

The Amazing Galaxy-Man
by Brent Bunn

Preface

In a galaxy not so far away, so close in fact, that you are currently in it, there lived a peculiar man in shades that no one ever had much faith in. In his old, rundown spaceship he traveled the stars with his cat Stevie by his side seeking adventure and fame as a self-proclaimed "space man," and in his travels he had seen things both amazing and terrifying. He had done great things to be sure, but people saw him only as a bad egg and a delinquent because of his reckless lifestyle and never-take-anything-seriously personality. He was truly an enigma, a man of mystery. No one knew his real name, his exact age or even the color of his eyes, as he never took off his legendary black shades. This is a story of discovery, adventure, rebellion, defying the odds, companionship, the importance of self-expression, and above all, having fun. This is his story. He is The Amazing Galaxy-Man!

Chapter 1

Though no one knew for sure where Galaxy-Man came from, he now resided on a planet of wheat called The Breadbasket. It orbited

a red hypergiant called The Colossus, named for its incredible size. What'd ya think it was named for? For comparison, it was about 9 billion times the size of Earth's sun. You'd think the solar system would be truly enormous, but no. A grand total of three planets orbited The Colossus: Charbraxis, the coldest, most distant planet, Beaverball, the solar capital and awkward middle planet, and lastly, The Breadbasket, the innermost planet, though it still orbited at an incredible distance from The Colossus. Because the planet orbited so far away from its star, seasons lasted roughly 1,500 years there, so its northern hemisphere was in a sort of perpetual state of summer. It was a perfect place to grow wheat, but beyond that it was a pretty uninteresting planet. Galaxy-Man lived amidst amber waves of boring unfortunately. It was like Kansas if it were a planet, but somehow even more monotonous and uneventful. Living there was about as exciting as playing a text-based waiting room simulator in slow motion.

The entire world was owned by only a handful of people. There were shareowners, and there laborers. The shareowners didn't actually have any involvement in the wheat itself, but collected big checks each month simply for owning the land. Most of the shareowners didn't actually live on the planet itself, but those that did lived in luxurious vast mansions. The laborers lived

nomadic lives endlessly circling the planet, harvesting and replanting crops.

Galaxy-Man's estranged father was a particularly wealthy shareowner who resided on the planet. He lived in a small town called Spunky Hollow. He had the nicest house in the whole world and he took care of it. He was also a collector of antiques and other finery. He owned vast collections of vintage items, books and anything else considered valuable. One day he had the bright idea to see just how the wheat was harvested, so he packed his bags and traveled with the laborers. After 6 days, 12 hours and 18 minutes, he died of boredom, and also he had a heart attack. Having never written a will, his next of kin inherited his vast fortune, his next of kin being his son, Galaxy-Man, otherwise he'd of never left him anything.

For the past few years Galaxy-Man had lived with his cat in Spunky Hollow with stuck-up neighbors who absolutely despised him. His neighbors were always comparing him to his father, whom they saw as a great man. Galaxy-Man was not his father's son, they were nothing alike, never were. He saw him as nothing more than a greedy business person with no style. Galaxy-Man found that having a lot of money made life boring as he never had to work for anything. He quickly gave his crop shares to his money-grubbing neighbors and gave most of his vast fortune away to his best friend, Hamilton, as he wanted nothing to do with it. He

was now a poor man who just happened to live in a house with 15 bathrooms.

Today was a very special day indeed for Galaxy-Man. The long-awaited StarFighter Episode VII had just hit theaters and it's a pretty big deal for Galaxy-Man. He was as happy as a dog with two tails. He had been ready for this movie for quite some time. He woke up with a big stupid grin on his face, took a quick shower, ate the world's fastest bowl of Cap'n Crunch, and exploded out of the mahogany double-doors of his abode. Galaxy-Man had always-messy, medium bushy black hair that had never once been brushed, and his skin was pasty pale and white as a toilet. He wore his usual, superhero-like getup that day: his trademarked red headband with circular yellow "G" emblem, a bright silver necklace, his padded red vest with black thermal long sleeve undershirt, a cape that was red on the inside and black on the outside, a thick brown belt with circular belt buckle with the Galaxy-Man logo which is a minimalist black and yellow image of a barred spiral galaxy, black bell-bottom pants and shiny black leather boots. His most prominent feature however were his legendary jet black sun shades which he has never once been seen without, not even one time.

He stood on his porch and smiled big as he thought about the wonderful day ahead of him. There was one problem though, he had no money to buy a ticket, but that's okay, he had a plan.

He started strolling across the street. Along the way he saw his neighbor, Dr. Etsuka Fukunaga, an historian and curator at the Spunky Hollow museum of history, checking her mail. "Good morning, Ms E.!" said Galaxy-Man with a cool grin. "You're lookin' lovely today. Makin' me feel basic."

Galaxy-Man always called her Ms. E. as a term of endearment, though she never really liked that name.

She gave him a sort of sneer. "Someone woke up on the right side of the bed," she said somewhat coldly. Whenever she spoke you could tell English wasn't her first language. No, she spoke much too clearly. Every letter was clearly enunciated, like an Asian automated phone line.

Etsuka was a very intelligent and knowledgeable woman, but also snobby and conceited. Still, Galaxy-Man usually treated her with respect and kindness. Having been close friends with Galaxy-Man's prestigious father, she despised Galaxy-Man with a passion and wanted nothing but to see him fail. She, along with most of the town, saw Galaxy-Man as nothing more than a delinquent who'd never amount to anything.

"I'd love to stay and gab with ya," said Galaxy-Man, "but I've got a movie to catch."

"Have fun," said Etsuka very insincerely.

Galaxy-Man had no time to dawdle. He was on his way over to his best friend's house across the street. His friend's name was

Hamilton Beach of all names, no relation to any kitchen appliance moguls. He was the nicest, sweetest person in the world and never did anything wrong. Never once did Galaxy-Man ever see him angry or raise his voice. His parents were both deaf and could only communicate with sign language, so as a kid they used to let him spend time with Galaxy-Man, who is about 10 years older than him, to be around spoken language more, and the two quickly became inseparable, though, Hamilton doesn't like leaving the planet with Galaxy-Man when he goes adventuring. Not being able to speak with Galaxy-Man directly, Hamilton's parents didn't see him like everyone else did. They thought he was weird, but ultimately a nice guy, if a little on the silly side. In hindsight, Galaxy-Man wasn't the best person to leave your kids with. From a young age he smoked pot, took pills, he drank heavily, he was lazy and unreliable, he frequently stole things he didn't need like sticker machines and item divider bars. He and Hamilton were two completely different people, and yet they were the best of friends. Hamilton was a very devout Christian and strongly believed in God, which is interesting because Galaxy-Man was an unwavering atheist. Hamilton went to church every single day as if he were Ned Flanders or something, and though he was Christian, he kept it to himself and had never once asked Galaxy-Man to come to church. He had different beliefs than Galaxy-Man, but was also very understanding and

respectful to others who didn't think the same way as him.

Galaxy-Man was lucky to have such a good person like Hamilton as a friend. Even so, Galaxy-Man constantly teased and pranked him. He once broke into his house and stole all the marshmallows from his Lucky Charms, he once replaced the wicks of his dinner candles with firecrackers, he frequently stole his mailbox, and on one occasion he even put cat poop on the blades of all his ceiling fans. It was amazing that they were friends at all with all the things Galaxy-Man did to him. Galaxy-Man always made up for it though. He knew Hamilton better than anyone and always knew just how to make him smile.

Galaxy-Man walked up to Hamilton's porch and knocked on the door, but no one was home sadly. Galaxy-Man beat on the door like it owed him money.

"Yo, Hamilton! I need money for the 'Sode VII! Where you at, man? This is important stuff!" There was no answer. "Guess Godboy went to church early today," he said to no one in particular. He stepped off the porch, grabbing Hamilton's hummingbird feeder on his way down. He started chugging it down like someone dared him to as he strolled around to the side of the house. "Mmm, sweet like Paula Deen's blood," he said in a laid-back voice. He came to some garbage cans and threw Hamilton's homemade bird feeder in the trash after he drank the last bit of his sugar water like the wild savage he was. He climbed onto the can and

pulled himself up to the roof. From the roof he hobbled his way over to Hamilton's bedroom window. He gently opened it and crawled inside.

Upon entering he stumbled slightly and fell over, putting his foot through Hamilton's pricey Ikea nightstand and breaking it along with a lamp and little totem pole that sat on top of it. He freed the table from his boot and made his way to Hamilton's chest of drawers. He opened the top drawer. Inside were fresh socks, loose change, store brand antacid tablets, peppermints, keys, gloves, a Swiss army knife, SPF 60, an empty prescription allergy medication bottle, a photo of Galaxy-Man and Hamilton together at a Christmas party, and also a "The Best of Bread" CD case that Hamilton kept his money in. The universal currency of this time being 2x4 Lego bricks called "profit." There's quite a story behind that actually, but I won't be going too deep into that I'm afraid. One profit, depending on where you go, has about as much buying power of a Euro.

Galaxy-Man helped himself to 300 profit, which was way more than he actually needed. He left a note simply reading "New StarFighter. That is all. I'll pay you back when I can... unless I forget. Er, what were we talking about again?"

Galaxy-Man then walked down stairs and out of the house, leaving Hamilton's front door wide open. He headed back across the street and into his backyard, which was a complete disaster

compared to everyone else's. Galaxy-Man's two biggest fears were centaurs and lawnmowers. The latter of which made him very anti-cutting-the-grass and thus his yard was as wild and overgrown as the jungles of Madagascar used to be. Stevie, his cat, was sleeping in the sun inside an old plastic shopping basket. She didn't have a care in the world. She was lazy even by cat standards, but accompanied Galaxy-Man on all his wacky misadventures throughout the galaxy.

"Wake up, Stevie," said Galaxy-Man, "Episode VII!"

She crawled out of her cozy basket and let out a very big yawn. The two trudged through the tall grass over to Galaxy-Man's most prized possession (after his beloved sunshades of course,) his legendary spaceship, the Star Whomper. It was roughly as big as a double-wide trailer and about as luxurious. It resembled an old timey wooden pirate ship, though, the masts and sails didn't serve much of a purpose out in the vacuum of space. It had certainly seen its fair share of action. It was covered in dents and scratches; it was a miracle it worked at all. Though the inside and outside were made of some sort of dense wood, it was also layered with another material to withstand the harshness of space. The two walked up a wooden gangplank up to a old screen door and sort of a metal sliding door behind it.

He walked inside and sat in a red and gold throne at the captain's helm, which was in a small wooden room piled with odd

treasures and trinkets. All the dials, buttons and computers looked rather intimidating, but he seemed to know what he was doing... somewhat. He hooked up his Walkman into the ship's stereo system and played the original Star Trek opening theme song on his mixtape. Stevie quickly walked over to the nearest cardboard box for a nap. Galaxy-Man let out a loud excited yelp as he set sail for the wild black yonder.

Chapter 2

According to Galaxy-Man, the Star Whomper was the fastest ship in the galaxy. The ship's engines worked by warping the empty space around it, sort of like an air bubble rising up through a pond. The engines received their incredible power by tapping into what's called the "field dimension." It's a dimension of space that's chock full of exotic energy just waiting to be harnessed. Since it constantly pulled in energy from a practically infinite source, the Star Whomper could theoretically run forever assuming nothing broke. The weird thing about field energy is that the only known way to capture it is by the power of a very particular brainwave pattern that some animals could possess given the proper drugs, though few actually did. In fact, the most important part of the Star Whomper was a large brain kept in an aquarium wired to the engines, an elephant's brain to be exact, living in a simulated reality. Galaxy-Man's tech-savvy friend back home, JupiterRay, designed the virtual world in which the brain lived. It was actually an online video game that anyone could log on to. The elephant's name was Eli and he wondered the world helping or hindering players. So, in short, intergalactic space travel is possible by warping space-time using the brainwaves of a drugged elephant who lives in a video game to pull energy from another dimension; it's pretty simple stuff really.

Along the way, Galaxy-Man stopped at a way station for salt and vinegar chips and a slushie. He was very partial to Sunkist slushies actually. With his overly salty chips and his frozen soda treat, he was on his way to Cinetron 16, the moviegoers planet. He could've easily gone to his local theater, but the seats were better at Cinetron theaters, and Galaxy-Man was picky about where he sat. Most importantly, each of the seats there had two armrests, none of that shared armrest, no-where-to-put-your-drink hooley.

Galaxy-Man was becoming more and more excited by the second. He could barely contain himself. He was as happy as a tornado in a trailer park. He was so worked up in fact, that he had to put on some smooth jazz to calm his nerves.

"Hello ladies and gentlemen," said Galaxy-Man in his sexiest weatherman's voice, "this is your local on the 8s. Looks like we got a 95% chance of smooth grooves, baby."

Stevie opened her eyes slightly and let out a tiny meow.

Galaxy-Man got up from his throne and started softly dancing as he slowly boogied his shirt off. He whirled and swayed across the ship over to a pile of miscellaneous junk and started digging around. "You seen my back scratcher, the one that looks like a little rake?" he asked Stevie.

Stevie just yawned and rolled over, not a care to give.

The Star Whomper was positively filthy. It looked like a thrift store run by raccoons, and smelled about as nice.

"Here it is! It was underneath the Uncle Sam hat I jacked from that fat kid. That was the best Christmas ever."

He scratched to his heart's content. Too long had his back gone unscratched. "Oh, that's so much better!" he moaned loudly.

Just as he was happily itching away at his back, the Whomper was hit hard and he was knocked to his knees. Stevie quickly hightailed into the kitchen area of the ship and crawled into a cabinet. That was where she always ran to when things got hairy. Stevie was something of a fraidy cat.

"Oh my science, what the Mama Jama was that?" He got up and walked over to the window. Outside was an alien spacecraft mounted with laser cannons. They were space piratas, Mexican space bandits. They were mean, they were nasty and they liked their sauce hot. They pillaged and plundered any spacecraft they could pick up on their space-radar. A space-radar was sort of like a regular radar, but used waves that traveled faster than light. Their spacecraft resembled a work van complete with orange stepladder and air hoses on top and an igloo cooler mounted on the back. "Dang it, I don't have time for this horse malarkey!" yelled Galaxy-Man.

They fired another laser of the ship and Galaxy-Man fell all the way to his back. "Grrr, looks like we got a 100% chance of I'M

PISSED OFF!!" He rushed over to the controls and maneuvered the ship into firing position. On the front of his ship were two powerful laser cannons that Galaxy-Man had painted to look like a goat's eyes. There was apparently a joke behind that, but Galaxy-Man was too drunk when he did it to remember what it was. With a crooked grin and sweat beading in his brow, he grabbed a joystick with both hands and not-so-carefully aimed the cannons at the piratas. "How bout a little laser eye surgery!?" he yelled.

Still very shirtless, Galaxy-Man opened fire and an epic battle ensued, all to the tune of sweet, smooth jazz. Hundreds of deadly laserbolts danced across space like Gradius on hard mode, and Galaxy-Man was sweating like a horse trying to read. He fired like there was no tomorrow, stopping only to take the occasional swig of his orange slushie. "How many Mexicans does it take to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop? Juan!!" He landed a crippling blow to the enemy ship and the piratas fled, shouting horrible obscenities in Spanish, though, in space no one can hear you swear so it was pretty pointless.

"Yeah! You mess with the goat and you get the horn! Unless they're born genetically hornless... which they sometimes are." The battle was over and the day was won. To celebrate, Galaxy-Man cracked open an ice-cold IBC root beer from his secret stash. Normally Galaxy-Man would get completely sauced before

seeing a movie, but he wanted to be good and sober this time around so he could remember it, plus he didn't want to get kicked out of the theater yet again. He hadn't drank or done any hard drugs in several weeks actually.

Stevie crawled out from her cozy cabinet and stretched.

"Thanks for all your help, Stevie," said Galaxy-Man sarcastically. He smiled and laughed as Stevie brushed up against his leg. "Want some IBC? Here you go, man." He poured some root beer into Stevie's bowl and she lapped it up like fresh cream. "Don't ever change, Stevie."

A short while later, Cinetron 16 was in sight. It was a planet of extremes: harsh deserts, biting tundras, dense jungles, molten lakes of fire and brimstone, boggy swamps, rugged mountain ranges, deep canyons and windswept plains, all within miles of the visitor center. This made Cinetron 16 the perfect place for making blockbuster movies. The planet's entire economy was based solely on movies and movie paraphernalia.

With Kenny G. blaring at an unreasonably high volume, he entered the planet's atmosphere at an incredible speed. He was going much too fast. What in the world was he thinking? "Hang on to your butt, Stevie. We're going down!" Bathed in flashing red light and sweating profusely, Galaxy-Man pushed buttons, pulled levers and did anything he could to bring the vessel to a safe landing, stopping only to stuff his maw with tater chips. "I

could sure use a good one liner about now!!" he yelled as he neared the surface, crumbs spewing from his mouth when he spoke. The Star Whomper came careening toward the ground and hit hard, like an iron train hitting the side of a mountain. It slid a good 100 meters through a gritty desert. It was a miracle it stayed in one piece. Once the ship had come to a complete crash, a tiny parachute deployed from the ship's rear, too little too late.

Galaxy-Man's throne had fallen backwards into the floor along with the man himself, though, his slushie remained unspilled despite all the jostling. He and Stevie were a little shaken up, but ultimately okay. Galaxy-Man stylishly rolled backwards onto his feet, not spilling a drop of his beverage. He walked over to the exit and pushed a button to open the metal door.

He undid the latch to the screen door, opened up and poked his head outside to see where he was. He was in a desert a short ways from the theater. "Looks like we're a little late, Stevie. Wanna just walk from here? Beats paying two profit for parking. No thanks, man."

And so Galaxy-Man and Stevie began their mile or so trek through the blistering desert.

"Jeez, it's not that hot" said, Galaxy-Man, though he was sorely mistaken.

"No really, it's kinda balmy. It's actually pretty pleasant."

The brutal heat was clearly getting to his head. He was delusional and out of sorts.

"Dude, it's like 79°F out here. Get your facts straight, narrator guy."

Uh, I'm exaggerating the truth a bit. It's called good storytelling. Look it up some time.

"Whatever, dude."

Fine, Galaxy-Man and Stevie trudged across the *tepid* desert. It was so warmish that Galaxy-Man almost broke a sweat, but didn't. About halfway to the theater, Galaxy-Man was then ambushed by a pack of killer wolves that walked on two legs and fought with dual flaming scimitars.

"What!? Ain't nobody got time for that!"

Stevie puffed up her tail and arched her back. She started cautiously boppin' 'em on the shins, definitely afraid.

Galaxy-Man had his eyes set on the brilliant neon of the imminent theater. "Come on, Stevie, we're gonna miss First Look! And I wanna make it in time for really long Coke commercial!"

"Help!! Help!!" said a breathy voice in the distance. Galaxy-Man looked over and saw a gentry-looking woman in a frilly pleated dress and she was tied to a cactus. Ouch. Galaxy-Man sighed and reluctantly put up his dukes. "Have at ye," he said unenthusiastically, not even looking up at his opponents. Galaxy-Man and Stevie did battle with seven or so wolves.

Galaxy-Man got banged up pretty good, but Stevie scratch 'em up so much that they took off running. They really weren't so tough after all. Their bark was certainly worse than their bite!

Galaxy-Man ran over to the woman and hastily untied her.

"Thank you, brave warrior," said the woman, "I am Princess Acelia of--"

"Yeah, yeah," interrupted Galaxy-Man, "I really don't care, dude. Look, I got a movie to catch." He reached into his pocket and pulled out some money. He dropped it at her feet. "Here, buy a gun in case they come back. That way you can kill yourself before they get a chance to torture you." Galaxy-Man and Stevie took off towards the theater. The woman was left in confusion and disbelief.

The two finally made it to the theater. Galaxy-Man bought two tickets, one for him and one for best gal Stevie, though, the people at the box office didn't even notice her. With tickets in hand, he headed over to the concession stand. With the money he blatantly stole from Hamilton's drawer, he bought a stupidly large bucket of popcorn with way too much salt, butter and cheese. It was much more than he could possibly finish on his own. He believed that too much of anything was just enough. For candy, he bought Duds, Dots and Whoppers, and to drink, his all time favorite beverage, a crisp clean cherry limeade with crushed ice.

"Your total comes to 46 profit and 21 cents," said the lady behind the counter.

"Er, here's a hundred," said Galaxy-Man. "Keep the change," he smiled and winked.

"Oh my," said the woman "that's so generous of you."

"Just trying to do the right thing, ma'am," he said as he tipped his imaginary hat.

With the snacks bought, it was off to go find a good seat.

Again, no one happened to notice Stevie. You'd be surprised at all the things that go unnoticed. The two sat in the middle of

the 8th row, in the exact center of the room. It was the

absolute perfect seat. Next to him sat Stevie who was already

going to town on the popcorn. It was perfect; everyone who was

there wanted to be there. There were no reluctant spouses, no

annoying babies and no pesky terrorists to speak of. The room

was full of nerds and sci-fi junkies just like Galaxy-Man. After

all the previews, all the commercials, all the messages about

turning off cellphones, it was finally happening; the movie was

starting!

"Oh my God, oh my God!! It's starting!!" yelled Galaxy-Man. He

grabbed a fistful of popcorn and popped some Duds like they were

ecstasy. The movie opened with a grand battle in deep space.

"Wow, look at that CGI! That space battle looks so real!!"

Galaxy-Man thoroughly enjoyed the show. He was in heaven from

beginning to end. "Whoa, look at him save that princess! He's so awesome!!"

By the time the movie was over, Stevie was fast asleep. She was awoken by Galaxy-Man's standing ovation. "Woo-hoo! Yeah!!" he shouted as everyone stared. He was so impressed with the film that he must've shed a tear, maybe two.

He left the theater with an even stupider-looking grin on his face. He popped over to the concession stand before leaving the building.

He rested his elbow on the counter and leaned in close. "Yo," he said to the woman. "I saw a couple punks sneaking into an R-rated movie just now."

"What!?" she asked in disbelief. "Well, we'll just see about that." She took off her belt and cracked it like a whip as she walked off.

While there were indeed kids sneaking into an R-rated movie, Galaxy-Man had an ulterior motive. With the stand now unattended, he hopped behind the counter for a free refill on his cherry limeade. The man really loved his limeades. A burly guy and his wife and daughter walked up to the stand.

"Can we get some cheese and nachos?" asked the man.

Galaxy-Man paused and then smiled. "I don't see why not," he said. He made the family some nachos with extra goodness.

"Mmm mmm, that smells good" said the man as he reached for his wallet. "What's the damage?"

"Nah, this one's on me, sir," said Galaxy-Man very kindly.

"What a nice man," said the wife. "Say thank you, Suzie."

"Thank you, sir," said the bashful little girl.

"Oh, I'm just doing my part," kindly chuckled Galaxy-Man. "You folks enjoy the show."

Whether that was actually a good deed or not is debatable, but regardless, it was time to amscray.

Galaxy-Man climbed back over the counter and looked for Stevie.

"Stevie, where'd you run off to now?" He walked over to a sort of mini arcade where kids were playing. She was sitting at the center of an air hockey table all up in the way of two boys trying to play. "Whaddaya doin', sillyhead?" he picked her up off the table and put her in the floor. "Come on, stoop. We gotta get scarce before they find out that I left the cheese machine runnin'. It's a mess over there."

The two sauntered on out of the building and Galaxy-Man whistled a nonchalant tune as they strolled as not to be noticed. It was now night and the sky was a brilliant deep blue. It was breezy and the air was cool and dry.

They walked back into the desert and started back towards the Whomper. "Hey Stevie, you know why African cats don't play

cards? Too many cheetahs!!” He laughed boisterously at his own joke until he was in tears.

As he walked nearer and nearer to the ship he could see a strange dark shape behind the ship, but couldn't tell what it was. Closer and closer, he could start to make it out. Have you ever seen something far out in the distance while driving or out on a walk, and you can't quite tell what it is, so you try to puzzle out what it could be and come up with theories and guesses until you're close enough to make it out? Galaxy-Man wondered what the thing was. He figured it was either a terrible monster or a windmill. He hoped it was the latter as windmills are much easier to fight. He noticed that the closer he got to the object, the flatter it got, like it was shrinking. After a few minutes, he had finally reached it. It was much further behind the ship than he originally thought, as it was a truly gigantic object. It was a hot air balloon that had touched down and had been slowly deflating as he approached it.

“A... balloon?” he asked no one in particular. To find a hot air balloon out in the middle of nowhere is a pretty weird thing on its own, but it's what was inside the basket that was truly astonishing. Galaxy-Man looked in utter disgust at the unsightly horror before him. It was small, it was dirty; it was a baby!

Chapter 3

Galaxy-Man did not like children, even though he was basically a child himself. He loved cartoons, wore TMNT pajamas, and every year on his birthday he would rent a bounce castle for himself with a little construction paper sign that read "no girls allowed." Still, he despised children. The only things he hated more than kids were centaurs, hammocks, people who used

hammocks, and most importantly, babies. Who can blame him? Babies are weird, annoying tiny people who scream and cry and poop their pants on an hourly basis. No one wants to be around someone like that. What if Josh from accounting up and soiled his britches and started crying and screaming about it until someone changed his pants for him? That would be unacceptable! All babies are terrible people, every one. Not one good egg in the bunch.

Galaxy-Man was shocked to find a baby of all things in the basket. He would've rather it have been a centaur. On a side note, according to Galaxy-Man at least, he had long ago lost his right index finger fighting a centaur. Regardless of the particulars, all that remained of his nose-picking finger was a stubby nub.

There was no one else around, just Galaxy-Man, Stevie and the baby. He jumped sharply aback, tightly clutching his now fast beating heart like Fred Sanford having the "big one."

"Get it away from me!!" he shouted. He looked around but there was no one in sight. No mother, no father, no babysitting grandmother hoping and praying it didn't poop itself until after the parents came back from the Halloween party; there was no one. "Gosh, you're really putting me in a tough spot here, man. What do you think we ought to do, Stevie?"

Stevie mewed softly.

"You're right!" he yelled way too loudly. He tented his fingers and smiled fiendishly. "I should smother the baby with my cape, cut its body up into little fun-sized pieces, and flush them down the toilet. It's perfect!"

He walked up to the basket again and looked at the baby. It was a girl. She was wearing little pink overalls and had a ribbon in her hair. She started giggling and smiling at Galaxy-Man's funny face.

