He’s an astro-dweeb. Now go on, get out of here!”

I turned around and slowly walked back towards the locker room with my head hanging low in defeat. I released the note and it gently rode the air down and settled on the gym floor. I heard some kids laughing behind me, but refused to turn around.

I pushed through the door that said ‘locker rooms’ and entered a smaller room with the girls’ room to the left and the boys to the right. I bet that girls’ room smelled like roses, perfume and cinnamon – a very tempting combination of flavors. What harm could a quick little peek do?

I put my ear up against the girls’ locker room door and listened. I heard the showers going and girls giggling. I *had* to see inside. I pushed the door open just a tad and took a ‘lil peek. A warm steam blew into my face and to my surprise, the locker room didn’t smell like flowers or perfume at all. It was more of a musty, damp smell – more like a locker room. This couldn’t have been right. It must have been an off day in there or something.

I pushed the door open a little more and slipped inside and hid behind a giant rack of basketballs on wheels. I ducked down and looked through the basketballs and saw some of the girls in towels. Jackpot, brotha!

Between the heat from the steamy showers and my overwhelming-ness of being in parts of the school Chuck had only dreamed of, I started to feel a bit woozy. I sat back against the wall and blacked out.

The locker room door closing into place woke me up several minutes later. I looked around the rack of balls and noticed that the steam was fading and the entire room was quiet. I couldn't help but wonder that, if I didn't pass out, what wondrous things would I have seen?

I stood up and shook off my haze. Okay, it was time to get out of here before someone saw me. I stepped towards the door and heard a gross bubbling sound coming from behind me. I turned around. Could that have been someone taking a... nah, the room was empty. I heard it again and thought maybe it was *my* gaseous fumes. I sniffed around, but I was good to go.

The bubbling sound was coming from the shower area. I walked through the locker room and hung a left into the wide-open shower room. There were roughly twenty showerheads along the walls and a large drain in the center of the floor. The gurgling, bubbling sound was coming from there. I walked closer and looked into the drain.

Something was in there. It bubbled again and this time, a dark blue - almost purple - goo oozed out of it. I cringed, as it was the grossest thing I ever saw, and then quickly turned into the weirdest thing I ever saw. The goo formed itself into a jelly-like hand and reached for me as the drain made more of a growl than a gurgle.

I jumped backwards and splashed my butt down onto the floor. I saw the gooey hand form a fist and then retract quickly back

into the drain, complete with a wet, squishing sound. A couple slight gurgles later, and it was gone.

Hix was back.

IV.

Once the bell rang to end the first day of my junior year, I was trying to track down Nog to tell him about the shower-drain incident. It was quite obvious that after months of MIA action, Hix was back, and he was slithering around the sewer systems like a chump.

I fought my way through the hordes of students and up the stairs to Nog's classroom. The light was off and nobody was there. Crap.

I had made it the whole rest of the day without running into Detective Raggs too, just as Nog wanted. I wanted to tell him that, cause I thought he'd be proud of me.

Suddenly, a hand rested on my shoulder. I swore to God that if that was Raggs, I'd chew on Nog's maroon shorts for five minutes. I slowly turned around – for dramatic fashion – and sighed in relief when I saw it was just Nog.

He smiled and said, "Good job avoiding Raggs today." I nodded in return, still relieved that it was just -

“Avoiding who?” a voice questioned from behind Nog. My eyes widened as Nog turned around slowly. This time, it *was* Raggs. “Avoiding who?” he repeated.

“Uh,” Nog stuttered, “not who, but *what*.”

Raggs stood there and tilted his head, trying to understand. “Well, what is it? I thought I just heard you say Raggs.”

“Uh, no, I said, *rags*...” Nog continued. “Ya know, like torn-up washcloths? Scout...” Nog stuttered again, grasping for words – any words – “Scout seems to attract them for some reason that defies all logic. But, the boy was able to avoid them today.”

Like I said, he was grasping for *any* words.

“Well, I don’t know what that means,” Raggs said, “but good job, Scout.”

He patted me on the shoulder and I smiled. “Thanks.”

“I’m glad to see you’re okay, Scout. I was looking for you today. You weren’t in your class when I came to talk to you,” he said.

“Talk to me?”

“Yeah, I left Professor Nog a voicemail this morning and said that I was coming to interview you, Chuck Taylor and Phil Easton about Dr. Hix’s whereabouts. I came to your art class, where you were supposed to be patting clay, and you weren’t there. Actually, none of the students were where they were

supposed to be.” Raggs smiled at Nog. “Do you know anything about this?”

“Hey,” Nog said, “if these kids are skipping classes, you need to talk to the principal. I’m just an astronomy teacher.”

“Exactly,” Raggs said, pulling a white slip out of his coat pocket. “An astronomy teacher who thinks he has the power to send random students to other classes to avoid detection...or...detectives.”

“Look, if these kids are forging my signatures on notes to get out of random classes...”

“Save it Nog. Save it and shove it. I know what you’re up to, and I don’t like it,” Raggs said, getting all in-your-face serious with us. “Someone at your little Fort Nog’s knows something about Hix Blossom, and I’m going to find it out.”

Raggs crumbled up the white slip and threw it on the ground before stepping on it, like he was putting out cigarette. He turned to walk away down the hallway, which had nearly cleared out of students, and then stopped. He turned back and smiled. “By the way, your records show that the day Hix went missing, he checked into the Fort, but never checked out. That’s protocol, isn’t it? Protocol that *he* put into place that very day?”

Nog and I nodded.

“That’s what I thought. Why wouldn’t he check out? You know, since he installed that protocol.”

We both shrugged.

“Also, that very same day, you fired a man named Maxwell Ferguson. Where is he now? I’d like to speak with him.”

“I don’t know what happened to Maxwell, that creeping freak,” Nog said.

Raggs smiled and nodded. “Good day, guys.” He turned around and left for good.

“That could have gone badly,” Nog said.

“Huh? It did go badly! He knows you wrote those notes.”

“He’s bluffing, Scout.”

“Bluffing about what? He knows we know, Nog! We know that now, ya know?”

Nog shrugged it all off. He clearly didn’t want to deal with this right now. “Did you need something, Scout? Why are you up here?”

“I saw Hix today.”

“Shh!” Nog freaked out as he dragged me into his classroom and shut the door. He flipped the lights on. “What do you mean you saw Hix? Where?”

“In the girls locker room.”

“Why were you in the -”

“Doesn’t matter,” I stopped him right there. “I heard a gurgling sound coming from the drain in the showers, and a

purple, gooey hand reached out towards me. I fell down and then the hand went back into the drain and disappeared.”

“So he *is* traveling by sewer drain. That was the theory that I ran by Farrow. We need to send you guys into the sewers to look for him.”

“A mission? On Earth?”

“I know, an Earth mission seems a little out of this world, but this is an urgent matter Scout. We need to find out where Hix is, and what his current state is. Is part of him still alive? Or is he all blob now?”

Nog gathered his thoughts for a moment, and then continued:

“This weekend. We scour the sewers this weekend. I’ll draw up the mission plans tonight.”

It was Thursday, so the mission was right around the corner. One more day of school, and then The Fellas would be back in action.

CHAPTER FIVE

Blobbery Goo

I.

Mandy was working, so I picked up Chuck and Phil and we went to get a bite to eat at Father Peanuts. The place was hopping for some reason. We sat in the back corner booth, where Mandy was always assigned to.

“Did it smell like roses?” Chuck asked after I told him I was in the girls’ locker room.

“You’re missing the point, Chuck. Hix is back, and he’s not even a man anymore. He’s more like...some blobbish creature stalking the depths of the sewer systems.”

“So, it’s up to us to eliminate any threat, I take it?” Phil asked.

“Yeah. Nog is coming up with mission plans, and we go into action this weekend.”

Mandy came over and pulled out her pad of paper. “Chuck, Phil,” she began, “what’ll it be?”

“I’ll take a peanut butter and ham please,” Chuck said.

“White, wheat or rye bread?”

“White wheat please.”

“And for you Phil?”

“Surprise me,” he said with a creepy smile. “I’ll eat anything. And a round of slushies for the table.”

“Okay,” Mandy smiled.

“Well, hey now, funnel cakes?” I said, grabbing her attention as she was trying to leave. “What about your ‘ol boyfriend here?”

“Oh, you’re *my* boyfriend? I thought you were Adia’s boyfriend.” Mandy was annoyed, as she should have been. But who the heck told her?

“Trouble in paradise, Scout?” a voice called out. We all looked towards the counter and saw Jeffrey Shuster and his pals sitting there. Jeffrey had become the new Radar. I wish I could just get rid of him too...

“Mandy, it’s not like that. It was a mistake,” I said.

“Scout, maybe you need to take some time to find out what you really want. Because I don’t want to waste my time with some boy who’s oogling other girls all the time.”

“But I’m a teenage boy!”

Mandy didn’t respond. She turned and left to place the order.

“So, am I not getting food?” I asked the table.

“Let it go, Scout,” Phil said, patting his hand on top of mine.

I sighed, annoyed, and sat back in my seat. I must have been the only guy going through this kind of mess.

“Excuse me,” a little boy tapped Phil on his arm. We all looked at him. He must have been around eight or nine years old and was holding a book in his hand. He held the book out, along with a marker. “Can you sign this for me?”

Phil grabbed the book and noticed that it was his book, *Dragon Wind*. Phil then smiled in a way I had not seen him smile before. He looked genuinely happy, almost like this little moment made his day.

“Sure,” Phil said. “What’s your name?”

“Marshall.”

Phil continued to smile as he popped the cap off the marker and signed the book, addressing it to little Marshall. Marshall smiled as he accepted the book back.

“Thank you,” he said.

“No, thank *you*,” Phil responded.

“I can’t believe your book is getting so much attention around here,” Chuck said.

“I know. It’s pretty cool,” Phil said.

I was happy for Phil, but I had other things on my mind. I looked over behind the counter where Mandy was placing the food order. I was hungry gosh darn it, so I snapped. I stood to my feet. “I want food, Mandy! Fooood!”

Everyone in Father Peanuts turned and faced me and the whole place became quiet. I didn't have anything else to say, so I just stood there and faced her. I heard Jeffrey Shuster laugh.

I could see Mandy's eyes begin to swell with tears. She dropped her order pad and ran into the kitchen, and out of sight.

"Great job, Scout," Phil said. "Now we're not getting our food."

All the customers went back to eating their meals and chitchatting quietly. Jeffery Shuster stood up from his seat at the counter and walked over to our table; his buddies followed close.

"Sit down," he said, putting his hand on my shoulder and forcing me down into my seat. "You're a loser, dude. A big old, farting loser."

Jeffery and his friends turned around and left the restaurant. I could have sworn I heard their server yell out that they didn't pay.

II.

Midnight rolled around, and I was wide-awake in bed looking at my phone. I was reading an on-going text conversation in the Frog Nog app between Nog, Farrow and Marco. They were discussing plans for our mission. It appeared Marco and Hastings were going to lead the mission into the King's Town

sewer system on Friday night. Chuck, Phil, Adia and myself would round out the rest of the team.

Nog changed the subject to his memoirs, so I turned the bright screen on my phone off and laid there, staring up at the ceiling. I couldn't stop thinking about Mandy. I felt bad that I made her cry, but I was hungry. She couldn't just *not* take my order because I was daydreaming about Adia today. God, some would jump to the conclusion that she was jealous or something.

My phone buzzed and I saw that I had a text. I opened it and saw it was from Nog. He had sent a mass text to all of The Fellas.

NOG: After school tomorrow, everyone meets at my house. The mission is a go.

I responded with a 'K'.

I set my phone down on my nightstand and popped in my ear buds. I listened to some Iodine Eyes, and was finally able to get to sleep, like, two hours later.

The next day, I sat down in the cafeteria when lunch came. Chuck and Phil were already there. Lamar came minutes later.

"Guys," Lamar said, shifty-eyed, "I saw a monster this morning."

Chuck and I went wide-eyed and looked straight at Lamar, while shooting each other looks. Phil kept eating.

“What do you mean, Lamar?” I asked.

“I walked into the bathroom when I got here a little bit ago, cause I needed to use the urinal. But there was some kid already pooping in it. So I went into the stall and shut the door. I turned around and looked into the toilet, like I always do before I go, and that’s when I saw it. It was gross – a beast of alien consistency. It was thick, dark-colored – bubbles rose up from underneath it...”

“Are you sure it wasn’t just a poop,” Chuck asked.

“It had eyes, Chuck. Eyes that stared up at me with fear and anger hidden behind them.”

“Well, some poops have been known to -”

“It wasn’t poop, Chuck! I know what poop looks like - I’m in the business, remember. Plus, this thing was like, purple.”

“What did you do? Did you tell anyone?” I questioned him.

“No, I didn’t. I screamed and flushed it down the toilet. I didn’t really have to pee after that,” Lamar said.

