

SECOND CHANCE

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James Gauthier
with
Ed Martin



**HOMEWORLD
PRESS**

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SECOND CHANCE

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DEDICATION

All of our loyal and supportive fans, past, present and future.

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PROLOGUE

DESPERATE TIMES
CALL FOR...

Bishop's chest was pounding. He was short of breath. His legs felt as if they had been running for hours. "How big is this cave?" he wondered. He was surrounded on both sides by countless statues each one more grotesque than the other. Their horribly twisted faces seemed to mock him as he ran. Every time Bishop stopped, he saw a familiar figure standing nearby and laughing.

"Run all you like, boy!" the figure bellowed. "You can never escape me!"

Bishop shook his head. "No! No! You can't be here! You're dead! I saw you die!"

The man laughed again. "Do you think that I am so easy to kill? Many before you have tried, but I have always emerged victorious!"

To most people, this man was known as Onyx, but Bishop knew him as his uncle. A murderous death-defying madman. Frightened, Bishop looked around for someplace to run or hide, but the scenery shifted. The statues disappeared and he was now outside. A shining castle appeared in the distance. He could no longer see his uncle but he could still hear his taunts.

"Where to now, boy?" Onyx laughed. "You have no one to help you. You are all alone."

Seeking safety, Bishop started to run toward the castle but he had to stop. He was exhausted and his legs could take him no further.

Christie Rae Mann, his former teacher and mentor, suddenly appeared in black beside him. "You can't give up, Bishop. We are depending on you."

Just as quickly the image of his friend, Justin Wellington III, also in black, appeared beside her. "Yeah, Chance. We're depending on you. Just like your parents depended on you. And look how you disappointed them."

Bishop's father Alabaster and his wife Alaine were the next to materialize.

Bishop was momentarily startled. "Mom? Dad?"

His parents looked at him and shook their heads. "You disappointed us, Bishop," his mother said.

"You were supposed to come to the Homeworld and take my place," Alabaster added. "You couldn't even do that right. You can't do anything right."

"Can't do anything right," Justin repeated.

"Can't do anything right," Miss Mann said.

The four figures started to close in on Bishop, repeating that phrase over and over.

Bishop closed his eyes and put his hands over his ears trying to block out the sounds, but with no success. He fell to his knees as the four figures towered over him speaking louder and louder.

"It's not like that. It's not my fault! Leave me alone!" he screamed.

The four figures disappeared into the darkness as a man with a sword in one hand and a hook in the place of his other hand stepped forward. Darkness now surrounded them both. "What's the matter, Bishop?" the man asked. "Afraid of the truth?"

Bishop opened his eyes and looked up at him. Seeing the infamous fictional pirate standing there, he knew that it could only be his old adversary Print in the form of Captain Hook. "Print?" Bishop asked.

Print-Hook smiled and did a slight bow. "None other. But in this form I prefer to be called Hook." He held up the hook at the end of his arm. "For obvious reasons." He looked down at Bishop. "I believe we have met under these circumstances before. You on your knees before me."

Bishop rose to his feet. "I've beaten you before, and I can do it again."

Print-Hook laughed. "You barely defeated me when we first met in Philadelphia. And that was only with the help of your friends. I would have beaten you if they hadn't been there." Print looked around. "I notice



that they are missing now.”

“I can beat you anytime!” Bishop was defiant.

Print-Hook aimed his sword at Bishop’s heart. “Care to make any bets on that?”

“Go ahead, try it!” Bishop dared. “Don’t forget what Onyx did to the last Emissary who tried to kill me.”

The figure of Print suddenly morphed into Onyx. Onyx looked at Bishop and smiled. “I can always change my mind boy.” He laughed as he plunged the sword into Bishop’s chest.

Bishop sprang up from his pillow screaming. Lying on the two beds next to him were his android bodyguard Aquarian, and his best friend, Gary O’Leary. Gary’s eyes opened as he heard Bishop scream. “Not again, Bish!” he moaned.

A frantic Bishop looked around. “I had another one of those dreams.”

Gary sat up in bed and turned on the table light. “Yeah, I could tell. It’s the third one you’ve had this week. What is it with you, Bish? Since you started to stay here a couple of months ago, you’ve been having these dreams more and more often. If this keeps up, I’m never going to get a full night’s sleep.”

“I can’t help it,” Bishop said. “The dreams feel so real. And they all end the same way, with Onyx killing me.”

“That does not compute,” Aquarian said. “You defeated Onyx and he died when his castle was destroyed.”

“I know,” Bishop replied. “It doesn’t make sense, but I keep getting the feeling that Onyx is still alive somehow. And he blames me for everything.”

“Bish, we’ve got to do something about this,” Gary said. “Why don’t we go back to your house in the morning and you can open up a portal to the Homeworld? Then you can see for yourself that everything is fine there, and that Onyx is not alive.”

“Yeah, that sounds like a good idea.”

Gary’s ten year old brother, Jerry entered the room. He was wearing pajamas with multi colored monkeys on them. He was groggy as he rubbed his eyes.

“What are you doing in here, twerp?” Gary asked.

“I was asleep and I heard a noise,” Jerry yawned. “What’s going on in here?”

“Nothing,” Gary snipped. “Go back to bed.”

“I can’t now. I’m not tired. I want to stay up with you guys.”

Bishop recognized the characters on Jerry’s colorful pajamas. “Hey, Jerry, you like the Mighty Morons?”

“Yeah,” Jerry excitedly replied. “Mom just bought me these pajamas today. It’s my favorite show. I have all their action figures and I’m collecting all their cards.”

“If you go back to your room I’ll buy you a pack of their cards,” Bishop offered.

“Make it two packs,” Jerry countered.

“Two packs?” Bishop exclaimed. “Those things cost over ten dollars a pack.”

Jerry jumped on the end of Bishop’s bed. “Okay, then I’ll stay here for the rest of the night.”

“All right,” Bishop agreed. “Two packs. But go back to your own bed, okay?”

“Okay,” Jerry replied as jumped off the bed and raced out of the room.

Gary sighed. “So it’s settled. We go to Bish’s house in the morning.”

“But what about your schooling?” Aquarian asked.

“We don’t have to worry about that,” Bishop answered. “It’s the first day of summer vacation. School’s out for the next couple of months.”

“Great! We can call Mandy in the morning and see if she wants to come. Now will you please go to sleep, Bish? I’m exhausted,” Gary complained.

“I don’t know if I can sleep,” Bishop said. “I’m still too nervous.”

Aquarian climbed out of bed. “I will stay by the door and protect you. I told you that I should be doing that from the beginning. But you instructed me to stay in bed even though I do not require sleep.”

“Yeah, but my parents don’t know that,” Gary said. “It’s a good thing that Bish was able to forge a note from his grandfather saying that he suddenly had to leave town for a little while.”

“It wasn’t a lie,” Bishop said. “He did leave town. And it was very nice of your mother to let me stay here until he returned.”

Gary laughed. “I don’t see him coming back anytime soon.” Gary turned his attention back to Aquarian. “So we’ve got to make my parents believe that you do sleep like everyone else. I had to tell them that you’re Bishop’s cousin. I don’t think they would believe that you are really an android.”

“I would feel safer if Aquarian stayed by the door tonight,” Bishop said as Aquarian took his place by the door. “Aquarian, stay alert and

keep on your toes tonight.”

As Gary turned off the light Aquarian stood on his tiptoes and remained in that position for the rest of the evening.



CHAPTER ONE

GREAT PLAN. POOR EXECUTION

The battle was not going well for Christie Rae Mann and the people of the Kingdom of New Hopes. The war had started a short time after Bishop had returned back to Earth with his friends. She had thought that peace would endure now that Onyx was dead. Instead, Miss Mann and her colleagues had become virtual prisoners in the medieval style castle that Miss Mann’s long departed friend Alabaster once called home. The Kingdom of New Hopes was currently surrounded and under attack by a multitude of soldiers. The men had originally been disciples of Alabaster’s evil brother, Onyx. Onyx had mysteriously disappeared from the Homeworld many years ago and had just as suddenly reappeared, only to be reported deceased shortly thereafter.

A few weeks later, the first attack began. Rumors began flying around the kingdom that Onyx was not dead after all. That somehow he had managed to escape his assumed demise. A force field in the form of a light blue bubble that enveloped the kingdom was all that protected them from the rockets and lasers Onyx’s army had at its disposal.

It was nearly dawn and Miss Mann sat by the tower window looking out at the battle below. She knew that if the force field failed there would be nothing to stop Onyx’s army from taking over everything that she held dear. She knew deep in her heart that if Alabaster had been in charge the war would be over by now. She didn’t have the leadership ability that Alabaster had, and that his son Bishop had inherited. Things were so bad now that she was beginning to wonder if she would be around to

see another sunrise. She had been without sleep for more than two days and it was starting to take its toll on her. As she looked up into the sky she could see the rocket's red glare, and the bombs bursting in air, which gave proof through the night that their force field was still there.

Miss Mann turned at the sound of a low groan and saw a wolf enter the room. She mustered a weak smile. Seconds later, the wolf morphed into her young Earth friend, Justin Wellington III. A specially designed uniform quickly formed around him. Miss Mann wished she could apologize for having gotten him into this situation. Because of his age, she did not want to risk his life in this war, but he was the best spy that they had.

"Any word yet from Chance?" Justin wearily asked.