"D'aww!" Galaxy-Man gushed. "I can't flush you down the toilet." He clumsily crawled into the basket and sat next to her, yet, amazingly, he still didn't spill his beverage, his still cold cherry limeade. "Listen, bro, I don't like you, and you prolly don't like me, but it looks like our paths have intertwined, man. I just wanna say that--"

The baby reached for Galaxy-Man's cherry limeade.

"Hey, I'm talkin' here!" he said in his best New Yorker voice.

The baby must have been awful thirsty. Who knows how long she'd been floating around in the balloon. One sip couldn't hurt.

"Here," said Galaxy-Man as he handed the baby the drink, "you can have a little."

She grabbed the cup from him and went to town. She almost drank it all. Surprising given how small she was.

"Good lord, you like limeades even more than me. Okay, that's quite enough. You're gonna end up like the blueberry girl from that Willy Wonka movie I saw with my pervy uncle."

Stevie then hopped into the basket.

"Welcome to the party, Steve. I'd offer you something to drink but Little Miss Limeade here just quaffed the whole punch bowl."

Galaxy-Man looked deeply into her eyes and pointed at her. "I'm gonna do everything in my power to get you back home, toots."

Galaxy-Man promptly returned to the theater and went to the lost and found bin. "Whaddaya mean I can't leave this here!?" shouted Galaxy-Man to the janitor. "Someone lost it!"

"You can't just leave a human being in a plastic bin," said the janitor.

"What? It's not a human, it's a baby, dude."

"Look, have you ever heard of Choupassé?"

"No, what's that?"

"During the 1960s they were an intelligence agency on Earth. They conducted all sorts of high level stuff like espionage and whatnot. Yeah, well they went defunct as an espionage agency in 1991, but for the last 20 years or so they've been using their resources to find missing children and stuff like that. I'm sure they'd be glad to help you find the girl's parents."

"Well the sooner the better," said an impatient Galaxy-Man. "How the heck do you know all this stuff anyway?"

"What, you think that just because I'm a janitor that I don't know things about child services and espionage agencies? Is that it? Huh!?"

"Yeah, sorta."

There were no police on Cinetron so there weren't too many people to call for help. A citywide search for the girl's parents was carried out briefly, but it was no use, and absolutely nobody volunteered to look after her.

Galaxy-Man called up this Choupassé organization on the nearest space phone and a hectic and confusing few days followed. They came to Cinetron in a gigantic spacecraft that looked sorta like a tall office building, in fact, that's exactly what it looked like.

Inside, tests were conducted, blood was taken, forms were filled out and nails were bitten. It was all very stressful. Everyone acted like chickens running around with their heads cut off and nothing made much sense. Over the next few days, Galaxy-Man wasn't allowed to leave the spacecraft and slept in a boring beige room and the baby was kept in a constantly monitored bedroom. Stevie was kept in another room altogether for whatever reason. Every five minutes a new agent or government official would show up and Galaxy-Man had to fill out the same dumb form every single time. Galaxy-Man wasn't even allowed to leave his

room most of the time. He was allowed to leave his room only during interviews and for his two daily meals.

On the third day, an important-looking man in a suit from the "Space John Child Services Division" or "SJCS D" showed up to speak with Galaxy-Man. He was actually taken out of the ship this time and into another ship that looked exactly the same as the last ship. Inside there were kids running around everywhere. Galaxy-Man was thoroughly disgruntled now. He was taken into a drab office.

"Have a seat," said the man as he sat down behind his nice wooden desk.

"Ugh, this... is... so... BORING!!" Galaxy-Man groaned way too loudly.

"Why don't you have a seat right over there," the man motioned.

"Sure thing, Mr. Hanson."

The man raised his brow. "I'm sorry?"

"I'm saying you people make me wanna shoot myself."

"I just wanna talk."

Galaxy-Man was starting to lose it. "Look, I've filled out the same dang form 500 times now. You've taken my blood, my pee, I've practically written a freaking autobiography!" Galaxy-Man leaned to the side and looked over at a door behind the man's desk suspiciously. "If I didn't know any better I'd think you people were making a clone of me back there or somethin'."

"I'm not affiliated with Choupassé. I just wanna talk."

Galaxy-Man sighed. "What is this?" he asked with a wary inflection.

"Well, I won't beat around the bush. We've given you temporary custody of Jane until we can find her parents."

"Jane?" asked a confused Galaxy-Man. "And also, WHAT!?" He started breathing heavily and sweating profusely. His chest already moist with sweat, and his salty perspiration dripping from his nose, he adjusted his collar as he panted. "Is it hot in here? Can somebody open a goddamn window!?"

The temperature inside was around 58°F and there of course were no windows in the room.

"We couldn't find any record of her in our system," said the man, "so we've been calling her Jane Doe. Look, you've known her longer than any of us have, so we feel it is in her best interest that she stay with you. She likes you an awful lot, you know? She cries whenever you're away. We've looked at satellite images of your neighborhood and your town and we feel it would be a great environment for her for the time being."

Galaxy-Man was freaking out. He slammed his fist on the desk hard. "Yeah, but I'm totally reckless and stupid. I got a negative IQ score 'cause I didn't put down any answers AND I got caught trying to cheat. I have bad habits, too! I smoke weed all

the time, I take pills I don't need, I drank a whole barrel of whiskey by myself. A whole barrel!!”

“According to your report, they found no such drugs in your system. You're clean as a whistle.”

“Well check again dammit!!” said Galaxy-Man way too loudly. He was indeed drug free at the time because he wanted to be sober for the movie of course. Talk about irony - the moment when *not* doing drugs lands someone in trouble.

“Look,” said the man, “It's only temporary.”

A long moment of silence followed.

The Milky Way was partially ruled by a powerful and tyrannical dictator named Space John, who was the self-appointed “King of the Galaxy.” He actually had little jurisdiction over anything, the galaxy being as big as it was. He did, however, write a book called the “Space John Book of Law” that virtually every developed world followed. Space John would literally destroy any civilization found not following his rules. His book was complicated and often made no sense. It was convoluted and full of contradictions and loopholes, but everyone obeyed it. None of this baby business made any sense. Who in the world decided that Galaxy-Man of all people was a good father? This whole ordeal was complete and utter madness. You can thank the Book of Law for that.

"For how long?" asked Galaxy-Man who was now twitchy and drenched in salty sweat.

"Either until we find Jane's parents, which isn't very likely at this point," said the man, "or until a vacancy opens up here for her in a week or so. Little Johnny just found his forever home. Isn't that great?"

"Yeah, I really don't care," said Galaxy-Man indifferently. "So in a week Jamie'll be dead or whatever and the baby can stay here, right?"

"Well, yes, but--"

"Great," said Galaxy-Man as he got up from his chair. "See you in a week," he smiled. He tipped his imaginary hat and exited the room. He left the ship but was then escorted back into Choupassé's ship.

"Mr. Galaxy-Man, we just need you to sign a couple more things and you'll be good to go." said a woman very kindly.

"Good," said Galaxy-Man. "I'm glad I can finally go. Another five minutes here would've made me lose the rest of my mind."

After a grueling six more hours of paperwork, Galaxy-Man was taken to see the baby. He was brought into a room with colorful cartoon wallpaper and a woman was standing over a crib holding a piece of paper.

"Okay, sir," said the woman. "We just need you to sign her name on this certificate here and you guys'll be set to go."

"What? I don't know her name, dude," said Galaxy-Man.

"Well of course not. You have to give her a name, silly."

Galaxy-Man just wanted to leave. He was sick and tired of being in there. He gave the first name that came to his mind.

"I don't know," said Galaxy-Man who hadn't the slightest care in the world. "Call her Cherry Limeade. She likes those."

"Cherry Limeade?" she asked. She was clearly not amused.

"Yup."

"That's what you're gonna name her?"

"Yep, Cherry Limeade."

The woman squinted her eyes. "Are you being serious right now?"

"Dude, I really don't care. I just wanna get the heck outta here.

Cherry Jane Limeade, final answer, Regis."

And so the girl's legal name became Cherry Limeade. The only reason he was given custody of her was because of people blindly following orders for fear of being fired all because of the broken system of laws.

Galaxy-Man was reunited with Stevie and the gang finally left the planet. He finally got to go home. The trip home was filled with crying and screaming, and the baby cried some, too.

Galaxy-Man brought the Star Whomper to a safe landing in his backyard. Stevie quickly went back to her grocery basket for a sunny nap. The first thing Galaxy-Man did was go hit up

Hamilton's house. He walked inside without knocking of course. Hamilton was sitting on his couch reading a christian novel.

"Dude, Hamilton," said Galaxy-Man.

"Long time no see, old friend," said Hamilton kindly. "What's with the kid? You didn't steal it, did you?"

"No, dude, I found it in a balloon and now I'm like, legally her father or whatever. The system ain't right, man."

"Wow, sounds like you've had quite a week."

"Dude, tell me about it, man. I've never felt so drained in my life, and now I've got this little snot to look after."

Cherry started smiling and making adorable baby noises.

"Aww, she's a cutie," said Hamilton as he got up from the couch.

"What's her name?"

"Cherry."

"Hmm," pondered Hamilton as he made his way to the kitchen, "that's an interesting name. I like that. Hey, you want some pizza bites. They should be cooled off by now."

Galaxy-Man stepped into the kitchen with Cherry in his arms.

"Yeah, man, I'm starving. I tell ya, all this parenting stuff's putting me in a bad way, man. You ever changed a diaper? It ain't pretty."

"You know, I think this is really good for you. I think you're gonna be a great dad."

"Thanks, bud, but I actually came by to see if you could babysit."

Hamilton popped a pizza bite in his mouth as he brought the plate over to the kitchen table. "Oh, for how long?" he asked.

"Yeah, gonna be away on a long business trip for exactly one week," said Galaxy-Man as he stuffed his maw with pizza goodness and sat down at the table.

"What business?" asked Hamilton. "You don't have a job."

"Look, man, my hands are tied here," Galaxy-Man insisted.

Hamilton started sniffing, as there was now a foul odor in the air. "Ugh, that's raunchy," he said with his hand over his nose. "I think your little one just had a code brown."

Galaxy-Man checked his imaginary watch. "Would you look at the time," he said. "I gotta get going. Don't wanna be late." He handed Cherry over to Hamilton and made his way for the door. "I really appreciate you doing this for me, Hamilton."

"But, but-" stuttered Hamilton.

"Thank you so much," interrupted Galaxy-Man as he walked out the door. "Catch you on the flip-flop, laaaater!"

On his way to go hide out in his basement for the next seven days, Galaxy-Man was stopped by Etsuka and her husband Barnard. Barnard was a pasty overweight pianist with short, balding white hair.

"We saw you carrying a baby," said Etsuka. "What the hell have you done now?"

Galaxy-Man crossed his arms and squinted. "What's that s'posed to mean?"

"We're tired of your reckless behavior, young man," said Barnard. He spoke like a lawyer from south Alabama and dressed like one, too.

"We've dealt with a lot of crap from you," said Etsuka, "I thought the sick elephant you brought home was pretty bad, but this takes the cake. You've gone too far this time. Bringing home a baby? What the hell is the matter with you?"

"When are you going to turn your life around, child?" said Barnard.

"You're a disgrace, you know that?" said Etsuka.

Galaxy-Man hung his head in anguish. "Ouch, words hurt, you know? And the elephant's name is Eli, and he lives in a video game now." Galaxy-Man was a little annoyed, but kept his cool. He was used to talks like these.

"Your father would be ashamed of you." said Etsuka. "You're nothing like him."

Galaxy-Man just couldn't hold his tongue anymore.

Uncharacteristically, he became enraged. He hated his father with a passion and wanted to be nothing like him. "Good!!" he exploded. "'Cause I want nothing to do with that greedy fat

cat." Galaxy-Man put his finger right in Etsuka's face, stared her right in the eye and gave her an intimidating look. "Don't you ever compare me to him," he said with heavy emphasis on the ever.

"Hey," said Barnard, "don't talk to my wife like that, son." Etsuka was enraged. "You're pathetic," she said cruelly. Her words carried so much weight that Galaxy-Man started tearing up a little, though, when you wear shades, no one can see you cry. "You know what?" asked Galaxy-Man. "That baby you saw... that's my daughter."

"What!?" asked Etsuka in utter disbelief.

"Yep," said Galaxy-Man as he backed away, a crooked grin on his face. "I'm gonna raise her myself and she's gonna grow up to do great things. You'll see! You'll all see!!"

Chapter 4

This wasn't like Galaxy-Man to get so worked up like this. It wasn't unusual for him to get overly emotional over small things like stubbing his toe on the door frame, or intensely sobbing over spilling milk on the floor, but he rarely let big things get to him. He usually just brushed off all the insults and ridicule from his neighbors, but he'd finally had it. He was sick and tired of people comparing him to his father. He was

tired of people seeing him as some punk kid who'd never amount to anything. He felt that he had to prove something to everyone, that he wasn't a screw-up. Raising a child though, that's a big decision to up and make out of the blue.

Galaxy-Man ran back over to Hamilton's house and busted open the door. Hamilton was in the exact same place, still holding Cherry in disbelief.

"I want my baby back!" yelled Galaxy-Man. He marched over and grabbed her.

"Oh, you're gonna take her with you on your business trip?" asked Hamilton.

Galaxy-Man was making his way to the door. He stopped and gave a look of confusion. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

"Y-you told me you had an important business trip to make."

"What? No I didn't."

"But-but-" stammered Hamilton.

"You must be hearing things, Hamilton. I'm disappointed in you," he said as he walked out. "See y'round, Hammy."

Hamilton just stood in confusion.

I think this goes without saying, but no one should ever raise a kid out of spite to his or her neighbors. This was an extreme prospect even by Galaxy-Man's crazy standards. Something big like this was long coming, though. Galaxy-Man had been dealing with this kinda stuff for years, but he always kept his cool. He

just bottled up his feelings and shrugged it off. It wasn't healthy, because what happens when you keep putting more and more things into a bottle? It breaks, and everything inside pours out at once.

If Galaxy-Man is anything it's spiteful. He'll go to incredible lengths just to prove a point, and this time was no different. The first few weeks were the hardest. In the back of Galaxy-Man's mind he hoped Choupassé would actually find Cherry's mother so he'd be forced out of the bold bet he made on himself. There were lots of times when he wanted to give up, but he kept going. He was much too prideful to admit defeat. He knew nothing about parenting, but despite what everyone expected of him, he proved to be a great father. Galaxy-Man was good with her, and he kept to his word. He brought her up, in his own special way. He became the father that he wished he had when he was growing up.

Weeks past, weeks turned into months, and before he knew it, eight years had past by, and Cherry's bio-parents were yet to be found. Not much changed in Spunky Hollow. The neighborhood got curbs, Etsuka and Barnard adopted a kid of their own, a new family moved in, Hamilton started a spice garden, Galaxy-Man entered a few very brief relationships, Stevie got a little fatter and a little lazier, the town church burned down and was rebuilt, and believe it or not, Galaxy-Man was still his same

ol' goofy self. He did everything he would normally do, only this time Cherry would be right at his side. If Galaxy-Man wanted to prove everyone wrong, he certainly did. He proved himself to be a wonderful and loving dad. He truly came to love his little Cherry Limeade and the two of them became inseparable. Who'd have thought he would come to be such good friends with a child of all people. Must be a glitch in the Matrix, huh?

You'd think that the story ends here. Galaxy-Man did what he set out to do. He proved himself worthy in the eyes of his neighbors... or did he? Nope, they still saw him as a menace to society, only this time there were two of him! There's just no pleasing some people. Galaxy-Man didn't care about some stupid bet he made way back when, though. He'd found new happiness and meaning in life with his daughter. They were just alike. They did everything together; they liked the same things, they were both terrified of Al Roker; Cherry was definitely her father's daughter.

Galaxy-Man was a very lenient dad. He believed the key to being a good father was respect. He didn't see Cherry as a daughter, but as a friend, just one of the guys. He trusted her to make her own decisions. He let her get piercings, dye her hair, wear whatever she wanted. He let her swear, watch whatever she wanted on TV, and listen to whatever music she wanted to listen to.

Their neighbors hated the way she was being brought up and I mean they absolutely HATED it, but Cherry was a good person. She was smart, funny, respectful of others, loyal, proud, and had great style and originality. Despite what others thought, Galaxy-Man had raised a fine young lady.

Since no one knew Cherry's real birthday, every October was celebrated as her "birthmonth," as that was the month she was mostly likely born. On one such October, they were on a very important trip to Earth. They were going to their favorite new band, Maudeville. They were a band of four young sisters who played a sort of experimental, modern-classical genre of music that Galaxy-Man just loved. He was their biggest fan, which was a little creepy given how much older Galaxy-Man was than all of them.

Cherry had pale skin like her dad, and purple eyes. No kidding, they were purple! She had short hair, which she dyed blue, (no one except Galaxy-Man knew her true hair color,) piercings, cherry earrings, braces, a rasta-colored T-shirt with a lion on it, black pants with holes in the knees, a Triforce necklace, wristbands and pink Converse shoes.

Galaxy-Man and Cherry were just goofing around until they arrived at Earth. Galaxy-Man sat in his throne at the ship's helm pretending to fly, the Star Trek theme song playing over

Hamilton's brand new iPod that Galaxy-Man has stolen the day before.

"More steam, Scotty!!" he yelled. "The killer space bananas are getting away with the orphans!!"

Cherry was shoveling clothes into a basket with a toy shovel.

"I'm givin' 'er all she's got, Cap'n!" said Cherry in her best Scottish accent.

"That's not enough, dammit!!" yelled Galaxy-Man. "Divert all energy to the main engine!"

"Have ye lost yer marbles, Cap'n? We'd be disengagin' the ship's debris shields! We'll be Swiss cheese!"

"It's the only way, Scotty! Do it!!"

Cherry ran into the kitchen and turned on the coffee maker. "It is done, sir. May God be with us."

"Hold on to your booty," said Galaxy-Man, "'cause things are about to get fruity!!"

At that moment, Stevie walked over to Galaxy-Man and jumped onto his back. "Ow," he said calmly as Stevie's claws dug into his neck.

Cherry laughed. "Dang it, Stevie," she said in her normal voice.

"Do you want the banana men to beat us?"

"Ah, it's okay," said Galaxy-Man. "It's her birthday."

"How old is she, like 112 or somethin'?"

"No, man. She's 10, dawg."

"Whatevs. Wish I knew my birthday."

Galaxy-Man got up and walked into the kitchen. "Aw, but what's wrong with having a birthmonth?" he said as he looked into the fridge, scratching his belly. "You get the whole month of October, man. That's probably definitively when you were born after all."

Cherry sighed. "Everyone I know has a birthday but me though."

Galaxy-Man grabbed two slices of stiff, old pizza. "Yeah, but a birthmonth is like 30 times better, man." He stuff his face with bad pizza.

Cherry looked a bit sad.

"Hey," said Galaxy-Man. "Happy birthmonth," he said with his mouth full as he handed her a slice of bad pizza.

Cherry smiled. "Thanks, Dad."

Before they knew it, Earth was in sight. There was one problem though - they were going much too fast.

"Hang on to something!" yelled Galaxy-Man as he ran to the helm.

"We're goin' down!!"

"Dang it, Dad!!" yelled Cherry as she ran over to the couch and buried herself in blankets, clutching Stevie in her arms.

Red lights flashed and computers beeped as they entered Earth's atmosphere at an incredible speed. They crashed hard into a golf course lake across from the community center where the concert was being held.

Galaxy-Man and Cherry poked their heads out the door.

"Eh, looks like you got a water hazard, Dad," said Cherry.

Galaxy-Man just shook his head. "Forget you, man."

The surrounding golfers were petrified with confusion at what just happened. Galaxy-Man, Cherry and Stevie walked out of the ship over to the community center while onlookers were too weirded out to speak.

There weren't many people there for the concert. Maudeville was a pretty obscure band after all. The band consisted of four sisters: Marleen, Henrietta, Esther and Evelyn Geirich. Always wearing some fancy getup or another, Marleen was born to perform and was always putting on a show. Henrietta was the shy and unsure one, so her sisters picked on her the most. Esther was the cynical and mean-spirited one, who was also the most talented member, and Evelyn was the ditsy, carefree one who never took anything seriously and was always flirting with anyone and everyone.

Galaxy-Man had found out about them a few months back while browsing random bands on the internet and he'd been hooked ever since. This was his first concert of theirs and he was beyond excited. He was as happy as a bodybuilder directing traffic.

"Alright, Cherry, get your camera ready and follow my lead," whispered Galaxy-Man. He walked up to the ticket booth.

"Hello sir and or madam," he said as politely as he could.

"Howdy," said the woman in the booth. "Alrighty, party of two?"

"Three," said Cherry as she picked up Stevie for the woman to see.

"Okie dokie, that'll be 60 profit and 21 cents."

Galaxy-Man showed the woman his camera. "Oh, we're from Rolling Stone Magazine, man," he said.

"Yeah," said Cherry, "we're photographers."

"Wow," said the woman, "rolling Stone in our small little town?"

"Yep yep," said Galaxy-Man with a big phony smile.

"You'll need these VIP bracelets then," said the woman, "I'll let the band know you're here."

Their plan had worked swimmingly. They had successfully fibbed their way in, free of charge. They of course had no affiliation with Rolling Stone Magazine. Inside, they followed the signs leading them into a large room. There were about 45 people inside sitting at tables enjoying free snacks and drinks.

"Yo," said Galaxy-Man, bumping Cherry with his elbow, "let's go hit up ye olde snack table."

"Righteous," said Cherry.

They moseyed on over. This was fantastic! There were pigs in blankets, cheese cubes, deviled eggs, Ritz crackers, strawberries, carrot sticks, cookies, apple slices, popcorn, and to drink: classic red Kool-Aid, 7-Up, sweet tea, Double Cola, Cherry Coke, regular and diet Dr. Pepper, and an assortment of

various juices. This was quite lovely indeed. Galaxy-Man and Cherry filled their plates with way more food than they needed and found a nice place to sit.

"Do you think we'll get to meet 'em when the show's over?" asked Cherry. "We are from Rolling Stone after all."

"Doubt it," said Galaxy-Man, his mouth stuffed with cheese cubes.

"They don't speak English like we do."

"They don't?"

"Nope. They speak Germish. It's like German, but completely different."

"Well okey dokey, smokey."

A woman wearing a ball cap with a ponytail out the back walked onto the obviously makeshift plywood stage. She spoke in a thick Wisconsin accent. "Okay, it's just gonna be a few more minutes, guys. They're backstage getting ready." Backstage of course meaning the rec room across the hall.

"Oh I'm so excited!" squealed Galaxy-Man. "I can't believe we're gonna see them in person."

Stevie hopped onto the table and started eating off Galaxy-Man's plate.

"Looks like Stevie's having a good time, too," giggled Cherry.

Stagehands started bringing out all the instruments.

"That's a really big violin," pointed out Cherry.

"That's not a violin, sillygoat," said Galaxy-Man. "It's a double bass."

The woman from before walked on stage again. "Okay, guys, they should be coming on in just a few seconds. Let's all give the girls a warm welcome when they get here, alright?"

Galaxy-Man was now playing on his phone. "Oh my God, is she still talking!?" he said snobbishly.

"I think the band's about to come out, dude," said Cherry as she munched away on some strawberries.

Galaxy-Man put away his phone when he saw the band walking in.

"Oh my God!! Oh my God!! Oh my God!!" screamed Galaxy-Man as he squeezed Cherry's shoulders.

"Dad!" Cherry groaned.

He caught the attention of Esther who always seemed to have a bored, annoyed expression on her face. At age 12 or so, she was the youngest member of the band. She had freckles, and like her sisters, she had curly blonde hair. She wore a green headband, purple ball earrings, a purple turtleneck sweater, black pants and red shoes.

She looked at Galaxy-Man. "Ervy evor vets, sonnenscheizen," she said, which meant something along the lines of, "Cool your jets, sunshine."

"Oh my God," said Galaxy-Man quietly, "Esther talked to me," he giggled.

"Cool your jets, Dad," said Cherry.

Galaxy-Man noticed a stagehand that he thought was very pretty.

She had dark skin, thick brown hair, blue eyes, was a little overweight and wore colorful clothes.

"Ooh, she's purty," said Galaxy-Man.

"Who, Esther?" asked Cherry. "That's a little creepy, Dad."

"No, not Esther, dummy. Eh, it's not important."

The girl with the hat and ponytail walked over to the door and turn down the dimmer switch so everyone knows that the show is about to begin.

"Wow," said Cherry, "things just got fancy up in here."

The sisters were finally ready to perform. They readied their instruments and their sheet music and the show began. Galaxy-Man was in absolute heaven. He couldn't stop smiling. Cherry really enjoyed the music, too. Stevie seemed happy as well, but who know if she actually liked the music. Regardless, the band played really pretty music. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the show.

After 40 minutes they had finished playing and everyone applauded, especially Galaxy-Man. "Wooo!! Yeah!!!" he screamed way too loudly, waking Stevie up from her unneeded nap.

The woman with the ponytail tapped Galaxy-Man on the shoulder.

"Uh-oh," said Cherry. "I think we're in trouble, Dad."

"Look," said Galaxy-Man "I don't know who smeared Nutella all over the bathroom toilet seat during intermission, but it definitely wasn't us, man. It was probably that fat ginger kid who ate all the GODDAMN OREOS!!" he said with a very loud and angry inflection so the pudgy kid across the room could clearly hear him.

Cherry started cracking up, but tried her best to keep her composure.

"What?" asked the woman. "I just wanted to tell you guys that Maudeville has requested to see you. You guys are here for an interview, right? From Rolling Stone magazine?"

Galaxy-Man and Cherry just looked at each other. Next thing they knew they were taken into the hall to go "backstage" to see the band. Galaxy-Man was nervously excited. He was sweating profusely and panting like a tiger in a net. "Is it hot in here to you?" he asked Cherry breathily as he kept adjusting his collar.

"Dude, how are you even sweating right now? asked Cherry who was practically shivering. "It's freezing in here. Even Stevie's cold."

The woman in the hat lead them inside a large room where the band was. Marleen, Henrietta, Esther and Evelyn were sitting in folding chairs. The room was full of instruments, amps, and lots

and lots of wires. It was a very easy place to trip if you weren't careful.