“Well, don’t tell anyone,” I said.

“Why? Is there a cover-up?” Lamar’s eyes shifted again. He was wising up to mysterious knowledge.

“No, I just don’t think anyone will believe you. I don’t want you to be the poop kid that sees a monster poop and flushes it. People just won’t get that.”

“That’s a good call, Scout,” Lamar said, glancing around. “I’m going to see if it’s popped up in another toilet or something.”

Lamar swallowed his sandwich in one bite and scurried away to search the schools toilets. Chuck and I sighed in relief.

“Hix is getting closer. We don’t know what he’s capable of,” I said. We looked over at Phil, who was still eating. I don’t think he even heard a single thing that was discussed. He was devouring a greasy, boney... “Phil, what the blazes are you eating?”

“Frog legs.”

“Ew, gross, bro! How could you do that? That’s like...eating the wings of our ship.”

“It’s nothing like that, Scout.”

“It’s *something* like that!”

“Mmm,” Phil savored the legs.

Suddenly, Nog’s voice was in my head. *Scout, can you hear me?*

“What’s up, Nog?”

I’m trying to prove something to Farrow, via Face Chat, and I need my old gym clothes. Did you ever give those back to me?

“Oh crap, man, I think I left them in the locker room.”

Bring them to me.

III.

I walked down the hallway to where the gym was and pushed the double doors open. Mr. Ripped was in the middle of doing push-ups with an un-lit cigar in his mouth. He was yelling out random numbers...

“45! 49! 42! THAT’S YOU!” Mr. Ripped shouted at himself. He had really short gym shorts on, and no shirt. His muscles were covered in pulsating veins. And I could have sworn that the harder he push-up’ed, more facial hair was forced out of his chin and cheeks.

He stopped in mid push-up and looked at me. “Scoutness?”

“Um...I think I left Nog’s gym uniform here yesterday.”

“Nog’s uniform? That space dweeb?” Mr. Ripped stood to his feet and his six-pack and pectoral muscles glistened. It was intimidating. He could have given Schwarzenegger a run for his money.

I stood there and gulped loudly.

“You have a lot of bones coming back into my gym, Scout. If I had a shirt on, I’d be rolling up my sleeves, preparing to fight you,” he said.

I gulped again, as he stood there, towering over me.

“A gym uniform you say?”

I nodded.

Mr. Ripped then bent down and whispered in my ear. “I think I saw one in the locker room.”

I was terrified of this guy. I glanced over at the locker room door and then back at Mr. Ripped.

“Go on. Fetch the uniform, boy. Fetch it good,” he said, moving the un-lit cigar from one side of his mouth to the other.

I walked slowly towards the locker room.

“Oh, and Scoutness...” Mr. Ripped called out.

I stopped and looked back at him. He was now lighting the cigar and puffing the smoke.

“It’s in the *boys* locker room – not the girls. We *all* saw you passed out in there yesterday, ya weirdo.”

I took a deep breath and continued into the locker rooms. I pushed the door to the boys’ locker room open and immediately saw Nog’s uniform sitting in the corner of the shower room, soaked to the bone.

“Crap,” I muttered as I picked up the soggy clothing and rung them out over the shower drain.

The drain started to gurgle again. I dropped the clothes and backed up. There were purple bubbles foaming out of the drain. “Hix?” I called out. I quickly reached into my pocket and pulled out my phone. I opened the Frog Nog app and selected ‘capture video’ and began filming the purple, foamy bubbles. More and

more of the blobbery goo began to come out from the drain and began to spread like putty across the tile floor.

Behind me, the locker room door opened up and Mr. Ripped barged in. “What the heck is taking you so long?”

He looked passed me, and saw the giant, lively blob squirming up from the drain. I kept the video running.

“What the heck did you do, Scout?!” Mr. Ripped yelled at me. “Get out of the way!”

Mr. Ripped grabbed me by the back of my shirt and yanked me to safety, throwing me into the corner of the locker room just as the gooey beast launched itself towards us. Mr. Ripped stood strong as the blob wrapped itself around him and devoured him within seconds. I sat against the wall in the corner by the door and kept rolling film. Through the translucent goo, I watched as Mr. Ripped melted down to his bones and skull, and finally became one with the monster.

The blob then laid out flat on the shower floor and split into two. Both blobs stood up like small mountains, side by side, and I watched each of them extend tentacle-like arms towards me. I shoved my phone back into my pocket and stumbled to my feet. I reached for the locker room door, but was taken by surprise when the blobs released several tiny, squirmy worm-like creatures from themselves. Four or five of them slithered up to me and latched onto my legs.

I screeched loudly like a girl and did some sort of dancing jig to shake them off of me. They hit the floor and I stepped on one. I squashed it against the tile and it too split into two different squirms with minds of their own.

I quickly pulled the door open and escaped and shut the door. I survived. I walked back into the gym and sat against the wall, trying to catch my breath.

I needed to get Nog down here, and fast.

IV.

“So, you’re telling me my gym clothes are soaked to the bone?” Nog said as I stood with him in the now calm, quiet and empty boys locker room. “*And Hix Blobsom was here?*”

“Yes, sir.”

“Dang,” Nog muttered as he tickled the inside of his cheek with his tongue. “This situation is escalating faster than-”

“Faster than what?” a voice startled us from behind. We both turned around and saw the locker room door closing as Detective Raggs stood there, removing his hat. “What is this situation escalating faster than?” Raggs questioned again.

“Um, it was the, I had to,” Nog stumbled over his words. “These damn wash rags that Scout keeps attracting!” Nog stood back and pointed at me accusingly.

“Wash rags? Again, Scout?” Raggs asked me, kind of disgusted.

I had no freaking idea where Nog came up with this ‘wash rag’ nonsense. It didn’t even make any sense! How could someone attract rags? And why was... no, *HOW* was Detective Raggs even believing any of this?

“Look, I don’t know anything about this wash rag fetish Scout has,” Raggs explained, “but I just wanted to let you both know that I’m on to you. I’ve heard rumors that the man you fired, Maxwell Ferguson, is street trash now – homeless and living in some alley here in King’s Town. I’m going to track him down and learn the truth about Dr. Hix Blossom.”

We waited for him to continue.

“That is all,” he said, putting his hat back on and leaving the locker room.

“Why does he just randomly show up from time to time?” I asked.

“He’s trying to keep his significance, Scout,” Nog said. He put his hand on my shoulder. “As soon as school is out, gather everyone and come to my house. We need to resolve this thing.”

CHAPTER SIX

ParaZap, Fool!

I.

Mission time had come. We were about to embark on another dangerous task – locating and either capturing, or destroying, the massive blob formerly known as Dr. Hikalous Blossom, now featuring Mr. Ripped.

I drove over to Chuck's house and picked him up. We then drove to Phil's house and picked *him* up. And then, since Adia didn't want to ride with us, we drove straight to Nog's farm.

In the main chamber of Fort Nog's where The Frog Hopper sat unoccupied, Chuck, Phil and I stood in our boxers and pulled our blue jumpsuits over them and zipped them up. The cigar smoking attitude frog was still our patch emblem, and was presented on the left breast of the suits.

Speaking about breasts, we were all hoping Adia would change into her jumpsuit in front of us, seeing as how you have to start off in your underwear. But Farrow caught wind of our teenaged hormone desires and he asked Adia to change in the bathroom. Marco and Hastings stood guard outside the door.

Once she was ready to go, Nog supplied us all with new and improved laser phaser rifles. We each had a backpack full of

supplies and extra charges for the rifles. And of course, our Batman-style utility belts were back, filled with endless supplies.

As we all lined up side by side in front of Professor Nog and Farrow, Marco and Hastings joined our sides. And just as the Frog Nog app conversation had indicated, they were going to accompany us on, and lead, our mission.

“Welcome, The Fellas,” Nog announced. He wore his white lab coat, red tie, thick-framed glasses, and terrible comb-over. “This mission will be different than previous ones. First, it’s an Earth mission. That means we face a devastating threat on our very own planet – making a success extremely crucial. We don’t know what this blue goo is capable of in its fullest extent, but as we saw with Dr. Hix Blossom six months ago, and as Scout witnessed today in the boys locker room – it’s dangerous, and has already claimed two lives.”

Farrow set a small orb-shaped item on the ground and pressed the top of it. It then presented a digital map of schematics right before our very eyes. We all ‘ooh’ed’ and ‘ahh’ed’ at our continued amazement of Fort Nog’s technology.

The digital map seemed to float right in front of us, and Farrow then interacted with it by walking directly into it. “This is a laser schematic of King’s Town High School, kids. This is where the last three sightings of the creature we’ve scientifically named, Blobberous Squirmhixious, have been. A student says he viewed a portion of the beast in a toilet, almost mistaking it for

a poop. The other two instances come from Scout, who had two run-ins with the squirmy gelatin mass. Once in the girl's locker room, then once in the boys – which lead to the untimely consumption – and death – of gym teacher, Mr. Ripped. God rest those abs.”

Nog entered the schematics as well. “One can only assume that Blobberous Squirmhixious is dwelling primarily in the sewer systems directly below the school. This is where you will make your entrance.” Nog pointed to a room on the map. “The boiler room in the school basement has an entrance panel to the sewers. Lead by mission specialists, Marco and Hastings, you’ll enter the sewers there, and track down the gross glob of alien hair-gel. Once you make contact, I give you permission to kill it. We can’t chance letting that thing get loose around King’s Town. Everything we’ve worked so hard to keep so secret would be ruined.”

Nog walked straight through the schematics and stood before us. A satisfactory grin grew across his face. “What a time we live in, kids. I just walked through those schematics – that’s going in my memoirs.”

He turned around and faced the schematics with both of his hands in his lab coat pockets. “To prevent any unwelcomed visits from Detective Rickert Raggs, I plan to invite him over to my house tonight for a brewski and Monopoly night. Once I earn his trust, Farrow will bash him over the head with a 2x4.”

“Whoa, whoa, Nog, you said I wouldn’t be involved in that plan,” Farrow said, getting nervous.

“The plan has changed.” The Professor turned around and faced us all again. “Go get ‘em.”

Surprised by the sudden and immediate end of the mission briefing, we all slowly disbanded.

II.

Before we departed for the mission, Marco and Hastings told everyone it’d be a good idea to double check our equipment and go to the bathroom one final time. I knew my equipment was good to go, but there was one more thing I wanted to bring with me.

I took the elevator down to the Dungeon of Stuff and walked into the narrow hallway that held the artifacts. I looked into the glass case that protected the sphere spear. In the glowing purple orb on top, I saw Blorf’s face floating in it. His eyes were closed and he appeared to be asleep.

“Blorf, are you awake?” I whispered. His eyes remained shut. “Brotha?”

Blorf’s eyes shot wide open and he smiled. “Scout! It’s good to see you. What’s the cause?”

“We’re going on a mission. I want you to come with me and be my weapon of choice.”

“I’d be delighted, my brotha,” Blorf said. “Where are we going?”

“Right here on Earth. There was a mishap with some blue goo that we kept down here and it created a monster. We need to stop it.”

“Have no fear, Blorf is here!”

I opened the glass case, grabbed the spear and then rode the elevator back up to the ground level.

About ten minutes later, we were on our way to the school. I was driving my Premise with Chuck riding shotgun and Phil riding in the back. We buckled the spear into the other backseat and Blorf’s mystical face looked out the windows and admired our planet. I looked in the rearview mirror and saw Phil was chewing something.

“What are you eating, Phil?” I asked, getting kind of hungry myself.

“Mini cheeseburgers,” he responded.

Chuck and I both turned around and looked at Phil. He was holding a plate of four or five sliders, and he had mustard on his cheek.

“Where did you get a meal?” Chuck asked.

“Heated it up before we left,” Phil said.

I turned around and faced the road again. We were behind Marco’s car. He was driving Hastings and Adia. We were closing in on the school so naturally my nerves began to pick up. My stomach bubbled before everything mission. And I usually expelled farts, so maybe it was a good thing that Adia didn’t ride with us. I smiled as I thought about her.

“For some reason she was keeping her distance from me. I didn’t know if I was just too young for her, or maybe I repulsed her. Or the third option, maybe she did like me, and was just intimidated by the fact that I was already seeing Mandy. Mandy was great and all, but she didn’t have anything on Adia. Adia wore tight blue jean shorts like a champ. I could be a two-woman man if she wanted me too. I’d juggle -”

“Scout, you know you’re talking out loud right?” Chuck said. I looked over at him and he awkwardly gawked at me. The world fell silent. I felt sick and my face felt flushed. I looked into the rearview mirror again and saw Phil staring at me, his mouth opened wide. I glanced at Blorf and he tried not to make eye contact with me.

“I...” I began, but didn’t know what to say. I just said a thought monologue out loud!

Scout, that was embarrassing.

Nog heard it too!?

“And you wonder why Mandy hates you right now,” Chuck added.