"No," Miss Mann sighed. "I thought the interdimensional transmitter would work, since it was repaired by Bishop's duplicate back on Earth. All Bishop needs to do is activate C.H.I.P. and he will receive my message instantly. But I've received no response to any of my requests for help. I know that if Bishop were receiving them, he would come to our aid. I'm sorry to have brought you into this."

"It's not your fault, Miss Mann. You didn't know that Onyx left Talisman in charge of his empire while he was away and that his forces had grown so much. Chance must be in some serious trouble back home, otherwise he would be answering you."

"Nobody knew, Justin. Not Castleton, nor any of our colleagues who were here. It was Onyx's plan to secretly build so enormous an army while he was away on Earth and then mobilize it upon his return. We just never realized that Talisman would be able to carry on to this extent in his absence. Then when Onyx returned he must have set this into motion before Bishop defeated him."

"It still amazes me that Chance was able to do that," Justin said. "Back home he always seemed like such a loser."

Miss Mann slowly shook her head. "No, Justin. While on Earth, Bishop never had the opportunity to reach his destiny. His destiny was not on Earth, but elsewhere. But I am still very concerned about the rumors that you've heard about Onyx. If what you heard is true, then Onyx may still be alive. Even after all of Bishop's best efforts to stop him."

"But how did Onyx escape the destruction of his castle? Chance said that he saw Onyx die in there before it blew up."

"Don't underestimate Onyx. He is very wily and cunning and has gotten out of worse traps than that. Knowing him as I do, he probably



escaped in a secret passage after Bishop barely escaped with his life.”

“How can anyone be as evil as Onyx? Look at all the terrible things he’s done here and back on Earth.”

“People don’t start out in life as evil. Things happen and they eventually choose that path. But enough about Onyx. Were you able to find any trace of Reprint when you were out there? He’s been missing too long.”

“No, I couldn’t catch a scent of him. I’m afraid that he may have been captured by Onyx’s men.”

At that moment a dark haired boy wearing a shiny lime green outfit appeared at the door. “I’m sorry to interrupt, Miss Mann,” the boy said. “But I’m afraid I have some bad news for you.”

Miss Mann turned to the newcomer. “More bad news, Diggory? What is it?”

“It’s about Castleton,” he replied hesitantly.

A growing look of concern crossed Miss Mann’s face. She grabbed Diggory by the shoulders and shook him. “Castleton? What about Castleton?”

“He’s... he’s been captured. By one of Onyx’s men.”

Miss Mann released her grip. “Captured!? How?! How did they breach our defenses and enter the city?”

“I don’t know,” Diggory replied. “All I know is that he is no longer in the city.”

“He’s outside? In the hands of the enemy?” Miss Mann cried. “How could this have happened?”

“I don’t know,” Diggory said nervously. “That’s all I know.”

“Go out and get me more information,” she commanded.

Diggory scurried out of the room as Miss Mann sank into the nearest chair.

Justin walked over to her and put his hand on her shoulder. “I’m sorry, Miss Mann. I know how much Castleton means to you.”

“Thank you, Justin. I shouldn’t have snapped at Diggory. It’s not his fault. It’s just that Castleton and I are very close.”

Justin felt a little envious of Miss Mann. In his whole life he had never felt very close to any of the people that he knew. He wished that he had the ability to console her, but he didn’t know the right words to say.

“First Reprint and now Castleton,” Miss Mann sighed. She was silent for a moment. Justin thought she looked a good deal older than she had just a few weeks earlier. Clearly she was losing hope.

Several large explosions impacting the force field broke the silence. “I just don’t understand where they are getting all their firepower from.” Miss Mann frowned. “I thought we had destroyed it all before Bishop left. How could I have not suspected that Onyx’s resources were greater? That his reach extended well beyond one castle?”

“Don’t blame yourself, Miss Mann. You couldn’t have known, not after being away from the Homeworld for so many years.”

Miss Mann was wistful. “If only Bishop were here. He could activate the computer system that controls our offensive systems. The only thing that is working is our automatic force field, and that was not designed to protect us for a very long period of time.”

“Can’t you pull together an army to fight Onyx’s men?” Justin asked. “Surely the people here would defend themselves.”

“Our people are craftsmen, artists, musicians. They are not trained in combat. We have been at peace for so long that we do not have an army.”

Justin looked out the window at the fires and explosions in the distance. He was hoping for the cavalry to come and save them all. But the cavalry needed to come in the form of a fourteen-year-old boy. He suddenly felt very defeated. “It looks like Chance is our last chance.”

A decorative graphic for Chapter 2. It features a large, stylized number '2' inside a circular frame with a drop shadow. This circle is centered on a horizontal grey bar with a dark border. The words 'CHAPTER TWO' are written in a bold, sans-serif font across the bar, partially overlapping the circle.

CHAPTER TWO

TIME TO TAKE CHANCES

Due to an uneasy nights' sleep Bishop and his friends didn't start to make the trip to his house until late afternoon. Bishop was finally going home for the first time since that fateful day when he had returned from the Homeworld. For some reason the walk home felt longer than usual. It might be because he was walking slower hoping to delay the inevitable. He felt a bit of dread and apprehension as he rounded the corner and saw it down the street. As he walked towards it he saw the same thing that everyone else saw. Just a normal looking house in need of paint. But he knew that inside it held many dark secrets. It was only a short time ago that this house was his home where he lived with his grandfather until that momentous day that he turned fourteen and his whole life changed. It was on that day that he gained the ability to control any electronic device and nothing would be the same forever.

Gary and Aquarian were with Bishop now for his return home. So was Mandy Conway, the girl who had unwittingly stolen Bishop's heart during their life changing adventure many months ago. Bishop and Mandy were now officially dating.

Bishop paused as he climbed the steps to his front porch. Memories of his years in this house – years shared with a man he thought to be his grandfather, but who turned out to be his evil uncle Onyx – washed over him. Mandy took his hand. "Are you okay, Bishop?"

"Yeah. I just didn't think this would bring back so many unpleasant

memories. I used to have a lot of good times in this house before I found out that my grandfather was really..." Bishop stopped suddenly in midsentence.

Gary put his hand on Bishop's shoulder. "Try not to think about it, Bish. There was no way you could know that your rotten uncle Onyx had killed your real grandfather many years ago and taken his place. Once we use Checkmate and have him open a portal, we can go back to the Homeworld and you'll see that everything is fine and that Onyx is no longer a threat to you or anyone."

"And we can see Miss Mann and Justin again," Mandy added happily.

"You're right. I guess I've just been putting this off too long. I should have come back home sooner." Bishop took a deep breath and unlocked the front door. The group stepped inside. Bishop looked around. "It just doesn't feel like the same house."

Aquarian scanned the premises. "It has the same appearance and attributes of the domicile that you lived in."

Bishop shook his head. "That's not what I meant, Aquarian." He walked over to the chess set on the table.

"Ready, everyone?" he asked to no one in particular.

"What's the rush, Bish?" Gary replied. "You haven't been here in a long time. Don't you want to look around?"

Bishop was sullen. "No, I don't. I thought I would enjoy being back home, but I don't. I need to figure out what to do about this place. We can't sell it. Not with Onyx's lair in the basement and secret rooms behind the mirrors and..."

Mandy interrupted him. "You don't have to think about all that right now. Maybe we shouldn't have come here. This is obviously very painful for you."

"No, I'm okay. Let's just get this trip started." Bishop looked down at Checkmate, the super computer his father built which was a combination of technology from two worlds.

"Checkmate, open another portal to the Homeworld," he said. Nothing happened. There was dead silence in the room.

"Checkmate," Bishop said again. "I said open another portal to the Homeworld." Again, nothing.

Gary studied Checkmate. "Maybe he's out of practice."

"What's wrong, Bishop?" Mandy asked.

"I don't know."

"I hate to break the news to you, Bish, but there seems to be a piece missing," Gary said.

"What?" Bishop exclaimed. "Which one? Don't tell me the bishop's missing again."

"No," Gary replied. "This time it's the king."

A strange voice suddenly filled the room. "The king!" it boomed.

Mandy and Bishop gasped in unison. "What?"

"The king," Gary responded.

Bishop and Mandy looked at each other. They had both heard another voice but Gary and Aquarian had not.

"The last time we were here, this chess set was complete, and the master computer was working!" Aquarian said. "Something is amiss."

"Maybe one of Onyx's men is still here. Are you sure all of his emissaries went back to the Homeworld with him?" Mandy asked.

"No, I'm not," Bishop frowned. "If you were an Emissary of Darkness where would you be?"

"Downstairs in Onyx's lair," Aquarian replied.

"Do we have to go down there?" Gary asked. "That place gives me the creeps."

"Don't worry," Aquarian said. "If you are afraid, I will protect you."

Gary was offended. "Get out of here! I don't need your protection. I can handle anything."

"Very well," Aquarian said. "I will delete your name from my rescue program." A small beep emanated from Aquarian. "Done."

Bishop walked over to the wall with the secret button that activated the door down to Onyx's hidden lair. Once the door slid open, Bishop, Gary, Mandy and Aquarian walked slowly down the poorly lit stairs.

"It's just as dark and damp and disgusting as I remember it," Mandy said. "I almost expect to see Onyx popping out of the shadows."