"Hello," said Evelyn with a smile. None of them could speak English, but they knew simple words like "hello." Evelyn was 15, highly social and extremely charismatic. She was the silly one, constantly joking around and never taking things seriously. She was highly affectionate, a hopeless romantic and very flirty with everyone, but mostly used her affection to tease others and make them feel super uncomfortable. Evelyn was a very brisk girl and a little intimidating. She always had a big smile and looked people right in the face with wide eyes.

"Hiya, Evelyn," waved Galaxy-Man awkwardly.

The stagehand from before was in the room as well, the one with the dark skin and colorful clothes. She walked over to Galaxy-Man and Cherry and put out her hand for a handshake. "I like your cape," she said to Galaxy-Man as they shook hands.

"I like your everything," gushed Galaxy-Man, though, he sounded like a total creep when he said it.

"Dad," groaned Cherry.

"Um, thanks," said the woman, who was a bit weirded out. "My name is Cutty, and I'm gonna be translating for you guys today."

"Right on," said Cherry.

There wasn't too much to say about Cutty. Cutty was a perfectly average woman: she liked tennis, and going to the movies and

bands like Radiohead. She was kind, courteous, considerate and fairly well-educated. She made a decent living as a translator for Maudeville, as they mainly toured in English-speaking countries. Other than that, Cutty was a fairly unremarkable woman, but for whatever reason Galaxy-Man was quite enamored with her.

They all sat down in a quarter-circle of folding chairs to converse. Stevie crawled inside an amp that had a hole in it and went to sleep. That's what she did best it would seem.

"Ys es hel bares e umnhang?" asked Esther.

"What did she say?" asked Galaxy-Man. "Was she complementin' my good looks?" Galaxy-Man looked at his nails and smiled bashfully.

"She asked 'who the hell wears a cape?'" replied Cutty.

"Ouch," said Cherry.

Galaxy-Man hung his head in sadness, but seconds later he exploded into a big ol' smile. "I have a question for you, Lady Marleen," he pointed.

At 16, Marleen was the second oldest. She's was a total ham and loved to entertain people. She was the self-proclaimed leader of the band and called herself "Lady Marleen." In addition to playing a multitude of wind instruments, she could dance and sing. She was always putting on a show. She had great fashion sense and she was always wearing some fancy getup or another. On

that day she wore a black suit with a top hat and cane; a class act. Her demeanor was usually pleasant and cheerful, but she had somewhat of a hard edge about her. She was friendly and kind, but also no goody two-shoes. She was like the glue that held the sisters together. They sorta looked to her as a mother.

"My question to you," continued Galaxy-Man, "is - as the founder of the band, what is the story behind the name 'Maudeville'?"

Cutty translated while Marleen nodded. Marleen loved interviews. She was really good at them. She always knew just how to respond to questions and carried herself with great poise and civility. She spoke and Cutty translated into English. She said:

"Well, we all grew up with an interest in music, and learned to play a wide variety of instruments. We were poor, but there was always music in the house. We grew up during the great war in our country, and we never had much money. Our father was killed in a riot, and our mother struggled to raise four daughters. We did everything we could to help out: we scraped pans at the local bakery, we shined shoes, we washed cars. Still, we struggled to survive. I always felt bad for the people in our neighborhood who sometimes couldn't even afford to eat. I wanted to cheer them up, so each Tuesday I would put on my tap shoes and danced for the town and my sisters would play music. It was from then on that I realized I wanted to entertain people for a living. We found that more and more people kept showing up on

Tuesdays to see us. That's why we only do concerts on Tuesdays. We started playing at a local theatre and people were actually paying to see us perform. Everything we did was for our mother. Her name is Maude, and because our shtick was similar to that of a Vaudeville act, we thought Maudeville was the perfect name. "

"Seit handelmalfe," said Evelyn, which meant something along the lines of "So professional." "Ooh, ooh," she continued, now very energetic, "pretzi tehm ish ictwez de oeit meest tardar!"

"What did she say?" asked Galaxy-Man.

Cutty let out a shy sort of chuckle. "She wants to know if you want to... get with her later."

"D'aww," gushed Cherry, "now I can finally have a mom."

"Malfe'z arunder desgibb avumz po, Evelyn," said Marleen, which meant something along the lines of "He's like 68 years old, Evelyn."

Galaxy-Man smiled awkwardly. "That's very nice of you," he said, "but it's not you I'm interested in."

"Teh'z e vierdo," said Esther, who sat with an increasingly bored look as she chewed gum that had lost its flavor an hour ago.

What she said roughly translates to "He's a creep."

"Esther esel krectzi," said Henrietta, breaking her long silence.

She was the oldest of the four sisters at age 19. She was incredibly very shy and easily spooked by stuff. She was very skittish, typically very wide-eyed and always seemed to be

worried about something. She was very wary of people and very slow to trust others. Unlike her sisters, she didn't joke around much, or tease others. She was somewhat gullible and easy to mess with. Her sisters teased her constantly. She was actually a very lovely person. She was kindhearted and innocent and never did anything to hurt anybody. That's probably why people picked on her so much. She was probably the most mature of the bunch. She enjoyed peace and quiet and was happiest when everyone simply got along. "Ine ven'ght viest sitsein ys bare sonnenschattenz enndorz," she continued. "Instz oxght natreall." This meant something along the lines of, "I don't trust people who wear shades indoors. It's not natural."

After a few more questions, the interview was said and done, and the band headed out of the room. Galaxy-Man, Cherry and Cutty got up from their chairs to hit the old dusty trail.

"I knew you guys aren't from Rolling Stone by the way," said Cutty.

"You did?" asked Galaxy-Man. "What gave it away?"

"Well, you didn't write anything down for starters," said Cutty.

"Aw, rats," said Galaxy-Man, snapping his fingers in bitter disappointment.

Cherry starting scratching her neck and looking at the floor.

"Yeah," she said, "that's kind of a dead giveaway, huh?"

"Yeah, but that's okay," said Cutty. "It's pretty cool they let you backstage. You guys are kinda silly, but I like you."

"I love you, too," said Galaxy-Man, but again he sounded like a total creep when he said it.

Cutty gave a sharp look of confusion. "What? I didn't say I was in love with you, dude."

Embarrassed, Galaxy-Man was now sweating like a pig in a parked car.

"Uh, I-I gotta go," he said. He started towards the door, his figurative tail between his legs.

"Hey," said Cutty. Galaxy-Man stopped and turned around to hear what she had to say. "You can call me sometime if you want if you wanna be my friend. Maybe we could hang out sometime."

"Marry me?" asked Galaxy-Man sharply.

"What?" asked Cutty.

Cherry face-palmed.

"I said 'sure that sounds great.'" Galaxy-Man wiped the sweat from his face with his cape,

"You musta said it really fast the first time," said Cherry.

Cutty started writing down her phone number. She seemed very interested in Galaxy-Man and Cherry. Cutty got no further than 555 before Galaxy-Man stopped her.

"That won't work," said Galaxy-Man.

"You don't have a phone?" asked Cutty.

"A call would take millions of years on that phone," added Cherry.

"Yeah," nodded Galaxy-Man. "We live around the Colossus, a quaint little red hypergiant 'round the Scutum-Centaurus Arm. Can't miss it."

Cutty was shocked, but knew he was telling the truth.

Interstellar travel, while uncommon on Earth, wasn't totally unheard of. "You guys are from another planet!?" she asked.

"Pretty much," replied Cherry. She started walking over to the amp Stevie was sleeping in. "Let's head back home, pops. I gotta use it and I sure as hell ain't about to use no strange toilet. Is Stevie still in the amp?"

Cutty found it unusual for a child to swear, but didn't say anything.

"Careful, Cher," said Galaxy-Man. "Those wires look kinda trippy."

"Shut up, loser," said Cherry. "I'm not gonna-" but she tripped and fell before she could finish her sentence.

"What did I tell ya?" asked Galaxy-Man. "Wires be trippin'." Cherry hit her head on the amp and Stevie ran out with her tail puffed up. Galaxy-Man couldn't tell right away, but Cherry actually banged her mouth pretty good. He even lost a tooth. Cutty let out a small gasp. "You're bleeding!"

Cherry wiped the blood from her forehead. "Oh God," she shuttered, "I done broke my head."

With Cherry's mouth bleeding, it was high-time to go. Galaxy-Man gave Cutty Cherry's spacephone that would allow Galaxy-Man and Cutty to communicate from the incredible distance they would be from each other.

Chapter 5

Galaxy-Man sorta made a fool of himself back there. He was as nervous around Cutty as a cat in a house of rocking chairs. He couldn't stop thinking about her. Galaxy-Man had been in and out

of relationships for as long as he could remember, but no good ever came of any of them. This time was different though because Galaxy-Man didn't want to enter a relationship with Cutty right away. He wanted to take things slow and get to know her. A relationship hadn't even crossed his mind. For the most part, he just wanted to be friends with her. Who knows why he was so interested in her. Maybe it was her style, her mannerisms; there's no way to know for sure, but for whatever reason, he adored Cutty.

For today, however, Galaxy-Man put aside his thoughts of Cutty and took Cherry to the doctors to make sure she was okay from what happened on Earth. She seemed fine, but she was overdue for a checkup anyway.

Galaxy-Man and Cherry sat in a dull dim waiting room full of people who clearly didn't want to be there. The room was cold and smelled of sickness and disease, but Galaxy-Man looked surprisingly well. He was even smiling a bit. It was weird because he despised waiting rooms. They were the bane of his existence. Galaxy-Man was looking very dad-ly that day. He wore his least holey khakis with a semi-nice pink Looney Tunes T-shirt. He sat with his legs neatly crossed, reading the newspaper, which must've been tough wearing shades. He had a very pleasant expression on his face, like he was listening to jazz, sitting warm by the fireplace on a chilly winter's night.

If he'd brought his corncob pipe he'd have looked like just walked out of a 1950s Sears catalog.

"I don't wanna be here, Dad," moaned Cherry. "I told you I'm totally fine. I just need a couple more shots of whiskey and I'll be straight."

"Come on, man," said Galaxy-Man comfortingly, "It's not that bad. Look, they got a bowl of candy, and last month's Golf Digest." Galaxy-Man loved golf, but he'd never ever read a golf magazine. Something was up with him today.

"I don't want candy," said Cherry, "it hurts the hole where my tooth used to be. And Golf Digest can kiss my black ass." Cherry looked up at the ceiling and sighed. It was dreadfully boring in there. There was a TV, but the only thing on was a court show about people getting divorced. "Ugh, this is so boring, Dad." Galaxy-Man just kept smiling. He looked as happy as a witch in a broom factory. However, just then, Cherry noticed a single tear rolling down Galaxy-Man's cheek from behind his shades. His smile began to quiver and he could no longer hide his true feelings. "I know!" he bawled, the weight of his predicament finally coming down on him full force. "I've never been so bored in all my life!! And I lived in Delaware for a year!" He started loudly sobbing and cupping his eyes as everyone in the room began to stare.

Cherry patted him on the back. "Aw, don't cry, Dad."

"I thought I was strong enough to make it through this, but I'm not. I'm not even reading this paper, man. I've been sitting here for the past 20 minutes just imagining what it'd be like to be a squirrel. I can't take it anymore! Sitting in this waiting room is about as fun as walking up an escalator that's been turned off. Now they're just stairs!" He started shaking Cherry vigorously. "They're just stairs, Cherry!!"

Everyone was now looking and whispering to each other.

"Dad, cool your grits. I don't even know what you're talking about anymore."

"I'm sorry. I'm not so good with waiting rooms. Let's just say I had a bad experience when I first found you. So much waiting, so much paperwork."

Cherry softly patted her father on the back. "Relax, Dad. Hey, maybe it doesn't have to be boring!"

"How do you figure?"

"Well, you said you wanted to know what it was like to be a squirrel, right?"

"Yeah."

"And what do squirrels do?"

They both paused and pondered. "Build nests," they both said in unison. They both stood up out of their chairs.

"Right," said Cherry, "so we just gotta build a nest out of all these empty rinky-dink chairs."

"Let's do it, man," said Galaxy-Man.

Before long, they had built quite the chair fortress. They had used almost all the chairs in the room, forcing new walk-ins to either stand or sit on the floor. No one said anything surprisingly. Most people won't take the time to associate with the weird. They sit back, hoping someone else does something. Everyone in the room just sorta shook their heads and made disapproved onomatopoeias.

They formed large arches by stacking the chairs. Their fort resembled an airplane hangar and was actually pretty roomy inside. The two sat inside giggling.

"This is one hell of a squirrel's nest," said Cherry with a big grin, her missing tooth clearly visible.

"Yep yep," said Galaxy-Man, "Squirrel Girl would be proud."

"Who?"

"Good question."

Cherry stood up and stretched. "I'm a freakin' hungry little squirrel."

"I just had an idea, man!"

"Well spit it out, Squirrely Dan."

"What do squirrels do after building their nests?"

Cherry thought and pondered. "Hmm," she muttered.

"Forage for apricots!!" they both yelled in unison.

"But Dad," said Cherry, "There are no apricots."

"Sure there are," replied Galaxy-Man. "I'm sure I saw some in the candy bowl," he winked.

"Oh," smiled Cherry. She started crawling out of the nest.

"And bring me back a Hustler from the magazine rack," said Galaxy-Man as she was on her way out.

"I'm pretty sure they don't have nudie mags, Dad. You know you can just look up porn on the internet, right?"

"What!? You mean I can just bring up naked people on my phone anytime I want!?"

"Yeah, dude, I do it all the time. I've been really into redheads lately."

"Cool."

Cherry crawled out from the nest. Being in the dark nest for so long, the florescent light made her wince. Her foot was also asleep so she hobbled over to the candy bowl like some kind of crazed zombie. Everyone stared, but no one said anything to her. She reached the candy bowl but there was a little Chinese boy reaching in. Cherry popped his hand hard and hissed at him ferociously, making sure to show all her teeth. The boy began to cry and he ran away. Cherry nabbed the entire candy bowl and staggered back to her squirrely lair.

Inside, Galaxy-Man was hunched over swiping through his phone looking at who knows what. He looked back sharply at Cherry.

"Nothing!" he said loudly.

"I brought the apricots," said Cherry in an eerily low voice.

"Well let's have a look-see then, shall we?"

It was a fairly good hall: Hershey's Kisses, little Nerds boxes, Jolly Ranchers, Sour Patch Kids, Sweet Tarts; a fine selection indeed.

"Gimme somethin' smooth, Mac," said Cherry. "I wanna go easy on my tooth hole."

Galaxy-Man reached in and pulled out some chocolate. "It don't get no smoother than a Hershey's Kiss, darlin'."

Cherry gave a big toothy grin. "I love you, Dad."

"Me, too," said Galaxy-Man as he hugged Cherry, "and you're not so bad yourself," he chuckled.

Cherry opened up a Kiss and put it in her mouth. "That's too good," she smiled. She coughed a little.

"Uh-oh, you okay, bud?" asked Galaxy-Man.

She coughed again, this time much louder. "I don't know," she said between coughs.

"Don't die," Galaxy-Man said jokingly.

Cherry laughed, but her coughing began to get more and more serious. She spit out the chocolate. Galaxy-Man could tell that something was really wrong. Cherry was now struggling to breathe and her eyes were as wide as they could be.

He grabbed Cherry and ran out of the fort. "Someone call an ambulance!!" he yelled, even though they were already inside a hospital.

This was certainly a scary ordeal, both for Cherry and for Galaxy-Man, but to think just how lucky they were for this to happen in a hospital of all places. It's amazing. Imagine if she were someplace out in space with no one around for trillions of miles. There's good chance that she would have died.

Doctors came rushing to her aid. They took her back and gave her epinephrine which seemed to do the trick. She was stable. She was lying in a hospital bed and Galaxy-Man was right by her side.

A doctor entered the room holding a chart. "Hello there, I'm Dr. Jone."

Galaxy-Man snickered at his name. "Just one Jone?" he asked.

Cherry laughed a little, too.

"It looks like Cherry here went into anaphylaxis brought on by the cocoa in the candy she ate. I guess you could say it was the *Kiss of death.*"

"Dude," said an upset Cherry, "that's not funny, man. I almost died."

"Seriously, bro," added Galaxy-Man.

Doctor Jone cleared his throat in embarrassment. "All the same," he said, "you should stay far away from anything with chocolate in it from now on."

"I'm allergic to chocolate!?! Ugh, I might as well kill myself now."

"That can't be right," said Galaxy-Man. "We eat chocolate all the time and this has never happened before. What the F, man?"

"Well, it's not uncommon to develop an allergy. You can suddenly become allergic to all sorts of foods you used to eat with no problem. It's most common in children Cherry's age."

Cherry looked very sad.

There was a knock at the door and in walked Hamilton. "Sorry I'm late, guys," he said. "Someone stole my wallet and I couldn't afford to get into the parking deck."

"Yo," said Galaxy-Man as he held up Hamilton's wallet. "We needed money to buy yard sticks this morning. By the way, we emptied your bank account."

Hamilton smiled and shook his head. "You guys."

"Hey, Cherry," said Galaxy-Man, "guess what Hamilton's allergic to."

"What?" asked Cherry who was starting to smile.

"Peanuts!"

Galaxy-Man and Cherry both started laughing and pointing.

"Ha ha, what a loser!" laughed Cherry.

Hamilton just smiled and sighed. It was all in good fun.

Hamilton was always a good sport. Problems like allergies are only as serious as you make them after all, and if you can't laugh at yourself or take a joke then you're only gonna get hurt.

Chapter 6

For the next few days, Galaxy-Man did nothing but text and talk to Cutty over the spacephone. Spacephones were basically like regular phones but used a special superluminal electromagnetic field generator powered by magic to send radio waves through space well in excess of the speed of light. It's simple stuff, mere basement science really. With it, people who were literally worlds apart could speak to each other as if they were just down the street, though, it was still impractically for intergalactic communication.

At midnight or so, Galaxy-Man was in the living room by the fireplace hovering over the spacephone in case Cutty called.

Cherry came marching down the hall in her llama pajamas holding a scented candle to see.

"Dad, it's time for bed," she ordered.

"Aw come on, it's only 12:00," groaned Galaxy-Man as he wasn't ready to go to bed yet.

"Yeah, but you've been up for three days clamoring over the phone."

"Yeah, so?"

"You need to get some sleep. You're spending too much time on that phone, young man."

"Shut up! You're not my real daughter!"

"Yeah, well I'm all you've got!"

Galaxy-Man crossed his arms in protest. "Hamilton lets me stay up late," he mumbled.

"What was that!?"

"I said I want ice cream."

"You can have ice cream tomorrow, Dad. Now go to bed."

Galaxy-Man got up and started towards the kitchen.

"What are you doing?" asked Cherry. "Hey, I'm talking to you, mister!"

Galaxy-Man walked into the kitchen and turned on the light. He pushed a chair up to the fridge and climbed onto it.

"What are you doing? You get down right now, young man."

Deliberately disobeying Cherry's orders, Galaxy-Man opened up the freezer door.

"You close that freezer right now. I'm not kidding around."

He reached in and grabbed the ice cream.

"You go put that right back. I'm warning you, you take one bite out of that and you are in big trouble."

Galaxy-Man sat down at the table with his bucket of ice cream with spoon in hand.

"Don't... Hey! Don't you dare... Don't you DARE do that. You hear me?"

He put the spoon in the ice cream slowly, as if to mock her.

"Hold it right there! You put that ice cream in your mouth and you are in very, very, VERY big trouble."

He raised the ice cream up to his mouth, all while looking Cherry right in the eye.

"Don't you dare go anywhere beyond that... Put it down right now. I am not going to say it again. I am NOT going to say it AGAIN." Galaxy-Man took a bite and Cherry ran over and started spanking his behind hard.

"I hate you!" yelled Galaxy-Man, "I hate you!"

They both paused for a bit, then erupted into exuberant laughter.

"That was fun," said Galaxy-Man, "I wanna be Kramer next time."

"Alright, you can be Kramer next time, Dad, but we really need to get some sleep, 'kay?"

"'Kay," said Galaxy-Man, giving the thumbs up.

The two looked over at the glistening tub of delicious strawberry ice cream on the table and paused.

"Er, we'll just have a little bit of ice cream first," said Cherry.

The next day Cutty finally had some time off from work so Galaxy-Man arranged for her to be brought to the Breadbasket via spacebus. They were a lot like regular buses, but in space. Cutty had never been to space before. She was just an average girl who lived an average life. It wasn't totally unusual for people on Earth to travel to other planets, but most people

simply didn't like the idea of being in space. Space is a scary place after all.

This was certainly a new experience for Cutty and she was very afraid at first, but the scariest part of any trial is the time leading up to the ordeal itself. People who go skydiving are most afraid of the plane ride. People taking their final exams are most afraid waiting for class to begin. Cutty had trouble sleeping the night before, but once she was up in the sky, and she could see the stars, everything was fine. And nothing gives a stronger appreciation of the stars quite like traveling to them. She was so struck with awe that she forgot her worries and fears as she watched the stars pass by like ships at sea.

A person from the Middle East might find snow to be beautiful, while someone from Colorado might not even notice it. When you grow up traveling from planet to planet, from star to star, it can be hard to notice the beauty of the universe. Galaxy-Man had done and seen so many things that the only thing that would seem out of the ordinary was being normal, and maybe that was why he liked Cutty so much, because she was so normal, because her normality was so weird, so different to him. Being normal, after all, is weird.

She arrived in Spunky Hollow around noonish. They made the 5000 light-year journey in about an hour and cost a grand total of 45 profit and 21 cents. Cutty took a deep breath and stepped foot

on a new world for the very first time. She was the only person in the bus going to the Breadbasket that day. There wasn't much there after all, just a few small businesses and a whole bunch of wheat. The planet looked much like Earth, but the prospect of being on another planet made it exciting, even if it was only a world of wheat.

Cutty could not stop smiling. From the bus stop she followed cardboard signs left by Galaxy-Man and Cherry leading to the mansion. It was as if she were looking for yard sales. She walked for a mile or so from the bus stop to the house.

"Is this right?" she asked herself. Cutty had no idea that Galaxy-Man lived in a huge mansion. She then saw Etsuka checking her mail.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Cutty politely. "I'm looking for Galaxy-Man. Does he live here?"

"Unfortunately yes," said Etsuka.

"Okay, thank you."

She walked up Galaxy-Man's sidewalk and looked at his very tall grass. On his front stoop, she rang the doorbell. Galaxy-Man and Cherry immediately exploded out of the house in a big hurry.

"We gotta go, we gotta go," said Galaxy-Man who seemed to be in an extreme rush. Cherry was right behind him looking a little confused.

"What's going on?" Cutty asked.

"I don't know," said Cherry. "He won't say."

"Come on, we gotta go!!"

Cutty wondered why they were in such a hurry, but just went along with it. It wasn't like things could get much weirder for her at that point.

They all trudged through the mountainous grass to the Star Whomper and walked aboard. Along the way Stevie followed everyone into the ship.

Galaxy ran over to the helm and started flipping switches and pressing buttons that Cherry had never seen him flip or press before. Wherever they were going must've been really important. Cutty sat down next to Cherry on the couch and crossed her legs.

Stevie began smelling Cutty intently.

Galaxy-Man turned his head to Cutty and Cherry. "Pick your favorite body part and hold on to it," he said "'cause things are about to get dangerous!"

Cherry put her hands over her butt. Galaxy-Man took the ship off the ground and left the planet at an amazing speed and within seconds they were in space.

"This is so exciting!" said Cutty, who was now happier than a slinky on an escalator. This was so new and exciting to her.

"Hang on to something," said Galaxy-Man. "We're making the jump to 60 gc."

"What's 60 gc?" Cutty asked Cherry.

"60 million times the speed of light," answered Cherry.

Cutty couldn't believe it. "60 million!?"

"I've never even seen him go that fast before. This must be really important."

The ship went so fast that the passing stars appeared like blurred city lights. Stevie jumped into Cutty's lap, walked in a circle a few times and went to sleep.

"Hey there, Stevie," said Cutty. "What are you doing, silly?"

"Aww, I think she likes you," said Cherry.

"She's a really pretty cat."

"Hang in there, Eli," mumbled Galaxy-Man to himself.

"Who's Eli?" whispered Cutty.

"Eli Whomper," said Cherry. "He was an elephant that Dad used to have. He was dying so they put his brain in a computer and now he powers the ship's engines."

"Oh, well that's... interesting," replied Cutty.

"Wow, people usually have like 800 questions about that," said Cherry. "You know, I kinda like you, Cutty."

"Thanks. I like you, too." Cutty probably had a million questions, but didn't know which ones to ask. This was all so much to take in. She figured that she ought to just go with it and ask questions later.

Galaxy-Man was pressing all sorts of buttons and flipping switches. What was he doing? "Brace yourselves" he said. "We're

slowing down." Galaxy-Man was now grinding his teeth and sweating like Jafar at airport security.

For whatever reason, slowing down seemed to take a lot more energy than speeding up. The ship's engines were usually about as loud as a minivan, but made a truly awful, almost terrifying roar when slowing down from such an amazing speed.

"Just a few... more... light-years," said Galaxy-Man. "In five... four... three... two..." he stopped. "What comes after two, Cutty?"

"Um, one?" she said.

Cherry face-palmed and Galaxy-Man laughed.

"No, silly, three comes after two," Galaxy-Man chuckled.

Cutty had walked right into Galaxy-Man's trap "Dang it," she said, snapping her fingers.

They had finally reached their destination. They traveled several thousand light-years in around 25 minutes. The ship could've gone even faster, but things get a little weird when traveling over 60 gc. The last time he went any faster, he arrived at his destination before he left. It's best not to think about it.

They came to a planet called Kepler-452b which looked a lot like Earth. Not a very interesting name, but whatever. It was a planet mostly inhabited by old people, a sort of retirement world. Galaxy-Man took the ship down safely for a change. They

barely crashed at all in fact, merely bending a hapless telephone pole.

Galaxy-Man checked his watch and let out a sigh of relief.

"4:70 am, we made it, guys," he said. Time of day is sort of a meaningless concept when you go from planet to planet. It's always gonna be a different hour, and days are almost never the same length.

Cherry got up and looked out the window. She could now see clearly where they were - Doagie's Hoagies. It was named after restaurant's founder, Logie Hoagie, though, she no longer worked there. Doagie's was the best hoagie joint in the galaxy, open 24/7, and home of the Logie Doagie's Hoagies Hoagie.

"You drag us halfway across the galaxy for a ffffrickin' sandwich!?" snapped Cherry. She almost slipped up and said the F word. Cherry swore a lot, but never said the F word. Guess she was saving it for a special occasion.