“Can we not talk about this now?” I pleaded.

Everyone stopped talking. I felt more awkward than I had in a while. But the timing couldn’t have been any more perfect. We turned the corner and into the schools empty parking lot.

III.

For some reason, the school was locked with a chain and padlock. Marco used a heavy pair of bolt cutters and squeezed so hard that he farted. The chain broke and dropped to the ground where he kicked it off to the side.

Like clockwork, Hastings pulled out a ring of keys that he spun on his finger before pinching a particular key with his fingers. The keys jingled in his grip and he inserted the key into the door, turned it, and opened up the school.

“Nog, we’re in. Where to?” I said.

Alright, The Fellas, go down the freshman hallway to your right and turn left at the art room.

We followed Nog’s instructions and crept down the hall silently with our weapons drawn. Aside from the backup generator, all of the lights were off. The atmosphere in the

school was fairly dark and cold with a few dull lights scattered about, flickering. Once again, I felt like I was in a movie.

A clanking noise sounded above us and we all stopped and looked around, aiming in every direction.

“What was that?” Marco whispered loudly.

The clanking sound was followed by the flow of air from the ventilation system.

“It’s just the air conditioning. Let’s keep moving,” I said.

We stopped at the end of the hallway where the art room was and slowly turned the corner to the left and stared down another dark hallway. This hallway had given me nightmares in the past – it’s where my Geometry class was.

We continued slowly down the hallway.

On your right, about three classrooms up, is a door that says Maintenance Office.

We arrived at the door Nog specified.

Use the blue key to get in there, Hastings.

Hastings pulled the ring of keys off his belt and spun them on his index finger again, stopping with the blue key between his fingers. He was so good at that!

Hastings stuck the key into the door, turned it, and pushed his way into the office. We all followed him into the cramped quarters.

The boiler room door should be off to your right. Use the red key to get in. And to keep true to our timeline, I'm going to call Detective Raggs and invite him over for the plan...

As Hastings spun the ring of keys in his hand again, I leaned in and whispered to Adia. “Everything will be alright. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

She didn’t look at me, but I could tell she rolled her eyes. “Just stay focused on the mission, Scout. I’d hate for you to not make it back to Mandy.”

So it *was* Mandy she was intimidated by. Did I maybe sense a bit of jealousy there, Ms. Smidgeon? I smirked and looked over at Chuck who was staring at me.

“Good thing you didn’t speak what you just thought again,” Chuck said.

My smile disappeared and was replaced by an annoyed frown.

“We’re in!” Hastings called out. We looked over and he had the boiler room door open.

Right then, a cell phone ringing caught everyone’s attention. Marco and Hastings turned around and looked at the four of us youngsters.

“We specifically said NO cell phones, kids!” Marco said.

I knew it wasn’t mine – the volume was turned off. I looked to Chuck and he shook his head.

“Not me,” Adia said.

“Nope,” Phil said.

“Sorry, that’d be me...” a voice said from behind us. We all turned around and saw Detective Raggs standing in the office doorway aiming his pistol at us. He looked at his phone. “It’s Professor Nog,” he said. He put the phone to his ear. “Nog, you old coot! What’s happening?”

Raggs listened for a moment and then smiled. “No, I can’t tonight, I’m a little busy right now. I’m at the school, watching The Fellas sneaking around doing God knows what!”

Raggs’ smile disappeared. “Nog? Hello?” The detective shoved his phone back into his pocket. “He hung up.”

Scout! Raggs is onto ya! Use the ParaZap setting on your laser phaser. It’ll knock him out cold!

I glanced down at my laser gun and saw that next to the trigger was a knob with three settings: laser, projectile launch, and ParaZap. I slyly turned it to ParaZap.

“I find it funny that Nog invites me over for a brewski at the same time that his elite team is sneaking into the school – guns out,” Raggs said. “Who wants to tell me what’s going on?”

Raggs aimed his gun at Phil. “What about you robot-boy. What’s the meaning of all this sneaking?” Phil didn’t respond. Raggs then aimed at Adia. “What about you, beauty queen?”

Adia stood strong and didn't open her mouth. She did give him a glare like the ones Mandy had been giving me lately.

“What about the adults?” Raggs said, turning his interrogation to Marco and Hastings. “This little sneaking mission wouldn't have anything to do with the disappearance of Dr. Hix Blossom would it?”

Before anyone else had a chance to be asked, I dropped to my knees and aimed my gun at Raggs. “ParaZap, fool!” I shouted and pulled the trigger. A squiggly purple laser beam shot out and connected with Raggs. He dropped his gun and began to shake like he was being tazed. He dropped to the ground and began to glow a purple hue as he lay motionless in the doorway.

“Booya!” Blorf yelled.

“ParaZap? Good thinking, Scout! He'll be out for hours now!” Marco said and gave me a high-five.

“It was Nog's idea,” I said, giving credit where credit was due.

“I didn't know our phasers did that now!” Phil said, looking his gun over inch by inch.

“These are new and improved laser phasers, kids. They do a lot more now,” Marco said.

“I hate to interrupt, lady and gentlemen, but that squirmy S.O.B. down there in the sewers is just getting stronger by the minute,” Hastings said. “Let's move.”

We all set our focus again and followed Hastings into the boiler room. It was hot in there – steam rose off of the pipes and heating systems. We all gathered around a hatch on the floor in the far corner.

Hastings knelt down and pulled on the handle and opened the hatch. He pressed a button on the side of his laser gun and a flashlight ignited. He pointed it down into the hatch. There was a metal ladder that went down about twelve or thirteen feet into murky water.

“I got this,” Chuck said as he pushed his way through everyone. He stepped one foot down onto the ladder and Marco grabbed him by the sleeve. Chuck looked up. “What, man?”

“What kind of man are you, boy?” Marco said. “Don’t you know the golden rule for anything? Ladies first, moron.”

Everyone looked at Adia and she nervously gulped. “No, it’s okay. Someone else can go down into the monster filled dark sewer first.”

“Adia, we insist,” Marco added. “What kind of organization would we be if we were disrespectful to a lady. Now, go on get down there.”

“I’d really rather not, guys. I mean, we don’t know what -”

“No means no, dudes,” I said, slinging my laser phaser over my shoulder and holstering Blorf into my backpack. “If Adia

says someone else goes first, that means someone else goes first. I'll do it.”

I looked at Adia and winked at her. She smiled back – finally, she appreciated something I did or said.

I dipped my leg down into the hatch and onto the first step of the ladder. Within just a couple seconds, I was well on my way down into the sewers. I reached the bottom and found myself standing in about a foot of gross, greenish brown water. It smelled like the portable bathrooms at a county fair.

I flipped on the LED flashlight on my phaser and examined the sewer. It was dark, smelly and warm. I could hear dripping echoing throughout the labyrinth of tunnels. The coast seemed to be clear.

“Alright, guys!” I called up. “Come on down!”

After everyone was down in the sewer, Adia put her hand on my shoulder. “Thanks, Scout.”

“No problem,” I said with a smile. She smiled back. Aw yeah!

Everyone flipped on their flashlights.

“Which way do we go?” Chuck asked.

“Nog wanted to use Philclops’ thermal vision to guide us,” Marco said. “Philly, flip on your eye.”

Phil closed his eyes tight and opened them back up – the one eye was glowing red. He said that anytime he turned his eye on,

he could see any kind of motion through walls, he could pinpoint body heat, and he could pick up on any sort of movement. He was going to be our best chance to find Blobberous Squirmhixious.

Philclops looked down the sewer in one direction, and then looked down the other direction. “This way,” he said.

“Stay up front with us, Philly,” Marco said.

Marco, Hastings and Phil lead the group as we waded through the disgusting water. Adia and I were close behind them, and Chuck served as the caboose of our team, watching all of our backs.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Classic Sewer Joke

I.

“This sewer reminds me of a classic sewer joke,” Marco said, his voice echoing through the tunnels. “What do you do if your ex-wife tries to take everything?” Marco allowed a couple seconds of silence, and then said, “Sewer.”

Phil laughed, but no one else did.

“Not one of your finest, Marco,” I said.

“Eh, not every classic can be a classic, I guess,” he said.

With my gun slung over my shoulder, I held the sphere spear out in front of me and let Blorf’s purple glow be our guiding light.

“This place reminds me of the tunnels back on Bethani,” Blorf’s majestic presence spoke from the orb. “Remember the good old days, Scout?”

“I remember, brother,” I said, keeping my eyes peeled.

“Guys, over here!” Adia called out. Everyone stopped in their tracks and turned their focus on her. She was along the side of the tunnel where a metal grate sheltered a smaller, dark tunnel.

She aimed her phaser at the grate and shone the light down the tunnel. "I heard something."

"Stick me in, Scout," Blorf said. I stuck the orb end of the sphere through between the bars on the grate and let Blorf illuminate the tunnel.

"Well?" I asked.

"Rats..." Blorf said.

"What? What happened?" I inquired.

"RATS!" Blorf screamed. I yanked the spear back out of the tunnel just in time to see a flood of rats spew from it and drop into the water we were wading in.

"Oh my God!" Adia screamed. She splashed through the water, away from the flood of rats. "I hate rats!"

"Then I got you covered, baby!" Chuck shouted as he aimed his phaser down at the rats. He pulled the trigger and started firing lasers at the animals.

"Whoa! Chuck!" I said, putting my free hand on his shoulder. He stopped firing and looked around at all of us. We all gave him a crazy look. "What the heck are you doing?"

"She hates rats...I was just getting rid of the rats..." Chuck muttered.

"That was stupid, Chuck," Hastings said. "You're going to draw attention to -"

Hastings was interrupted by a monstrous, gutty roar; Blobberous Squirmhixious rose from the murky waters in which we stood.

“There it is!” Marco screamed. Everyone aimed their phasers at the squirmy mass, but no one fired. It was almost like we were waiting on *it* to make the first move.

The beast grew over eight feet tall and towered over us. It gurgled and bubbled and sprouted long, blobbery tentacles. Near the top of the blob, a mouth opened, lined with rows of sharp teeth, and it growled.

“Scout, aim me!” Blorf cried out. I pointed the sphere spear at the Blobberous and Blorf began to pulsate and then fired a bright purple laser beam at the blob. The beam made impact and the Blobberous screeched nightmarishly. One of its tentacles reached out and knocked the spear out of my hands.

In slow motion, it flew across the tunnel. I saw the look of Blorf’s orb face. His eyes widened just as the orb shattered against the wall. The purple glow was gone, and the rest of the sphere spear disappeared into the dark water.

“Blorf!” I screamed. I couldn’t believe we lost him...again.

“Fire!” Hastings shouted. Upon his command, all of us began firing at the Blobberous. It twitched and squirmed as its gelatin mass absorbed all of the lasers.

“It’s not even making a dent!” I yelled.

At the same time, Marco and Hastings reached into the holsters on their utility belts and pulled out 9mm pistols. They both aimed their weapons and fired at the blob. The bullets didn't seem to make any kind of impact either.

One of the Blobberous' tentacles swung out and slapped Marco and Hastings. Both of them were launched into the air and dropped into the water. Both of their pistols were lost.

Another tentacle reached out and wrapped itself around Chuck and Adia, and started to constrict them as it lifted them into the air. Chuck screamed like a girl and kicked his legs wildly.

"My God..." I said to myself. Had we finally met our match? "Nog! What do we do? The lasers and bullets wont hurt it!"

There was no answer from Nog.

"Nog!?" I screamed, and once again, no answer.

I looked over at Philclops. He slung his laser phaser over his shoulder and unscrewed his hand. He aimed his stump at the Blobberous and grit his teeth. Fire spewed from his stump – like a flamethrower – and ignited the Blobberous.

Adia and Chuck were dropped into the water as the creature screeched and squirmed in pain from the flames. The blob then began to sink back down into the water. Its mouth closed and it fully disappeared underneath the shin-deep sewage.

A calm came over the sewer and things grew silent as we watched the water ripple in the other direction as the Blobberous made its escape.

“Good thinking, Philclops,” I said, helping Chuck and Aida to their feet. Marco and Hastings rejoined our side.

“Wow,” Marco said, wiping the water from his face.

“Nog!” I snarled.

Jesus Christ, Scout, hold on. I was on the toilet.

I pretended like I didn’t just hear that.

II.

So, the lasers and bullets don’t hurt it, you say?

“Yup,” I said annoyed. “How come this wasn’t thought out more, Ed?”

You call me, Professor Nog – or even just Nog, Scout. That one had grown on me. And as far as this plan not being ‘thought out’, this is all new to us, Scout. We know diddly-squat about this alien being. We learn from our mistakes. Don’t worry, Farrow and I are in the lab right now trying to come up with something. The Philclops used fire? And that worked?

“The fire seemed to just annoy it. The Blobberous just dipped back into the water and fled the scene of the crime.”

Well, then we can potentially use fire to destroy it. Let me see what we can come up with.