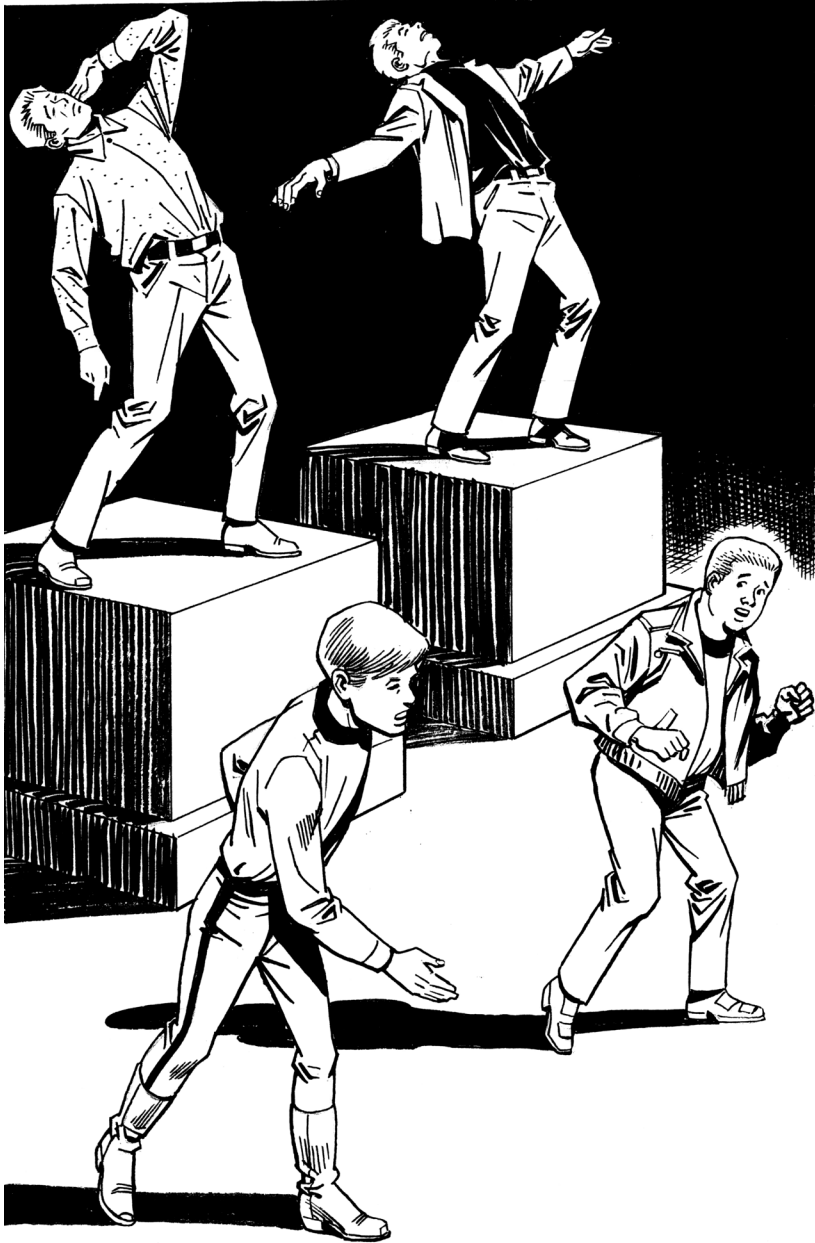
Gary pulled a lollipop out of his pocket. "Well that's not going to happen. Bish saw to that on the Homeworld. Right, Bish?"

"We were lucky before," Bishop warned. "I'm still not convinced that he is dead."

"That's what we came here for," Gary said.

"I hope we never have to deal with my uncle again. I just wish that there was some way to contact Miss Mann and let her know we were coming," Bishop said.

Gary laughed. "She's probably got her hands full with Justin, the wolf boy."



"This is weird," Bishop noted as they continued their descent. "It's the first time I've been back in my own home since everything went down. Everything looks the same, but it doesn't feel the same, somehow."

"What do you mean?" Mandy asked.

"I'm not sure. I've got this feeling that something is gonna happen. It's probably just a reaction to being back here, or something."

Bishop and his friends exited the stairwell and looked around the gloomy basement room that once served as Onyx's secret headquarters. It was still filled with statues of people in various stages of torture. Bishop and Gary started to examine the statues up close.

"Someday I want to find out who these people were," Bishop said.

"They were real people once, until that crazy Random got 'em," Gary replied. "I'm glad she's gone."

"She was the only one who could return them to normal." Bishop grew somber. "We should have brought her back and made her change them back! We should have done better than we did!"

"Don't be so hard on yourself, Bish. Random is gone. She died along with Onyx when the castle blew up," Gary said. "You did the best you could. We all did."

Mandy looked behind a large tapestry hanging on the wall behind Onyx's throne. She draped the tapestry on the back of the throne, revealing a hidden door.

"Where do you think this door leads to?" she asked.

"I don't know. I never saw it before," Bishop said. "But there's a lot about this house I never saw, even though I lived right upstairs."

Bishop walked toward the door, but Aquarian stopped him.

"Wait!" Aquarian exclaimed. "There might be a trap on the other side. I should go first and make sure it is safe."

Aquarian walked to the front of the group, cautiously opened the door and stepped through. Tense moments followed, and then he yelled out, "It's safe! Come on in!"

Bishop, Gary and Mandy found themselves in a small dimly lit room. They looked around but they were unable to find the source of illumination. It was a sparsely furnished room with one wall filled with television monitors. There was also a large chair with a high back and arm rests situated in front of the monitors.

"This must have been Onyx's master control room," Bishop surmised. "Be careful not to touch anything."

"Man!" Gary said. "How could somebody watch so many TV shows?"



No wonder you never had any money, Bish. Your cable bill must have been huge!"

"I don't think Onyx used these to watch television," Bishop said. "There must be a hundred monitors on the walls. There's a name of a different country under each one."

Gary stared at the monitors as he sat down on the arm of the chair. He didn't notice the red button embedded in the chair's arm. As he sat on the button, a beam of red light shot past his ear and hit the opposite wall, burning a hole in it.

Gary jumped to his feet. "Whoa! What was that?"

Bishop studied the newly formed hole on the wall. "My guess is that it was a laser beam of some sort. Another inch over and the hole would have been in your head."

"Where did it come from?" Gary asked.

Mandy looked at the arm of the chair that Gary had been sitting on. "Look, there's a red button here. Gary must have activated that beam when he sat on it."

Aquarian stepped forward. "Maybe next time you'll listen to Bishop."

"Aw, why don't you just turn yourself off?" Gary grumbled.

"Okay guys, no more arguing." Bishop was stern. "Onyx may have more booby traps set in here, so we've got to stay focused."

Mandy suddenly cried out. "Bishop! Come here! Quick!"

Bishop ran to Mandy's side. "What's the matter? You're not hurt, are you?"

"No. Look! We're trapped!"

Bishop saw the door through which they had entered the hidden room was now closed.

"It must have closed behind us." Mandy tried to open it.

"It's probably stuck. Let me try," Bishop said. But he could not open the door, either.

Aquarian was the next to try. "I know that I am not as strong as I used to be, but I am still stronger than humans." Several moments later, he also gave up in defeat.

Bishop turned to Gary. He tried not to sound too angry. "When you pressed the button that set off the laser beam, it must have also closed and locked the door on us. There must be some kind of button or lever that will reopen it. We'll have to look around this room and see if we can find anything."

Mandy sat in the large chair that faced the monitors.

"This is the most comfortable chair I've ever sat in," she said. "It must have been built especially for Onyx."

"Bish, man, how did Onyx and his goons get all this stuff down here without you seeing them?" Gary asked. "Or your neighbors?"

"I wish I knew. Some kind of interdimensional transport, I guess. Remember, my father was able to build an entire laboratory upstairs that can't be seen and doesn't take up any space."

Gary smiled. "Man, the people on the Homeworld know some pretty cool tricks."

Mandy stood up and pointed to the chair. "There's a small compartment on the arm," she said. "Maybe there are controls of some kind inside it."

Bishop was curious. "Let me see. It has some kind of spring latch."

"Be careful," Mandy warned.

Bishop worked the mechanism until the compartment sprung open. He looked inside. "More buttons! Maybe they control the door."

"Or they may control some type of trap," Aquarian cautioned. "Let me press them."

"No way," Bishop said.

"Since I am not alive, I think that I should be the one pressing buttons around here. If anything happens in the vicinity of the chair, it will happen to me, and none of you will get hurt. You three should stand near the door. If it opens you can get out quickly."

Bishop started to protest, but Aquarian cut him off.

"This is what your father built me for," he said sounding strangely human.

Aquarian sat down in the enormous chair as a reluctant Bishop, Mandy and Gary moved toward the door. He then pressed a button and a set of spikes shot out from the back of the chair barely missing his head.

"Aquarian!" Mandy shrieked. "Are you okay?"

"Yes. It's a good thing you weren't sitting here. That could have been quite painful. Stand back, everyone."

Aquarian pressed another button and a series of holes of varying sizes opened in the floor. One was right in front of Gary.

"Hey!" Gary exclaimed.

"Hmmm," Aquarian mused. "This could be a problem."

The holes continued expanding.

"Somebody do something!" Gary was pinned between the wall and an expanding hole on the floor. Before the others could move, he fell in. He stopped halfway in, sticking out from the waist up.

"Hey, what gives?!" Gary exclaimed.

"It looks like you're too large to fit all the way into the hole," Aquarian observed. "All those sweets you eat have served a purpose."

"Nobody move," Bishop warned. "You could fall into a hole. You may not be as lucky as Gary."

"You call this lucky?" Gary squeaked.

"Would you have rather fallen all the way in, and found out what's at the bottom?" Aquarian replied.