"I just found out this morning that my gift card expires today. We've got about 10 minutes left, so let's get going. We gotta go!!" Galaxy-Man pushed a green button on his throne and was ejected out of the ship high into the air. He pulled off some rather stylish flips, but ultimately landed flat on his face in some dirt next to the parking lot. He abruptly sprang to his feet and ran over to the door to Doagie's.

Cutty, Cherry and Stevie walked off the ship and over to Galaxy-Man. Cutty was absolutely amazed by everything she saw, though, it was a pretty unremarkable world. It was a clean planet that looked a lot like Florida. It was hot and muggy and smelled like mothballs and old people. Maybe it doesn't sound like much, but to Cutty, it was out of this world.

"I think this is the best day of my life," said Cutty.

"What, you've never seen a parking lot before?" teased Cherry.

"No... NO!!" screamed Galaxy-Man as he looked in utter despair at the unsightly horror before him. It was... a dreaded closed sign most foul.

"I think they're closed, Dad," said Cherry.

"The hell they are!" said Galaxy-Man as he walked over to his left to a payphone.

"Is he gonna call the owner?" asked Cutty.

"I kinda doubt it," said Cherry.

Galaxy-Man forcefully ripped the payphone from the wall, walked it over to the entrance, and hurled it through the glass door, shattering it into a million little pieces.

"Wow," said Cutty. She didn't exactly approve oh Galaxy-Man's crime, but didn't say anything.

Galaxy-Man walked in and Cherry and Stevie followed. Cutty was looking around to see if anyone saw Galaxy-Man's heinous crime. She then followed them inside.

It was very dark in there. Inside there was a bespectacled man in an orange shirt and black pants. He had dirty-blond hair and he had scars on his face. He was holding a screwdriver and appeared to be working on the light switch by the light of an electric lantern. He was an old friend of Galaxy-Man. Just like Galaxy-Man, no one knew his real name, or where he was from. Everyone called him Nomad because he never stayed in one place for very long. He had done and seen so much in his life, he was an even bigger enigma than Galaxy-Man himself. Galaxy-Man had known him all his life, but in all that time, Nomad hadn't appeared to have aged at all. Galaxy-Man's neighbor who had died a few years back of old age claimed that Nomad was his third grade teacher, meaning that Nomad was 90 years old minimum, but didn't look a day over 22.

"You know," said Nomad, "you could've just knocked." Nomad was very old, and very wise. He was a man of peace and grace. He chose his words very carefully and smiled whenever he spoke. Galaxy-Man flashed his gift card as if it were a sheriff's badge. "Gimme a sammich," he ordered.

Cherry walked in and Cutty followed, carrying Stevie and carefully navigating over the broken glass.

"And why should I do that?" asked Nomad as he scratched his chin.

Galaxy-Man looked at the mess he had made and felt bad. He scratched his neck and looked to his feet. "Aw, I'm really sorry. I just really needed a hoagie."

"I can pay for the door if you want," said Cutty. "I don't mind."

"That's okay," said Nomad. "I'll take care of everything. It is only money after all, that and little extra work."

"Are you sure, bud?" asked Cherry.

"Well, you know what they say," replied Nomad, "hard work is its own reward."

"Well hell, " said Galaxy-Man, "we got a fence that needs painting, the house needs a new roof, the gutters don't work; come by sometime and we'll put your ass to work."

The man just softly laughed and smiled. Nomad simply had a warm glow about him. He was a very pleasant man.

"So what are you working on there?" asked Cherry.

"Oh, I was installing a dimmer switch." he said.

"So you close the whole restaurant?" asked Galaxy-Man "Couldn't you just do it really fast while everyone ate? I'm sure people wouldn't mind eating in the dark for a few minutes."

"I could do it fast," replied Nomad, "or I could do it right."

"Ooh, burn," said Cherry. "He got you there, Dad."

Nomad checked his watch. "You know, people don't usually show up at 4:20 am," he said. "I figured this'd be the best time."

"I can think of a few people who'd be hungry at 4:20," quipped Galaxy-Man.

"Why a dimmer switch?" asked Cutty, Stevie was literally asleep in her arms now. "Just curious."

"Well," replied Nomad, "I believe one of the big appeals of eating at a restaurant is atmosphere. Have you ever eaten at a fancy restaurant? I've a theory as to what makes a restaurant fancy, more so than anything else - warm lighting."

Cherry raised her eyebrow. "Warm lighting?" she asked.

"That's actually really clever," said Cutty. "Every nice restaurant I've been to had warm, dim lighting. I guess I never noticed."

"Oh it's just something I happened to notice one day," said Nomad. "I figured I'd install the dimmer switch so I can zero in on the perfect level of fanciness. But I guess you're all hungry though so I'll shut up." Nomad walked behind a counter and turned on his till. "What'll it be?" he asked.

"Let's do a 3 ft monster club Hoagie, hold the peanut butter." Nomad laughed at the idea of peanut butter. "I generally don't put peanut butter on my hoagies. Would you like extra hot fudge on that?"

Cherry and Cutty laughed.

"No thanks, dawg," said Galaxy-Man. "I'm trying to watch for girlish figure."

Nomad rang up the order. "Dog," he reflected. "You know, I remember back when dog was considered an insult. Alrighty, that comes to 15 profit and 21 cents."

Galaxy-Man gave him the card.

"Okay, fellas," said Nomad, "make yourselves at home and I'll be right back with your sandwich in a few minutes. Luckily all of my equipment here is mechanical."

"Oh, I've been meaning to ask you something, Nomad," said Galaxy-Man.

Nomad stopped and turned around. "Oh, what's that?"

"How old are you?"

Nomad just smiled and laughed. "29," he said jokingly as he walked into the kitchen.

"Yeah, you've been 29 for like 30 years, man," laughed Galaxy-Man.

The gang then sat down at table. Cutty turned her phone on so they could see.

"Hey Cutty," said Cherry.

"Hey Cherry," she replied.

"Why are you black?" she asked.

Cutty laughed and Galaxy-Man snickered a little.

"I got too much sun," she answered jokingly. "I'm actually white and this is just a monster tan."

Stevie leapt up from Cutty's arms, walked across the table over to Galaxy-Man and hopped on his shoulders. "'Sup, Stee-Dizzle??" he asked Stevie.

"Ooh, let's play 20 questions," suggested Cherry.

"Bring in on," said Galaxy-Man, already wearing his game face.

"Sure," said Cutty, "I like 20 questions."

"Okay," said Cherry, "I've got it in my head. Now you guys guess what it is."

"Hmm," pondered Galaxy-Man.

"Who's going first?" asked Cutty.

"Er, you go first," replied Galaxy-Man.

"Let's see... Is it bigger than a breadbox?" asked Cutty.

"N-no," said Cherry who seemed a bit surprised at the question.

"Is it a breadbox?" asked Galaxy-Man immediately.

Cherry blushed a bit. "Goddamn it," she said.

"Wait, was that it?" asked Cutty.

"Yeah," she replied bitterly.

"I am the grand champion!!" gloated Galaxy-Man, Stevie asleep on his shoulders. He stood up and thrust his pelvis vigorously.

"In your face, loser!!"

Cherry rolled her eyes. "Whatever, man," she said.

"Okay, I wanna go now," said Galaxy-Man.

"No, Dad, because you always think of something totally obscure and no one ever gets it."

"I do not," Galaxy-Man insisted.

"Like anyone is gonna think of the British Overseas Territory of Gibraltar," bickered Cherry.

"What, lots of people have been to Gibraltar," said Galaxy-Man.

"Been there!? No one's even freaking heard of Gibraltar!!"

Cherry got up and shook her head. "Whatever, man," she said, "I'm gonna go find some place to pee." She started walk towards the bathrooms. Cherry always stormed off into to the bathroom to end arguments, though, she didn't like strange bathrooms. When you gotta go you gotta go.

"Well I can pee standing up," shouted Galaxy-Man as Cherry walked away, "so there!"

Cutty shook her head and started laughing, her hands over her mouth. "Oh my God," she said, rolling her eyes. They weren't actually mad of course. It was all in good fun.

After a few minutes, Nomad came back from the kitchen wheeling the sandwich on a special cart. Galaxy-Man and Cutty could clearly hear him speak, but Nomad needlessly spoke into the intercom. "We've got an extra supremo 3-footer monster club hoagie hold the peanut butter for a Mr. Galaxy-Man," he said. Galaxy-Man got up, Stevie still on his back. "Please, Mr. Galaxy-Man was my father," he said jokingly.

"I could've sworn there were four of you just a moment ago."

"Yeah," said Galaxy-Man, "you just missed it. Big ol' gorilla came in and ate her up."

Cutty laughed. "She's in the restroom, sir," she said kindly.

"She had some business to take care of," said Galaxy-Man "and then she had to take a pee."

"It's awfully dark in there," said Nomad. "I am glad that she's a girl, though. You know, when I was younger I lived in a house where the power would go out every other day. There were four girls and seven guys in the house, and the guys would always go in the bathroom and these knuckleheads would stand up to go. It was pitch black in there unless we happen to have a candle that day, so you can probably imagine about how that went."

"Eww," said Cutty.

"Yeah, people often don't question the way they do things. People don't ask enough questions these days."

Galaxy-Man raised his hand like he was in grade school or something. "Why?" he asked.

Nomad just laughed and smiled. Cherry came out of the bathroom looking very relieved.

"Hey, Cher," said Galaxy-Man, "Nomad says thank you for sitting down when you pee."

"Um, you're welcome?" said Cherry, unsure. "It'd be kinda hard not to. I guess I could use the urinal if I hiked my leg up really high or something."

Cutty noticed something in Cherry's hand. "What's that in your hand?"

"Oh, I found this weird glove in the toilet." It was a golden glove with a D-pad and buttons on the side. Oddly, it had seven USB ports on it.

"Inside the toilet?" asked Galaxy-Man. "That's gross, Cherry."

"I mean, it wasn't like, inside the toilet or anything," she retorted.

"Then what?" asked Cutty.

Cherry looked flustered. "It was a really cool glove okay!" she yelled.

"I'll be darned," said Nomad. "That is an NES Power Glove. I've never seen a golden one before."

"Why would something like that be in the toilet?" asked Cutty.

"Dunno," said Nomad. "You'd be surprised, though, all the things you can find in toilets. I've found guns, bottles, clothes; I even once found a working lava lamp."

"Ooh, do you still have it?" asked Cherry.

"Yes actually," replied Nomad, "and some people might find that to be gross, but did you know that on average even a computer mouse has more germs than a toilet? In the grand scheme of things, toilets are actually fairly clean."

"Wow, I didn't know that," said Cutty.

"Is it okay if I keep the glove?" asked Cherry.

"Sure," replied Nomad, "I don't see why not. I could be wrong, but I'd say it looks pretty important. I'm sure it'll come in *handy*," he winked.

"Ha!" said Galaxy-Man. "I get it."

"Thank you," said Cherry very warmly.

"Well," said Nomad, "I don't wanna keep you folks any longer. I hope you enjoy your sandwich."

Galaxy-Man reached into his pocket and pulled out a fist bump.

"Respec'" he said.

Nomad smiled and happily gave him a tater, that is to say he bumped his fist.

Galaxy-Man, Cherry and Cutty all worked together to carry the great sandwich to the ship while Stevie did nothing at all. What a lazyhead.

"This sandwich is really heavy," groaned Cherry. "When you die, in like twenty years, I'm not being your pallbearer."

"Twenty years?" asked Galaxy-Man, Stevie still on his shoulders,

"I'm not that old, man. I'm not gonna be dead."

"You keep eating all these 3 ft hoagies and you will be."

On the ship they sat the sandwich down on a table and let out a collective sigh of relief.

"That was an ordeal," said Cutty.

"You're tellin' me, sister," said Cherry. "Let's eat, shall we?"

"Absolutely not," said Galaxy-Man sternly.

"Say whaaaat!?" asked Cherry in disbelief.

"This sandwich is for my best friend," said Galaxy-Man.

"Jack Daniels?" laughed Cherry.

"No, not Jack Daniels! It's for Hamilton."

"Aw, that's sweet," said Cherry.

"Yeah, that's really nice of you to do that for your friend," said Cutty.

Galaxy-Man liked hoagies a great deal, but he liked his friend Hamilton even more. It didn't always seem that way. Galaxy-Man constantly picked on Hamilton, stole from him, lied to him, but Hamilton was family, and he took good care of him in his own special way. He did horrible things to Hamilton, but he always made up for it in the end. He always knew just how to make him smile. This time he'd bought him the greatest hoagie in the galaxy. Lying and stealing are very bad things to do, but keep in mind, this was a really, really good hoagie. It was perfection, and for someone like Galaxy-Man, someone who at times risked the lives of himself and those around him all for a sandwich, not to eat such a perfect sub himself is saying a lot. The gang returned to the Breadbasket and walked over to Hamilton's house. Everyone stood at the door holding the sandwich.

"Okay, guys," whispered Galaxy-Man, "like we rehearsed." With one hand on the hoagie, Galaxy-Man rang Hamilton's doorbell. "Trick or treat!" he yelled. "Open up!"

Hamilton slowly opened the door.

"SURPRISE!!!" they all screamed at the top of their lungs. It was way louder than it needed to be, but that was the gag.

Hamilton was frightened and jumped back a bit, tripping over a pile of used toilet plungers Galaxy-Man had scattered throughout his house. He was breathing heavily but started smiling. "You guys," he panted.

"We got you a gift!" said Cherry.

"Please come in," said Hamilton politely.

"I'm Cutty by the way," said Cutty."

"Hi, Cutty," said Hamilton. "I'm Hamilton."

"I'm Cherry!" yelled Cherry.

"We all know," said Galaxy-Man, "and we don't care," he said, jokingly of course.

"Hey, Cherry," said Hamilton. "I like that glove you're wearing right now."

They all walked in and sat the hoagie on the table.

"You guys bought this for me?" asked Hamilton. "You shouldn't have," he smiled.

"Should not have we?" said Galaxy-Man.

"Not have should we have *have*," said Cherry very fanciful.

"Enjoy," nodded Galaxy-Man.

"Guys, I don't know how to thank you," said Hamilton. "Listen, I can't finish this all by myself."

"Okay, let's eat," yelled Cherry abruptly as she reached for the sandwich immediately.

Everyone laughed. It was like the ending to a campy sitcom or something. They all ate, and there was more than enough for everyone. They spent the rest of the day playing Uno. It was a lovely evening, but for Cutty, it was the most magical experience in her whole life. To think that she had been to three different solar systems that day. After watching the sunset on Hamilton's roof, Cutty was returned home. It was the perfect end to the perfect day, though, it was only around 3:00 P.M. back home.

A few weeks past and Thanksgiving had come to the Breadbasket. Galaxy-Man didn't know how to cook a turkey, so every year he would go to Doagie's and buy a turkey sub and gather all his friends for a nice supper.

Galaxy-Man and Cherry were soundly asleep in their bedroom. There were no actual beds in the house, so they both slept together in a room full of blankets and pillows, which were piled halfway to the ceiling. It was actually very comfy. Even when he slept, Galaxy-Man wore his trademarked black shades. Galaxy-Man and Cherry almost always went to bed at the same time and woke up at the same time, but today Galaxy-Man woke up a little earlier than usual. He sat up and lifted his shades slightly to rub his sleep-encrusted eyes, and then crawled over to the door and walked out, not making a peep. He walked into the next room, which was a dusty room full of clothes and dressers. He put on some semi-nice clothes for the day ahead. He wore a thin blue shirt and an okay pair of khakis. He looked pretty good actually.

For the next few hours, Galaxy-Man was in the kitchen getting everything ready for the big day ahead. Hamilton, his parents and Cutty were all coming over later and he wanted everything to be perfect. He prepared dressing, gravy, cranberry sauce, sweet potato pie, green beans, corn, mashed potatoes, hushpuppies and collards. He had already bought the turkey hoagie the night

before. Today was sure to be special, but there was a problem - the house was a complete disaster. Normally, Galaxy-Man didn't care how his house looked, but it was beginning to smell, and it was becoming hard to navigate. There were stacks of plates everywhere, mountains of clothes, and a leaning tower of pizza boxes to top things off.

Cherry walked into the kitchen rubbing her sleepy eyes. She saw Galaxy-Man laboring over the hot stove. There was food everywhere. "Good Lord, Dad," yawned Cherry, "that's a big breakfast. I ain't that damn hungry, man."

Galaxy-Man pointed a greasy spatula at Cherry. "Whatchu talkin' about, man? This my breakfast!"

Cherry laughed. "It smells really good, Dad."

"Thanks, kiddo. Maybe I'll share a little with you," he winked.

He tossed his spatula over his shoulder into the sink and walked over to the broom closet and grabbed a couple of brooms.

"I didn't even know we had brooms," said Cherry.

"Me either. I've never even opened that closet before, man. I grew up here, man." He lifted one of the brooms up. "Catch!" he shouted as he tossed the broom over to Cherry.

Cherry wasn't very thrilled with sweeping, but she didn't mind helping out her father.

They walked into the living room, but were quickly overwhelmed.

They sort of pushed everything into a pile in the middle of the

room. The pile was about as tall as Cherry, and smelled about as nice.

"Come on, man. That's my daughter you're talking about."

"It's okay, Dad, I am a little funky today."

They watched TV while cleaning to make things a little more bearable. They liked watching Beaverball news because of the funny way they talked, Beaverball being the capital planet of the solar system of course.

"Here is a bulletin from BBN." said the newsman on TV. "The last morpher is in captivity. The Galaxy is at peace." On screen was a little gooey worm about the size of a pinky finger.

"What's a morpher?" asked Cherry, propping herself up on her broom.

"They're kinda like silkworms," said Galaxy-Man, "but they don't make silk."

"So, kinda like a worm then?"

"Well, not exactly. They look puny, but they can be pretty darn scary when they get bigger. I didn't even know there were any morphers left to be honest."

"It sounds like they should just kill it then."

Morphers were once the most powerful creatures in the galaxy. They never stop growing and they never stop changing. They were called morphers because they had so many forms, each more terrible than the last. They could survive anywhere and eat the

very ground itself to survive. It's good that the last one was in captivity.

After a about an hour, the living room and kitchen were clean, though there was still the giant mound of filth to deal with.

"What are we gonna do?" asked Cherry. "We can't just shove it under the couch. It's still full from the last time we cleaned the house."

Galaxy-Man gave a big smile and snapped his finger. The answer had came to him. He knew exactly what to do. "Go get the wheelbarrow, please, ma'am," he said politely.

"You got it, Father-Man." Cherry walked outside and walked across the street over Hamilton's garage. She walked to the back of the room and jacked Hamilton's brand new red wheelbarrow and wheeled it outside, but not before cutting the ends off all his extension cords with a pocket knife for no good reason. With the wheelbarrow, she booked it back across the street and wheeled inside the house.

They piled everything into the wheelbarrow. "Where are we gonna put it?" asked Cherry. "The yard's pretty full."

"I know what to do," said Galaxy-Man confidently.

They rolled over Hamilton's back yard, making sure not to be seen, and dumped their load.

"Go, go, go," whispered Galaxy-Man as they both ran off with the wheelbarrow. Galaxy-Man rolled it inside his garage. It was a

nice wheelbarrow, so Galaxy-Man figured he'd just borrow it for a while.

Etsuka and her newly adopted son, Caiden, saw Cherry and Galaxy-Man and knew they must've been up to no good.

Galaxy-Man smiled and waved as he walked outside. "Hey Miss E.!" he shouted. "Would you guys like to come over and eat later?" he kindly asked.

"No, thanks," said Etsuka, coldly.

Cherry then walked over. Caiden had never actually seen Cherry before. He stayed in the house mostly. He was about the same age as Cherry. He was a kid who just wanted to play and have fun like all the other kids, but his parents pushed him hard to study all the time and learn everything. His parents were strict and hard, and always pushed him to be the very best. He was very smart, but he was a dreadfully unhappy kid.

"I like your son's blue hair," said Caiden.

"Caiden!" said Etsuka loudly with her teeth closed and her eyes wide.

Galaxy-Man and Cherry were a bit surprised. It wasn't unusual for Cherry to be mistaken for a boy, though. She had short hair and never wore feminine clothes.

"Respect the curves, dude," said Cherry.

"Yeah, man, Cherry's a girl, bro."

"I got Fallopian tubes, dawg."

"Okay!" snapped Etsuka. "We don't need to know about your anatomy."

Caiden was very embarrassed.

"Aw, it's okay, dude," laughed Cherry "want me to buy you a beer?"

"Mother only lets me drink water," said Caiden.

"Come on, Caiden," said Etsuka, "you've got homework to do. I don't want you hanging around those two."

"Ouch," said Cherry. "Standin' right here, man."

"You guys are still welcome to stop by if you get hungry!"

shouted Galaxy-Man as he and Cherry headed inside.

The house was finally clean, er, clean-ish at least.

"Wow," said Cherry, "I didn't know our carpet was red."

"I didn't know we had carpet."

Cherry began sniffing. "It's still kinda stanky in here, man.

Smells like a sumo wrestler took a dump on a burning tire."

"Wait," said Galaxy-Man "I've got it!"

"Well spit it out, fool."

"Bring me my stink stick good sir!"

"You mean your deodorant?"

"You know it, braj."

With his Speed Stick, he rubbed the walls, the floor, the furniture and even the cat with smell-good. The house now smelled like an armpit, but it was a good-smelling armpit.

The house was finally as presentable as it was gonna be. Galaxy-Man and Cherry set the table and put on some Ella Fitzgerald on the record player. Galaxy-Man turned on the fireplace even though it was always Summer and there wasn't much of a need for it. Regardless, it was quite lovely.

Hamilton and his parents were the first to arrive.

Hamilton's house used to belong to his parents, but gave it to him and moved into a house at the end of town. Though they were both deaf and couldn't hear him speak, they always liked Galaxy-Man. Galaxy-Man liked teasing them, though. He would often pretend to yell and get angry, but they could always tell he was only playing. They were both born deaf so they couldn't read lips, and Galaxy-Man liked to say mean things to them, but with a big smile.

"Hey there, you crazy son of a Beach," said Galaxy-Man to Hamilton, their last name being Beach of course.

"Wow," said Hamilton, "you've got the place looking great. I didn't know you guys had a floor."

Coming behind Hamilton were his parents. Galaxy-Man walked over and gave his father a handshake. "I just pooped and didn't wash my hands," said Galaxy-Man with a wolf's smile as he shook the man's hand. He then walked over to Mrs. Beach and gave her a big hug. "So glad you could make it," said Galaxy-Man. "Oh my, you've gotten fat, Mrs. Beach." Mrs. Beach just smiled bashfully

and giggle a bit. She had a very pretty smile. She wasn't actually fat. She was very short and small, and had short, graying brown hair. She wore nice earrings and a lovely dress that day. Mr. Beach on the other hand was a thin, mustachioed gentleman with white hair and very pale skin. He wore a black suit with a fedora. He looked like he just walked out of a Norman Rockwell painting. He kindly tipped his hat and gave a sort of salute to Galaxy-Man, which was sign language for "howdy," that much Galaxy-Man could understand.

Galaxy-Man led them into the dining room and everyone sat down. Stevie was sitting on the table licking the gravy bowl and Cherry was sitting at the head of the table with her nose in a book. Galaxy-Man never made her read anything. In fact, she didn't even have to do her school work unless she wanted to, she being home schooled. Galaxy-Man let her make her own decisions. She didn't have to read, but she got to. Since school wasn't a chore, she enjoyed it. She got to pick and choose what she wanted to learn about and chose to read and learn things just because she could. She did things her own way and as a result she was smarter than most kids her age. This time she was researching the glove she found at Doogie's.

"Are you still reading about that toilet glove?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"It's called the Power Glove, Dad," said Cherry, "and everything else is child's play."

"Pff, whatever," said Galaxy-Man as he sat down. "Okay guys, Cutty should be rolling up any second now."

At that very moment, the doorbell rang.

"Did that just happen?" asked Cherry who was in disbelief.

"You must be psychic, Galaxy-Man," said Hamilton.

Galaxy-Man and Cherry got up to go greet Cutty. Galaxy-Man opened the door and there she was.

"Hi guys," said Cutty.

Galaxy-Man gave her a nice warm hug. "It's good to see you," he said.

Cherry walked over and started smelling her arm.

"She smells real nice," said Cherry, "like that fancy store we aren't aloud to go to no more."

Cutty was wearing very nice clothes and smelled rose petal sweet. She wore a fancy dark blue navy coat with a white scarf and soft black pants. It was easy to forget that it was always summer in The Breadbasket.

"You look really fanciful today," said Cherry.

"Yeah, why are you wearing your Sunday best?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"Sorry, I wasn't sure what to wear," replied Cutty.

"It's all good in the hizzy, C-Dizzle," said Galaxy-Man. "Now get in here, hooligan. We're all starving, been waiting for you for

hours. Hamilton's totally p'd off at you. He's talkin' all this bad crap about you. Said he fixin' ta bust a fool." Cutty of course knew he was only joking.

They all sat down at the table to eat.

"Hi Cutty," waved Hamilton.

"How goes it?" she asked.

"Very good," he replied.

Galaxy-Man, Cherry and Cutty sat down at the table.

"You wanna say grace, Hamilton?" asked Galaxy-Man. "It'd be weird coming from an atheist an all."

"Certainly," he said.

Everyone bowed their heads. Galaxy-Man and Cherry were both atheists and didn't believe in God or an afterlife, but they both had respect for others beliefs and always let Hamilton say grace. They liked hearing him say grace though because he always had something beautiful and poetic to say. He also gave grace in sign language whenever his parents were with him.

"O father we are thankful for the meal we are about to eat, for those that made it possible, and for those with whom we are about to share it. Let us be together; let us eat together, and never shall we entertain hostility. Amen."

"Amen," said Galaxy-Man, Cherry and Cutty.

Galaxy-Man handed Cherry an electric knife. "Would you like to carve the Thanksgiving turkey sub?" he asked.

"Golly, you really think I'm ready, Dad?" asked Cherry.

"I do," said Galaxy-Man. "You're a man now."

"I love you, Dad."

Cherry gladly carved the hoagie. Everyone dug in and began to eat. Mrs. Beach was helping herself to some mashed potatoes.

Galaxy-Man looked at her and smiled. "I poisoned the potatoes," he said politely. Mrs. Beach just smiled bashfully and said thank you in sign language.

"I'm gonna tell her what you said," threatened Hamilton, who was chawing away at some corn.