“Okay,” I said. I rejoined The Fellas who were huddled together about ten feet away. “Nog and Farrow are in the lab right now, trying to come up with a Plan B.”

“Until then, we keep moving,” Marco said. “Maybe we’ll catch a break and find a way to trap it or something.” Marco pointed down the tunnel in the direction that the Blobberous fled. “This way. Phil, you’re up with us again.”

Marco, Hastings and Phil lead the way again. This time, Chuck stayed close to them – probably for protection in case he got wrapped up again – and Adia and I hung in the back of the group.

We walked for a good ten or fifteen minutes, not entirely sure where we were. We probably weren’t below the school anymore. Adia hadn’t said anything to me the whole time, but I could have sworn we had a moment when I volunteered to go down the ladder first.

My teenage years, unlike anyone else’s it seemed, were confusing. I liked Mandy, but I also liked what Adia had to offer. I was struggling with my mustache, while Philclops showed his off like a trophy wife. I had splotches of acne that I couldn’t explain, and I seemed to have a crush on the entire girls volleyball team. None of this could have been normal.

I looked at Adia, who was brushing her disheveled bangs away from her eyes. Dare I cross the line and engage her in conversation again? I felt like I would be doing Mandy wrong, but ya know what? Who cares!

“Sure smells like crap down here, huh?” I said, starting the conversation.

Adia looked over at me and smiled. “Yup.”

“Pure crap, actually,” I needlessly added.

Adia nodded.

“Are you doing okay down here? I know that must have been scary back there.”

“Scout, don’t you have a girlfriend?” Adia said out of nowhere.

I wasn’t sure what to say, so I just nodded.

“Then stop trying to hit on me. Trust me, Mandy wouldn’t appreciate it. She’s a good girl. You need to remember that.”

What was she talking about? Give me a life lesson, will ya? I knew what I wanted. I wanted Mandy. I mean, Adia...I mean...I guess I wanted Mandy...

“It’s baaacck!” Hastings yelled from up ahead. I looked forward and saw Chuck hit the deck as the Blobberous rose from the sewer water again right in front of everyone. Hastings and Marco lifted their laser rifles and started rapid firing. Philclops

ducked off to the side and tried to unscrew his mechanical hand again.

I aimed my rifle and looked through the scope. In the crosshairs, I studied the Blobberous as it stood there roaring and taking all the laser beams. Through the translucent-ness of it, I could see human bones – probably that of Hix and Mr. Ripped. There also seemed to be dozens of other bones – smaller ones – probably from rats.

“This thing has been down here in the sewers for six months eating rats and growing in size...” I muttered to myself.

“Scout, look out!” Adia screamed. I looked down and there were three squirms slithering through the water in my direction. I aimed my gun down and fired a barrage of lasers at them. The laser beams riddled the water and penetrated the squirms. The squirms then lay there motionless, floating in the water.

“The lasers kill the small ones, just not that BEAST!” I yelled to everyone. I looked ahead and watched as the giant monstrosity absorbing all of the lasers.

“It’s no use!” Marco screeched as he stood there and continued to fire. Philclops stood up and aimed his mechanical stump at the blob, but before he had a chance to expel flames, one of the creatures’ tentacles reached out and wrapped itself around Phil.

“Phil!” I screamed and raced forward, towards the ordeal. Chuck was hunched over, avoiding the situation, so I ran up onto his back (as I heard him scream in pain) and leapt off heroically. I landed on top of the squirmy tentacle and gripped on with one hand. With my other hand, I aimed my gun straight down on the tentacle and fired off a couple beams.

The Blobberous screeched and loosened its grip on Phil. He dropped down into the water and sparks flew from his mechanical stump, shorting out its power.

Another tentacle reached over and wrapped around me and pulled me closer to the creature. My hands were stuck down by my side and my laser gun was crushed in the tight, constricting grip.

“Scout! Hold on!” Marco yelled.

I could feel my circulation being cut off throughout my body. Was this the end of me, Scout Brooks?

III.

Not quite...

I tried to wiggle out of the tentacle as it smashed me into the blob's body. I felt myself start sinking into the goo. I was then face to face with a skull – either Hix's or Mr. Ripped's. I held my breath so I wouldn't suffocate or inhale this crap.

Right then, a loud ‘boom’ shook everything around me. The Blobberous jiggled and roared and tore me out from it’s gooey-ness and tossed me aside like the unwanted crust of a child’s peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

I looked up and saw a flame burning inside the Blobberous. Once it dwindled, I saw Marco pull a Gernog out from his backpack and tear the pin out.

“You want another one!?” Marco threw the Gernog like a baseball directly into the Blobberous. He and Hastings turned their heads just as it exploded inside it again.

The Blobberous roared and screeched and morphed itself into different shapes as the explosion shook it to its core. However, it didn’t seem to be doing anything.

“Guys!” Adia screamed. We all looked over at her and she was climbing a ladder that led up to a manhole cover. “Come on, let’s get out of here!”

Marco, Hastings and Phil ran over to the ladder, and I helped Chuck up.

“You did a maneuver off my back?!” Chuck yelled at me.

“Sure did,” I said.

“I bet it looked so cool,” Chuck smirked.

We joined everyone else at the bottom of the ladder. While the Blobberous was still recovering from the multiple explosions, Marco ushered everyone up the ladder. Adia was up first and

removed the manhole cover. I could see it was dark outside. Hastings went up next to make sure everyone was able to get out ok. Phil climbed up the ladder with one hand – he lost the other one in the battle.

“Scout, get up there!” Marco yelled at me.

“Chuck first!” I said.

I helped Chuck onto the first step of the ladder, and he was quick to make it the rest of the way.

“Scout, go!” Marco yelled again.

“You’ll be right behind me?” I asked.

“*Right* behind you!”

I jumped up on to the ladder and climbed my little heart out. Once I got to the top, I climbed through the manhole and out onto the street. We were in the middle of an intersection – it was too dark to tell exactly where though. The air was cool and the moon hung low in the sky.

I looked back down into the sewer and saw Marco climbing up the ladder fast. When he got close enough, he threw his gun out on the road and reached for my hand.

“Scout! Hurry!” he shouted.

I bent down and grabbed his arm with both of my hands. Without warning, a dark purple tentacle reached up from the sewer and wrapped itself around Marco’s neck. Marco’s eyes

opened wide and he gasped as the tentacle yanked him back down the ladder and right out of my grip.

“Marco!” I yelled. Everyone else gathered around the manhole. The ground began to shake and knocked us all over. In the middle of the intersection, the concrete cracked and then split. It felt like an earthquake. The road opened up right before our eyes and the Blobberous rose from the underground. It stood there right before us, pulsating and growling.

Car alarms from cars parked along the street began to go off from all the commotion. I looked directly into the Blobberous and saw Marco inside the goo, almost like he was frozen in time. The skin on his face and hands began to slowly fizzle away.

I closed my eyes for a moment – this couldn’t have been happening. When I opened my eyes back up, the Blobberous squirmed its way in the other direction, squeezed between a couple houses and disappeared into Kings Town.

To the sound of car alarms and Adia crying, I sat down and sighed in defeat.

CHAPTER EIGHT

All Because of a Cup of Coffee

I.

I check my watch – 9:45pm – it was later than I thought. We were down in the sewers for a while. We all decided to take a break and regroup to catch our breath, assess our damage, and get a new plan in order.

We reformed in Old King’s Town. The streets were clear and the shops and restaurants were closed down for the night. The air was cool and the atmosphere was still and calm. For how long, we didn’t know.

We all sat on the sidewalk, up against Father Peanuts. I took a deep breath and looked down the line. Phil was next to me – he buried his face in his good hand. He had formed a tight bond with Marco as of late, so his death was hitting him hard. Chuck and Adia sat side by side, staring off into space. Chuck didn’t let up his grip on his gun, not even a little bit.

Hastings was on the other side of me. I turned to him. “What now?” I asked.

Hastings sighed heavily. “We need a new plan. The first one isn’t working out.”

“What do we do until Nog and Farrow can come up with something?” I asked.

“We wait, I guess.”

“But the Blobberous is loose in King’s Town. Someone else is going to see it, and if we don’t do something soon, it may take more lives,” I explained.

“I agree with you, Scout! But what do you want me to do?!” Hastings snapped at me. He closed his eyes and turned his head the other way. “I’m sorry. Marco was a good friend of mine too.”

I heard a snuffle and looked over at Phil. He was crying. I put a comforting hand on his shoulder, but he pulled away. “Phil?” I said, taken aback.

I stood to my feet, the stars to my back. “Look, guys, we’re getting our butts kicked here, that’s no secret. But we need to stay strong and think of a way to stop that thing before it hurts anyone else. We’ve already lost Marco and Blorf – the casualties stop there, ok? No one else is losing their life tonight.”

“Blorf didn’t last that long this time, huh?” Chuck forced out a smirk.

“No,” I said. “No he didn’t. But don’t worry, I’m sure he’ll find a way to come back. He always does.”

I picked Marco's banged up laser phaser up off the ground and slung it over my shoulder. "Everyone pick up your stuff. We need to go find that thing."

A bright light in the sky caught everyone's attention. We all looked up in the starry night sky and saw what, at first, looked like a comet shooting across the vastness of space.

"Great, what now," I said. Hastings grabbed his gun, as did everyone else, and we all stood there, staring at the unidentified flying object. It seemed like it was getting closer and closer by the second. And then, it broke Earth's atmosphere with a bright flash and a loud boom, and disappeared behind a tree line in the distance.

"What the heck was that?" Adia cried out.

"I have no idea. But whatever it was, Nog's farm is back behind that tree line..." Hastings nervously said. "We have to make sure he's okay. Nog? Can you hear me?"

We waited for Nog to respond to Hastings, but it didn't seem that he was.

"Nog?" I said, trying my luck. Nothing. "Nog? Are you okay?"

Hastings and I looked at each other.

"I have to go make sure he's okay," he said.

I nodded. "We'll try to track down the Blobberous."

“Be careful, Fellas,” Hastings said. He then turned around and started jogging away down the middle of the street.

A hand rested on my shoulder. I looked and saw it was Phil.

“Scout, I don’t know if I can do this anymore,” he said with tears still in his eyes. I just looked at him, trying to figure out what he was hinting at.

I nodded my head, not saying anything.

“I’m sorry,” Phil added. He then took off, jogging after Hastings. I turned around to the rest of my team.

“And then there were three,” Adia joked.

“Are you guys up for this?” I asked.

Chuck gripped his laser gun tightly. “Heck yeah, bro. Just like old times.”

Adia smiled and nodded her head. “I’m game.”

“Good,” I said. “Let’s move.”

I held my laser phaser out in front of me, and led the charge deeper into King’s Town.

II.

We stayed on the sidewalks through Old King’s Town because of the light that the old street lamps emitted. We kept a

slower pace, that way we weren't taken by surprise if the Blobberous Squirmhixious popped back up out of nowhere.

"I didn't know Marco as long as you guys did, but he was a good man," Adia said.

"He really was," Chuck said. "He had a thing for joking around with Phil. No wonder Philly's taking it so hard."

"And Phil was the only one who really appreciated his jokes," I added with a laugh.

"Yeah, they were so lame," Chuck said.

"Do you guys think Phil meant he was done with the EIA all-together? Or just this mission?" Adia asked.

"I think Philly is just having a hard time with losing Marco. Give him some time and he'll be back in action. I can't imagine the EIA without him now," I said.

We came to the end of the sidewalk, crossed the street and wandered into the King's Town Park. It was a couple blocks of green grass, benches and water fountains in the center of town.

"What happens if someone else see's the Blobberous?" Adia asked. "I mean, the EIA wouldn't be so secret anymore, right?"

"All the more reason to find that thing quick," I said.

"Scout?" A familiar voice called out from behind us. We stopped and turned around. It was Palm Leafton – the comic book store-owner. He was in his jogging gear and ran up to us, keeping his pace by running in place. "Chuck too? What brings

you guys out this late? Are those...guns? What's with the get ups? A girl!?"

"Um, you know, were high schoolers, Palm. We're just out playing guns. You know, cops and robbers-like," I said, trying to cover up the fact that we were actually an elite team of science fiction heroes searching for a carnivorous blob that was created because of one mans ridiculous allergy to coffee.

"I hear ya, boys," Palm said, still running in place. "I was a teenager once too. Lots of craziness to be had." Palm looked at Adia. "My craziness never involved a female though. Props to you, Scout and Chuck. Props, indeed. Props all around."

Palm put his fingers to his neck and felt his pulse. "Well, gotta get back to my nighttime jog. I'll see you two at work tomorrow. 9am sharp – don't make me call your mothers. Oh, and stay away from the alley over there," he said, pointing in the direction he had just come from. "Lots of weird noises and smells coming from that alley."

Palm jogged away, and we all looked at each other.

"Weird noises?" I smiled.

"Smells?" Chuck added.