"Help me pull him out," Bishop said to Aquarian. They each grabbed one of Gary's arms and pulled, but Gary remained stuck.

"It's times like these when I wish I had my old body back and I could lift super heavy objects," Aquarian groaned.

"Hey, watch who you are calling a super heavy object. I wish I could reach into my pocket. I could use a lollipop right now," Gary said.

"It's all your lollipops that got you into this mess," Aquarian responded.

"Try pressing another button, Aquarian," Bishop said.

"Do you want me to stop looking for the door button, and start looking for the get Gary unstuck button?" Aquarian asked.

"If I didn't know you any better, Aquarian, I would almost think that you were trying to make a joke," Bishop said.

"Wait! What if the holes close up? I'll get squished!" Gary exclaimed.

"It's either press a button or be stuck there for the rest of your life," Bishop stated. "We've got to take the chance."

"There are still several buttons that I haven't tried yet," Aquarian said as he pressed a green one. The group watched as the monitors retracted into the walls and metal panels slid into their place sealing their openings.

"Is that all?" Mandy questioned.

Mandy spoke too soon. Moment's later a low rumbling sound filled the room.

"I hear something," Gary said. "And I also feel something."

Mandy pointed to the floor. "Look! Something is coming out of the holes!"

Gary began to come unglued. "I told you not to press anymore

buttons! What's happening?"

A clear bubbling liquid began oozing out of all the holes, except for the one that Gary was stuck in.

"What is that stuff?" Bishop asked.

"It looks like... acid!" Mandy said.

"Acid?!" Gary screamed. "Get me out of here! Hurry! Hurry! Oh my God! I can feel it oozing on my feet and legs! It's burning me!! It's burning me!! Its..."

Bishop nervously placed his hand into the slowly rising liquid.

"Relax, Gar," Bishop said. "Whatever it is, it's not acid. It's cold and bubbly."

"You're right," Gary said. "Yuck!"

The liquid started to flow at a faster rate of speed, quickly covering the floor as it continued to rise.

"If we don't stop this stuff, it will soon be over Gary's head," Aquarian noted.

Gary was still aggravated. "Oh, great! I won't burn to death. I'll just drown!"

"At least we can be thankful that it's not acid," Mandy replied. "But what is it?"

Bishop cupped his hands together, dunked them into the liquid and brought a sample close to his face. "I have the strangest feeling that I've seen this before," he said as he put the liquid up to his mouth.

"No, Bishop, don't drink it!" Mandy shrieked.

Ignoring Mandy's plea, Bishop took a quick sip of the bubbling liquid. Seconds later he emitted a loud belch. "It's ginger ale," he said.

"What?" Gary cried. "That's crazy!"

"I thought it looked familiar. It was my grandfather's... I mean Onyx's... favorite drink. He always had several bottles of it in the fridge. When I asked him about it, he just said that they had nothing like it when he was growing up. Now I know what he meant by that. They must not have ginger ale back on the Homeworld. Strange that he should try to kill somebody with it."

"No it isn't." Gary struggled frantically as the liquid went past his chest. "Your uncle is as crazy as a loon! Could we please get back to the problem of getting me unstuck before I drown?"

"Don't worry. I know what to do," Bishop replied.

"You always say that, Bish. I just wish you would do it quickly."

"Hey, it's not easy being in charge, you know. There's a lot of pressure."

"Well do something. Now!" Gary began gurgling and choking as ginger ale flowed into his mouth.

"Bishop!" Mandy cried. "Help him!"

Bishop turned to Aquarian. "You're an expert on underwater stuff. Is there anything we can do to help him breathe?"

"Yes," Aquarian responded.

After a few second of silence Bishop screamed, "Well? What?! What can we do?"

"Get his head above water."

"This is no time for jokes, Aquarian."

"I don't joke. You asked a question, and I answered it."

"If this keeps up, we'll all drown," Mandy said. The liquid had risen to her shoulders.

"I won't. I don't breathe," Aquarian said.

Noting the angry look on Bishop's face, Aquarian slipped below the surface. Moments later, an enormous popping sound could be heard from under the ginger ale. Gary bobbed to the surface coughing and gasping for air.

"What happened? How did you get out?" Bishop asked Gary.

"I think the pressure underneath me was too great. It safely popped me out like a cork from a bottle."

"Safe is a relative term right now," Bishop replied. "In case you haven't noticed, we only have a few more feet before this room fills up entirely with ginger ale."

Mandy drifted over toward Gary. "Say, Gary, how come you're floating? I thought you couldn't swim."

"Oh. That's right. I can't!" Gary said as his head started to sink under the surface.

Mandy dove into the ginger ale and helped the flailing Gary back to the surface.

"Why did you have to remind me that I couldn't swim?" Gary asked. "I had forgotten all about it."

Aquarian suddenly surfaced. "I have an idea. I'll be right back. Don't go anywhere." He then disappeared once again.

"Don't go anywhere?" Gary sputtered. "Are you sure he doesn't have a sense of humor, Bish?"

"That's what he keeps telling me."

"What do you think he's doing down there?" Mandy asked.

"I don't know. But we haven't much time to find out," Bishop replied.

The ceiling was just a few inches above his head. "Mandy, if we don't get out of this alive, there's something I want you to know."

"Bishop, don't talk like that," Mandy said. "Of course we'll get out. We've faced worse dangers than this."

"Name one!" Gary gasped.

"You keep out of this," Mandy said.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Was this a private conversation?" Gary was sarcastic. "Maybe I should just go outside for a few minutes and leave you two alone."

"Mandy, I've really got to tell you something," Bishop said, but before he could continue, the ginger ale surged and filled the room. All three were forced underwater. Time had run out.

Suddenly, Bishop felt a tug downward. He looked around frantically but all he could see were the holes in the floor. He then floated upward, hoping to find an air pocket. To his surprise he broke free of the surface. As he gasped for air, he saw Gary and Mandy doing the same thing.

"What happened? Why is the ginger ale getting lower?" Gary said.

Aquarian popped his head above the surface. "I can answer that."

"Aquarian? Are you responsible for this?" Bishop asked. The level of ginger ale in the room was continuing to drop at a rapid speed.

"Yes, Bishop."

"Well don't just swim there, tell us what you did!"

"I reasoned that the ginger ale was coming from somewhere, so I dove into the biggest hole. I found the device that was pumping out the ginger ale. Then I pressed the reverse button and the machine started to work in reverse. It started to suck the ginger ale back in, instead of pumping it out."

"Great thinking, Aquarian," Bishop said. "It's too bad you didn't get the idea sooner. You could have gone down there earlier and stopped it before we almost drowned."

"Oh, I had the idea as soon as I saw the ginger ale coming up through the holes," Aquarian replied.

"Then why did you wait so long?" Mandy asked.

"I would have gone down there sooner, but there was only one hole that I could fit through, and there was something stuck in it. I had to wait for it to become unstuck," Aquarian said.

"Hey, I am not an 'it'," Gary sneered.

"Why would Onyx make such a fancy trap?" Mandy asked.

"Stupid trap, you mean," Gary grumbled.

"I don't know", Bishop said. "All I can say is that he had a sick sense of humor."

As the last of the ginger ale bubbled through the holes, Bishop turned to Aquarian. "Maybe you could go back down there and see if there is another way out of here." But as soon as he finished speaking all the holes closed, as if they had never been open. The panels in the wall slid back and the monitors moved back into the positions they were when the group entered the room.

"Too late," Mandy replied.

"Would you like me to press the button and open them up again?" Aquarian asked.

"No!" Gary screamed.

"When you were down there, how did you know which button to push to reverse the flow of the ginger ale?" Bishop asked.

"I just pressed the one marked 'Reverse'," Aquarian replied.

"I wish the buttons up here were marked like that," Bishop said.

Mandy touched Bishop's hand. "Bishop, a few minutes ago, just before we both went under, you said that you had something important to say to me. What did you want to tell me?"

"Huh? Oh, that. Well, um, you see, I just thought that with both of us where we were, you know, and things being the way they were, you know, that I should just, you know, tell you something," Bishop stammered.

"But what was it?" Mandy prodded.

"I'll tell you later, okay? We had better get focused and be more careful in trying to get out of here. Our last attempt almost killed us."

"Yeah, what a way to go!" Gary said. "Ginger-aled to death. That would look very weird on my tombstone. Here lies Gary O'Leary. Died from a swift alement."

Aquarian sat back down in the chair and examined the control panel.

"We've pressed all the buttons except for this one here. Anybody object to giving this one a try?"

"Before you do, let me find someplace safe to stand. I don't want anything opening up underneath me, or shooting out at me," Gary replied.

Mandy took Bishop's hand. "I feel safer when I'm with you," she said. Bishop smiled a silly grin.

"Okay, brace yourselves. Here goes," Aquarian said as he pressed

the final button. Instantly, the lights in the room flickered and a sound like rushing air was heard on the other side of the room.

"Was that another whooshing sound?" Gary asked nervously. "I am really starting to hate that sound. I can live a very long, happy life if I never hear another whoosh again."

"That's if you come out of this alive," Aquarian noted.

"Hold on, you guys," Bishop interrupted. "We don't even know what that last button did."

"Well from the looks of things, it didn't open the door. And that's all I wanted to see happen," Gary said.

Bishop appeared dejected. "I can't think of anything else to do. Does anyone else have a suggestion?"

"Yeah, I suggest that we search my basement next time," Gary replied. "It's safer."

"Other than that," Bishop said.