"Is she deaf?" whispered Cutty quietly.

"They're both deaf as a post an ugly to boot!!" screamed Galaxy-Man way too loudly.

Cherry started cracking up and Cutty laughed a bit, though she tried her best to hide it.

"Hey, ask your dad if the music's okay," said Galaxy-Man.

Hamilton told him what Galaxy-Man said to Mr. Beach and he laughed. He respond and Hamilton chuckled.

"What? What did he say?" asked Cherry who had her nose back in her book and a big bite of hoagie in her maw.

"He said 'no, the only song I listen to is 'The Sound of Silence,'" replied Hamilton.

Cutty let out of loud laugh but covered her mouth and looked a bit embarrassed.

"Haha, you laughed," Galaxy-Man teased. "Oh my God, you shoulda been here last Thanksgiving when we played charades. I'm starting to think they cheated."

Cutty erupted into loud laughter. Cutty wasn't a person who could hold her laughter in. "I'm sorry," she said, trying to regain her composure. "I'm sorry."

"I guess you should've seen the signs," said Hamilton.

"You guys are too funny," said Cutty.

"You know why they're deaf?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"Why?" asked Cutty, who knew that he was about to say something hilarious.

"They used high volume shampoo!" he responded.

"I can't eat," giggled Cutty as she shook her head. "You guys keep making me laugh."

Cherry seemed to be really into her book.

"Care to join us in reality, Cherry?" asked Galaxy-Man. "You're like, off in your own little world over there."

"Sorry," she said. "I was just trying to learn more about the glove. It says here it was first made in 1989 and used for video games, but that wouldn't explain all the USB ports because USB wasn't invented until 1996, and why would there be seven of them?"

"Cool, cool," said Galaxy-Man, not really paying much attention.

"Hey, Cherry, did you know that Cutty had a deaf boyfriend who

used to talk in his sleep? Yeah, well long story short, Cutty woke up with a black eye!" Everyone laughed, and Hamilton translated to his parents who also thought it was funny.

"I don't see the problem," said Cherry. "She's already got two of 'em," she grinned.

"Oh my God," laughed Cutty as she shook her head.

"Why you gotta play the race card, Cherry?" asked Galaxy-Man.

Everyone had a good laugh. It was a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner and there was more than enough food for everyone.

Everyone got to take home a plate. It was especially magical for Cutty. She didn't have many friends, and wasn't very close with her parents, so she hadn't had a proper Thanksgiving in quite a long time.

Chapter 8

Over the next few days, Cherry became more and more obsessed with the glove. She did nothing but read old books and search the web, looking for even the slightest bit of information to go on. It was surprisingly hard to research as there wasn't much info to go on, but from what she could gather, it was once a video game peripheral that was converted into some sort of tool, but for what purpose?

It was a cool Sunday morning, and Galaxy-Man and Cherry had gotten up early to watch ThunderCats. They both sat together in front of the TV in their underwear eating Froot Loops they "borrowed" from Hamilton's pantry. Galaxy-Man wore long johns with a hole in the butt and a black Metallica T-shirt, and Cherry wore tighty whities with no shirt. Commercials were on so Galaxy-Man and Cherry were hovering around the cereal box and Cherry was using a marker to navigate the maze on the back. "No, not that way," urged Galaxy-Man. "Turn around, turn around!!"

"Okay, okay," giggled Cherry.

"Do you even want Toucan Sam to make it through the cloud maze?" "Geez, I'm sorry, Dad." She shook her head. Something was eating at her and she had to speak her mind. "You know, it's just - he's a bird. Why the heck doesn't he just fly over the maze? And also, they're freaking clouds, man. I'm going through them." She then drew a straight line through the maze.

"No," cried Galaxy-Man, "what if that no good Carl the King Crab is up to no good and they clouds are like poison or something."

"Here, you're in charge." Cherry gave Galaxy-Man the market and went back to doing research. This time she used a laptop that Galaxy-Man "borrowed" from Hamilton.

"You're still on about that old potty glove, huh?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"Ugh, and I can't find anything," Cherry looked sad. "It's hopeless. I read the complete history of gloves and I found nothing."

"Maybe it's not hopeless."

"How so?"

"Well, I got a buddy who's like super tech savvy. He might know what it is."

Cherry looked very annoyed at hearing that. "You wait until now to tell me!?" she asked.

"You were having so much fun though," said Galaxy-Man. "I didn't wanna intrude."

"You ever read the history of gloves, Dad? It's not that interesting." Cherry closed her eyes tight and put on her thinking face. "Gloves date back to antiquity. According to translations of Homer's Odyssey, gloves are said to be used to protect against brambles." Cherry wasn't really mad. She was actually very excited to see if Galaxy-Man's friend would tell her anything about the glove.

Galaxy-Man and Cherry slowly flew across town to meet with Galaxy-Man's old friend, JupiterRay, no spaces. He was a computer programmer and hacker and he was very good at what he did. Galaxy-Man met him at a town StarFighter convention about 10 years back and the two had been on-and-off acquaintances ever since. He was the man who designed the simulated reality for Eli

the elephant of course. Galaxy-Man still emailed him from time to time, but didn't see him very often.

Galaxy-Man and Cherry arrived at his house, which was a modest brick home in a middle class neighborhood.

"Hmm," mumbled Cherry, "I pictured him living in some sort of biodome the way you described this person to me."

They walked up the door and rang the doorbell, which play the dial-up modem sound. "What's that sound?" asked Cherry.

"The 90s, kiddo."

JupiterRay answered the door. He was very thin and very pale. He had long brown hair he kept in a nappy ponytail, and had a big beard. He wore glasses, a black T-shirt that read "Hello World" in terminal font, tan cargo shorts, and flip-flops. "Galaxy-Man, long time no see, my friend," he said. "Come in."

"Thanks, JupiterRay," said Galaxy-Man. "This one here has some strange tech she need identifyin'."

His house was an organized mess. There were computers, surge protectors and wires everywhere. JupiterRay repaired computers for a living. He walked over to the couch, which was covered in papers, and brushed everything into the floor.

"And this must be the legendary Cherry Limeade I've heard so much about."

"That's my name," smiled Cherry.

"Have a seat," said JupiterRay. He lived with his dad, who was also a programmer apparently, though, Galaxy-Man had never seen him. He was always there, though, in the back room doing something or other... apparently. JupiterRay had the odd habit of yelling at his father to come into the room. He would very often turn his head at any given time and call out for his father. He would stop mid-sentence just call out for his assistance, but he never seemed to come. JupiterRay's father was this elusive, almost mythical being whom everyone assumed was real, though no one really knew for sure. Technically, no one had ever seen his father.

"So I was hoping you could tell what us this is," said Cherry, holding up the glove.

"Oh, let's take a look," said JupiterRay. He began looking very closely at the glove, squinting his eyes as he adjusted his glasses. "Hey Dad!!" he called.

"Do you know what it is?" asked Cherry.

"I think I might know what it- Dad, can you come in here a sec!?"

"Have you seen it before?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"It's definitely a Power Glove," said JupiterRay, "but I've never seen one like this be- Dad! Get off the dang computer and come look at this!! Whoever built this tech wasn't playing video games- Dad!"

"How do you mean?" asked Cherry.

"Well," said JupiterRay "These batteries on the side are about the most powerful you can get. They have way more energy than any video game peripheral would ever need. This thing could've been built as a weapon. I guess these seven USB ports are for dongles that enable additional functions."

"Dongles?" snickered Cherry.

"What the junk is a dongle, Ray?" asked Galaxy-Man. "That doesn't sound like a real thing."

"It's like, something you plug into a computer to add more functions- Dad!!"

Cherry was a bit weirded out that he kept calling for his father, but didn't say anything.

"How is Mr. Jesseks anyway?" asked Galaxy-Man, Jesseks being their last name.

"He's fine," said JupiterRay, "if he'd quit horsing off and get in here!!" He pointed out a little red dot on the tip of the glove's finger. "See this dot?" he asked. "It's some sort of transmitter I think. Hang on..." He stood up and looked excited. "Come into my lair," he said ghoulishly. "I wanna run some tests to see what kind of waves we're dealing wi- Dad, get in here!! We've got some strange tech that needs testing! Put down the freakin' controller for five minutes! I'm sorry, guys, my dad's being a dord." What in the world was a "dord"? He started

walking down the hallway into a bedroom and Galaxy-Man and Cherry followed him.

His walls were covered in Video Game posters: Donkey Kong Country 2, Super Mario World, Smash Bros., Halo 2, Half-Life, Mega Man 2, Hatsune Miku, Kirby 64, Castlevania, The Legend of Zelda, God of War III, Bubble Bobble, Wario's Woods and Sim City to name only a few. It was pretty random assortment, but he had good taste for sure.

It was a truly messy house, but Jupiter seemed to know exactly where everything was. There was a bed in the room but it was unlikely that anyone slept there. It was covered in computer parts and various papers. There were no free surfaces in the room. There were soda cans, bottles, books, electronics, cups, plates, modified Nerf guns, clothes, tools, Amiibos, various other statues and figures, Beanie Babies, pens, CDs, video games, wires and a ton of other stuff.

Cherry and Galaxy-Man followed JupiterRay into the room. Cherry sat in a nearby beanbag chair and looked around the room. There was a lot of things to look at after all. Galaxy-Man was too busy texting Cutty and giggling. "Hehehe, the silly kitty doesn't like the mirror," he giggled. Cherry just rolled her eyes.

JupiterRay dug around under the bed looking for something. He quietly mumbled to himself as he searched. "If I can find...

that dang... energy reader we... can get- Dad! Get off your butt and put one foot in front of the other! It's not that hard! I apologize. My dad's being such a doogus today." JupiterRay would often use insults that no one ever heard of before. What was a "doogus"?

He looked and looked and then he finally found it. "Woot!" he exclaimed as he held up the odd gadget.

"What's that dealy gonna tell us?" asked Galaxy-Man as he glanced up from his phone. "Hehehe, that kitten is sleeping in a cup!"

"Well," said JupiterRay, "if it's emitting electromagnetic waves, we can use this tech to find out what kind and that may tell us the glove's purpose." JupiterRay always referred to gadgets and other electronic devices as "tech."

"Groovy," said Galaxy-Man. He started snickering again. "That cat has a lime peel for a hat! How decadently droll."

"I'm about to take that phone away from you, mister," said Cherry in her stern voice.

"Aw, but Mom!!"

JupiterRay pushed aside some junk on the table into the floor to make room for the energy reader. It was a homemade machine fabricated from an old sewing machine, an electric thermometer and a few other odd parts here and there.

"And now lemme put on the glove and point it into the energy reader's lens and we can- Dad!! Put down the KFC and get your

butt in here! We got company! I'm really, really sorry, guys. My dad's just being a real funkledunk today."

"It's all good," said Cherry.

The machine beeped three times, then it dinged. JupiterRay looked extremely intrigued. "Huh," he said as he tugged his beard.

"What, what does that mean?" asked Cherry.

JupiterRay plugged the device into a nearby computer and started typing away. He looked as though he just the found the lost city of Númenor or something. Galaxy-Man and Cherry were in suspense.

"Have you guys ever heard of fools light?"

"Nope," said Galaxy-Man and Cherry together.

"It's a new-form energy left over from the event that happened on Earth back in 1991."

"Wait, what happened in 1991?" asked Cherry.

"You don't know?" he asked. "It was this experiment that almost destroyed the universe, let's leave it at that. It sort of changed the way certain universal laws functioned and created extra dimensions that don't make a whole lot of sense, and sometimes energy from these dimensions bleed through into other dimensions."

"Yeah, none of that makes any sense," said Cherry.

"Fools light is- Dad! Bring me the fools light scanner."

"Spit it out, JupiterRay," said Galaxy-Man.

"Fools light is pretty much the fastest thing in the universe and it's the only effective way of communicating with other galaxies."

"Good Lord," said Galaxy-Man. "What kinda speeds we talkin' about?"

"Fast, let's leave it at that," said JupiterRay. JupiterRay had a habit of *leaving things at that*.

"Why would it need to communicate with other galaxies?" asked Cherry.

JupiterRay tugged his beard and pondered. "It could be attempting to communicate with its missing pieces."

"You mean the dongles?"

"Yes, and I believe we can check the gloves programming to see where it's sending the signals and perhaps, if it's receiving signals as well, we can find out from where."

"Cool beans," said Galaxy-Man.

Over the next half hour, JupiterRay ran tests on the gloves and found that it was indeed sending out signals to seven points scattered around the Milky Way and other nearby galaxies. While he toiled away at the computer, off in his own little universe, occasionally calling his father, Galaxy-Man and Cherry raided the kitchen for snacks. Galaxy-Man pillaged the fridge while Cherry plundered the pantry. In the fridge there were a large

assortment of cereals. JupiterRay kept them in the fridge because he had a roach problem.

"Ooh, Waffle Crisp," smiled Galaxy-Man.

"I found a box of instant grits, yo," said Cherry. "Toss me a bowl, Father-Man!"

"You got it, Daughter-Man." Galaxy-Man walked over to where the dishes were and tossed Cherry a bowl, but she didn't quite catch it and it fell into the floor and shattered. They stood frozen, fearing JupiterRay would come barging in and give them the business.

They then heard him yell. "Dad, put down the freaking Etch-A-Sketch and get in here!" hollered JupiterRay from across the house.

Galaxy-Man and Cherry let out a sigh of relief and went back to their ransacking. Galaxy-Man ate six consecutive bowls of cereal until there was nothing left and Cherry ate all the grits her little stomach could hold. While they ate, JupiterRay called for his father eight times and apparently he walked into the room and helped out briefly, but Galaxy-Man and Cherry never saw the man.

Galaxy-Man went back to texting Cutty. "Hehe, that cat's wearing a tie and giving helpful advice," giggled Galaxy-Man. Cherry just rolled her eyes again.

Before they knew it, JupiterRay had built a device to locate the missing parts of the glove out of an electronic 20 questions game, a modified turkey thermometer and an old sock. It didn't seem to make much sense, but it worked.

The gang stood back in the bedroom.

"This tech right here should make it easy to find the missing dongles," said JupiterRay. "I call it the DongleDar... no spaces." JupiterRay didn't like spaces very much.

"Rad," said Galaxy-Man coolly.

"Yeah," said Cherry, "that's actually pretty amazing you were able to build that so fast. Is that a sock?"

"Yes," said JupiterRay, "and let's just leave it at that. Dad!!"

After saying thanks and goodbye, it was high-time to go. The ride home was very slow. The Star Whomper only had two speeds: greased Millennium Falcon, and antarctic molasses, so the 3 mile journey took quite a few minutes. Galaxy-Man sat at the helm and Cherry sat on the couch fixated on the DongleDar.

"So are we gonna go looking for the missing dongles?" asked Cherry.

"You bet!" exclaimed Galaxy-Man. "I'm always up for a good adventure. And who knows, maybe if the glove is really a weapon, we can use it to like, destroyed Hamilton's fence or something. That fence has looked too nice for too long."

"Let's do it, man."

Chapter 9

The very next day, Galaxy-Man and Cherry suited up for adventure and were on their way to Earth to pick up Cutty. Stevie decided to stay behind this time around. She had slowed down a bit in her old age and occasionally stayed with Hamilton when the gang went on an adventure. Inside the Whomper, Galaxy-Man and Cherry were chilling out to some low-volume Bob Marley. Galaxy-Man was drinking a bit of prohibition punch and watching Sailor Moon on Hamilton's laptop while Cherry read a book of random facts.

"Fighting evil by moonlight," sang Galaxy-Man, "winning love by daylight! Never running from a real fight, she is the one named Sailor Moon!" Galaxy-Man had a weakness for very girly anime.

"Hey Dad," said Cherry, "Did you know that gophers crawl through their tunnels backwards?"

Galaxy-Man sharply pointed at Cherry. "As a matter of fact I did know that! I don't like talking about it, though... not after what happened."

Before long, Earth was in sight, but there was a problem - they were going much too fast.

"Uh-oh," shouted Galaxy-Man "we're goin' down!!"

"Dang it, Dad!!" screamed Cherry.

The two entered Earth's atmosphere at an incredible speed.

Galaxy-Man was flipping switches and pushing buttons, but Cherry was beginning to suspect that they didn't actually do anything at all. The ship crashed into a large fountain outside of the hotel and casino where Cutty was staying. It slid a long ways, taking most of the stone fountain with it. It finally came to a complete stop after crashing through the window of the casino.

"Ah craps," said Galaxy-Man as he face-palmed hard.

Cherry began to snicker, and it turned into a good laugh.

"Yeah, yuk it up," said Galaxy-Man.

Cherry was cracking up. "I like to think the guy at the blackjack table just said 'hit me,'" she giggled.

Galaxy-Man just shook his head and smiled.

The two stepped out of the ship and all the gamblers just stood and stared, too struck with confusion to move or say anything. Most of the slots players just kept playing, like they were so detached from reality that they didn't even notice the spaceship that crashed right in front of them. Galaxy-Man and Cherry awkwardly walked through the casino.

"Sorry, guys," said Galaxy-Man, "ice on the road and whatnot." He stuffed his face with finger food along the way to the elevator. Meanwhile, Cherry just read her book.

"Did you know that in 1535, King Henry VIII of England introduced a tax on beards, taxing every beard of more than two weeks' growth?"

"Yeah I knew that," said Galaxy-Man with his maw full of shrimp.

"What, you think just because I'm stupid that I'm an idiot!?"

The two walked into a crowded elevator of unhappy-looking people. Cherry pushed every last button and the elevator made 27 grueling stops while Galaxy-Man sang "Your Love Keeps Lifting Me Higher and Higher" by Jackie Wilson. Cherry danced a jig and clapped to the beat and Galaxy-Man sang his heart out like a born again Baptist on Sunday morning. Everyone sure was annoyed, but Galaxy-Man and Cherry sure had fun. When they reached their floor, Cherry mashed all the buttons once more before exiting. "You're evil," chuckled Galaxy-Man.

They walked down a long white hall to Cutty's room.

Galaxy-Man checked a little piece of paper that was in his pocket. "Cutty should be in 2721," he said.

"Okey doke."

They walked a little ways and found it. Galaxy-Man gave three gentle knocks to the door, and Cherry then ran over and started beating it like the door owed her money or something.

"What is your damage little boy?" asked Galaxy-Man.

Cutty answered the door. She was wearing a lovely cashmere sweater, black pants, and simple brown sandals.

"I told him not to beat on the door so hard," said Cherry, "but he just wouldn't listen."

"You really are evil," said Galaxy-Man as he shook his head.

"Hey guys," said Cutty. She sounded a bit hoarse and looked as though she had been crying.

"Aw, are you okay, Cutty Buddy?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"Yeah," said Cutty.

"You sure?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"I'm fine," she insisted. "Come on in, guys."

Galaxy-Man and Cherry walked in and sat down on the bed, but they both knew something was wrong. Galaxy-Man tried to cheer her up.

"If you don't tell me what's wrong I'm gonna punch Cherry in the arm," he threatened.

"He's not lyin'," added Cherry. "He'll do it."

"Look," said Cutty, "something did happen, but I don't want you guys to worry."

"Very well," said Galaxy-Man. He then punched Cherry in the arm, way harder than any grown man should ever punch a nine-year old. It sounded like a hammer in cloth hitting a slab of beef.

"Ow!!" wailed Cherry. "That freakin' hurt, you bastard!! You motherfu- grr!!!" She lunged at Galaxy-Man. "I'll kill you!!" She punched him in the face with great force, causing him to stagger to the floor. He got up and wiped the blood from his lip.

"Oh, ya wanna throw down? Huh!?" asked Galaxy-Man. "'Cause I'll throw down!!" He rushed over and faked with his right and got her square in the jaw with his left, leaving her mouth dripping with fresh blood. She spit and put her dukes back up.

"You punch like a velvet child, Dad."

Cutty stood watching in confusion, not knowing what to do exactly.

Galaxy-Man got right in Cherry face. "What's up? What's up?"

"Guys, stop fighting please," said Cutty very calmly.

"Never!!" yelled Cherry as she picked up her facts book from the couch. She ran over and started whacking Galaxy-Man on the head hard.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!!" cried Galaxy-Man as he was struck repeatedly. He wrestled the book from her and hit the side of her head, knocking her over.

"Guys, this has gone on long enough," said Cutty.

Ignoring Cutty's plea, Galaxy-Man ran over to Cherry and picked her up over his head and spun her around like he were in the WWE or something. "I'm a #adult!!!" he shouted as he spun her around. He then threw her into a dresser with a mirror on it, shattering the mirror to pieces. After hitting the mirror she fell to the floor.

"Jesus Christ!!" screamed Cutty.

Cherry grabbed a nearby white sock from the floor and started waving it around, admitting defeat.

"Uh-oh, you okay, Cher?" Galaxy-Man walked over to make sure she was okay. Her eyes were closed and she wasn't moving. Cutty stood with her hands over her mouth looking at Galaxy-Man. He knelt down over Cherry. Galaxy-Man and Cherry would every once in awhile have fistfights, which would occasionally turn into bloody squabbles, but they did it for fun and never out of real anger. They both had a warped and twisted idea of entertainment. Galaxy-Man usually won them as he never held back, even against a child, and Cherry loved that about him. Had he gone too far this time, though? "Did I hit you too hard, Cher?" asked Galaxy-Man.

She then abruptly opened her eyes and gave a sort of sinister look. "In your dreams!" she yelled. She then grabbed the book and whacked him in the face so hard that somewhere in the universe his mother shed a single tear.

"Oh God, not the book again!! Truce, truce!!"

They then both lied on their backs panting and looking up at the ceiling. Cherry started laughing, and Galaxy-Man soon joined. They certainly had a strange idea of fun.

"That was fun," giggled Cherry.

"Yeah," agreed Galaxy-Man.

"You guys are something else," said Cutty. "I should probably check out now before they see what you guys did to their mirror."

"That's nothing," said Cherry. "You should see what we did to the casino."

Luckily, Cutty was staying under the band's name and not her own so she didn't get in trouble. After checking out, the gang walked into the casino over to the ship. Everyone was still gambling and no one seemed to notice the giant crashed spaceship in front of them. They walked aboard and set sail for adventure. On board, Galaxy-Man sat in his throne eating an old box of stale animal crackers he found, and was doing a crossword puzzle. Cherry and Cutty were sitting in the floor eating a bag of chips and Cherry was showing Cutty some drawings she drew.

There were drawings of Spider-Man, swords, Steven Universe characters, upside down gorillas, and a drawing of her and Galaxy-Man playing in the snow together.

"Aww, that one's cute," said Cutty, "and the snow looks really good."

"Thanks, lady! Wanna know how I drew the snow?"

"Sure," smiled Cutty.

"Like this," said Cherry. She took some construction paper and started vigorously scratching her scalp with both hands until the page was covered in flaky white dandruff.

Cutty was a bit grossed out, but didn't want to say anything about it. "Cool," she said with two thumbs up.

"Hey, you guys good on Doritos back there?" asked Galaxy-Man from across the ship.

"You know it, dawg," answered Cherry. And then she had a brilliant idea. "Wait a minute, I can draw dirt with my Dorito fingers! Cutty, save me the crumbs."

"You got it," said Cutty.

"What's a six-letter word for an unintelligent person?" asked Galaxy-Man as he worked at his puzzle.

"Yo mama," answered Cherry. Cutty let out a loud guffaw and covered her mouth.

Galaxy-Man jumped up from his throne. "Whatchu say 'bout my mama!?" he yelled in his most macho voice.

Cherry started laughing.

"Dimwit," said Cutty.

"Oh, now you're against me, too?"

"No no, dimwit's a six-letter word."

Galaxy-Man paused. "So it is." He went back to his puzzle.

Cutty looked as though something was really troubling her.

"Can I ask you guys a question?" she asked.

"You just did," Cherry pointed out.

"What is it, Cutty?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"Why do you hang out with me? It's just - You guys are so interesting. You go on all these crazy adventures and do amazing things, and I'm just some average girl from Earth who plays tennis sometimes and reads books."

Galaxy-Man walked over and sat down in the floor next to Cutty and Cherry. "That's one of the reasons why I like you so much."

Galaxy-Man started drawing a picture with crayons. "I like you because you're weird, and you're weird because you're normal. Do you understand?"

"I guess so," said Cutty, unsure.

"There you go," said Galaxy-Man as he finished his drawing. He held it up so Cutty could see. It was a doodle of two poorly-drawn stick figures playing tennis. "It's me and you. Sorry you have orange skin. All we have is two crayons, dandruff and Doritos."

"Why are we sword fighting?" asked Cutty.

"What? We're playing tennis, dord!"

"Don't call her a dord, dord," said Cherry.

"Shut up, dord," said Galaxy-Man, "you don't even know what a dord is, you dord." Galaxy-Man looked behind him as if someone were in the back room. "Dad!!"

"What is happening right now?" said a very confused Cutty.

"Inside jokes," answered Cherry.

Galaxy-Man looked closer at the drawing. "I guess the rackets do look a bit like swords. Hey, you look good with a sword, Cutty."

"Thanks," said Cutty. "I used to have a wooden sword when I was little. I'd pretend to be Dirk the Daring from Dragon's Lair."

"I don't know what that is," said Galaxy-Man.

"Don't we have a real sword around here someplace?" asked Cherry.

"Oh yeah, the Durendal, the legendary sword of Roland."

"What, you guys just have that?" asked Cutty.

"Yup," said Cherry.

Galaxy-Man stood up to look for the sword. "Hey, if I didn't take it, someone would've stolen it." He looked in a large pile of randomness for the blade and surprisingly, he found it.

"Found it!!"

"Cool," said Cutty.

"You could use it to fight the forces of evil," said Cherry who was now drawing what appeared to be Galaxy-Man with a gorilla's head. "You could be like, our protector."

Cutty had dreams of being a sword fighter when she was younger, but never paid them much attention as she got older. "Gosh, you really think I could be a fighter?"

"I do," said Galaxy-Man. "Catch!" He tossed Cutty the sword, but she wasn't expecting it and she caught it by the blade, cutting her hands.

"My hands!!" she wailed. Her hands began to bleed. "You cut my hands!"

Galaxy-Man and Cherry rushed to Cutty's aid. Her hands were cut pretty good, but nothing life-threatening.

"Oh God," said Galaxy-Man with both hands over his mouth.

"Cherry, go get some bandages."

"You used them all after you fought that windmill, remember?" asked Cherry.

"Darn, what else we got?" asked Galaxy-Man.