"Blobberous?" Adia asked what we were all thinking.

"Let's move, Fellas," I said. We all locked and loaded our laser phasers and ran for the alley that Palm warned us about.

When we got to the alley, all three of us flipped on our gun lights and aimed them into the darkness. I could see a dumpster and the lid had just shut. I held my fist up to stop my team, and then did some hand movements that included pointing, waving, waging my finger like I was an old woman jamming to swing music, and finally snapping my fingers.

“What does that even mean, Scout?” Chuck asked.

“It means, follow me to the dumpster cause I saw something.”

On my lead, we slowly walked down the alley, holding our guns out, ready to fire – even though the lasers didn’t do anything to the Blobberous.

We cautiously approached the dumpster and I hushed my team – even though they weren’t making any noise. I pushed the barrel of my gun forward and slipped it under the lid. In my mind, I counted down from three and then flung the dumpster lid open.

A bushy man jumped up from inside and extended his arms out to his side. We all screamed, as did the man in return. We backed up, keeping our lights focused on the man. He looked like a Wildman – bushy hair, bushy beard, bushy mustache, bushy chest hair sticking out of a torn and shredded v-neck shirt... and a banana peel hung out of his mouth.

It took a second, but I finally recognized him. “Maxwell Ferguson?”

Maxwell removed the banana peel from his mouth and chewed what was already in there. “Scott Bricks?”

“Scout Brooks.”

“My God! I haven’t seen you in like... four years!”

“Six months, actually.”

“Whatever, bro. Did you hear I got fired?”

“Yeah, we know, man. Your cup of coffee created a monster,” I said.

“I haven’t had a cup of the dark stuff ever since,” Maxwell said. “I can’t bring myself to enjoy it anymore. Not after what happened. Hey! Do you think Nog would hire me back as a consultant or something? I’m in the market for a job. I won’t be too picky, bros.”

I gave Maxwell a pity smile. “I don’t think so, man. He’s pretty peeved. I mean, you have no idea as to the problems you’ve caused.”

“I didn’t mean it, brotha,” Maxwell said. “I was just enjoying a cup of Joe. It’s not my fault that that Hix guy was allergic.”

“No one’s blaming you, Maxwell,” I said.

“Yeah they are! You are! Everyone is!”

“Okay, so maybe you are to blame. But that doesn’t mean -”

A single gunshot rang out and startled all of us. We turned around, and in the moonlight, saw a figure standing in the alley

holding a pistol in the air, smoke billowing from the barrel. The man was glowing purple.

“End of the loaf, Scout!” the man called out.

I lifted my gun and aimed the light at him. It was Detective Raggs.

“Raggs?” I questioned.

Raggs slowly moved toward us, his purple glow humming in the otherwise quiet alley. He aimed his pistol at us, and laughed a crazy laugh. “You think I’m STUPID! Huh, Scout?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Detective,” I said.

Raggs reached into his trench coat pocket and pulled something out. When he got close enough, he threw it at me. It was a washcloth. It hit me in the chest and dropped to the ground.

“Who attracts wash rags, Scout? No one, that’s who!” he screamed. “You’re all keeping me in the dark about Hix, you lie to me about WASH RAGS of all things, and then you shoot some purple crap at me that makes me go stiff and crap my pants! Now I’m purple, Scout! PURPLE! I’m a glow-worm!”

Raggs snapped again and fired his gun at the dumpster. It pinged against the front of it and ricocheted.

“Hey! That’s my house, yo!” Maxwell yelled.

“*Your* house?” Raggs said. “Who are *you*, you freak?”

“The name’s Maxwell Ferguson. *Doctor*, Maxwell Ferguson.”

“Doctor?” I whispered.

“Shh, he’s buying it,” Maxwell whispered back.

“I’m not buying anything!” Raggs yelled. “I know who you are, Maxwell. I’ve been looking for you too! Tell me everything you know about Dr. Hix Blossom!”

“Blossom? That guy who was consumed by the blue goo?” Maxwell inquired.

“Consumed! Ah-ha! I knew he was consumed!” Raggs seemed to get louder and louder.

“Detective, listen!” I shouted. “It’s true – Hix was eaten by a small vile of blue goo back at Fort Nog’s and escaped through the sewer drain. Now he’s back – a *lot* bigger – and loose in King’s Town. He’s already killed a few people and we need to stop him before he does it again.”

“A goo creature?” Raggs asked, as he lowered his weapon. He had a shocked and confused look on his face.

“Yes. Scientifically known as Blobberous Squirmhixious?” I explained.

“Squirm*HIX*ious?” Raggs cried. “Dear Lord, his name is even in it?”

“Look,” I said as I pulled a box over which was sitting by the side of the dumpster. I stood on top of it and gave an epic speech. “We *could* stand here in this very alley and discuss

where the Blobberous got its' name, or we can band together," my voice got deeper, "and defeat this thing once and for all. I'm standing here before you all – friends, possible love interest, former employee, annoying detective – to ask you one simple thing -"

The box gave way and I collapsed into it and tumbled to the ground. Chuck and Adia helped me to my feet.

"Possible love interest?" Adia seemed annoyed.

"You never know..."

A roar interrupted everything. All of our attention was drawn to the entrance of the alley. The Blobberous stood before everyone, tentacles waving wildly in the air. It squirmed its way forward and instantly engulfed Raggs.

"Run!" I yelled. We ran the other way, deeper into the alley. I glanced over my shoulder and saw Maxwell cowering by the dumpster. "Maxwell! Run, bro!"

"I can't! I'm too -"

A tentacle reached out and wrapped around Maxwell and pulled him towards its giant, watering mouth.

"Maxwell! No!"

When I turned back around, I saw Adia and Chuck slide to a complete stop. There was a fence blocking our way.

"Crap! What do we do?" Chuck screamed.

I frantically looked around. I saw a window on the brick wall next to us. “There!” I aimed my laser phaser at the window and fired three quick beams. The window shattered and we rushed for the opening.

The Blobberous was making its way down the alley.

“Quick, get in!” I said. I cupped my hands and Adia stepped into them. I lifted her up and pushed her into the building. I helped Chuck next. Then, I jumped up and grabbed the windowsill, pulled myself up and climbed inside just as a tentacle slammed against the side of the building, shattering the remaining glass.

III.

We found ourselves in a hardware store. We moved through the aisles quickly until we reached the front of the store. The three of us looked out the front window, but didn’t see the Blobberous. It must have still been in the alley.

“We should see if there’s anything in this store that can help us defeat that thing,” Adia said.

“Good idea, babe,” I said, catching myself saying ‘babe’ after the fact. Adia just shook her head. “Guys, grab what you can.”

The three of us split up around the store and searched for anything that could help us. I ran straight for the aisle that had the chainsaws.

I ran to the end of the aisle and ducked down behind a cardboard cutout of a burley man holding a Saw-Thru brand chainsaw.

“Nog, can you hear me? Is everything okay back at the fort?” I said quietly so the others wouldn’t hear me. I didn’t want them to get worried if I couldn’t get a hold of Nog.

I could hear the Blobberous out in the alley still, roaring and slamming its tentacles against the side of the building. It was only a matter of time before it would finally break though.

“Nog?” I repeated. No answer still – I was starting to get worried. I pulled my cell phone out of my pocket and looked at it – I had two missed texts; one from Farrow, and one from Mandy.

Farrow’s said: *Scout – get back to Fort Nog’s as soon as you can! We have a major problem!*

I then checked Mandy’s text: *Hey, Scout. I miss you. I hope your sewer mission is going well. Call me when you can!*

I smiled after I read Mandy’s text. I couldn’t believe how much I was actually missing her too.

“Scout! Check out these jugs!” Adia said from behind me. I closed my eyes, hoping she wasn’t referring to what I thought she

was. I was right in the middle of missing Mandy – I didn't need this right now. I put my phone back in my pocket and stood up.

“Adia, I don't know how appropriate this is. I mean, you gotta know that I'm taken,” I said as I turned around and faced her. She was holding two red jugs that said flammable on them. “Oh...”

“You really are sick...” Adia said, disgusted.

“It's not like that, Adia.”

“Anyway, do you think we can get that Blobberous to ingest these and then we can try to blow it up from the inside again,” she asked.

“Those jugs might be more powerful than Marco's Gernogs. Good thinking, Adia!”

Adia smiled. “Thanks!”

Chuck came running over. His gun was slung over his shoulder and he was gripping two axes. “Bros,” he said. “Look what I found!”

“Chuck, those aren't going to do anything!” I said.

“Oh, and chainsaws are?” he said, lowering his axes.

The building shook on another slam from the creature outside. This time, we heard things fall off of the shelves.

“It's going to get in here...” Adia worried.

“Guys, there’s something going on back at Fort Nog’s. I can’t get a hold of the old coot, and Farrow texted me and said that they had a major problem back there. I think we should go.”

“We can sneak out the front door while that thing is in the alley,” Chuck suggested.

“Good call. But first, we need one more attack on the Blobberous. Adia, let me see your jugs.”

Adia’s jaw dropped. I knew what I said that time...

Chuck slammed his axe into the front window and shattered the glass. The store’s security alarm immediately started going off.

“Oh, sure! The alarm goes off when I smash a window, but when *Scout* does it, everything’s cooler than beans!” Chuck yelled.

“Dude, just go, man!” I said, leaping through the shattered window with Adia’s jugs in my hand... I know, I’ll stop.

Adia followed me, and Chuck followed her. We ran to the entrance of the alley and saw the Blobberous slamming on the side of the building with its slimy tentacles.

“Hey! Blobberous!” I shouted. The creature turned and faced me and growled threateningly. “Hungry!?”

It then darted straight for us. With all my might, I tossed one of the flammable jugs at it, and the Blobberous swallowed it

whole. I tossed the second one and it hit the top of its head and slowly sunk into the goo.

“Alright, guys, stand back,” I said. I aimed my laser phaser and looked through the scope. I lined up one of the jugs in the crosshairs and pulled the trigger.

A single laser beam shot out and traveled down the alley and penetrated the blobs goo. It connected with the jug – a dead on shot, no doubt – and exploded. A massive fireball crawled towards us and up into the sky. The three of us leapt out of the way just as the flames roared above our heads.

Once the explosion died down, we stood up and looked down the alley – hopefully at a messy, dead, situation. But it was the exact opposite. The Blobberous stood there, stronger than ever, roaring into the night. Its tentacles were waving wildly in the air – we seemed to anger it even more.

“Well, I’m out of ideas!” I yelled. “Run!”

I bolted out into the road and ran through the King’s Town Park. I heard police sirens in the distance. I was wondering when someone else would catch on to the goings-on.

“Where are we going, Scout?” Chuck shouted.

“Fort Nog’s!”

CHAPTER NINE

A Whole New World of Gums

I.

As we ran through the streets of King's Town, towards Nog's farm, the ground shook. Chuck, Adia and I came to a halting stop in the middle of the street and looked up into the night sky, just above the tree line in the distance.

Whatever had crashed or landed, or crash-landed, on Nog's farm, was blasting back off into space, leaving a tail of smoke from its mega-nitro thrusters. It blended in with the night sky too well for me to really get a good look at it.

"What was that?" Adia panicked.

"I have no idea. We need to hurry," I said as I watched the craft disappear into the sea of stars above us.

As we approached Nog's mailbox at the end of his long gravel driveway, I noticed that there was a lot of commotion up ahead near the barn and Nog's house. I picked up speed, leaving Adia and Chuck in the dust.

I ran up to a man in a lab coat; he was rushing out of Nog's house. "Hey!" I called out, catching his attention.

"What, kid? I need to get back into the fort," he said. He was obviously in a hurry.

"What's going on here?" I asked.

"We've had a breach – I'm sorry, but I've got to go." The scientist took off running back into the barn. There were people everywhere. Some of them were scientists and some of them were armed guards. I also thought I saw a random pig running around.

"Phil? Hastings?" I called out over the panic that seemed to plague the farm. I grabbed an armed guard by the sleeve as he ran past me. "Where's Hastings?"

The guard pointed towards Nog's house and then released himself from my grip and ran off.

I made a dash for Nog's backdoor and busted into the kitchen. Adia and Chuck were close behind me. None of us knew what was going on.

We ran into the living room and saw Farrow on the couch, sprawled out with a wet washcloth draped over his head. Philclops knelt down by his side in a comforting manner. The television was on, and it was a news crew, live from Old King's Town:

“The police are being very quiet about what’s going on in King’s Town tonight,” the female reporter gripped a microphone and spoke urgently into the camera, “but sources tell us of a possible earthquake that split the streets and caused a massive explosion near Bud’s Hardware Store. A witness also tells horrifying tales of a large, unknown creature.”