Mandy suddenly looked very pale. "I've got to sit down. I'm feeling very tired right now."

"Me, too," Gary said, huffing. "I don't know why, but I'm out of breath."

"Strange," Bishop said. "I'm also out of breath."

"I'm not," Aquarian said.

"We know, we know!" Gary wheezed. "You don't breathe."

"Maybe that's what that whoosh sound was," Mandy said. "Something is sucking all the air out of the room."

"Quick!" Gary gasped for breath. "Press the button again! Maybe that will stop it!"

Aquarian pressed the button. "Nothing," he said.

Gary ran over to the chair and began frantically pressing every button he saw.

"One of these stupid buttons has to reverse the air flow! It has to!"

"Calm down! You're using up more oxygen," Mandy said. "Losing control will not help us any."

"Well, sitting here doing nothing won't help either," Gary gasped.

"You've hit all the buttons several times and nothing seems to be happening," Mandy replied. "I don't think the buttons are functioning anymore."

"Why not?" Gary asked.

"How should I know?" Mandy replied. "Maybe they are deactivated after you hit them too many times."

"We're all going to die!" Gary cried.

"I'm not," Aquarian said.

Gary looked Aquarian right in the eye. "If you say 'I'm not' just one more time, I'll take you apart like I did my TV remote control," he growled.

"Everyone, keep calm!" Bishop ordered. "Give me a minute to think."

Gary sat on the floor. "We may not have a minute left, Bish."

At that moment, the door through which they had entered the room suddenly sprang open.

"Air!" Mandy gasped.

Everyone was so busy breathing that they didn't notice an older boy standing in the doorway. He had dark wavy hair and was just a little older looking than Bishop, and dressed in an uniform similar to the one that Bishop wore in their past confrontation with Onyx and his Emissaries of Darkness. The only difference was that this outfit was black with a grey stripe across the chest.

"Ahem," he coughed.

Everyone looked in his direction.

"Is one of you Bishop?" the boy asked.

"I am," Bishop said, looking at the boy. There appeared to be something familiar about him, but Bishop wasn't sure what it was.

"I've been looking for you."

"Well you've found me. Who are you?" Bishop asked.

"I'm your brother," the boy replied.

A decorative graphic for Chapter 3. It features a large, stylized number '3' inside a circular frame, which is centered on a horizontal bar. The bar has a gradient and a drop shadow. The words 'CHAPTER THREE' are written in a bold, sans-serif font across the bar, partially overlapping the '3'.

IT TAKES ALL KINDS

Bishop was stunned. He had never heard anything about a brother. He was immediately suspicious. But before he could say anything, the boy turned around and walked into Onyx's throne room. A bewildered Bishop, Mandy, Gary and Aquarian followed.

"I don't have a brother!" Bishop said when he caught up with the boy.

"I'm not exactly your total brother," the boy replied as he plunked himself into Onyx's throne. "More like your half-brother. We both share the same father, but our mothers were different. My name is Gambit. I was born back on the Homeworld, just before the time that our father came to this world. I don't even know if he was aware that I existed. When I heard that you were on the Homeworld and at the castle, I went there as quickly as possible. But you had just left by the time I arrived. I followed you and I made it through that portal just before it collapsed. I found myself in this world, and I have been exploring it ever since."

Gary was stupefied. "How do we know your story is true? Do you have any proof?"

"I don't have any proof on me, but there are people who can vouch for me on the Homeworld," Gambit replied.

"So why didn't you come looking for me sooner?" Bishop asked. "We've been on Earth for months!"

"I didn't know where you had gone. I stayed in this house for a few days thinking you would return, but you never did."

"I've been staying with Gary and his family." Bishop pointed to his friends. "Uh, this is Gary, and Mandy, and Aquarian," Bishop said as he pointed to his friends.

"I had time to fully explore the house. By the way, don't press any buttons you find in that room. It's full of traps."

"Gee, thanks for the warning," Gary groaned.

"After it looked like you weren't going to return, I decided to travel and see what this world had to offer."

"Wellington isn't that big a place," Gary stated.

"Oh, not just Wellington. I went around this world. An interesting collection of separate civilizations. What do you call them? Continents?"

"That's right," Mandy offered.

"There are many continents on the Homeworld, but only one that supports life," Gambit explained.

"So, where were you earlier when we needed you?" Gary asked. "I almost drowned in there, you know. I'm never going to drink ginger-ale again."

"A ginger-ale trap, eh?" Gambit chuckled. "Ol' uncle Onyx has a bizarre sense of humor."

"There was nothing funny about it," Mandy said.

"No. You're right. Sorry. Anyway, I had gone into town. When I got back I heard you guys down here."

"How did you find the secret passage down here?" Gary asked suspiciously.

"The door to the passage was open when I arrived," Gambit replied. "I've been all over down here investigating everything."

"What do you know about the monitors in that room?" Bishop asked.

"I used them to try and locate you," Gambit replied. "Uncle Onyx could watch the whole world from in there."

"We weren't able to get the monitors to work," Bishop said.

"Really?" Gambit replied. "Did you try pulling the lever on the wall?"

"Lever? There's a lever in there?" Bishop asked. "Show us."

"Hold it!" Gary was loud. "If you want to go in there and look, go right ahead, Bish. But I'm staying out here where it's safe."

"I've been in there before and nothing happened to me," Gambit walked toward the door. "Let me show you how it works."

Mandy approached Gary. She was all comfort and concern. "Come

on, Gary. I've never known you to be afraid of anything."

"If it will make it easier for you, I will hold your hand," Aquarian said.

"Get out of here!" Gary waived Aquarian away from him. "I don't need anyone to hold my hand, and I'm not afraid of anything. I'll go in."

Gambit was the first to enter the room. He walked over to a section of the wall and pointed to a small lever hidden between two monitors. "Here it is," he said to Bishop. "Just pull that lever."

Bishop did as he was told and was startled to see all the monitors immediately turn on. He was very impressed with the images that he saw. "These people look like important leaders from all over the world. There's the President talking to the vice-president. And that's the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom."

"You know what the Prime Minister of England looks like?" Gary asked.

"Yeah. We learned about him in school this past semester. As well as all those other people on all those other monitors. They're all leaders of different countries."

"You're saying that Onyx could find out what was going on in any country in the world at any time?" Mandy sounded very worried. "It's like he was getting ready to do something really big."

"But what, exactly?" Bishop asked.

"What indeed," said an unfamiliar voice from somewhere behind Bishop.

Bishop whirled around. "What? Who said that?"

"Said what, Bish?" Gary replied. "Nobody said anything, but you."

"Are you sure? I could swear that I heard somebody behind me say something."

"I thought I heard something too," Mandy said.

"You two are both hearing things," Gary concluded.

"Let's go upstairs," Bishop said. "I think we've seen all there is to see for now."

Bishop led the rest of the group upstairs to the living room, always keeping a close eye on Gambit. He didn't trust this mysterious stranger. Gary could see the concern on his friend's face. He took Bishop aside.

"Hey, Bish," Gary whispered. "Why don't you use your ring to check out your 'brother'?"

"I can't. After we came back, I realized that I'd left the ring on the Homeworld."

Mandy rose to her feet from the chair. "I'm going to get something to drink in the kitchen. Does anybody want anything?"

"No thanks," Bishop replied as Mandy left the room. "I'm not thirsty."

Aquarian looked at the chess set. "Our original plan today was to go back to the Homeworld. We could all go there and see if his story is true."

"We will, once we find that missing chess piece," Bishop said.

Gary pointed a finger at Gambit. "He's been the only person here since we were here last."

"Wait a minute," Gambit sputtered. "I didn't take anything. Nobody's been living here for months. Anyone could have come in and taken it."

"Who would do that?" Gary asked.

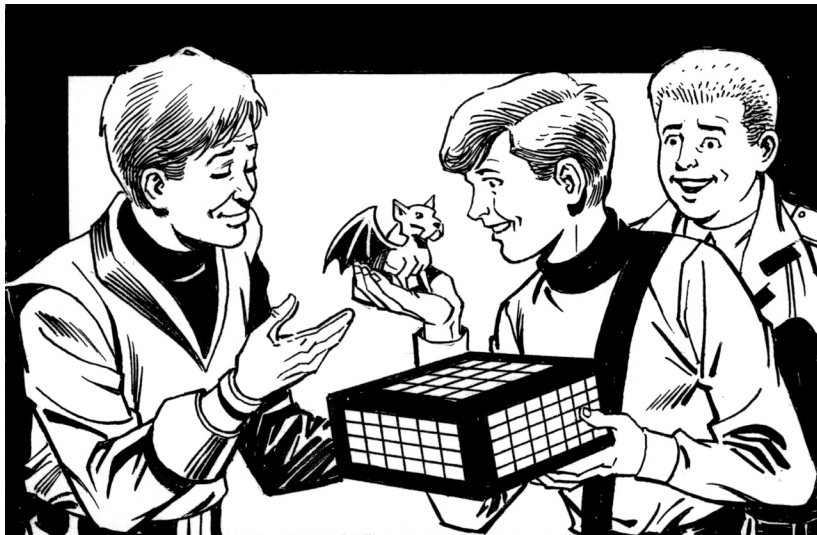
"Maybe one of Uncle O's men was left behind," Gambit suggested. "Are you sure all of his Emissaries went back to the Homeworld with him?"

"No, we can't say that for sure." Bishop turned to his friends. "Until we have more evidence, I think we should believe what Gambit says."

"No way!" Gary fumed.