They both stopped and pondered, letting out a collective "hmm." Galaxy-Man and Cherry then bandaged Cutty's hands with toilet paper, duct tape and green boxing gloves.

"There," said Galaxy-Man, "good as new! Maybe even better than before," he laughed guiltily as he scratched his neck. "Look, I'm really sorry for throwing a sword at you, man." He looked at

his feet and twiddled his fingers. "That was- That was kinda stupid."

"Yeah, sorry my dad is such a funkledunk," added Cherry.

"You're a funkledunk!" said Galaxy-Man.

"It's okay," said Cutty, "I actually think these boxing gloves are kinda cool."

"So you're not mad?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"Well, I'm not thrilled about having cut palms, but it was an accident. I forgive you. I just have one question."

"What is it?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"What's a funkledunk?"

"We don't know!" said Cherry loudly. "Dad!!"

Chapter 10

With Cutty's hands patched up, it was off to find the first dongle. Using the patent pending DongleDar, they traveled to a nearby solar system called the "Realm of Doom." They arrived on a dreadful planet called Dethfyre, which orbited three very hot stars; it was a fiery world of agony and destruction covered in oceans of molten lava and savage monsters. This was definitely not a good place to buy real estate.

Galaxy-Man landed the Star Whomper in a volcanic crater of all places. Surprisingly, it was one of the few areas not covered in boiling lava. To say it was hot here would win you the Understatement of the Year Award.

Cherry looked out the window of the ship in horror at the strange and terrifying world around them. "Are you sure this is even safe, Dad?"

Galaxy-Man put his hand on Cherry's shoulder and warmly smiled as the two stared out the window at ash-filled skies and a myriad of powerful volcanic lightning bolts. "I've never been sure about anything," he said comfortingly.

The ship began to shake violently and bounce around like a Mexican jumping bean in a sack race.

"Is th-the g-g-ground m-m-m-moving?" asked Cutty who sounded as though she were receiving a karate chop massage on count of all the shaking.

It was then that they realized that the volcano they landed on was actually a colossal ash-breathing monster made of hellfire and brimstone and was the size of a mountain. It crept slowly on its four stubby legs and resembled a tortoise, though, its shell was quite literally a volcano, and fully functional at that. The beast fed on rocks, which were superheated in its belly and ejected in a manner akin to a whale, though, whales don't typically spew hot lava from their backs.

"It's al-al-alive!" stammered Cutty.

"Yeah, w-well I'm n-n-not scared," said Galaxy-Man, "not one b-b-bit!" Sure enough, the creature began to erupt. Without hesitation, Galaxy-Man fumbled and tripped his way over to the helm. "Er, we'll just come back to this one," he said coolly as he flew back into the ragged sky.

They promptly left Dethfyre and set course for the next dongle. The DongleDar led them to a little known jungle planet called Lackadaisia, the sloth homeworld. Sloths came to Earth around 60 million years ago from this planet on a mission to conquer the planet, but as of writing this, they have yet to complete their mission on count of their incredible laziness.

Before long, Lackadaisia was in sight, but there was a problem - they were going much too fast.

"Uh-oh, we're goin' down!!" shouted Galaxy-Man. He was bathed in flashing red lights as if he were developing film, and he was sweating profusely like Cutty was looking through his browsing history or something.

"Dang it, Dad! Can't we go one day without crashing!? Just one!!"

The ship touched down in a large creek and slid several miles before crashing into a gigantic tree. It was bigger than any tree any of them had ever seen. Its size was truly mind-boggling. The base of its trunk was as wide as a supermarket, and its crown touched the clouds. It stood all of 10,000 ft tall

and its bark alone was 8 ft thick at least. This was certainly an impressive plant to behold.

Galaxy-Man thought for sure that it was about to fall. "It's comin' down!!" He yelled to everyone, but the tree stood standing. "Oh, I guess not." Galaxy-Man was actually a bit let down.

"That's a bit disappointing," said Cherry. "I was hoping we'd see it fall down."

"I know!" Galaxy-Man agreed. "I mean, it should've fell, right?"

"Right," nodded Cherry.

"You know what? screw it," said Galaxy-Man. He flew the ship backwards to a safe distance

"Uh-oh, what are you doing?" asked Cutty, fearing the worst of him.

He fired both of the ship's lasers cannons at the same time. When they were fired simultaneously the beams would merge into an extremely powerful swirling disk of energy.

Cutty shook her head. "Oh my God." She didn't exactly approve of his act.

The lasers hit the tree hard and sawed all the way through with relative ease. The very old tree fell to the ground. It was quite a spectacle really.

"Timber!" shouted Galaxy-Man as the poor tree fell. When it finally struck the ground, it boomed like loud thunder and it shook the ground for several seconds.

"Poor tree," said Cherry who kinda felt a bit bad for it.

"It's not like it's the only tree here," said Galaxy-Man. He pointed out the window. "Look, that tree over there's like 20% bigger. Why didn't the narrator mention that one?"

Galaxy-Man didn't know it, but he'd actually done a good thing by cutting the tree down. Dead trees are just as important as living one, especially on Lackadaisia. The fallen tree would become home to mushrooms, moss, insects, birds, and it would return important nutrients to the surrounding soil for thousands of years. One problem that Lackadaisia faced, was that trees tended to live too long and grow too large. They would hog all the water and nutrients from other plants.

The gang stepped off the ship and looked around. The planet was dotted with enormous trees and smaller but very thick, dry plants and hanging brown vines.

Her palms cut and wearing green boxing gloves, Cutty still carried her new sword. She had taken quite a liking to it actually. She cut and sliced through vines like a Jedi with a piñata.

"Doesn't that hurt your hands?" asked Cherry.

"A little," she replied, "but it's worth it. I've never felt more alive before."

As Galaxy-Man walked he tripped on a catchy vine. "Oh no!" he shouted.

"I'll save you!" yelled Cutty as she ran to Galaxy-Man's aid. She cut the vine and freed his tangled foot.

"Thanks," said Galaxy-Man. "Hey, you're pretty good with that thing. Why don't you take the lead."

Cutty was ecstatic. "Really?" she smiled.

"Go for it," said Cherry.

Cutty took the lead and began walking. She stopped. "Um, I don't know where we're going."

Cherry walked over and gave her the DongleDar and showed her how to use it. "Here, if the little number on the display gets smaller, it means you're getting warmer. If it gets bigger, it means we're getting colder. Easy like Sunday morning.

Unnastand?"

"Do you guys really want me to lead? Asked Cutty. "This may come as a shock, but I've never led an expedition on an unknown world before."

"You'll do fine, man," said Galaxy-Man. "I feel safe with you having that sword. I'm certainly no good with it."

"Well, you defeated me."

"You mean dehanded," said Cherry.

Galaxy-Man face-palmed hard and let out a very long sigh.

Cutty examined the DongleDar closely. "Is that a sock?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Cherry, "let's just leave it at that." She was mocking JupiterRay of course.

With the DongleDar in one hand and a legendary sword in the other, Cutty led the team towards the dongle. The DongleDar worked much better outside of the ship because of interference from the Star Whomper's electromagnetic debris shield. With the ship turned off, the DongleDar was much more accurate and precise. Cutty blazed a trail with the Durandal, and checked the DongleDar every few seconds to make sure they were on the right track. She made an excellent leader, making sure no baddies tried any funny business. She felt the thrill of adventure for the very first time in her adult life. She felt like Dirk the Daring himself, and half-expected a dragon to appear and kidnap Galaxy-Man. Cutty dreamed of battling a dragon actually.

While they didn't find any dragons this time, they did come across something equally foreboding. Cutty, who was ahead of Cherry and Galaxy-Man, stopped dead in her tracks at the dreadful sight before her. "Oh my God," she said in a hushed, somber tone. Lying at the base of a tree was a human skeleton. "What is it, Cutty?" asked Cherry who was lagging behind. "Did you realize the irony of your name?"

"Guys, I don't think we're welcome here," replied Cutty.

Galaxy-Man bravely walked up to where Cutty was. "It can't be that ba- Sweet cosmic Jewish zombie Jesus with gravy!!!"

Cherry then walked up and saw the skeleton. "What? It's just a dumpy ol' skeleton. It's not like he's gonna attack us or anything. He ain't got the guts!!" She then laughed heartily at her own joke.

Some rustling was then heard in the distance. Cutty readied her sword, "What was that noise!?"

"Uh, who wants to go for a little cross-country jog?" asked Galaxy-Man who was clearly afraid.

The gang trudged through the jungle at a brisk pace, Cutty cutting the path. They entered a clearing and lying before them was a gigantic three-toed sloth hanging from a large low-hanging tree branch. He was about as big as a garbage truck and smelled about as nice.

"Cheese it!" yelled Galaxy-Man, but Cutty charged the beast.

"No way!" yelled Cutty. "I can take it." The sloth didn't seem very interested in her. He yawned and slowly adjusted his body as Cutty ran at him. When he moved, a gigantic moth emerged from his fur. The moth was bulky and had a wingspan of 4 ft..

"Sloth moth!" yelled Galaxy-Man.

"No, Cutty," urged Cherry, "it might eat your sweater!"

"I'm not scared," said Cutty. She cautiously stepped over to it and bopped it on the face with her gloves. Then, more moths began to emerge from the sloth.

"There's too many of them!" yelled Galaxy-Man.

Cutty cut her losses and ran away. The moths didn't seem particularly dangerous, but Galaxy-Man had a way of blowing things way out of proportion. It was only a bug after all. The sloth on the other hand could've been scary, but didn't seem to care much at all about the world around him. By the time Cutty ran away, the sloth was already in a deep sleep, not even one-quarter of one care to give.

Breathing heavily, the gang ran through the jungle to a place they thought was safe.

"That was too close," panted Galaxy-Man. "That sure was a big moth."

"I guess you could say it was a behe-moth!" laughed Cherry.

Cutty chuckled while Galaxy-Man face-palmed again and let out an even longer sigh. "That was really good actually," he admitted. Cutty stood motionless, not laughing, looking in the distance with an expression of terror.

"Hey Cutty, why aren't you laughing?" asked Cherry.

"L-look!" pointed Cutty in utter terror. There before them was another giant sloth, this time it wore a vertical-striped yellow button up shirt with red and blue leather shoes. He was leaned

up against the root of a large tree batting around a bowling ball back in forth. Galaxy-Man and Cherry could now see the monstrosity before them.

"Look out!" screamed Galaxy-Man. "He's a pro bowler!!"

Bowling was the only sport sloths participated in. Bowling is the only sport that the lazy and lethargic can be really good at. All you have to do is roll a ball across the floor and then you get to go sit down and eat nachos and drink too much.

Cutty charged the beast. "War cry!!" The sloth was standing next to an ancient monument built by the sloths. It was a stone statue of an ordinary-looking female sloth. The bowler sloth yawned and rolled on to his belly to sleep. He stretched and let out another yawn. When he stretched he nudged the ball slightly and it came rolling very slowly at Cutty.

"He's retaliating!" yelled Cherry from the sidelines.

Cutty looked behind at Cherry. "What?" But while her eyes were on Cherry, Cutty ran into the ball and stubbed her toe something awful. "Ow!" she yelped as she fell down on one knee. "Man down, man down!" yelled Galaxy-Man as he and Cherry ran to Cutty. "Get her outta here!" Galaxy-Man ran over to the monument and shoved it down, shattering it to pieces for fun. "Haha." The gang then ran away a good ways to a place they figured was safe. They reached a tree with branches that touched the ground. "That's a cool tree," said Cutty.

"Wanna stop and rest?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"I know I do," said Cherry. "Hey Cutty, wanna know the difference between Galaxy-Man's mom and a bowling ball?"

"What?" asked Cutty, expecting a cute joke.

"You can only fit three fingers in a bowling ball!" replied Cherry.

"Jesus Christ, Cherry," said Galaxy-Man, "get your mind out of the gutter, child."

"Ha, I see what you did there," laughed Cherry.

The gang started walking up the tree branch to sit down.

"Whatevva," said Cherry in her sassiest voice, "yo mama so ugly she made One Direction go the other direction."

Cutty chuckled a little but tried to hide it. She was a huge 1D fan actually.

Galaxy-Man got right in Cherry face. "Yeah, well at least I got a mama!" he gloated. "What's up? What's up?"

The jokes were all in good fun of course. They sat down on the branch to rest.

"Who wants generic toaster pastries?" asked Galaxy-Man as he pulled out off brand Pop-Tarts from his pockets. "There's only two in the pack so I figured we all get two-thirds of a tart."

Cherry looked at the pastries' shiny packaging and winced.

"'Bop-Tarts?'" she asked with a raised brow.

"Take it up with Hamilton," said Galaxy-Man. "He's the one who buys all this off-brand junk."

Cherry laughed a bit. "His cereal's so off-brand it doesn't even have a name. It's just a blank box filled with sadness."

Galaxy-Man laughed. "Yeah, and his soup is 'cream of something.'" He handed everything their two-thirds.

Cutty rubbed her sore toe. It wasn't bleeding thankfully.

"Guys, I think I let that sword get to my head a little."

"Aw, but you were so great," said Galaxy-Man. "You saved us from the sloth moth, remember?"

"I don't know, I just feel like I behaved silly or something," said Cutty. "I was acting like a child."

"Ouch," said Cherry. "I'm sitting right here, dude."

"What's wrong with being a kid?" asked Galaxy-Man. "You looked so happy out there, man. You make a really good leader, Cutty Buddy."

"Really?" asked Cutty.

"Really truly," smiled Galaxy-Man. "In fact, I'm promoting you to team captain."

"Aw, what!?" cried Cherry. "But I've been gunning for that title for nine years, man. How could you just up and give it to a newbie like her? What the F, man!?" She still didn't dare say the F word.

"Well," said Cutty, "my first act as captain is renouncing my captainship and making Cherry the new team captain."

Galaxy-Man was surprised. "What? You can't do that, man."

"Of course I can. I'm the captain, remember?"

"No you're not. You just made Cherry the captain, dummy."

Cherry sat eating her tart with a crooked grin. "Send this man to the brig," she ordered.

"Dang it!" blurted Galaxy-Man. He crossed his arms in protest while Cherry and Cutty had a good laugh.

"So how far is the dongle?" asked Cherry.

Cutty checked the DongleDar. "This can't be right," she said.

"What's it say, yo?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"It's right... right here," said Cutty who was very confused.

"Maybe the DongleDar doesn't work," suggested Cherry.

"No way," said Galaxy-Man, "JupiterRay's the smartest guy out there. He's never made faulty equipment before."

"Maybe it's below us or something," suggested Cutty.

"Or maybe," they all said in unison. They looked up above them and saw a terrifying sight. It was the biggest, slothiest sloth yet, hanging on a branch right above their heads this whole time, staring them down with its slothy eyes. It was wearing a crown and looked very important... as far as sloths go at least. The gang quickly fled out of the tree.

"Has that thing been there the whole time!?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"Yikes," added Cutty.

"He has the dongle!!" yelled Cherry.

The sloth looked at them all and slowly crawled out of the tree.

"He's coming at us!" yelled Galaxy-Man.

To say he was slow was an understatement actually. Seriously, it took five solid minutes for him to come down. The gang was sitting on a log waiting. Galaxy-Man was writing his name in the dirt while Cherry and Cutty played tic-tac-toe.

Cutty won three games in a row. "Wanna play again?" she asked.

"How 'bout tic-tac-no," replied Cherry.

The sloth finally stepped onto the ground and set his sights on them.

"Oi," said Galaxy-Man in his best Australian accent, "he's cranky!"

The beast was as big as a school bus and he had an evil look in his eye. His fur looked like a shaggy bathroom rug and he smelled about as nice as one. Cherry could see a clear plastic cartridge tied around his neck. It was a dongle! The gang prepared for combat.

Just then, the creature did something very unexpected, it spoke! "Be you very afraid," he said in a deep, booming voice, "for I am Gorox, the three-toed king!"

"It tic-tac-talks!?" yelped Cherry.

"Cranky, mate," said Galaxy-Man, still speaking Australian.

"Indeed, all sloths possess the ability to speak," explained Gorox, "though, we seldom feel like it." A little known fact about sloths is that they are one of the few creatures smarter than humans. They could probably conquer the universe if they weren't so very lazy. Sloths live to be lazy and are never in a hurry to do anything. They don't hurt anyone, but aren't of much use and never really do much of anything. They're harmless, but sort of useless, too. They're like the stoners of the animal world.

"Yo Gorox," said Galaxy-Man in his normal voice, "we need that there cartridge 'round yo nop!" For those who don't know, "nop" means head.

"Trade me your silver chain?" said Gorox, pointing at Galaxy-Man's necklace. Why would he want a chain?

Galaxy-Man took it off and handed it to Cherry. "You'll have to pry it from Cherry's cold, dead hands!"

"Screw you, Dad," said Cherry.

Gorox let out a terrible roar that shook the very ground.

Slobber spewed from his mouth as he gnashed his terrible yellowed fangs and he breathed fire as if he were the king of all dragons. All sloths Possess the ability to breathe fire, but very seldom do. It can be a bit tiring.

"Sweet uncensored, deep fried Muhammad on a stick," blurted Galaxy-Man.

Gorox's roar went from terrifying to kinda cute, as the roar became a sort of big yawn as the beast fell into a deep sleep.

"Is he dead?" asked Cutty after a long pause.

"Nah, he's just sleepin'" answered Galaxy-Man.

"Oh... well that's kinda lame," said Cherry who thought the encounter was a bit anticlimactic.

Cutty walked over and gently nabbed the dongle from the creature's neck. "Got it!" she whispered loudly.

Just then, Galaxy-Man felt sorry for Gorox. He realized then that they were sort of the bad guys all along. They stole Gorox's necklace, destroyed an ancient monument, bopped an innocent moth on the schnoz, and cut down a million year old tree, (though that was actually a good thing.) Regardless, Galaxy-Man felt bad.

When Cherry handed him his chain back, he walked over to Gorox. "What're you doing, Dad?" asked Cherry.

Galaxy-Man put the chain around Gorox's wrist.

"Dad, you've had that chain forever," said Cherry. "You really wanna give that up?"

"It's the least we can do," explained Galaxy-Man. "We did just steal something after all."

"I guess we have been sort of mischievous," said Cutty.

Cherry almost shed a tear when she realized. "Oh God, what have we done!? We've been a bunch of dooguses."

"Yeah, well we're gonna make up for it," smiled Galaxy-Man.

On the way back to the Whomper, they passed by the bowler sloth who was still looking at his shattered statue in horror.

"It took our kind 15,000 years to construct that monu-," but before he could finish his sentence, Cherry had already put the statue back together with a little bit of mud to hold the pieces together.

"Good as new," smiled Cherry. The statue looked better than ever. The sloth looked very pleased. Cherry tipped her imaginary hat and the gang went along their way.

They then came to where the sloth moths were and Cutty walked over to the one she hit and gave it her sweater. "Here, you can have it," said Cutty, bashfully. All the moths swarmed onto the sweater and looked very pleased with it. "You guys enjoy."

"Aww," gushed Galaxy-Man.

Finally, they had finally made it back to the Whomper. Cutty and Cherry began walking up the gangplank into the ship, but Galaxy-Man lagged behind.

"Hang on, fellas," he said.

"What is it?" asked Cherry.

Galaxy-Man didn't say anything. He walked over to the fallen tree he cut down and from its branch he grabbed three seeds.

They were the size of apples and about as heavy. Around him were hundreds of curious squirrels who were not afraid of him. They

chattered and twitched their squirrely tails as Galaxy-Man found a suitable place, knelt down on one knee, and buried the seeds together.

"Hang in there little guys," Galaxy-Man said quietly to the seeds, "you're all gonna grow together and someday you're gonna become the biggest tree the world has ever seen." He stood up and gave a Vulcan salute to the ground. "Live long and prosper, man." Curious squirrels began to envelop his legs but Galaxy-Man just sort of ignored them as if they weren't there.

Cherry and Cutty walked over to him. "You guys done having a moment?" teased Cherry. "We can come back if you want, dude." Galaxy-Man then burped loudly and scratched his belly. "Nah, let's get the junk off this dumb rock," he replied. More and more squirrels came crawling up Galaxy-Man's legs and he could take it no longer. "I'd make a joke about all these squirrels crawling up my legs, but unlike some of you, my mind is a pure and clean place."

"Well mine sure as hell isn't!" Cherry chimed in. "They're making an ice cream sundae and the last ingredient they need is your sweaty balls!!"

"At least I have balls ya dumb chick!" yelled Galaxy-Man. The squirrels then started crawling into Galaxy-Man's pocket and he realized what they were after - the remaining Bop-Tart bits from earlier.

"Oh, they're just hungry," pointed out Cutty.

Galaxy-Man then started brushing the squirrels off his legs.

"Well let's get into the Whomper post-haste 'for they decide to eat us or somethin' or other,"

The gang started for the ship as more and more squirrels began showing up. It was a truly odd phenomenon.

"I still have one question," said Cutty. "What killed the man we found earlier?"

Cherry looked at the oceans of squirrels around them and thought. "You don't think... "

"Sweet buttered Buddha with broccoli," said Galaxy-Man, "the man went nuts and killed himself!!"

Something very peculiar then happened. One of the squirrels began to speak in a thick Australian accent. "Actually the bugger was a real estate agent who tripped over his own beard and hit his head on a rock."

"Squirrels can talk, too!?" said Galaxy-Man in utter amazement.

"No, just me," said the squirrel. "By the way, your Australian accent sucks, mate." The squirrel then hopped away and the gang went inside the ship. As a parting gift, they left the squirrels a wide assortment of Hamilton's food. When all was said and done, it was high-time to vamoose.

On the ride home, Cherry put the dongle into the Power Glove, but nothing seemed to happen. They figure they'd take it to JupiterRay the next day and see what he thought.

And so their adventure had come to an end, and what a wacky, random quest it was. Cherry made it her life's mission to learn everything about sloths, and Galaxy-Man never looked at squirrels the same way again. Cutty on the other hand was absolutely amazed by everything that happened. When she returned home she filled her diary in one night and was too excited to sleep.

Chapter 11

The gang returned home to rest up for their next journey. Galaxy-Man practically went into hibernation. It wasn't unusual for him to stay in bed for several days after an adventure, and by bed I mean room full of blankets of course. After a few days

sleep, Galaxy-Man had awoken from his epic slumber and took things easy for the day. Cherry went to the library to study as she often did. Everyone was recuperating from the exhausting endeavor on Lackadaisia. Galaxy-Man believed in taking things easy after a big adventure like that and count his blessings, though he didn't believe in God of course.

It was a calm day: no monsters, no magic portals, the damsels (or lads) in distress. Galaxy-Man sat outside in Hamilton's childhood swing set with Stevie in his lap. He was wearing loose-fitting khakis and a sky blue Rugrats shirt. He was gently swaying back and forth reading comic books, smoking a very long cigar, and drinking cheap grape wine out of the bottle. Next to him was a stack of rare comic books he inherited from his father, though, he only took care of the ones he enjoyed reading. Value, after all, is relative to the individual. One person's treasure is another person's trash.

"Dude," said Galaxy-Man to no one in particular, "this sucks, man. Superman is so OP."

Etsuka, Barnard and Caiden came walking by and saw Galaxy-Man reading comics. Barnard and Galaxy-Man's father were both avid collectors of comics, though, they collected for sport so to speak and never actually read them.

Barnard was always jealous of his collection and when he saw Galaxy-Man reading them he had to walk over. "What are you doing

with Mr. Belfort's comics?" asked Barnard. Belfort being Galaxy-Man's father's surname.

"I never liked my father's name," said Galaxy-Man as he thumped through the pages. "I'm glad I got my mother's last name, but you guys don't know what that is."

Etsuka rolled her eyes. "Oh my God, we don't care," she said snobbishly.

"You should be more careful with such a collector's item, young man," said Barnard. "Do you know how much that book is worth?"

"Nothing," answered Galaxy-Man, very sure of himself.

"Excuse me?" asked Barnard. "That's an Action Comics # 3. It's worth thousands."

"Yeah, only 'cause dords like you say it is. The story's lame, the characters suck, the art isn't great. Is it wrong of me to say that the value of something should be based on its quality?"

"What's a dord?" asked Etsuka.

"Look," said Galaxy-Man, "if you promise to actually read them, you can have all of these comics... except Fantastic Four. You can't have those."

"I have more important things to do than sit around all day reading comics," said Barnard as he walked away.

A whistling was heard in the distance. Stevie got up from Galaxy-Man's lap because she knew Cherry was walking home from the library and she always brought Stevie a lock of fresh catnip

that grew wild around the library. Sure enough, Cherry came strolling along whistling the Andy Griffith Show theme song. Galaxy-Man thumped his cigarette away and took a swig of his cheap wine. He warmly smiled as he glanced at his daughter walking down the street. "Isn't she lovely?" he asked. "She's a real bookworm that one. Can't keep her away from the 'brary. For her, learning is a hobby rather than a chore, more of a game than anything else."

Etsuka shook her head. "Mm, she lacks discipline," she said. "Children need a hard, structured learning system in order to succeed. Isn't that right, Caiden?"

"Yes, mother," replied Caiden, though, he didn't really mean it. Like Cherry, Caiden was also home-schooled. Etsuka was a hard teacher though and pushed him way too hard to succeed. He wasn't allowed to read, watch or play anything that didn't further his learning. He was brilliant, but he was also miserable. He had no real friends and was socially awkward. He was shy and didn't make eye-contact with anyone.

"I don't mean to tell you your business," said Galaxy-Man as he took another sip of wine, "but kids need to play and have fun just as much as they need schoolin'. Why don't you let him come over some time and play with Cherry? I think that'd do 'em both some good. Cherry needs more friends her age."

Etsuka was adamantly opposed to this idea. "There will be plenty of time for play after Caiden finishes college," she said, very stone-faced.

"Yo Caidydid," said Galaxy-Man. "I got some knowledge for you. Life doesn't begin after school. It began the day you were born, dude. One day, when you get your fancy degree in being a know-it-all asshole, you're gonna look back at your dull, boring life and realize just how few nice memories you made."

Etsuka was totally speechless, but Caiden actually wished he would keep going. He was much too afraid to say anything himself and almost saw Galaxy-Man as a sort of hero.

Cherry then walked up wearing her turtle shell backpack. "What are you guys talking about?" she asked.

"Actually we were just leaving," said Etsuka angrily.

"Okay, hate you too," said Cherry. Stevie began pawing at Cherry's legs waiting for the sweet, sweet 'nip. She knelt down to give Stevie some of the catnip and glanced up at Caiden.