The video footage swapped over to a pre-recorded interview with Palm Leafton, in full jogging gear, running in place. “I was just out for my late night jog session, when I noticed some weird smells coming from the alley near the hardware store. At first I thought it was just a homeless guy or something, but after I ran into some teenagers out here, I hung around to make sure nothing bad happened to them, and that’s when I saw it. It was huge – kind of blobby – and had these octopus-like tentacles coming out from…” Palm stopped talking and put his fingers to his neck. “Look here, I’m losing pulse – I need to keep this jog session up. Sorry News Team 4!”

The footage then showed Palm turn around and jog away into the dark.

“Scout!” Hastings voice broke my attention away from the TV. I looked at Hastings as he came down the stairs and into the living room.

“Hastings, what the crap is going on here?” I asked.

“Professor Nog was taken – abducted by aliens.”

“Abducted?” I questioned, making sure I heard it right.

“Yeah. I was up in Nog’s bedroom, trying to pull the security footage from his computer, but it’s password protected. No one saw what happened except Farrow, and he’s been knocked out cold ever since.”

“How do you know it was aliens?” Chuck asked, concerned.

“A few people from Fort Nog’s said a small spaceship landed out in the driveway and someone, or something, knocked on the barn doors. When they refused to open the door, they said that whoever got out of the ship ransacked Nog’s house and captured him. Farrow must have been inside with Nog at the time – it appears Farrow put up some sort of struggle, but then was knocked out. We won’t know anymore until he wakes up. Philclops has been trying to wake him up for a little while now.”

I looked over at Phil. He looked up at me with his eye still glowing red. “I’m sorry I had to leave, bros. I just needed a minute.”

“Did you guys defeat the Blobberous?” Hastings asked.

“No. We tried to blow it up again, but it didn’t work. Nothing ever works! I don’t know how to solve this problem!” I yelled, more frustrated than ever.

Phil smirked and looked down at Farrow.

“What?” I asked him, seeing his smirk.

“Oh, nothing,” he said. “I was just thinking about Marco, and how he always used to tell me to put salt on my bacon. He always said that salt fixed any problem. You just reminded me of him for a minute when you said that.”

“Too bad salt couldn’t fix *this* problem,” Chuck whimpered.

Right then, the nuts and bolts of gears in my head started spinning and cranking like mad. My eyes widened as an idea popped into my head like an instant message on the computer – it even came complete with a “Plop” sound.

“Wait...maybe salt *can* fix this problem!” I said out loud, catching everyone’s attention.

Phil turned around and stood up. “What do you mean?”

“This thing is just like a giant, blobbery slug-thing, right?” I began. “Well, what happens when you pour salt onto a slug? “

“It shrivels up and dies!” Adia chimed in. I could tell there was now hope in her perky tone.

“Exactly!” I said. “We need to cover that thing in salt!”

“But how?” Chuck asked.

“The projectile launcher on the new laser phasers!” Hastings exclaimed. “We put salt in the chamber and fire it at the Blobberous!”

“Brilliant!” I said. “Marco, you saved us! Where do we get enough salt for this plan?”

“At the hardware store,” Adia said. “I passed an aisle that had winter shovels and bags of rock salt for melting ice.”

I snapped my fingers and pointed directly at Adia. “You are the brotha!” I said and she smiled. “Come on guys, we have a plan!”

“I’m coming,” Phil said gripping his laser phaser. “I need to do Marco some justice.” Phil pulled out his laser phaser. “Justified...” he said, trying to create a catchphrase. Everyone just ignored him.

“I’ll stay with Farrow until he wakes up,” Hastings said.

The plan was all squared away – *it had* to work.

II.

We stayed on the outskirts of Old King’s Town and snuck behind buildings and down dark alleys to avoid the police and media circus. We were still in the EIA, and that still needed to be a secret. All the media had to go on with the Blobberous was Palm’s crazy claims – no one else had actually seen it or got video footage of it. It must have went back into hiding; possibly back into the sewer.

“I’m worried about Nog, guys,” Phil said.

“Let’s kill this thing and then worry about Nog,” I said, keeping focus. “He would want it that way.”

“Who would abduct him though?” Chuck asked, as we stayed hidden in the alleys.

“Nog has had a lot of beef with tons of extraterrestrial beings over his years – it could be anyone, from anywhere,” I said.

We snuck around another building and came up the side of it. We looked around the corner at the police barricade about twenty yards down the sidewalk from us.

“This is the nail salon that I use to go to,” Adia said, patting the brick wall of the building we were up against. “Bud’s Hardware is attached right on the other side of this. If we can get inside the salon, they share a break room with the hardware store. Easy access.”

“Good idea. How do we get in?” I asked.

“Well, I know they have a skylight.”

“This is where I come in...” Phil said. “My arm’s busted, but I can still pull the grappling hook out of it.” Phil dug into the mechanical stump that was still occasionally sparking and clamped his fingers down onto a metal wire. He yanked it out and revealed the grapple cord with the hook still in tact.

I saw Adia smile and put her hand gently on his shoulder. “I like how mechanical you are.”

Phil’s stump began to spark faster as he got more nervous. Was Adia hitting on him?

She then brushed her fingers over his freaking awesome mustache. “I like your stash,” she said.

“Oh yeah, she was hitting on him for sure. And I *definitely* didn’t see that coming.”

Everyone looked at me.

“Dude, you need to stop saying things out loud!” Chuck said, punching me in the shoulder.

The focus was back on Phil. He wound up the grapple hook by swinging it like a lasso and tossed it up onto the roof. The hook caught a hold of something and Phil yanked on it to make sure it was good to go.

“I’ll climb up there, get in through the skylight, and open the front door for you guys. Be ready,” Phil said. He then started to climb up his cord with one hand, and bracing his legs on the brick wall.

It was a struggle for Phil to get up there. Poor guy – he was just hit on by a beautiful girl and then was going to be a hero. That would have impressed even me! But it was taking him forever to get up there.

“Phil, just use both your hands! Don’t try to be so heroic!” Chuck shouted up to him.

Adia and I shook our heads. Chuck wasn’t the smartest of the bunch.

About fifteen minutes later, Phil finally made it to the roof of the one story nail salon. He disappeared out of view and we heard him trying to finagle the skylight. We heard a creak and assumed he got it open, followed by a loud crash.

Adia gasped and covered her mouth.

I peered around the side of the building again and through the nail salon window, saw Phil was getting up off the floor and walking towards the door, dragging his long cord of a grapple hook behind him. It had gone limp. “Come on!”

The three of us snuck around the front of the business while the police were busy near the alley. Phil unlocked the door and opened it. He must have fallen directly onto a display of nail polish because he was covered in it. Red, green, sparkly blue, sprinkley silver – he looked like a child’s finger painting.

“I like those colors on you,” Adia joked as we walked into the nail salon. Phil looked at me and nodded proudly. He then smiled, showing off a whole new world of gums.

We ran through the nail salon and towards the back where the break room was. We pushed the door open and entered.

Maxwell Ferguson was sitting at one of the tables, eating a microwaveable meal with a plastic fork.

“Maxwell?” I said, surprised to see him alive.

“Scout, my man! You should have seen my escape...” Maxwell said as he drifted away into a daydream, probably detailing his escape, but we obviously couldn’t see it.

“We’ll talk later, Max,” I said, kind of ignoring his fantastic return from the dead and pushing open the door that led into the hardware store.

The four of us entered the store and Adia led the way to the aisle where she saw the rock salt. We passed the snowshoes, winter shovels and snowman repair kits and finally made it to the bags of rock salt.

We all knelt down and tore into the bags like a band of ravenous raccoons grabbing some dinner.

“How do we load the salt?” Chuck asked.

“We load the chambers of the phasers,” I said. I messed with the charging chamber of the phaser and was able to unlatch it. The outer rim of the chamber was where the mechanics of the lasers were charged. The inside of the chamber, however, was a hollow, available space for projectiles to be inserted. Whether it was paintballs, rocks, rabbit pellets, dirt, or in our case, salt, it could be loaded in and fired when the knob was in the right position.

Everyone else unlatched the chambers and we began to put fistful after fistful of rock salt into them until they were full.

“Slap ‘em boys!” I said as everyone jammed the chambers back onto the undercarriage of the guns. “Now we need to find that thing.”

III.

With Maxwell Ferguson now an unarmed stowaway in our group, we snuck back through the nail salon, out the front doors and regrouped back in the dark alley, still avoiding police detection at all costs.

“Here’s my idea,” I said as we all ducked down in the alley. “I say we make like bananas and split. We bundle up in groups of two and scour King’s Town for this thing. If one of us finds it, send a message through Frog Nog and we’ll meet up with you. Do not fire until we’re all surrounding it. We’re going to only have one shot at this...until we reload. Then we’ll have another shot, but we’ll have to come back here first to get more salt.”

I felt like I was rambling, so I stopped. “Does anyone have any questions about my plan?”

Maxwell raised his hand. I called on him. “Yes, you?”

“I don’t think banana’s actually split, Scout,” he said. “I think you were thinking about banana splits. They’re already split.”

“Well that’s what I meant then,” I said.

“But if that’s what you meant,” he continued, “you should have said, ‘Let’s make like banana splits, and split.’”

“That doesn’t make any sense. A banana split can’t split. It’s already split, you just said that, bro.”

“When does a banana split actually become split?” Philclops asked. “With the whipped cream, or nuts?”

“Neither,” Chuck chimed in. “It’s the cherry on top.”

“Now you’re just naming off toppings!” Maxwell said, throwing his arms up in the air. “The banana itself is split. Right down the middle. They pour the toppings inside of it.”

“Um...seriously, guys?!” Adia said. “What the heck are we doing here?”

“Adia’s right,” I said, noticing that we lost focus on the mission at hand. A banana split sure did sound delicious though. “Let’s split up into teams of two, and spread out around town. Any questions?”

Maxwell raised his hand.

“What, man?” I said.

“There’re five of us. We can’t do groups of two. You’re plan is flawed, Scout.”

“It wouldn’t have been if you didn’t show back up! Just go with Philclops and Adia. Chuck and I will team up.”

“You’re not sending this guy with me,” Phil calmly told me.

“Then he can come with me. It doesn’t matter, guys.”

“Oh no, bro. I’m not going with you, Scout. Not after our banana split debacle.”

“You gotta go with someone, man! Who do you want to go with?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Maxwell said. “Just not you.”

“Then go with Phil and Adia!” I said, getting mad.

“He already said he didn’t want me to go with him!”

Phil nodded. “I did. I did say that.”

“You know, Maxwell,” I said, raising my voice, “this whole thing is your fault to begin with! If you weren’t drinking that fresh cup of French Roast down in the Dungeon of Stuff...”

“It was Gourmet Roast, actually.”

I stood up and slapped Maxwell across the face as hard as I could and he was launched back into the side of the building by the sheer force of it. He put his hand to his cheek and looked at it.

“Blood...” he said, staring me down.

“From a slap?” I said. “Bro, you got your underwear on too tight.”

“I hate to interrupt,” Chuck said, “but we’ve been arguing on and on about banana splits and who’s going with who for two

pages now! We need to move before that thing eats the whole town!”

Chuck was right. Two pages was enough.

“You’re on your own, Maxwell,” I said. “Enjoy the dumpster life.”

And so the plan was underway. We snuck back through the alley and split into two teams. Phil and Adia went one way, and Chuck and I went the other. Maxwell stayed put.

Chuck and I slinked back across King’s Town Park and escaped the police and media presence under the cover of the dim street lamps.

“Where should we look?” Chuck asked.

“I have a gut feeling it’s back in the sewer. So let’s find some access.”

“Cool. Where are we going to find access though?”

“The school.”

CHAPTER TEN

Operation Set-Up

I.

We ran through the King's Town High School parking lot and I ran my fingers across my Premise as we passed it. It was good to see my car again. I loved that thing.

We ran up to the front entrance where the door was still unlocked. I pulled the handle and opened the door and Chuck and I slipped in.

“Do you think one of those aliens that were looking for the blue goo at the space café took Nog?” Chuck asked as we raced down the dimly lit freshman hallway.

“Possibly. Like I said, it could be a number of enemies. Or just some random abduction.”

We turned the corner at the end of the hall and came to the maintenance office. We got our phasers ready and slowly entered the room. We made our way into the boiler room and finally stood over the open hatch that lead back down into the sewer. We looked down into it. It was dark and smelled like crap.

“It's down there, Chuck. I'd bet my life on it.”

“Then let’s do it, brotha. I trust you.”

I climbed down the ladder first and Chuck followed. We splashed down into the dirty sewer water and aimed our lights up and down the dark tunnels. Without Phil’s computer personality, we were going to have a hard time tracking it down.

“Dare we split up again?” I asked.

“What do you mean?”

“There’re two directions to this sewer. If we both go this way,” I said pointing down the ribbed corridor, “and it turns out that the Blobberous was actually down *that* way, we’re screwed.”

“So if you go that way, and I go this way, we’d hopefully find it either way,” Chuck said, seeming to be on the same page as me.

“You know it, bro!”