Bishop looked Gambit in the eye. "If you are my brother, you deserve a chance. I don't have any family left, and I would like to give you the opportunity to prove yourself."

"I'm still going to keep my eye on him," a suspicious Gary replied.



Mandy returned carrying a large bottled water. She took a small sip and placed it on the table.

Gambit reached for something behind the couch. "I've brought a present for you Bishop, from the Homeworld."

"Watch out, Bish," Gary warned. "It could be a trap!"

Aquarian quickly rushed in between Gambit and Bishop to act as a shield for Bishop.

"I don't think that Bishop will require any protection against this," Gambit said as he handed a small cage to his brother. Bishop looked inside and saw a small animal about the size of a hamster. But this animal looked more like a small purple dog.

"What is it?" Bishop asked.

"It's a yipple. It's perfectly safe to let him out of his cage."

"It's the color of a grape lollipop," Gary observed.

As Bishop opened the door to the cage the yipple sniffed in his direction.

"Come on, boy," Gambit coaxed. "It's safe out here."

The yipple walked on to Bishop's hand. As Bishop brought him closer to get a better look at him, he let out a sudden sneeze and the tiny creature fell. Within seconds it sprouted tiny wings from under its fur and hovered in the air. Mandy and Gary looked on in amazement.

"Cool," Bishop said.

Mandy smiled. "He's awesome. He's so cute."

"Don't worry about him flying away," Gambit said as the yipple began to move about. "Once a yipple gets attached to a person, it stays with him."

As Mandy and Gary turned their attention to Gambit, the yipple flew up to Bishop's face and licked him on the cheek. A soft glow enveloped Bishop and seconds later disappeared. The yipple chirped a greeting that sounded like a little "Yip" and circled Bishop several times before resting on his shoulder, where it folded up its wings. Mandy turned to Bishop and asked him what he was going to name his new little friend.

"I don't know. What do you suggest?"

"How about, Trouble," Gary offered. Clearly, he was distrustful of Gambit and any gifts he might offer, including yipples.

"I think you should call him, Pipsqueak," Mandy said.

"Pipsqueak?" Bishop studied the yipple. "Do you like that boy? Pipsqueak. Hey, Pipsqueak."

"Yip, yip," yipped the yipple.

"I think he likes it. Pipsqueak it is," Bishop beamed. He had never owned a pet. His "grandfather" would never allow it.

Gary remained obstinate. "Uh, Bish, I hate to ruin the moment, but we came here today for a reason, remember? How are we going to get that chess piece back so we can return the Homeworld? And, what are we going to do about Gambit?"

Bishop wasn't paying any attention to Gary, he was too busy playing with Pipsqueak.

"Uh, Bish, did you hear me?" Gary asked.

"What?" was Bishop's reply.

"I don't believe this! I was talking about the missing chess piece and Gambit." Another long silent pause followed. Bishop remained engrossed with Pipsqueak. As he did his hand reached over to the table and he grabbed Mandy's bottled water. He quickly drank the entire bottle of water and placed the empty bottle on the table without ever taking his eyes off Pipsqueak.

"Bish!" Gary yelled.

"Huh?"

"Never mind. I can see you are too wrapped up in your new pet. It's getting late. Let's go home."

"Why don't you all go home?" Bishop continued to play with Pipsqueak. "I'll meet up with you in the morning."

"You mean that you're not coming home with me? What should I tell my folks?" Gary asked.

"Tell them I'd like to sleep in my old room."

"They won't like you staying here alone."

"Tell them I'm not alone, Gary. Tell them a relative of mine came to town." Bishop briefly looked at Gambit, and then turned his attention to the yipple.

Now Mandy was concerned, as well. "What about the person who took the missing chess piece? He could still be around."

Bishop dismissed her fears. "Aquarian can stand guard outside my door all night. I'll see you guys tomorrow." Bishop then climbed the stairs to the second floor as Pipsqueak happily buzzed about his head. Gary and Mandy exchanged a silent, worried look and then walked out the front door.

Moments later, Gambit climbed the stairs to the second floor. Bishop was seated on the top stair, the yipple perched on his shoulder. Aquarian followed close behind.

Bishop smiled at his new brother. "I really like this little guy," he said. "I've never had a pet."

"I thought you two would hit it off," Gambit replied. "You also don't have to worry about hurting him. Yipples are extremely tough and can't be harmed very easily. They can even go without breathing for long periods of time."

"Sounds like the perfect pet," Bishop said. "One that will stay with you for a lifetime."

Gambit smiled strangely. "Yes, you could say that. Yipples are pretty cool."

"Speaking of cool, have you discovered your power yet?" Bishop asked.

Gambit appeared puzzled. "Power? What do you mean?"

"When you arrive on Earth from the Homeworld, you get a special power," Bishop explained. "Everyone's power is different. I have the ability to control any electronic device. Onyx was a shape shifter. Miss Mann, a friend of ours, can make duplicates of people."

"Nope, no special power yet," Gambit said. "Not that I know of."

Bishop was suddenly serious. "You know, if there is anything you want to know about our father, just ask. There are a few things I have learned about him. And there are messages from him on my computer downstairs."

"Thanks, but I'm not really up for that right now. I'm kind of tired from all my travels."

"I have so many questions I want to ask you, Gambit. You must know so much about the Homeworld."

"I'll answer all your questions in the morning. Right now all I want to do is to go to sleep."

"Okay," Bishop said reluctantly. "No problem."

Gambit opened the door to grandfather Andrew's room. "I've been staying in this room. Is that okay with you?"

"Sure," Bishop replied.

"Goodnight brother."

As Gambit closed the door, Bishop briefly thought about the spacious secret laboratory in the realm of compressed space hidden behind the old mirror in Gambit's bedroom.

He turned to Aquarian. "Nobody is to come through these doors tonight. Okay?"

"Yes, I understand," Aquarian responded.

Bishop entered his room and closed the door behind him. He then put the yipple on the pillow. As he got undressed he looked around his room. Although nothing had changed since he had been last here, it all felt different. The last time he was here, his 'grandfather' was just down the hall and he was just like all the other kids in his school. He picked up a picture of Andrew from the bureau and looked at it. When he placed it back on the bureau, he put it face down. His grandfather was dead. Bishop had, in fact, never known him. Onyx had been impersonating him since Bishop was orphaned. He would have to dispose of this photo.

"Okay boy, sleep well," Bishop said to Pipsqueak as he climbed into bed and turned off the light. In the soft moonlight that filled the room, a figure slowly took form near the bureau.


 A decorative graphic for Chapter 4. It features a large, stylized number '4' inside a circular frame. The number '4' is white with a grey shadow. The words 'CHAPTER FOUR' are written in a bold, white, sans-serif font across a dark grey horizontal bar that passes behind the circular frame.

CHAPTER FOUR

DON'T MIND ME

The mysterious figure stood by the bureau in Bishop's room. It was a man in his mid-forties with auburn hair. He was dressed in a single piece brown uniform with an insignia on the sleeves that had the initials 'TMP' inside a field of stars. He also wore a strange blinking device around his wrist. He looked at the sleeping Bishop, and then turned his attention to the rest of the room. He walked around investigating everything in sight. He eventually came upon Bishop's uniform flung over the top of a chair in the corner.

"Great Gugiley Mugiley!" he muttered, somewhat louder than intended. "Is this what I think it is?"

Bishop, who was not yet asleep, heard the voice. He opened one eye and saw the intruder. He didn't move, but continued to watch the stranger.

"It is! It's Bishop's uniform! I'm here!" the stranger babbled. "I told them I could do it! And I did it! What will they say when I make it back?"

Bishop had heard enough. "Back where?" he asked as he sat up in bed.

The stranger was startled. "Oops! Sorry, I thought you were asleep. Oh, boy. We weren't supposed to meet like this. I'm in trouble now."

"Trouble with who? Meet like what?" Bishop was bewildered. "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

"Ah. Questions. There are always questions." The stranger stood and

smoothed his uniform. "First off, don't worry, I come in peace. I come from another place, far from here."

"How did you get into my room? Did you do something to Aquarian?"

"No, no. Don't worry. I have not harmed your little companion. I couldn't even if I wanted to. You see I'm not really here."

"What do you mean, you're not here? I can see you. I'm talking to you."

"Yes, you do see and hear me. But I am not really here. I am a temporal holographic image composed of light amplified by stimulated emission of radiation and quark particles."

Bishop sat with a confused look on his face. The same look that he had every day in science class at school. Science had always been his weakest subject.

The stranger tried to clarify it for Bishop. "You are just seeing light rays that look like me. Look, I'll prove it to you." The stranger put his hand right through Bishop's television set without any harm.

Bishop was surprised. "Are you a ghost?"

"Me?" The stranger patted himself. "Nope. Not yet. Still flesh and blood. What you are seeing is just a projection of myself that only you can see and hear."

"Me? Why just me?"

"Well, not just you. I should clarify that. Actually, just you and your girlfriend Mandy can see and hear me. That was my voice that you two heard earlier today in the living room and downstairs in that place. That awful place! Ugh! What was that place, anyway?"

Bishop was stern. "I'll ask the questions. How come I couldn't see you then like I do now?"

"Those were my first attempts at contact, and they were not perfected yet. But now, I am ready." The stranger suddenly started to flicker. "That is, I think I am ready."

"What's happening to you?"

"I think there is a little bit of transmission interference. I'm afraid I can't keep this connection going much longer."

"Before you go, at least tell me your name."