Cherry looked right in Caiden's eyes and smiled because she knew it made him uncomfortable. "Hi Caiden. How are you today?" she asked in her girliest voice.

"Come on Caiden," said Etsuka, "you don't have to answer that."

"What are you, his lawyer?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"I'm his mother," she replied.

"Whatevs, braj," said Cherry. "Yo, Father-Man, is the doh locked? I gotta feed the fish."

"Nah, man, city done turned the water off today. You gotta use Hamilton's bathroom."

"Son of a bitch, I hate pooping in strange bathrooms."

Etsuka's jaw dropped. "You let your nine-year-old daughter talk like that!?"

Galaxy-Man pointed at Cherry. "Yeah, Cherry, you watch your goddamn mouth you little shit!"

Cherry jokingly rolled her eyes. "Damn, man, why you gotta ride my ass all the time?"

After a short pause, the two then erupted into laughter as Etsuka stormed off holding Caiden's hand. Caiden glanced back at Galaxy-Man and Cherry with a blank expression. Who knows what was going through his mind.

"I kinda feel sorry for him," said Cherry.

"Yeah, but what can you do?" added Galaxy-Man.

Stevie was anxiously awaiting more 'nip. "Stevie want catnip," said Cherry in her best caveman voice. She took off her backpack and sat it on the ground. She reached in and pulled out the rest of the catnip she picked and Stevie went crazy. "You're such a sillygoat, Stevie,"

"Stee-dizzle 'bout to get tore up!" said Galaxy-Man. He took another sip of his wine. "Dude, this wine is killer. Want some?"

Cherry grabbed the bottle "You know, braj." She took a very generous swig. "Tee hee, I love wine," she giggled. "It makes my head tickle."

"You're funny, Cherry."

Cherry started walking over to Hamilton's door. "I'm gonna go make poops. Don't wait up." She tried the door but it was locked. "Aw, what? It's locked."

"Oh, guess Godboy's still at church," said Galaxy-Man. "Don't worry, we'll find a way in." Galaxy-Man walked over to Hamilton's bird bath, removed the top of it and poured the water out. He hobbled it onto Hamilton's porch and chucked the heavy stone bird bath through his window, shattering it into pieces. "Jesus Christ, Dad!" yelled Cherry.

Galaxy-Man crawled inside and opened the door. "Welcome!" he yelled to Cherry and Stevie.

Cherry shrugged and walked inside.

Cherry walked upstairs to poop while Galaxy-Man "repaired" the window. He walked into Hamilton's kitchen and got some clear plastic sandwich wrap from the drawer. He placed the wrap over the window with the hope that Hamilton wouldn't be able to tell the difference, though, it was painfully obvious that the window was now made of plastic and not glass. He looked at the questionable job he had done and scratched his head. "Uh, it looked better in my head," he said to no one in particular. The

window looked truly terrible and could be clearly seen even from the street.

After a generous 15 minutes' stool, Cherry finally came back down. She saw the horrendous repair work Galaxy-Man had done. "Nice patch job," she said sarcastically.

With catnip in her mouth, Stevie shredded a newspaper on the floor and slept on her back. She was on quite the 'nip trip.

"Shut up, he won't even notice," assure Galaxy-Man.

Cherry walked into the kitchen. "Whatever, I'm freakin' hungry, man. What kinda munchies does Hamilton have stashed away?"

Cherry went looking through Hamilton's cabinet for food while Galaxy-Man got out a frying pan to make eggs. "It's either gonna be an omelette or scrambled eggs," said Galaxy-Man. "Either one's fine."

Cherry opened a fresh box of granola bars. "Why does Hamilton have brown eggs?" she asked.

"'cause he thinks he's better than everyone else."

"Dad, does Hamilton even have a job? How does he buy food and stuff?"

Galaxy-Man grabbed six eggs from the fridge. "He makes money off all the wheat he owns. I gave him most of the sharecrops and the money I inherited. I made him a billionaire."

"That fool's a goddang billionaire!?"

"With a B."

"Then why does he have a standard def TV?"

Galaxy-Man made a few mistakes and his omelette became scrambled eggs. "The goody two-shoes gives most of his money to charity. Hey, pass me some picante. I'm feelin' a little dangerous today."

Cherry hopped down from the counter and walked over to the fridge. "So just how much did you give him?"

Galaxy-Man dashed some salt and pepper into his eggs. "A lot. Let's leave it at that. That's sorta why he puts up with so much crap from me."

Cherry tossed Galaxy-Man the sauce. "Oh, because he can never repay the kindness you did him."

"He makes millions every single day, but barely keeps any for himself."

The two sat down at the table and ate eggs. They were a little on the extra-spicy side, but pretty good.

After they finished eating, they moseyed over to JupiterRay's house to ask about the dongle. They had nothing better to do that day. They walked up to the door and Galaxy-Man knocked gently, as he always did. Cherry then banged on the door like it made fun of her hair or something. JupiterRay answered the door quick, fast and in a hurry. He thought it must've been an emergency.

"Dang it, Cherry," said Galaxy-Man. "Why you gotta bust my chops all the time?"

"Galaxy-Man," said JupiterRay, "is everything okay?"

"Yeah, yeah," said Galaxy-Man, "my hand slipped I guess." He gave Cherry a nasty look when he said this.

"Come in," said JupiterRay. "My dad was just baking brownies."

"Awesome, I want brownies!" said Cherry very eagerly.

They walked in and JupiterRay led them over to the couch. He brushed a stack of old magazines into the floor so they'd have room to sit. "So what do I owe the pleasure?" he asked politely.

"Well," replied Galaxy-Man, "believe it or not, we found one of the dongles you predicted."

"Really?" asked JupiterRay as he tugged his beard. "That's excellent. Hey Dad, come in here a sec!"

"We plugged it into the Power Glove but it ain't do nothin'," said Cherry.

"We were hoping you could help us out a bit," added Galaxy-Man.

"Certainly," said JupiterRay. "I'd be glad to- Dad!!"

"So how's Mr. Jesseks doing today?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"He's doing fine... if he'd just- Dad, take out the earbuds, and put them away! Jim Croce can wait!"

Galaxy-Man and Cherry were just waiting to hear him use some made up-word to describe his father.

"I'm sorry, guys," said Jupiter Ray. "My dad's being a real junkwagon."

Cherry fought back the giggles, but Galaxy-Man kept his composure alright.

JupiterRay walked into the kitchen, presumably to help his father out with the brownies. Galaxy-Man and Cherry were left alone in the living room.

"Hey, Dad," whispered Cherry with a smile, "you're a junkwagon."

"You're a junkwagon," whispered Galaxy-Man loudly, fighting back the laughter.

Cherry started shushing him as JupiterRay walked back into the living room holding a plate a brownies.

"They're a little hot," he said.

"Doesn't Mr. Jesseks want some?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"No, he's on some weird diet," said JupiterRay. "He's trying to watch his calorie intake... even though he was eating pudding at 2:00 A.M. last night!!" he said with a loud inflection so that his father could hear him.

Cherry and Galaxy-Man each had two brownies and then it was off to JupiterRay's lair. He examined the dongle intensely. He ran tests and crunched numbers and a whole bunch of other stuff that didn't seem to make any sense to Galaxy-Man and Cherry.

JupiterRay said nothing at all for almost 20 minutes while he ran his tests. Galaxy-Man and Cherry were left in suspense.

"Well," said JupiterRay, finally breaking his long silence, "the dongle appears to be in working order, but it seems as though it's somehow being blocked from carrying out its operations by some wicked encryption, like it needs some sort of key to operate."

"What? Lemme see that," said Galaxy-Man as he snatched the glove and put it on. "Maybe it's motion-activated or somethin'."

"No, Dad, you don't have enough fingers," said Cherry. She was of course referring to the fact that her father was missing his index finger.

When he put on the glove, it appeared to activate. It began to glow brilliant orange and it emitted pulses of invisible energy that warped the light around it like a shock wave.

"Dude," said Cherry in awe.

"Amazing," said JupiterRay. "Is this the first time you've worn the glove?"

"This is my first time even touching it," answered Galaxy-Man.

"It came from a toilet."

"You, uh, didn't tell me that," said JupiterRay. He was a little grossed out. "Anyways, I believe we should go into the backyard and conduct a few experiments. Don't a move a finger until we head outside. We still don't know what this thing is capable of."

They walked into the backyard. It was a well-kept yard. It was fenced in and the grass was green and short. Galaxy-Man made sure not to move his hand at all as he walked into the center of the backyard.

"Okay," said JupiterRay, "try plugging in the dongle."

"Yep yep," said Galaxy-Man. He plugged in the dongle and his body began to glow violet. "Well this is interesting." Bands of energy began to wrap around his legs.

"How do you feel?" asked JupiterRay.

Galaxy-Man balanced on one leg. "I feel like a frog. This is so weird. I feel like I could leap over a building or something." He began hopping around a little.

"Incredible," said JupiterRay. "Perhaps the glove has somehow granted you superhuman jumping."

Galaxy-Man hopped 2 ft into the air, then 4 ft, then 7 ft..

"Careful, Galaxy-Man," said JupiterRay, "we still don't know how safe the glove is."

"Whoa, do a flip," said Cherry.

"Okay!" shouted Galaxy-Man. He then jumped an astounding 75 ft into the air by accident and lost control. "Oh God no!!!" he shouted as he hurdled to the ground at an high speed. He landed hard in a shallow duck pond next door. While no ducks were harmed, Galaxy-Man sprained his ankle something fierce. He started sobbing. He took off the Power Glove and threw it on the

ground. "I don't wanna play this game anymore!!" he cried loudly. It could've been a lot worse. He could've seriously injured himself falling from such a ridiculous height.

Cherry and JuptiterRay rushed over to the pond.

"Dad, are you okay!?" cried Cherry. She was genuinely afraid her dad was hurt. "Please be okay!"

Galaxy-Man held his ankle in pain. "What good is having superhuman jumping if you just break your legs when you land? I don't feel like anybody learned anything in this chapter."

The Power Glove was certainly a strange thing. Who build it? What was it made to do? What other abilities could more dongles unlock? Find out next week on the next exciting episode of The Amazing Galaxy-Man!

Chapter 12

Christmas time had come to the Breadbasket and after a good night's sleep, a warm bubble bath, five Lortabs, and a few shot of straight whiskey, Galaxy-Man was feeling much better. He hobbled a bit when he walked, and made overly dramatic grunting noises as he moved, but he was mostly okay. On Christmas morning, he, Cherry and Stevie were on their way to Earth. Apparently they had failed to notice the last time the dongle that was right there on Earth. This was perfect actually because Galaxy-Man's second favorite band of all time, Funkmaster Shades, would be performing live there later that night.

Even though Galaxy-Man and Cherry were both atheists, they still celebrated Christmas. Who wouldn't wanna be a part of Christmas? For them, Christmas wasn't about some man in the desert who lived a long time ago, but about having a good time and spreading joy to loved ones. Since Galaxy-Man and Cherry would be away this Christmas, Hamilton agreed to celebrate Christmas the day after just so he could spend it with his best friends. What a nice guy Hamilton was.

On the ship was a Christmas tree that Galaxy-Man and Cherry had stolen from Hamilton's living room. It was adorned with shiny red and green balls, which for some reason is a symbol of Christmas. It was a real tree and it was strung with popcorn, though, Galaxy-Man and Cherry had eaten it all for breakfast that morning. Under it were presents to be opened the next day. They took the tree for no other reason than that it looked pretty. Galaxy-Man really liked the ambient light it gave off so he put it in the Whomper to give off good vibes. They kept all the other lights on the ship turned off, which made things feel more Christmas-y for them.

Galaxy-Man was sitting in his throne with his feet up on the dashboard watching Pandora Hearts on Hamilton's tablet, drinking a bit of adult lemonade and smoking a grape cigarillo. "Wait, why did they put Oz in jail?" he asked the show. "He ain't even did nothin', man."

Cherry was sitting on the couch with Stevie in her lap reading a book about psychology, and like her book on helium, she just couldn't put it down! "Hey Dad, did you know that people who spend money on experiences rather than material possessions tend to be happier?"

"What about Lite-Brite?" asked Galaxy-Man. "Now there's an experience."

"What's Lite-Brite?" countered Cherry.

Galaxy-Man was shocked at this. "You've never heard of Lite-Brite!?"

Cherry thought hard and stroked her imaginary beard. "Isn't that one of those big hoops you push with a stick?"

Galaxy-Man just stared at Cherry in utter amazement. "Did they just unfreeze you!?"

"Well excuse me."

Galaxy-Man just shook his head and drank another sip of his lemonade."

"Whatcha drinkin'?" asked Cherry.

"Lemonade mixed with Captain Morgan," replied Galaxy-Man. "It's pretty terrible. Wanna try?"

"Yessir," said Cherry as she got off the couch and Stevie reluctantly had to find a new place to nap. What a pain. Cherry walked over to Galaxy-Man. She took the lemonade and drank some.

"Ugh, that's really bad," she laughed.

"I told ya," said Galaxy-Man.

"Hey, Dad, can... I ask you something?"

"You just did, so apparently you can."

Cherry looked a bit serious, like something troubling was on her mind.

"What's wrong, Cher?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"Why do you let me drink and smoke and stuff?"

"Because I respect you."

Cherry began walking back over to the couch. "Yeah, but I'm just a kid," she said as she sat down.

"To tell you the truth, kiddo, I'd rather you didn't do those things, but I also think you're the smartest person I know, and I trust you'll make the right choices in life. If you wanna drink and stuff that's your business and I'll never try to stop you. Wanna know why I drink and do drugs?

"To fool yourself into thinking you're happy?"

"No, fool! I do this stuff because my dad told me I couldn't, and I was curious. He was strict and I really resented him for that, made me rebellious."

"Hey, Dad,"

"What's up?"

Cherry smiled. "I think I'm gonna keep clean from now on. Well, maybe a spot of wine every now and again for when we play Monopoly. I need to be good and drunk to make that game fun."

"Groovy," smiled Galaxy-Man. "I've got so much respect for you right now."

Cherry walked over and gave Galaxy-Man a big bear hug. "I love you, Dad."

As the two had a nice warm hug, Galaxy-Man patted Cherry on the back. "Don't ever change, kiddo."

Some might say that Galaxy-Man's style of parenting was dangerous and irresponsible, but one thing was sure - he loved Cherry more than anything and wanted her to be a good person. Galaxy-Man saw her more as a friend rather than a daughter, and that's why their relationship worked so well. For Galaxy-Man, respect and openness were the most important aspect of any friendship. He believed in being open with Cherry, giving her praise when she did well, as well as calling her out when she did bad. Galaxy-Man believed in leniency, but also in building a mutual respect and in keeping things real. Parents who are too strict will have children who resent them and are more likely to disobey them, while parents who are too lenient will likely have children who will take advantage of them. Sure, Galaxy-Man was a lenient dad, but the respect they shared for each other made it very unlikely that Cherry would ever disobey or take advantage of him. Only a fool would do something to hurt his or her best friend.

Before long, Earth was in sight... but there was a problem - they were going much too fast.

"Uh-oh," said Galaxy-Man as he broke into a fierce sweat, "hang on to something 'cause we are goin' down!!" He was bathed in red lights as he flipped switches and mashed buttons like it was going out of style.

Cherry was sick and tired of Galaxy-Man crashing all the time.

"God-freaking-dammit this is getting old!!"

They were going to a hotel in England where Cutty and Maudeville were staying. Cutty stayed in a new hotel just about every night when they were on tour. This hotel in England was particularly nice. It was of Victorian style and each room had its own balcony. Nicer still, it was only a short walk away from the marvelously mysterious Stonehenge.

Coming down at a ridiculous speed, Galaxy-Man did everything he possibly could to bring the Whomper to a safe landing. They finally touched down hard in a grassy field. They slid a long ways before, sure enough, finally crashing into Stonehenge itself, completely destroying the prehistoric monument! Galaxy-Man and Cherry tightly closed their eyes and gritted their teeth as they knew they'd messed up bad this time - or rather, Galaxy-Man had messed up.

"Ah crap," said Galaxy-Man, "I just destroyed an historical landmark, didn't I?"

"Pretty much," nodded Cherry.

Galaxy-Man got up out of his throne and walked over to the door of the ship. "Maybe it's not that bad," he said optimistically.

"They were already ruins, right?" asked Cherry. "Who cares?"

"Yeah, screw history," said Galaxy-Man. "Everybody died, the end." Galaxy-Man stuck out his head to gauge the damage. It did not look good. Every stone was knocked over and far away from where it originally was. Tourists were petrified with confusion and things were deathly silent. Everyone stared at Galaxy-Man, perhaps expecting some sort of response. Galaxy-Man didn't have a clue as what to say. He was sweaty and nervous as an antelope at a lion convention.

"Uh," he said with everyone watching, "Um, I... I got to go." He poked his head back inside and slowly walked over to the helm.

"Ugh, that was so awful."

"What's the damage?" asked Cherry.

"Not good," replied Galaxy-Man.

Cherry started cracking up. "You knocked over Stonehenge," she giggled.

Galaxy-Man smiled. "Yeah, yuk it up,"

Galaxy-Man took the ship off the ground and flew over to the hotel, hoping and praying he didn't get arrested for his crimes against humanity. This was a pretty bad thing even for Galaxy-Man's absurd standards, though, he actually found it sort of

hilarious. After all, who cares about a bunch of dumb rocks in a field that don't do anything?

Once at the hotel, they went up to Cutty's room and banged on her door. She looked very happy to see Galaxy-Man and Cherry.

"Hi guys," she said. "Merry Christmas."

"And a merry Christmas to you, madam," said Galaxy-Man politely as he tipped his usual imaginary hat. "You look so much happier than last time."

"Yeah," added Cherry. "You look as happy as a Corgi on stilts."

"I'm feeling much better today," said Cutty. "Our adventure together really made me appreciate life a whole lot more I think."

"I'm glad to hear that, Cutty, I really am," said Galaxy-Man, "but we need to get gone fast."

"Um, okay," said Cutty, "lemme just grab my sword real quick. I've been taking it everywhere. It's crazy."

After grabbing the Durandal, it was time to go. The gang promptly walked aboard the Whomper. Cutty noticed that the ship had been damaged since the last time she saw it. "What happened to the ship?" she asked.

"We crashed into Stonehenge," said Cherry as if it were no big thing.

"Ah," said Cutty as if it were nothing out of the ordinary.

Galaxy-Man quickly readied the ship for take-off before the fuzz showed up. "Yeah, it was hilarious. You shoulda been there, man."

Cutty and Cherry sat down on the couch, and, sure enough, Stevie had to lie down in Cutty's lap.

"Aww, Stevie really likes you," gushed Cherry.

Stevie began purring and making biscuits on Cutty's inner thigh.

"Ow!" yelped Cutty. She hoped Stevie would stop, but she had other plans.

Cherry picked Stevie up off of Cutty's lap. "Get off of her, you sillyhead," she said.

"So where are we headed, guys?" asked Cutty. Cutty actually had no idea where they were going. Galaxy-Man never gave his friends much information on what they'd be doing. He'd call and simply tell them to be ready.

"I've got it all planned out," said Galaxy-Man, very sure of things. "First we're gonna embark on an epic quest for the second dongle, then I've got something special planned for just me and you, then we're all gonna go see Funkmaster Shades live in concert together, then we're gonna go back to The Breadbasket and watch animated Christmas specials, and then, finally, tomorrow morning, we're gonna celebrate Christmas at Hamilton's. Everyone's gonna be there, man. It's gonna be fun-and-a-half."

"Wow," said Cutty, "you've really thought this out."

"Indeed I have," smiled Galaxy-Man, "and it shall be most fantastic!"

This was sure to be the best day ever. Galaxy-Man wasn't the type of person to plan things out, but he really wanted this day to be special, and did everything he could to make things perfect. With the gang all together, Galaxy-Man flew the Whomper to a place on Earth called Far Land.

"Why didn't we just get this dongle last time?" asked Cutty.

Cherry looked embarrassed and looked at her shoes. "I guess I thought the little dot on the monitor was us or something," said Cherry. "We were so close, you know?"

"Oh well," added Galaxy-Man, "everyone makes mistakes... except for Hamilton; he's perfect."

The DongleDar led them to what appeared to be a watermelon patch.

"Did you know that watermelon rinds are actually the healthiest part?" asked Cherry.

"Hm, I didn't know that," said Cutty.

Galaxy-Man brought the ship to a safe landing this time. They landed in a muddy area of dense vegetation. "Alright, men," he said, "we don't know what's out there so be on your toes."

"Don't worry guys," said Cutty, "my sword will scare off any baddies who try any funny business."

"Groovy," said Galaxy-Man as the gang walked over to the door.

Before leaving however, Cutty donned her green boxing gloves. She'd become quite fond of wearing them actually.

"What's with the Sock'em boppers?" asked Cherry. "Haven't your cuts healed by now?"

"Yeah," said Cutty, "but I still like wearing them though. They're kinda cool I think."

"Right on," said Galaxy-Man as the gang walked out into the unknown.

Galaxy-Man led the way as they walked off the gangplank. He was still in a fair amount of pain from the fall and he couldn't walk so good, and plus he was a little drunk. When he stepped onto the ground he instantly staggered and fell over like a house of dominoes.

"Oh no!!" shouted Galaxy-Man. "This land is inhabited by some sort of evil race of plant men!"

Cherry knew that Galaxy-Man was just drunk, but Cutty saw things differently. She rushed to his aid. "I'll save you, Galaxy-Man!" Cutty was fairly impressionable as it turned out. In the short time that she'd known Galaxy-Man her life had changed so much and she'd seen so many things; she learned to just go with things. In her eyes Galaxy-Man really was being attacked. She ran in with her sword and started slashing melons like she were going for the Fruit Ninja world record or something.

Cherry stood still with her hands in her pockets watching Cutty "kill" the watermelons. Stevie stood next to her licking her paw then rubbing her head. Even she knew that Galaxy-Man was in no real danger.

"Ten profit says the watermelon wins," Cherry muttered to Stevie. "Wait a tic," said Galaxy-Man. "It's just a bunch of melons, yo, and not the fun kind."

Just then Cherry noticed a boy and a girl standing in the distance. "Yo, Dad, I think we got company."

The boy looked angry and kinda crazed, but the girl seemed indifferent. They walked over to the Whomper and the gang didn't know what to make of things. Floating behind the children was a spiny, wedge-shaped, navy blue creature. The boy was around 13 and had shaggy, messy brown hair and a jewel-encrusted watermelon crown on his head. He wore an orange shirt, a brown belt with a little gold belt buckle, black pants and black shoes. The girl was about 11 and missing her left arm at the elbow. She had thick red hair and wore a mint green poof-ball hat with white stripes. She had an orange T-shirt, white overalls with yellow buttons and a badge that read "mother" over her heart, and red shoes. The girl also pushed around a gigantic ball of yarn, which Cutty thought was absolutely adorable. They were certainly a colorful group of characters, but no more so than they were: Galaxy-Man wore a cape, Cherry had blue hair,

and Cutty had a sword and boxing gloves. What a bunch of weirdos.

"hola, amigos modo fresco," said Galaxy-Man, thinking they were Spanish for God knows why.

For several seconds nobody made a peep, and things became deathly silent. The boy looked at all the sliced melons and shed a tear. His left hand began to quiver as he looked to the ground and placed his hand over his mouth. He was clearly very emotional about the melons. The girl didn't seem as bothered, but still a bit sad. The blue creature that hovered around them was very odd; he broke the silence and began making a noise that sounded as though he were saying "wobbus, wobbus, wobbus." The boy opened his mouth as if were about to speak. Galaxy-Man and co listened closely to whatever he was about to say. Other than the sound of the wind and the occasional "wobbus," things were painfully silent. As the boy was about to speak, he faltered and began to cry. His lip quivered and he bit his fist. You'd think the watermelons were his brothers and sisters or something. He was a very strange little boy. Even the way he carried himself was odd. He stood bowlegged and kept his arms outward from his body with his fists clinched. He almost looked as though he were flexing at all times, though, he was very thin and weak.

"Sends this folks to the Briggle," said the boy in a soft girlish voice, finally breaking the long silence.

"Whoa there, pilgrim," said Galaxy-Man, "there's no need to send anybody to the Briggle. Also, what's a Briggle?"

The girl walked over and gently grabbed Galaxy-Man's hand.

"Sorry about this," she said quietly. She spoke with a heavy Irish accent. "Pete's really let that crown go to his head," she continued. The boy's name was Pete.

It was then that Galaxy-Man saw that the clear plastic dingle was at the center of the crown.

Everyone shrugged their shoulders and followed the girl without hesitation. They were a bit curious to see what a "Briggle" was actually. They were walking up a dirt path to the top of a hill, but couldn't make out what was on top. The blue creature followed them, but Pete stayed behind.

"I'm Mint," said the girl as she rolled her yarn ball along, "and this is Wobbus."

"Good name," said Cherry, "it fits."

"Thanks," said Mint, "he's my best friend. We do everything together."

"What about that boy back there?" asked Cutty. "Who's he supposed to be, Captain Melonhead?"

"He's Pete," replied Mint. "We met after my hometown was destroyed by cats and we've been like peas and carrots ever since. He's... kinda silly."

"Looked like he had some demons back there," said Galaxy-Man.

"I'm sorry," said Mint. "He's usually lovely, but when we started this melon farm together he gave himself a crown and now he thinks he's a real king. He's been a touch bossy lately."

"Bummer, man," said Galaxy-Man.

They finally reached the top of the hill and saw the aforementioned Briggie. It naught but a topless cardboard box on its side with steel chicken wire on the front; it was a jail built by children.

"That's the Briggie?" asked Cutty.

"Yeah," said Mint, "now I have to lock you up I'm afraid. Sorry."

"Aw, what?" asked Cherry. "For how long?"

"For all of eternity I think," answered Mint, unsure.

Mint lifted the chicken wire and the gang willingly crawled into the Briggie. She was too adorable and no one wanted to make things difficult for her. Once they were inside, Mint pushed a brick in front of the Briggie cage to hold it in place, and then she walked away. It was a nice box, and Stevie was in absolute heaven. She was as happy as a... well, a cat in a box. She could barely contain herself and simply couldn't decide which corner to sleep in.

Galaxy-Man was feeling a bit more distressed however. "We're trapped for all eternity!!" he cried.

"Slow your roll, Dad," said Cherry. "It's just a box, dude."