“No,” Chuck said to my surprise.

“What do you mean, Chuck? What do you mean, ‘no’?”

“We’d leave ourselves vulnerable – no back up. If I got eaten, that’s the end of good old Chuck Taylor! If you get eaten, the Scout Brooks story comes to an end.”

I thought about what Chuck said, and he was right. But I was more right-er. “We’re splitting up, dude. My call.”

“Alright, well if I become blob-feces, it’s your fault,” Chuck said.

“I’ll take my chances. I feel the end of this mission is just around the corner.”

“Scout,” Chuck said, putting his hand on my shoulder, “if I do become blob-feces... will you... will you have...”

“Spit it out, Chuck. Will I what?”

“Will you have Lamar pick me up?”

I stared at Chuck after the most ridiculous request I’d ever heard. It was so ridiculous that I couldn’t tell if he was joking or not. But the dead serious look on his face probably told me he wasn’t. I just smiled and nodded. “Be careful, guy.”

Chuck nodded, turned and splashed down the tunnel. I turned around and headed the other way.

I was alone. If I needed to fart, now was the time to do it. But there were bigger things on my mind. Bigger, blobbery things. I wanted to be the one to find it and take it down. Between battling the Frooginites my freshman year, the Slimeborgs my sophomore year, and now the Blobberous – my junior year mission had proven to be my most difficult. We actually needed to formulate a plan.

And to top it all off, Nog was abducted by who knows what. I was hoping, as I’m sure we all were, that Farrow would be able to shed some light on the abductors.

II.

I crept down the disgusting sewer tunnel slowly, aiming my gun and light forward and constantly looking over my shoulder. The Blobberous could have been anywhere.

Up ahead, I saw a ripple in the water. I came to a stop and kept my eye on the disturbed water. I made sure my gun was set on 'laser', just in case it was one of the squirms.

The eerie sound of dripping water made for a nerve-wracking atmosphere. On this mission, it felt like danger was around every corner.

The ripple in the water then proceeded to make its way towards me. I backed up a couple steps and had my phaser ready. Then, suddenly, something broke the surface of the water and lunged towards my face. It latched on and knocked me down on my back. I thrashed around in the water, screaming my lungs out, as the hairy, soggy creature gripped my face and slashed its claws against my cheeks.

“Get off me you son of a -” I shouted as I set my phaser down and grabbed the animal with both of my hands, tore it off my face and threw it to the side. I stumbled to my feet and gripped my gun. I aimed the light down into the water and saw the creature racing back towards me – it was a muskrat!

The beaver/gopher/demon hybrid launched itself into the air again, getting ready to dock with my face once more. This thing seemed to be the size of a Labradoodle!

I lifted my gun as the muskrat spread out all of its limbs, preparing to latch onto my face again. Suddenly, one of the purple, gooey, slimy tentacles that I'd become far too familiar with, reached in and grabbed the muskrat in mid-flight. It was yanked back and the Blobberous devoured it.

"My God!" I lifted my phaser and fired off rounds of lasers at it, knowing very well they wouldn't do anything. I was just trying to distract it while I thought of an escape plan.

The Blobberous roared and I looked to my right. There was a ladder – I darted over to it and climbed it fast. I lifted the latch above my head and crawled out of the sewer and into...the boys locker room?

I was back in the school. I crawled out of the drain, which was located near the back of the boys' showers. I ran for the door and pushed it open, and ran into the empty gymnasium. I ran to the other side of the gym and knelt down. I pulled out my cell phone and opened the Frog Nog app.

I typed furiously and sent a message to the rest of the Fellas:
Blobberous at the school – gym – hurry!

I felt the floor shake and looked up at the basketball net back near the locker rooms. The glass backboard shook and then

became unhinged and crashed to the floor. I got my gun ready and kept my eyes on the locker room door.

The whole gym shook again and then there was a pounding thud against the far wall. The walls began to shake and Mr. Ripped's plaques on the wall that certified him an actual gym teacher, fell to the ground and shattered.

"Oh God..." I quietly said to myself. I looked around, trying to get ideas to brace myself from the impending attack. There was nothing. I was alone, and if I didn't make it to the gym exit back near the locker rooms, I was going to be trapped in here with the Blobberous.

I sprinted for the exit just as the wall next to the locker room door crashed open. Bricks and dust fell to the gym floor. I slid to a stop and watched as the dust settled.

The Blobberous oozed its way out of the locker room where it had broken through the floor. Several squirms detached themselves from the massive blob beast and slithered towards me. I backed up as I sprayed on some hardcore laser fire at them. They all blew up on impact, splashing a purple-ly colored blood on the floor.

The Blobberous roared again and started making its way in my direction.

Right then, the gym door flew open and the dark silhouette of Chuck stood in the doorway in heroic fashion. A smoke billowed

from behind him as he entered the gym. It was like a rock star entrance.

“Hey! Hix!” Chuck called out. The Blobberous turned its head and looked at Chuck. “Lookin’ for me?”

I don’t know why the Blob would have been looking for Chuck specifically, but it sure made for an awesome line!

Out of nowhere, the giant skylight above the gym shattered. Chuck and I looked up, as did the Blobberous, and we saw Philclops repelling down with his grapple hand, with Adia holding on tight to him. He made a swift landing and he and Adia immediately raised their guns.

“How ‘bout *that* entrance, Scout-ness?” Phil said with a giant gummy smile.

“That was fast!” I said.

“Yeah, but how about *that* entrance?” Phil repeated.

“Genuinely classical!” I said, so happy that we were all back together. Our plan could finally be executed.

As the Blobberous started squirming towards the three of us, Chuck ran along the padded gym wall and joined our side.

The four of us aimed our guns at the giant alien blob. I could see all of the bones and skeletons from all the people it had devoured, floating around inside its purple gelatinous body. Dr. Hix Blossom, Mr. Ripped, Blorf, Marco, Detective Rickert

Raggs...all of their deaths would not go unpunished. Our laser phasers were salted up and ready for seasoning.

“Wait for it to get closer Fellas!” I shouted over the gutty growls and ghastly roars of the Blobberous. The brute slithered towards us. “Salt up your weapons!”

On my command, everyone turned the knobs on their phasers to projectile launcher.

“Wait for it!” I screamed. The Blobberous got closer; its tentacles flailing every which way. “Wait for it!” I repeated.

Suddenly, the Blobberous stopped and started to shrink down, eventually flattening itself against the floor. It then split into two blobs again, and both separate Blobberous’ rose up – each with their own mouths, eyes and collection of bones and skulls.

“Uh...” I stuttered.

One of them flung a tentacle towards us and Adia and I were the first to duck. The tentacle slammed Chuck and Phil and launched them across the gym, tearing Phil’s grappling cord from the arm mechanism. They hit the wall and collapsed to the ground.

“Guys!” I shouted, standing up fast.

“Scout, duck!” Adia screamed from the floor. As I turned back around and faced the two alien creatures, the tentacle swung back and wrapped itself around me and lifted me into the air.

“Scout!” Adia, Chuck and Phil all shouted in unison. As I struggled in the tight, suction-cuppy grip of the tentacle, I saw my team rushing up with their guns drawn.

Phil aimed his gun at the Blobberous that held me. I saw him aim carefully through his sight-scope and pull the trigger. Salt sprayed out of the barrel of the phaser like water from a showerhead.

The Blobberous squirmed to the right and out of the way of the oncoming seasoning. The salt hit the ground in between the aliens. Phil let off the trigger for a moment and aimed at the creature again. He held the trigger down and the salt sprayed again. The Blobberous, who gripped me, slithered backwards quickly, avoiding the salt spray again.

“Dang!” Phil yelled as the salt spray dwindled to a lazy pour out of the barrel. “I’m out of salt!”

“Those things are too quick! We need to get closer!” Adia shouted as she ran towards the creatures. I could feel the grip on me getting tighter. My body felt warm and it was throbbing something fierce – I couldn’t breathe.

“Adia, no!” Phil screamed, reaching out and trying to grab her as she dashed for the creatures.

I struggled to keep my eyes open from losing consciousness and saw Adia run right up to the blob that had me. She lifted and aimed her gun, only to be swept off of her feet by a tentacle from

the other Blobberous. She hit the ground hard and her phaser broke open, spilling the salt all over the gym floor. The tentacle wrapped itself around Adia's legs and lifted her up into the air, hanging her upside down.

I knew Chuck wasn't going to be able to handle this by himself. One gun of salt wouldn't be enough to do the trick. My body had given up. I let my eyes close and my breathing became slow. My heart was slowing down – this was the end.

Without warning, the Blobberous' joined bodies again and formed a giant alien creature that towered over Phil and Chuck. I heard Chuck scream like a girl and I struggled to open my eyes, knowing my last sight would be that of the four of us dying.

Chuck and Phil were backing up slowly. I then saw Phil's robot eye start glowing red. Instantly, a red beam shot out of his eye and burned a small hole in the tentacle that held me. The Blobberous' grip loosened quickly as it shrieked in pain. I dropped to the ground and hit it so hard that one the lenses on my glasses shattered. Between the muskrat scratches on my face, my broken glasses, my sewer water soaked clothing – I certainly appeared to have been in one hell of a mission.

My weapon was still hanging over my shoulder by the strap, so I lifted it, turned the knob to 'laser' and held down the trigger as I aimed for the tentacle that was holding Adia upside down.

"Phil! Grab Adia!" I shouted.

Phil ran over underneath Adia just as the lasers penetrated the tentacle and released her from its' grip. Adia fell twelve feet straight down and landed on top of Phil.

“Chuck! By my side, now!” I ordered. Chuck’s heroicness kicked in again and he stood by my side. As Phil dragged Adia out of the way, I turned my knob back to ‘projectile launcher’.

“Ready!” I yelled. “Aim!” Chuck and I lifted our weapons and aimed at the massive Blobberous.

“Hopefully it doesn’t move out of the way again...” I heard Chuck nervously say.

As the feeling was coming back to my face, eyes and rest of my body – I thought about Detective Rickert Raggs and how I ParaZapped him up real good. He couldn’t move a single muscle after that.

“Hold it!” I yelled. Chuck lowered his weapon and I turned the knob on my gun to ParaZap. I pulled the trigger and watched a squiggly purple laser beam shoot out and engulf the Blobberous. It froze, unable to move, and starting glowing a bright purple color. I switched my knob back to the salt launch and yelled, “ParaZap, fool!”

Chuck lifted his gun and we both pulled our triggers at the same time. Salt from both of our guns sprayed out wide and hit the idle Blobberous. We drenched that S.O.B. from head to toe with the weaponized sodium.

The Blobberous screamed, roared, howled, shrieked – you name it, he made a deafening noise of it. The glutinous pile began to sizzle and emit a horrendous stench – worse than anything Lamar had ever laid his pooper-scooper on. The blob thrashed back and forth, sending splatters of glowing purple goo splashing against the walls, ceiling and floor. A sort of steam started to billow from it as the Blobberous’ black eyes went white. It’s mouth stayed wide-open and its teeth fell out one by one.

The purple coloring of its body started to turn a grayish color as the creature boiled to the ground. Pockets of bubbles burst on the floor – the sight reminded me of scrambled eggs boiling in a frying pan. The screaming came to an end and all that was left of the Blobberous was a pile of purple, corroded salt.

Finally, we were all able to catch our breath. The nightmare was over.

III.

We were in my Premise and driving back to Nog’s farm. Chuck sat in the passenger seat with his head back and his eyes closed. Adia and Phil sat in the back seat. Adia rested her head on Phil’s shoulder, and Phil stared out the window. Everyone was quiet.

To break the silence a little bit, I flipped on the radio. A news reporter was reporting:

“An unconfirmed earthquake hit King’s Town this evening. The ground split in multiple areas and there was an explosion near Bud’s Hardware - police say from a possible gas leak. Residents near King’s Town High School have reported feeling tremors resonating from below the area.

“And earlier reports of a strange creature have gone unconfirmed. Police say there is just no evidence of such creature and that a late-night jogger named Palm Leafon is just a nut-job.”

I had heard enough. As long as they didn’t investigate the Blobberous too much, everything else could be passed off as earthquake stuff. I turned the radio station and Mark’s ‘I Need Ya (To Live)’ was playing. I wasn’t in the mood for that either, although I was proud he was getting so much airplay. I turned the radio off all together and focused on getting back to Fort Nog’s.

When we got there, there was an operation set up, called Operation Set-Up. A sign that read just that was hammered to the barn doors and there were two heavily armed guards standing outside in the Professor’s floodlights. There were engineers working on setting up a satellite in the front yard, and running the cables into the barn.

There was another heavily armed guard standing at Nog's back door.

"We need to get in there," I said, expecting a hefty questioning and more secure scenario.

"No probs," the guard said, sliding out of the way and letting the four of us inside.

Adia and Phil sat down at the kitchen table. They looked completely worn out. Chuck went straight for the fridge. I however, walked into the living room to check up on Farrow.