After thinking about it for a moment, the stranger said, "Call me BJ."

"BJ? Is that your real name?"

"Well, it's what my friends call me, and my parents. But when I'm at work, they all call me by another name."

"What's that?" Bishop asked.

"Sorry, can't tell you that one. It's prohibited." BJ continued to flicker.

"Prohibited by who? And how come only Mandy and I can see and hear you?"

"I don't have time to answer that now. I've got to run." BJ's flickering intensified. "Please, don't tell anyone you saw me. Not just yet. I'm too early." BJ looked at the flashing watch like device on his wrist. "Definitely too early. Remember, Bishop, keep in the light."

BJ flickered out for good, leaving behind a very confused Bishop. The yipple was fast asleep on his pillow. "You'll never be a watchdog, will you, boy?" Bishop whispered.

Bishop climbed out of bed and walked to his door. Opening the door he saw that Aquarian was still standing guard, in the hallway.

"Aquarian, has anyone been out here?"

"No."

"That's odd."

"I heard you talking, but I didn't hear anyone else," Aquarian said. "I was starting to worry about you."

"Why didn't you come in and investigate?" Bishop asked.

"Because your orders were that nobody was to enter your room. And if I entered your room to investigate, it would have been against your orders."

"But I didn't mean you, Aquarian. Look, don't take my orders so literally from now on. Okay?"

"Affirmative."

"I'm going back to bed. Keep an eye and an ear open for the rest of the night." Bishop closed the door behind him. Aquarian stood in the hallway with one eye open and plugging one ear with a finger.

Meanwhile, back on the Homeworld, Talisman, Onyx's protégée and second in command, stood alone on a hill analyzing the battle below. His clothing was all black which reflected his somber mood. He was so captivated on the attack raging below that he did not appear to notice two people nervously approaching from behind. One of them was Print.

"I have bad news to report, sir," Print said.

Talisman did not respond or turn around.

"Both our munitions and the men's morales are equally low," Print continued.



Talisman remained silent.

"Perhaps, if Onyx were to appear and show his men that he survived the castle's destruction as you said he did, that would renew their spirit," the second man said.

Talisman turned around to address the man. He grabbed him by the neck and lifted him several inches off the ground.

"I've told you before, that Onyx survived and is away on a mission, I am in charge!"

"Maybe if we knew more about this mission?" Print tried to break the tension. "The men think Onyx should be here running things instead of running off on some mission."

The man struggled as he started gasping for air. Talisman moved until he was dangling him over the side of the cliff.

"Onyx does not have to answer to you or to any of his followers!" Talisman turned to address Print. "Tell the men that if they do not follow orders, then they shall suffer the same fate as this one."

"Please! No!" the man screamed. Talisman released his grip.

The man's cries echoed off the cliff as he fell to the rocks below.

"Now, go!" Talisman said. "Do not forget that I got you out of that prison you were in, and I can see that you find yourself in a worse place. When Onyx is done with his mission, he will take command. Until then, obey me as you would him." Talisman turned his attention back to the battle below as a nervous Print slowly walked away.

Print was puzzled. Where could Onyx be, and what was more important than the battle for the Kingdom of New Hopes? These thoughts kept going through his mind as he entered a large nearby tent. He stopped and looked around the sparse interior. Soon his eyes found what he had come in looking for. Tied up in a chair on the other side of the tent was an elderly man who looked like he had been recently beaten. His clothing was torn and bloodied and his face showed many recent cuts and bruises.

Print took off the elderly man's gag. "So Castleton, are you enjoying your little stay with us? I'll admit that it is not the type of accommodations that you are probably used to, but we hope to be changing location real soon. Maybe into a nice palace somewhere." Print chuckled.

Castleton slowly shook his head. "I knew your parents, Print. I can't believe that two loving people could spawn such a horrible offspring as you."

"Yes, I'm sure mom and pop would agree with you, if they were still

alive to do so. But don't worry, maybe you'll get to see them again and tell them yourself. You might be seeing them sooner than you think if you don't tell Talisman what he wants to know. I hate to think what he would do to you. Onyx taught him well."

"Onyx is another disappointment as a son," Castleton shot back. "Neither Onyx nor his protégée Talisman can succeed. Not when they have followers who are rejects and outcasts."

Print smiled an evil smirk. "Maybe they won't succeed, but I'll be sure that I'm around afterwards and pick up the pieces. Then I will take control and I will succeed where they failed."

Sensing someone nearby, Print quickly turned around and saw Talisman standing directly behind him. "I didn't see or hear you come in," Print stammered.

Talisman glared down at the youth. "Go," Talisman said softly but with great authority.

Print promptly ran out of the tent without turning back.

Talisman slowly began circling the captive. He then stopped and turned to face Castleton. "You will eventually tell me what I want to know."

"I will not betray my liege," Castleton replied.

"Do not think of it as betrayal. You are merely just following the wrong liege." Talisman's voice slowly began to soften. "I do not want to hurt you. But I must avenge myself upon he who was responsible for my sister's death."

"Your sister knew the chances she was taking when she began that journey of her life. The road it eventually led to was one that she chose to take."

"That boy is to blame for her death!" Talisman yelled. "I will have my vengeance upon him!"

Castleton looked up at his captor. "Do not blame Bishop for Random's demise. If you must place blame, place it on Onyx. He is the one who led your sister down the wrong path. And he has paid for his indiscretions with his life."

Castleton grew uneasy when he saw Talisman flash a smile. "No," Talisman said. "Onyx did not pay with his life. Onyx still lives. And he will also seek his revenge on the boy."

"Onyx! Alive?" Castleton was amazed.

"Yes, he survived while my sister did not. My dear departed sister. We were twins," Talisman explained. "You cannot know what it is like to

lose one that you hold dear."

Castleton looked up at his captor. "Yes, I can. I have lost ones that I have loved. But I do not seek vengeance. That path leads only to death and destruction."

"Yes, but it will not be my death or destruction," Talisman exclaimed. "You will soon see whose death it will lead to."

Talisman then struck Castleton across the face, knocking him unconscious and causing his chair to fall to the ground.

"I will talk more with you later, old fool," Talisman remarked as he headed out of the tent. "And you will tell me what I need to know to bring down that boy king."

5
CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

Early the next morning, back on Earth, Bishop found Gambit devouring a bowl of cereal at the kitchen table.

"I don't know if you want to be eating that, Gambit. I'm not sure how old the food in the house is."

"I picked up a few things at the store with some money I found in the bedroom," Gambit mumbled between mouthfuls. "Want some?"

"Sure," Bishop said.

Gambit grabbed another bowl and began pouring cereal.

Bishop looked at the cereal box. "That's funny."

"What is?"

Bishop pointed to the cereal box. "That is my grandfather's favorite cereal. Uh, I mean Onyx's favorite. He always devoured a bowl full every morning."

"Really? How interesting."

Bishop walked over to the refrigerator and pulled out a few bottles of water. Opening one he drank the entire bottle without stopping. He then saw the yipple hovering over the table. "I've got to feed Pipsqueak. What do yipples eat?"

"Don't worry about that. They don't eat food."

"Then how do they survive?"

"Um, they get their nutrition from other sources," Gambit said nervously.

"Like sunlight?" Bishop asked, giving his brother the benefit of the doubt.

"Yeah, like sunlight, and stuff," Gambit replied with detectable relief.

"That's... convenient." Bishop was growing somewhat suspicious. Was Gambit hiding something about the yipple? Or about himself? "You know, Gambit. I don't know anything about you."

"There's not a whole lot to know. Alabaster met my mother many years ago. She was a common woman, and he didn't want it to be known that he was in love with a commoner. After I was born, he stopped seeing her all together. My mother went looking for him. That's when she found out that he had left our world to come here."

Bishop was appalled. "I can't believe that! My father was not the kind of man who would run out on his own kid!"

"Well, he did." Gambit was sullen. Bishop suddenly felt bad for him.

"What happened next?" Bishop asked.

"Not much. My mother and I lived by ourselves for many years outside the kingdom proper, until my mother died and I was left alone. I lived by myself after that. One day I heard that Alabaster's son from another world had arrived on our world. By the time I made it to the castle, you had just left to come back here. I followed you and I found the portal that you had left through. Not having anything left for me on my world, I decided to come to yours. So, when your friends on the Homeworld weren't looking, I jumped through the portal. And here I am. Now, tell me about you. I'd like to hear about you and your friends."

Bishop wasn't sure how much he should reveal. "Last year, when I turned fourteen, I suddenly had the ability to control electronic devices. Shortly after that, my friends and I were hunted by our rotten uncle Onyx and his Emissaries of Darkness. He was after the secret portal that our father left for me so that he could use it to get back to the Homeworld."

Gambit rose from his chair. "I've heard stories about Uncle O. He sounds like some kind of psychopath. I can't believe he's related to us."

"Yes, he's my father's brother. I mean, our father's... brother. Sorry."

"That's okay," Gambit said. "You're not used to having a brother yet. The closest thing that you've had is that android, and it's not even human."

"Aquarian is like a brother to me. You know, he was made by our father, so he is technically our brother, I guess."

"I don't think so. Give me a flesh and blood bro anytime. Androids really aren't any different than toasters."

Pipsqueak rubbed against Bishop's cheek.

"Not any different than toasters," Bishop quietly said to Pipsqueak. The yipple had settled on his shoulder and was nuzzling his cheek.

Gambit changed the subject. "So, what do you want to do today? Do you want to start looking for that missing chess thing you were talking about earlier?" he asked.