"Yeah," agreed Cutty, "she even let me keep my sword in here."

"So we may yet escape this terrible dungeon of horrors?"

"By my sword, Galaxy-Man," said Cutty in her best renaissance accent, "this, I swear to you." She then cut a square hole in the box and everyone crawled through, except for Stevie was too busy doing nothing at all.

"This is no time to rest, madam Stevie," said Galaxy-Man. "Come, we must make haste!"

The gang walked down the hill back to where they were before. From there they could see Pete and Mint behind a tree. They trudged through fields of watermelons over to them. Pete was sitting in a throne and Mint was standing by his side.

Pete was shocked that they were able to escape. "What in the name of Cheesasaurus H. Rex be this!?" he asked.

"Look, dude," said Galaxy-Man, "we actually need that jewel on yo nop. There's a brand new iPod in it for you."

"Isn't that Hamilton's iPod?" asked Cherry.

"Shh," said Galaxy-Man, "I don't want him to know about all the crappy christian music on it."

Cherry crossed her arms. "Like random people on other planets know who the hell Hamilton is."

"Bah!" yelled Pete. "I fart at your offer! Hehehe."

"Come on, dude," said Galaxy-Man, "be cool, yo."

"Maiden Mint," said Pete, "I wants these dusty old fogeys
BANISHED... from my perfect kingdomlandshire."

Mint then took the gang over to a white picket fence at the edge of the farm. She lifted a section of the fence that wasn't nailed to anything. "By the order of the king, I banish thee," said Mint unenthusiastically.

They all shrugged their shoulders and crawled through, not wanting to make things difficult for her. Once outside Mint placed the section of fence back and walked away.

Galaxy-Man started to lose it again. "No hope!! No hope!!" he yelled way too loudly.

"Calm down, Dad," said Cherry.

"Yeah," agreed Cutty, "the fence is like 4 ft high at best. Stevie's already on the other side actually." Stevie was on the other side trying to catch a jumpy cricket. She almost caught it.

"Then the day is not lost?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"By my butt, Sir Junkwagon," said Cherry, "this, I swear to you."

They then hopped the fence and walked back over to Pete and Mint.

Pete was sitting in his throne sideways with his feet hanging out the side eating a cabbage with both hands. "They be back!" he yelled.

Mint was sitting up against the tree knitting a Christmas hat with her yarn. It was amazing watching her knit with only one hand. "What a shocker," she said sarcastically.

"Send them through the portal to HELL!!" screamed Pete, bits of cabbage spewing from his mouth.

"I think yer losing yer marbles, Pete," said Mint. "We don't have a portal to h-" Mint blushed because she almost said a bad word.

"We don't have a portal to... that place."

"Darn," said Pete, "I know this to be true. Very well, then I hereby declare war on your faces! Have the armies release the ICE DRAGON!!"

"Pete, we don't have any of these things, silly," said Mint.

Pete looked very disheartened. "Aw, why not?" he asked. "What kinda king doesn't even have an ice dragon?"

"Pete, yer taking this game too seriously. Yer not really a king, silly."

"I'm not?" asked Pete. "But I've got this crown."

Galaxy-Man chimed and gave his two cents. "Dude, a crown doesn't make you a king."

Pete put his hand over his mouth and shed another tear. No one said anything and silence returned. He opened his mouth a couple

of times as if to speak, but was too worked up to get the words out. He put both palms over his face like he was about to start bawling, but he did something a little unexpected, he started laughing. "Hehehe, I'm just a boy with a melon on his head," he giggled, "jobless, hungry; I was a big greasy fool, hold the mayo. Mycaruba!"

"I'm... glad to hear it?" said a very confused Cherry.

"Here," said Pete. "I want you to have the jewel." He stuck in his thumb and pulled out a dongle. Unlike the last dongle, this one was yellow.

"Groovular," said Galaxy-Man.

"Thanks for playing," said Mint. "It was a lot of fun."

"We had fun, too," smiled Cutty.

"Twas fun," agreed Galaxy-Man, "but I'm afraid we must be taking our leave now."

"You sure?" asked Mint. "We're going to a Christmas party later on today if you guys wanna tag along."

"I'm afraid I must decline thine offer, o maiden of--"

"Can we stop with the freakin' accents!?" interrupted Cherry.

Everyone had a good laugh. It was like the ending to a campy Saturday morning cartoon.

Once they found the dongle, they figured they ought to wait until they got home to plug it in. Who knows what craziness would happen, what strange new superpower it may grant. They flew over to where the Funkmaster Shades concert was being held. The band was named after their leader, Funkmaster Shades. They were a sort of funk-rock band that Galaxy-Man absolutely loved. Funkmaster Shades was Galaxy-Man's favorite band growing up, and it is rumored that Funkmaster Shades inspired him to where his trademarked black sunshades. Galaxy-Man aspired to be a rock star when he was younger, until he realized he didn't have any talent.

They arrived in a large field in Funkmaster Shades' hometown of Stubs Nebrasky, not to be confused with Nebraska. Nebrasky was a small town where nothing very interesting ever happened. Other than a bronze statue of Keith Richards next to the Walmart, there weren't many sights to see. Due to his parole, Funkmaster Shades wasn't allowed to leave the town to go on tour, so he played exclusively in Nebrasky.

When they arrived at the concert, the field was covered with cars. People had come from all over the world and all walks of life for the concert. There must've been 20,000 cars there. There were no seats, so people sat on the hoods of their vehicles. It was very cold that day, so everyone there brought blankets and pillows. It was an interesting sight seeing

thousands of people snuggled up on top of their cars. There were so many. Galaxy-Man was lucky to find a place to park the Whomper as big as it was. He was a bit early so he found a good spot.

"Wow," said Galaxy-Man, "big turn out this year."

They had forgotten to buy tickets, which everyone was supposed to show at the main gate to get in, so a man walked over to the ship and tapped on the door.

"Uh-oh," said Cherry. "We didn't buy tickets. They've probably been sold-out for like 10,000 years."

Galaxy-Man walked over to a pile of junk and picked up three cameras. "Not to worry, not to worry," he said confidently.

Everyone grabbed their cameras and tried their best to look official.

They walked over to the door and Galaxy-Man opened it.

"Lemme see some tickets, hombres," said the man.

"Oh, we're photographers," said Galaxy-Man.

"Yeah, we're from that Rolling Steezy, yo," added Cherry.

"And your cat?" asked the man as he pointed at Stevie.

"She's a service cat," said Cutty quickly.

"A service cat?" asked the man. He was not amused.

"Yeah, funkledunk," said Cherry, "can't you see that my dad is blind? Look at those black shades."

Galaxy-Man walked over and started feeling the man's face. "Let me see your face," he said, pretending he was blind.

The man raised his brow at hearing this. "A blind photographer?"

Cherry knew she had just dug herself a hole. "Um... yeah, he—" "You know what?" said the man as he shook his head. "I've just about had it with this weirdo town. You're telling me that a blind photographer from Rolling Stone magazine who wears a cape and drives a pirate ship comes flying out of the sky to see a rock concert, and he brought his cat?"

"Actually I'm not here to see the concert," said Galaxy-Man. "I can't see anything!" he laughed.

The man just shook his head and walked away. "You know what? I don't care. Take all the shoddy pictures you want, bud. I'm going home."

"What a junkwagon," said Galaxy-Man once the man had left. "When did wearing a cape become weird?"

Across the street from the field was a quaint but nice restaurant he had found on Google Maps. Galaxy-Man arrived early so they could go out to eat before the show. He figured there was time for a nice dinner, only this would be a special dinner because it would just be Galaxy-Man and Cutty. This would be their first time alone together actually. Cherry agreed to hold down the fort while they were away, though, she was a bit

worried about them leaving. Galaxy-Man had taken a shower, put on nice clothes, and did the unthinkable - he brushed his hair. He couldn't remember the last time he did that. He looked very suave. He wore a tuxedo that Cherry didn't even know he had. But of course, he kept his beloved shades.

Once they were ready to go, Cherry walked outside the ship with them to see them off. "Don't forget to bring protection, Dad," said Cherry.

If Cutty were drinking water, it would've spew from her mouth. "What the heck, child?" asked Galaxy-Man. "It's just dinner, man."

"There's lots of weirdos out there," explained Cherry. "I don't want you guys to get mugged or something." Needless to say, there was a bit of a misunderstanding with the word "protection." Cherry seemed genuinely worried for them. It was kinda sweet actually. Sometimes it was easy to forget that Cherry was only nine years old.

"Oh, we'll be fine," assured Cutty.

"Take your sword, Cutty." suggested Cherry. "Just in case?"

"I don't think they'd let me bring a sword in," replied Cutty.

"Besides, I don't wanna scare people."

"Don't worry," said Galaxy-Man. "We'll be totally fine. I promise."

"Okay," said Cherry, still a bit worried.

"And keep a close eye on Stevie please. You know how she just loves to get stuck inside the couch ALL the time."

Cherry laughed and smiled.

"I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to her."

"Bring me your leftovers please."

Galaxy-Man gave a thumbs up and smiled. "You got it, Daughter-Man."

Galaxy-Man and Cutty walked across the street over to the restaurant. It was a pizzeria called Pete's a Pizza, home of the Pete's a Pizza Pizza.

Cutty read the sign as they walked into the parking lot. "Pete's a Pizza?"

"You think that weird kid from earlier changed his ways and became the owner of a pizzeria?" Galaxy-Man joked.

"It sounds like he became the pizza itself." The name was only a coincidence of course.

Galaxy-Man held the door open for Cutty like a gentlemen and the two walked inside. It was pleasantly warm inside and warmly lit as well. The establishment had great atmosphere. It was the sort of restaurant with stuff on the walls. There were old advertising signs, the obligatory red tricycle, horseshoes turned up so its good luck wouldn't pour out, clocks, swords, paintings and a ton of other stuff. It wasn't going for a particular theme, but it looked nice regardless. It looked like

an antiques mall turned pizzeria. There were a lot of people inside, but things weren't too loud. The best word to describe the restaurant was lovely.

"This is nice," said Cutty as she looked around at all the stuff on the walls. It was a fun place to look around.

Inside however was something none of them expected to see. It was a familiar face! It was Nomad, who appeared to be working there.

"Well if it isn't the amazing Galaxy-Man," he said.

Galaxy-Man was happy to see his old friend. He walked in close for a fistbump. "Nomad, what are you doing here, man?"

"Well, the dimmer switch idea worked out pretty well and I was able to open a new restaurant. I figured since Funkmaster Shades only does concerts here that a restaurant only made sense.

There's a lot of hungry people out there and I figured the best way to get rich during a gold rush was to sell shovels. But I bet you guys are hungry so I'll shut up."

Nomad had purchased the building some time ago and converted it into a pizzeria. Originally, it actually was an antiques mall. They started walking towards the back of the restaurant to an open table.

"That's awesome, man," said Galaxy-Man as they walked. "Congrats, dude, but why are you here working on Christmas?"

"Oh I've got no other place to be I suppose. I think that Christmas isn't so much about where you go or what you do, but more about who you spend it with."

"You say that as if you knew I'd be here," said Galaxy-Man, jokingly.

"Well," said Nomad. "I had a hunch to be honest, but I was talking about my customers in general. They're like family to me, so everything is half-price tonight and you get a free candy cane with each meal."

Nomad escorted them to a nice booth and lit tea candles at the table. "Just the two of you tonight, huh?" he asked as he placed menus and napkin-wrapped silverware on the table. "Where is Miss Cherry Limeade tonight?"

"She's back at the ship," said Galaxy-Man. "Probably drawing us a picture for when we come back."

"She was so worried about us," said Cutty. "It was kinda cute."

"Well, the world can be a dangerous place," said Nomad. "It's natural to feel a little worried at times, though, sometimes the most dangerous thing to do is take too many precautions. You miss out on a lot when you don't take any risks."

His words resonated deeply with Galaxy-Man. "That's some mad deep knowl' right there, man."

Nomad just laughed and smiled. "So what can I get you guys to drink?"

"Can I get water with lemon?" asked Cutty.

"Certainly," said Nomad brightly, "if you promise to be careful. Water is the leading cause of drowning after all."

"Ha!" blurted Galaxy-Man loudly.

Nomad softly chuckled. "And what will you be having young man?" he asked.

"I want a suicide mixed with bad wine," he answered.

"You got it," said Nomad. "I'll be just a sec." He walked away into the kitchen.

The two began to look over the menu.

"It really is strange," said Cutty.

"What is?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"That we happen to run into him here, on this particular planet, in this particular town, at this particular hour."

"Well, we were all drawn here by the concert, so it wasn't totally by chance."

"Still a bit weird."

Galaxy-Man laughed. "He's a pretty weird dude. Hey, have you decided on anything yet? Everything looks so good here. I love it when menus have pictures."

"I think I'll have pepperoni and mushrooms."

"You want a pizza to go under that?" joked Galaxy-Man.

Cutty laughed. "You're too funny. Hey, can I ask you something?"

"Apparently so. Nah, what's up, Cutty-Buddy?"

Cutty hesitated. "Um, is this a date?"

Galaxy-Man was a little surprised by the question. "I mean, it doesn't have to be."

"No no, it's fine. I just... haven't done this in a while."

Galaxy-Man carefully arranged his silverware to give his hands something to do. "You know, I hadn't even questioned if we were a couple to be honest. I just really, really like hanging out with you. Lord knows Cherry loves you. She ain't got no mom, and I think she really looks up to you as a mother figure. I guess what I'm getting at is... I'm glad we're friends."

"Me, too."

Nomad came back with the drinks and a couple of straws. "How are you folks doing?" he asked. "We have one water with lime for the lady, and a little bit of everything for the gentleman."

"She asked for water with lemon, dude," said Galaxy-Man.

"Did I say lemon?" asked Cutty. "I meant to ask for lime. Oh my gosh, that's so weird."

"Huh, how about that," said Nomad. He flipped through a little notebook so he could write down their order. "You guys ready to order?"

"I want two slices of pepperoni with mushrooms with a side salad," said Cutty.

"I want a bowl of cereal," answered Galaxy-Man jokingly.

"Ah, all out of milk I'm afraid," said Nomad.

"Darn, guess I'll have an entire Pete's a Pizza pizza with everything on it then, and extra pineapples. Ooh and breadsticks for me and my BFF to share."

Nomad smiled. "Best friends forever. The way I see it, a friendship that ends never really began. Alrighty, I'll be back with your pizzas in just a bit." He then walked away into the kitchen.

"I'm telling you," said Galaxy-Man, "everything he says is just pure gold. That guy should write a book or something."

Galaxy-Man was a bit nervous being alone with Cutty for the first time. They had talked on the phone a bunch but had never gone on a real date before. For Galaxy-Man, Cherry was his wingman, always keeping the conversation going and giving him confidence. Without her there, Galaxy-Man was feeling the pressure, but he began to get into his groove. He decided to bombard her with questions so there wouldn't be any awkward silence. "I've got a question for ya," he said. "What's your favorite book, movie, show, likes, pet peeves, song, video game, cartoon, food, sport, and color?"

Cutty's eyes widened. "That seems like way more than one question." She looked at Galaxy-Man and softly smiled. "Ask me again, one at a time, silly."

"Wait, what was the first one again?"

"I think you said book. Hmm, probably the first Harry Potter."

"Oh, I didn't know you were a Potter head. Yeah, the books were so cool. I like the part where he did magic on that one dude and he-" He stopped. He could no longer hide the fact that he hadn't actually read the books. "I totally haven't read the books." He laughed guiltily as he scratched his neck.

Cutty just smiled. "It's okay, dude. We don't have to like all the same things."

Galaxy-Man really opened up that night. Over dinner they talked about all sorts of things and even stayed for dessert. They learned a lot about each other. Cutty learned that Galaxy-Man's favorite book was *Twilight*, his favorite movie was *You Can't Take It With You*, his favorite show was *ThunderCats*, he had a fear of centaurs, lawnmowers and waiting rooms, his favorite sport was badminton, and that he sometimes called his mother Galaxy-Mom. She asked what Galaxy-Man's real name was, but he wouldn't go there. The secrecy of his name was sacred to him. Galaxy-Man also learned a lot about Cutty: that her full name was April Brunhilde Cutty, favorite band was One Direction, her favorite movie was *The Land Before Time*, she had a fear of spiders, snakes and horses, her favorite color was dark blue, and that she didn't like slasher films.

While they were both a bit nervous at first, they had great chemistry. They were very different, but quite fond of each

other. They had a wonderful time, but the night was far from over. They waited for Nomad to come back with the check.

He walked up to the table, but he was empty-handed. "How was it?" he asked.

"Fantastic," replied Cutty.

Galaxy-Man was a tad drunk at this point. He got up and put his arm around Nomad. He had a habit of putting his arm around people when he was drunk. "Lemme tell ya," he said to Cutty, pointing at Nomad, "This fool right here knows his way around a kitchen. That was the best dang pizza I've ever eaten."

"Oh, just an old family recipe," said Nomad. "They made it and I simply wrote it down."

"It was really good," said Cutty, who was completely stuffed.

"What do I owe you, man?"

"No, no," said Nomad. "This one's on me."

"You're kidding," said Cutty.

Galaxy-Man gave Nomad a sincere hug. "You know I love you, right?"

Nomad smiled and patted him on the back. "I'm just doing my part," he said.

After many drunken hugs and praises, it was finally time to leave. They put their leftovers in a box for Cherry and headed back to the Whomper.

Chapter 14

After a long, long day of folly and adventure, it was finally time; the show was about to begin. The gang gathered all the blankets and pillows in the ship and headed up top to snuggle together on the deck. It was a shame they didn't go up there more often. It was actually very nice up top, just like an old-timey wooden ship at sea. Galaxy-Man by chance found three lawn chairs inside the ship. It was amazing all the things you could find in the Star Whomper if you looked hard enough. It was a menagerie of stuff.

Since the ship was so much taller than all the surrounding cars, they had an excellent view of the stage despite being so far away. It was chilly outside, but everyone was sitting warm under their blankets. Even Stevie joined in on the fun. She was sitting on Cherry's right shoulder and they were both eating pizza together. Stevie was keeping Cherry's neck nice and warm and they both looked very happy together. Cutty was wearing a thick jacket she found in the ship and had most of the blankets. She didn't like cold weather. Winter was the bane of her existence, but she was happily warm under all those blankets. Galaxy-Man on the other hand was too excited to be cold. He didn't have any blankets at all. Galaxy-Man was so excited for the concert that his hands were shaking and he was breathing heavily. If Cherry and Cutty didn't know better they think he were having a stroke.

"Oh my GAWD you guys!!" yelled Galaxy-Man. "I'm about to lose it!"

"Cool your grits, Dad," said Cherry. "You look like your head's about to explode." Cherry and Stevie were stuffing their faces with pizza and they both looked like they were having a pretty good time to say the least. Cherry would take a bite, then pick off a topping for Stevie.

"You guys enjoying your piece of Pete's a Pizza pizza?" asked Galaxy-Man.

"You know it, Father-Man."

"Is that him?" asked Cutty. Funkmaster Shades was finally there on stage. His appearance was followed by a thunderous roar from the crowd. You'd think Jesus himself had come down from heaven the way all the people cheered.

"OH MER GERD!!!" screamed Galaxy-Man. He sounded like a 10-year-old girl. He was as happy as... well, as Galaxy-Man at a Funkmaster Shades concert. That's really the only way to describe his level of happiness. Galaxy-Man could barely contain his incredible excitement. He almost had a hype attack. This was shaping up to be the best Christmas ever. He must've shed two, perhaps three tears that night. "You know I love you guys, right?"

"Yes, Dad," said Cherry. "Now hush!"

And there he was. There before the masses was the legendary Funkmaster Shades himself on stage, in the flesh. No, it was not a hologram, it was not a cardboard cutout; it was the man himself! He was a white guy with a big, bushy black Afro, thick sideburns, a horseshoe mustache, and, of course, his legendary banana-tinted shades, the likes of which rivaled even Galaxy-Man's shades in their eminence. His looks were the embodiment of funk culture; the 1970s all rolled into one. He slowly walked with a cool, confident swagger over to the mic as hoards of screaming fans cheered him on. Impeccable style and originality

positively radiated from him and whenever he spoke even migrating birds in the sky stopped to listen. "How are we tonight?" asked Funkmaster Shades. He never smiled and always spoke a cool, low voice.

"Oh he's so awesome!!" gushed Galaxy-Man.

"He looks like my dad if he were white," said Cutty.

"As some of you know," said Funkmaster Shades, "this is our first gig in quite a while. Due to some overblown drug charges I'm not able to leave town, so six months ago we did a show here, but 'concerned parents' decided that our music was corrupting the minds of children, so The Man was able to keep us down."

The crowd booed loudly. They practically worshiped the very ground he walked on and hung on his every word. This included Galaxy-Man.

"Corrupting the minds of children?" asked Galaxy-Man in disbelief. "Their music doesn't even have lyrics, man!"

Funkmaster Shades was unique for a funk-rock band in that all their music was instrumental. To say that any music can corrupt minds is a stretch, but to say that music with no words at all is ridiculous.

"What a lot of people don't know about us," continued Funkmaster Shades, "is that we actually give much of our money to charities and the fat cats in charge finally got it through their thick friggin' skulls that most of the money we make comes from doing

gigs. This town makes so little money on its own, that without our contributions the children's hospital could barely afford to keep its doors open. All I have to say is - don't burn your own friggin' house down to hurt someone."

The crowd erupted into applause. He was an excellent speaker. He could make his fans cheer, make them cry and make them scream, but no matter what he said his fans would blindly follow like Disney lemmings. He could tell them that gravity didn't exist and they'd believe it without question. Funkmaster Shades was very honest however and his plight was very much true. His parole didn't allow him to leave town and so he could only do shows in Stubs, though angry parents constantly try to sabotage him.

"He's such a great guy!" yelled Galaxy-Man.

"Yeah," agreed Cherry. "I didn't know he did all that stuff."

One thing the Funkmaster Shades did before each show was a short comedy routine. In addition to being the rhythm guitarist and leader of the band, he was also a moderately successful stand up comedian. "We are back, my friends!" he yelled. "You guys ready to rock?" He pointed the mic towards the crowd.

"Yeah!!!" screamed the crowd.

"I don't know about you, but when I listen to music, so do my neighbors."

Everyone laughed and cheered, especially Galaxy-Man.

"That sounds like you, Galaxy-Man," said Cutty.

Funkmaster Shades liked to walk around stage whenever he did a routine. "Do we have any reggae fans here tonight?" he asked as he moved around the stage. Most of the crowd cheered, but some were on the fence a bit. "Yeah, I like that song, too," said Funkmaster Shades.

"Ha! Because it all sounds the same!" yelled Galaxy-Man.

"That's freakin' funny, man," said Cherry.

"I listened to some dubstep today." said Funkmaster Shades.

"Thought my speakers were picking up extraterrestrial interference." Everyone laughed. "I also listened to modern country on the radio," he went on, "honestly thought it was a parody of modern country." The audience erupted into laughter.

"It really does make fun of itself," said Cutty.

"This guy's good," said Cherry.

Funkmaster Shades spoke in his best redneck voice. "Modern country - beer, girls, jeans, trucks, beer, tractors, dirt roads, beer, and gawwd." Everyone laughed hard and Galaxy-Man even snorted. He snorted whenever he thought something was really funny.

"Oh my God you guys," chuckled Galaxy-Man.

"Country rap," said Funkmaster Shades. He paused for awhile.

"Next joke."

"That's too funny," said Cherry.

"Do we have any Michael Jackson fans here tonight?" asked Funkmaster Shades. The crowd was a little divided, but most cheered. "Michael Jackson touched a lot of kids," he said. The audience wasn't sure what to think, "... with his music," he clarified; everyone breathed a sigh of relief, but the joke wasn't over, "... in the butt," he concluded. "Moving on!"

"Oh my," said Cutty.

"Wow," said Cherry.

"I thought it was gonna be something dirty," said Galaxy-Man, "then it wasn't, then it was!"

"You guys ready to rock the block?" asked Funkmaster Shades.

"Yeah!!!" screamed the audience.

Funkmaster Shades picked up his guitar and said block proceeded to be rocked. They played all of Galaxy-Man's favorite songs and everyone had an amazing time. Even Cutty clapped and cheered. It was an amazing performance, the perfect end to the best Christmas ever.

After an hour, the concert was over, and it was time to go home.

The band stood on stage together and bowed.

"Thank you all," said Funkmaster Shades, "you've been a wonderful audience. Goodnight, and merry Christmas. Stay funky."

Funkmaster Shades always ended by saying "stay funky." It was his catchphrase. The band came and played an amazing concert,

but like all things, it had to come to an end. The show was over and the band had to leave them.

"Hey, Cherry," said Galaxy-Man, "you thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?"

"You don't mean," said Cutty.

"You wanna Rolling Stone 'em?" asked Cherry.

Galaxy-Man nodded. "Get your cameras, guys. It's time for a little interview!"

The gang went into the ship and grabbed their cameras. They were gonna try for an interview with Funkmaster Shades himself. With cameras and notebooks in hand, they headed out the door. Even Stevie tagged along. She happily followed along like a curious puppy. There were plenty of interesting things to smell along the way after all. They walked towards the stage as everyone was driving away.

"Okay, guys," said Galaxy-Man, "we gotta hurry before they leave."

"I can't believe we're doing this," laughed Cutty. What an adventure today had been for her.

"Remember," said Galaxy-Man. "I'm supposed to be blind, and Stevie is my service cat."

"Gotcha," said Cherry. "Hey, where is Stevie anywho?"

Stevie was nowhere to be seen. Galaxy-Man figured she must've been off somewhere smelling something. They all stopped at a row of cars to look for her. She couldn't have gotten far. She then

came walking up from the row of cars behind her with a half-eaten Broaster's fried chicken leg in her mouth.

Galaxy-Man chuckled when he saw her carrying her big piece of chicken. "Whaddaya doin', sillygoat? We gotta go."

What happened next, no one saw coming, and there was no way that any of them could have prepared for what was about to happen. As Stevie walked over, a passing truck came speeding by and she was ran over. She let out a terrible shrill as the life was crushed out of her. None of them believed what they just saw. Cherry and Cutty stood in disbelief with their mouths open and Galaxy-Man rushed over, already beginning to cry.

"St-Stevie Ray?" he softly muttered, tears rolling.

The heavy truck had left her a bloody mess. She was killed instantly and there was nothing any of them could've done for her. Stevie was dead.

END OF PART ONE