There were two beautiful nurses tending to Farrow. He was awake and alert, and seemed to be enjoying every single moment of the wet washcloth forehead patting and medically induced foot rubs. Hastings stood in the corner and perked up when he saw me enter the room.

"Did you kill it?" They were the first words out of Hastings mouth.

"We did. The Blobberous is no more."

"Good. Now we just have to worry about Nog."

Farrow heard my voice and looked over at me. He shoed the nurse's away and sat up on the couch.

"Scout, are you okay?" he asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Farrow, what happened to Nog?"

Farrow took a deep breath and sat back in the couch. “It all happened so fast, Scout. They tried to get into the barn – they were looking for you.”

“Me?” I asked, surprised to hear that.

“Yeah. When our people wouldn’t let them into the barn, they smashed into the house and demanded to talk to whoever was in charge. I was quick to sell Nog out – something I now regret – and they swarmed him. One of them knocked me out and then Nog was gone.”

“Did they say anything? Like who they were?”

“No.”

“What did they look like?”

“Um, they were about five feet tall or so; they wore black armored space suits with yellow helmets and clear visors. Through the visors, it looked like they had large black eyes, gray skin, small, thin noses -”

“Let me guess,” I interrupted as the description sounded quite familiar, “they had whisker-like antennas over their mouths which looked like some sort of organic mustache?”

“Yeah – how’d you know?”

“Scout, do you know these space creeps?” Hastings asked.

“Sounds like the Grims.”

“Grims?” Hastings and Farrow said at the same time.

“The alien species that we killed on the moon. Remember, they had captured that dude, Flak, from Septune Five?”

Farrow rested his forehead in his palm and shook his head. It had become clear what was going on. The Grims learned about the two that we killed to save Flak, and then came looking for us. And when they couldn't find the Fellas and I, they scooped up Nog.

“We need to get him back,” I said.

“How?”

“We go find them. They are somewhere in the Andromeda galaxy.”

“We'll need to start an investigation and research this situation before we just go cruising through space again. We don't know anything about this species, or what they're capable of,” Farrow said. “It could take some time.”

I agreed with him, however, we didn't know how much time we actually had to save Nog. We didn't even know where the Grims took him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HyperNog Finder XX-1

I.

I woke up early the next morning and took a much-needed shower. I tended to the muskrat wounds on my face and tried to relax my body in the warm water. This job took a lot out of me, physically and mentally.

I walked back into my room and dried off with my towel. I got dressed and looked at my phone. It was a little after 8am. I had just enough time to grab some breakfast at Father Peanuts and get to work by 9.

The weather was cool, so I dressed comfortably in jeans and a hooded sweatshirt that Chuck had designed for me. It was gray with one of his classic designs on it – the mustache turtle. Chuck hadn't made many shirts lately, but his stock of them were still selling on a regular basis at Palmer's Calmics.

I hopped in my Premise and drove to Father Peanuts. Once there, I grabbed a booth near the back in Mandy's section, and she came to get my order.

“Good morning, ‘cakes,” I said with a smile. She smiled back as she flipped open her note pad.

“Good morning, Scout.”

“Can we talk?” I asked.

Mandy sat down across from me at the booth. “Just for a minute,” she said, “I don’t want to get in trouble.”

“I’ve acted a fool here lately. I admit, I was attracted to Adia, but there’s nothing there. I keep realizing how much you mean to me and it’s you that I want to be with. I’m sorry, Mandy.”

Mandy smiled. “Thank you for apologizing, Scout. I’m sorry too. I guess I was a little jealous that you were working so close to Adia. She’s pretty – much prettier than me – and I -”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa – she’s *not* prettier than you. No one is,” I said. I saw Mandy blush at my comment. That might have been the first time I saw her blush – I usually just made her mad.

She leaned across the table and kissed me on the cheek. “Maybe we can have a date night tomorrow. You want to come over around 7? We can order some pizza and watch a movie.”

“Action movie?”

“Chick flick.”

“Sounds perfect,” I said. Any kind of movie with Mandy would hit the spot at this point.

“How’re The Fellas? Everything resolved?” Mandy asked.

“Um, not really. We killed this giant alien called the Blobberous, but Nog was abducted, and we’re not really sure where he is.”

Mandy gasped. “My God...”

“We’re working on it though.”

“I’m so sorry, Scout.”

“It’s ok. We’ll figure it out and hopefully get him back soon.”

“Mandy! Order up!” the cook shouted from the kitchen area.

“I have to go,” Mandy said, standing up. “You want eggs and toast?”

“With some bacon, maybe?” I said. “Oh, and extra salt for the bacon.”

“Salt on your bacon?” Mandy questioned with a grossed-out look on her face.

“Please.”

“It’s *your* arteries!” Mandy sarcastically said, jotting down my tribute order before fleeing for the kitchen.

II.

After my unnecessarily salty breakfast, I arrived to work a few minutes before nine. I walked up to the door just as Palm was unlocking it.

“Good morning, Palmic!” I said.

“Scoutish! ‘Morn!” he said. He seemed pretty awake and perky for it being only nine in the morning.

“Good mood?” I asked.

“You know it! The news called me a nut-job last night, so I’m suing the crap out of their butts. I’m gonna be a millionaire, Scout!”

“Good for you, Palm.”

I followed Palm into the store where he flipped the lights on. Sometimes it was really refreshing to work there. It was such a laid back job, the store was always cool, and the customers that came in were always so personable and kind. It was a rare breed – a inspirational breed.

“I’m gonna brew a pot of Joe. You in?” Palm asked.

“I could definitely go for a pot. Thanks, man.”

Palm walked into the back room to get the coffee going. The front door chimed and I saw Chuck walking in with a box in his hands.

“Morning, Chuckalous,” I said.

Chuck set the box down on the counter and opened the lid. I looked in and saw it was a shipment of *Dragon Wind 2: Fire and Smoke*, by Phillip Easton.

“Oh, they’re done?” I asked, taking out one of the books and leafing through its pages.

“Yup,” Chuck said. “Phil asked for them to be on the shelf this morning.”

“I didn’t know it was going to be done this fast.”

“You know Phil, man... very secretive.”

“Yeah I know. Um,” I looked at an empty spot on the wall, “just put them on the shelf where the first one sold out.”

Chuck picked up the box and carried it to the empty shelf.

Palm walked out of the back room with two cups of coffee. He handed me one.

“That was fast!” I said, gripping the Joe.

“Well, it better be! I just purchased the MegaBrew 3000; brews the Joe in just seconds,” Palm said adjusting his hipster glasses. He looked over and saw Chuck unloading Phil’s highly anticipated sequel. “Oh, Chuck-man! I didn’t know you were here. You want some brew?”

“I could go for a brew!” Chuck said and stopped what he was doing. He followed Palm into the backroom to pour a cup.

I walked around the counter and sat down in one of the two seats. I looked down into my cup of coffee and watched the freshly stirred beverage. The milk that Palm had injected and stirred into it was spinning still. It reminded me of a spinning galaxy.

Nog was out there – somewhere possibly in the Andromeda Galaxy. He’d been taken by the Grims: a seemingly merciless

alien species out to settle the score. I didn't know at this point what would become of the situation, but I knew it probably didn't have a happy ending attached to it.

III.

I pulled a double shift at the Calmic book store and got out around 5pm. I texted my mom and told her I'd be late coming home because I was going to meet Mandy for dinner. That was a lie. I know it's not a good thing to be lying to your parents, or anyone for that matter, but I was an elite space agent, and that was on a need-to-know basis.

I was really heading back to Fort Nog's to check in on the research Farrow was conducting. I asked Chuck to go with me, but he was understandably worn out from our Earth mission, so I went alone.

I got out of my car and walked up the gravel driveway and towards the now heavily guarded barn.

"Name?" one of the guards sternly asked.

"Scout Brooks."

The guard pulled out a small iPad-like device and searched my name. "You're cleared. Please sign in at the front desk."

The guards moved out of my way and pulled the barn doors open for me. A desk sat off to the right as soon as I walked in. Adia sat behind it.

“Adia? What are you doing here?”

“I’m working here at the fort,” she said. “I don’t think the missions are exactly for me.”

“I see,” I said.

“My dad will be a little bummed out, but oh well. I’m sure he’d rather me not risk my life. I’ll leave that to you guys.”

“That’s okay. We’ll take care of everything,” I said as I leaned over the desk and signed my name on the check-in sheet. “Hey, Adia, I’m sorry for acting like a fool. The truth is, you’re gorgeous, and I was a little distracted. But I have a girl who makes me happy. I really care about Mandy.”

“Good for you, Scout,” Adia smiled. “It all works out in the end. I’ve found something in Phil that I can’t get enough of. He’s mysterious, mechanical and he’s a writer – I like that.”

“Phil’s a good guy; a bigger guy, but a good guy. A guy with a ponytail, but a good guy. A guy with some Blobberous-sized gums, but a good guy. A guy with -”

“You can say all you want about Phil, Scout,” Adia said, interrupting me, “but those are all reasons why I really like him.”

“I’m glad you both found each other,” I said. “Where’s Farrow?”

“Out back.”

“Thanks.”

I walked through the barn, passed up the good old Frog Hopper, which I was sure I’d be using again really soon, and out the back door.

Farrow stood there in his white lab coat, and over-saw a select few workers – including Hastings – building some sort of satellite with a giant computer base.

“Fellas,” I said, greeting them. Hastings waved and then immediately went back to stuffing blue and red wires into the base. Farrow turned and faced me.

“Scout, what are you doing here? If you’re here to see Philclops, he’s on level three getting soldered and welded back to perfection,” Farrow said.

“I was actually coming to see how everything was going with the research. What do we know?”

Farrow took a deep breath. “This secret satellite project, which I call HyperNog Finder XX-1, should give us some extreme details on where to locate Nog. We’ll have it focused on the Andromeda Galaxy for the next few days once it’s up and running, and we’ll see what kind of feedback we get from it.”

“Do we know much yet?”

“Not a ton. Andromeda is about 2.5 million light years away and is jammed-packed with more than a trillion stars. It’s too

soon to tell how many planets reside there, but it's a *massive* galaxy. Even though it's the closest galaxy to us, it will still be the most in-depth mission yet if we're able to locate Ed. It could take a lot of planning and manpower to even get there. We're talking multiple ships, not just you and the Frog Hopper. It'd be a whole squad we'd have to send."

"Wow. Sounds epic."

"It will be epic," Farrow said. "I hate to be a rude-nilly, but I really need to get back to over-seeing this operation. I'll let you know when we know more."

"Okay, just let me know."

"I will, I just said that."

IV.

It was after midnight and I was lying wide-awake in bed, scrolling through the Frog Nog app for information on the Andromeda Galaxy. The light on my nightstand was on, and I was drinking some instant coffee to stay awake and do my own research. The instant coffee sucked compared to a pot of fresh-brewed, dark goodness. But it worked for now.

I read that *if* we traveled at the speed of light, it would take us 2.5 million years to travel to the Andromeda Galaxy. That means, the EIA, and Farrow in particular, we're going to have to

find a way to travel *faster* than the speed of light – like, really faster. I was sure they would come up with something, but it would take some time. The technology needed for this trip only currently existed in science fiction movies.

But Farrow was bent on getting Nog back, so I knew he'd work tirelessly to achieve the goal.

The light on my nightstand flickered for a moment and then shut off, leaving me in a pitch-black room. I set my phone down and turned the screen off. The house began to shake and suddenly, a bright white light shone in through my bedroom window.

I quickly sat up in my bed and put my back against the wall and braced myself for whatever was coming my way. The window shattered and a shadowy figure climbed in and stood at the foot of my bed. I was shaking – was I being abducted next?

The light outside dimmed just enough where I could make out details on the invader: five feet tall, black armored suit, yellow helmet with a clear visor... it was a Grim.

The invader took its helmet off and stared at me with its giant black, soulless eyes. This Grim specifically had a particular characteristic that made it stand out: there was a giant slash – a battle scar – that stretched from the top of his forehead, straight down his face to his chin. He seemed to be a Grim of some importance.

The whiskery antennas above its narrow mouth wiggled, and the creature spoke. “Scout Brooks... we are aware of the EIA’s current agenda to retrieve the captured, one Professor Edward Nog. I came here to strongly advise you that such a mission would not bode well for you, or for anyone. If you attempt this mission at any point, we’ll kill Professor Edward Nog first, and then exterminate the entire EIA without hesitation. Do you understand, Earthling Scout Brooks?”

I nodded.

“Don’t make me come back here,” the Grim said. He turned back around, put his helmet back on and slipped back out the shattered window.

I heard a loud engine outside, similar to a 747, followed by a bright white flash. Within a matter of seconds, the ship that the Grim came in had blasted back into space.

I sat in bed, scared stiff, and was breathing heavily. I could feel a nervous fart coming on...