"Let me call my friends. They'll want to help."

"I guess it's okay to bring Mandy along. But why do you hang out with that fat kid, Gary? I would think he'd slow you down. He can't really be good at anything."

"Yeah. I mean, no. I mean Gary is good at things," Bishop said. "Geez, I'm having trouble thinking clearly this morning."

"If you really want to bring your friends, and that walking toaster you call Aquarian, I guess it's okay."

"They're really good guys. Really. You'll see. They can carry their own weight."

"Even Gary? I'd like to see that!" Gambit said.

"I'll call Gary and have him meet us over Mandy's house. We can hang at her pool and go over everything. I want you to get to know everybody better."

"Sounds good," Gambit said.

"I'll go grab a couple of swimsuits, give Mandy and Gary a call, and we'll be off," said Bishop as he grabbed a few bottles of water.

As Bishop left the kitchen, a deep frown suddenly passed over Gambit's face.

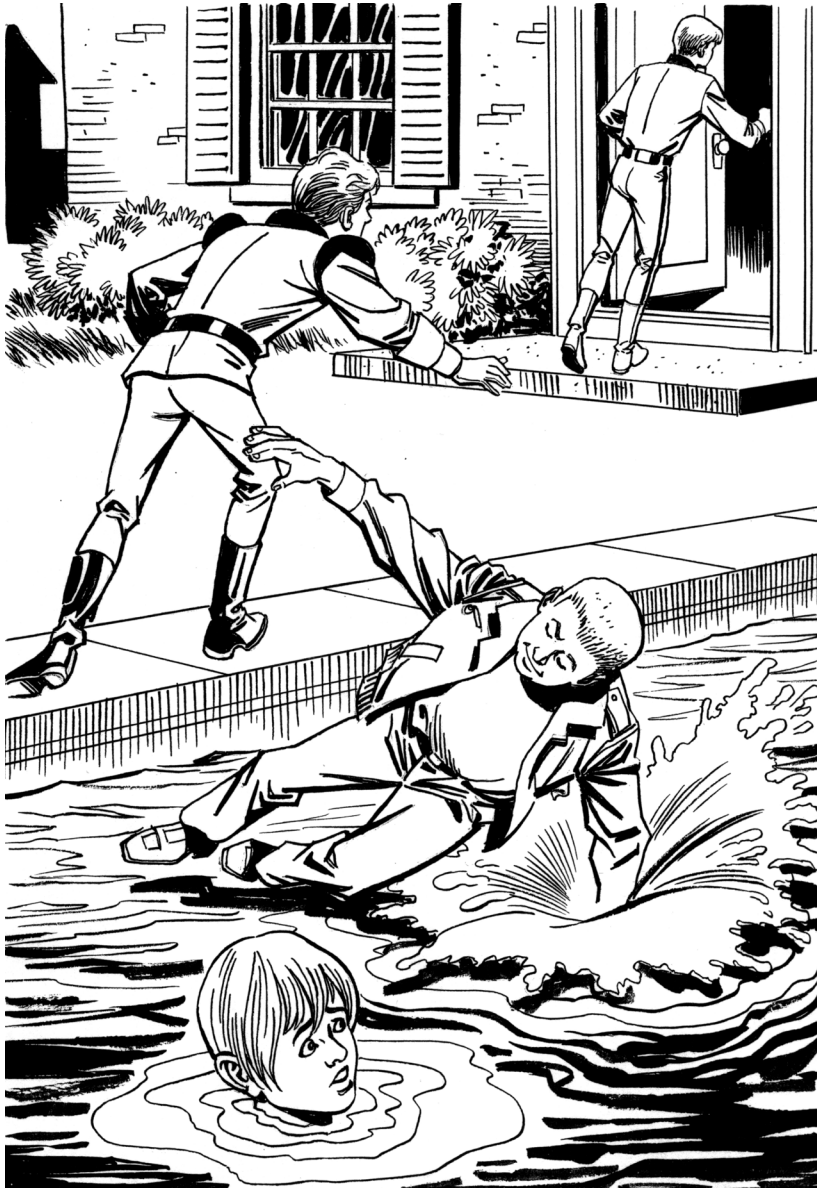
"This is going to take longer than I had expected," Gambit said in a low, frightening voice. "And I have to make sure that I stay away from that pool."

Unbeknownst to Gambit, BJ suddenly appeared behind him in the kitchen. He jotted something down into a notebook. He then adjusted the device on his wrist and disappeared.

Bishop, Gambit and Aquarian arrived at Mandy's house a half hour later. Pipsqueak was sticking his head out of Bishop's shirt pocket. Gary was already there, sitting on a lounge next to Mandy's built in pool in the backyard. He was eating an ice pop. Aquarian eyed the pool and raced over to it. Before anyone could stop him, he jumped in fully clothed. Gary walked to the edge of the pool.

"Way to go, fish boy," Gary said.

"Hey! Where's Mandy?" Bishop asked.



Gary pointed to the back door. "Inside."

"I'll be right back," Bishop said.

As Bishop entered the house, Gambit "accidentally" bumped Gary and sent him tumbling into the pool.

"Hey!" Gary spluttered as he surfaced. "What's your problem?"

"Sorry, dude," Gambit said with an insincere smile.

Aquarian swam over to Gary. "Do you need me to hoist you out of the pool?"

"Get lost," Gary growled.

"I am only trying to help," Aquarian continued. "Everything is heavier when it is wet. And you are very heavy to begin with."

Meanwhile, Bishop found Mandy getting soft drinks from the refrigerator in the kitchen. She was wearing a new two-piece bathing suit. Bishop thought she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Mandy turned and smiled.

"Hi!"

"Hi, Mandy."

"Where's Aquarian?"

"He's outside at the pool. Actually he's in the pool."

"How's that new brother of yours?" Mandy asked unhappily.

"You sound like you don't like him."

"It's not that. I just don't feel that I can speak freely around him. I feel like he's listening to every word I'm saying and analyzing it, or something."

"Well he's new to Earth. He's probably just paying close attention so he'll learn our ways faster."

"I don't know. I don't think I trust him."

"Well, you can trust me," Bishop smiled. "Give him a chance."

Bishop reached over and grabbed a can of soda. Opening it he drank the entire bottle without stopping. He then opened another can and did the same.

"Are you okay?" Mandy asked. "You're drinking an awful lot."

"Yeah, I'm fine," Bishop answered. "I've just been a little thirsty lately."

Mandy noticed that Bishop's eyes kept moving downward.

"So, Mr. Chance, how do you like my new swimsuit?"

"I, um, was just going to mention it," Bishop began to blush. "Blue is my favorite color."

"Liar," Mandy laughed. "I know red is your favorite color."

"Sorry. It's just that I don't know... You look really great."

"It's about time you said something," Mandy teased. "Justin would have the minute he entered the room. I wonder how he's doing? Come on, let's bring these sodas outside."

"Wait. There's something that I want to ask you."

Mandy put down the tray of sodas. "What is it?"

After looking around to make certain that they were alone, Bishop asked, "Did you have any unannounced visitors last night?"

"No, not that I know of. My parents didn't say anything this morning. They're at my aunt's house by the way."

"Your crazy aunt Mary?"

"My aunt isn't crazy. Besides, you want to talk about crazy relatives, how about your uncle. At least my aunt doesn't want to take over the world."

"I was just kidding. Besides, your parents wouldn't have seen him. I mean, did a guy appear in your room last night?"

"Of course not! Bishop, what in the world are you talking about?"

"Do you remember yesterday hearing a voice, but not seeing anyone?"

"Yes. And you were the only other person who heard it. I figured it was some kind of trick of Onyx's."

"It wasn't, Mandy. I saw the person behind the voice! He appeared in my room last night. When I confronted him, he started to talk strangely. Not really answering my questions. All I got out of him was his name."

"What is it?"

"He said I should call him BJ. But he said that he had another name. He also said that you and I were the only two people who could see and hear him."

"Why?"

"I don't know. He wouldn't say. He told me he's some kind of holographic projection and that his real body is somewhere else."

Mandy suddenly looked very worried. "Maybe he's one of your father's operatives."

"Could be. But I don't think so."

"Did he seem dangerous?"

"Not really. He reminded me of someone. I just can't think who."

"Probably someone from a movie. You watch too many movies."

Mandy grabbed the tray of sodas. "I'd better take this stuff outside."

"Don't tell anyone else about this, okay? Not even Gary. Not yet."



"Okay. I'm going back outside. We'll talk about this BJ guy some other time." As Mandy walked outside with the sodas, Bishop found himself staring at her once again as he reached for another can of soda without thinking.

Later in the afternoon, Bishop and his friends were enjoying themselves by the pool. Gary was sitting in a chair in his wet clothes. Gambit was lying on a lounge chair. To Mandy, it appeared that Gambit was studying everybody's actions. Pipsqueak was circling above Bishop's head as he jumped in the pool. There was no sign of Aquarian.

"So, when do we start looking for the missing chess piece?" Gary asked. "When we started on your last quest, we had a clue as to where to begin. We don't even have that much this time around."

"Maybe there's something in Onyx's lair that could be of help to you," Gambit offered. "I mean, us. To all of us."

"Oh no, I'm not going back down there any time soon," Gary declared. "I almost drowned in that place!"

"If you're afraid, Bishop and I can do it alone." Gambit was snide. This did not go unnoticed by Mandy.

"Gary is not afraid," she said. "He was very heroic in our last fight with Onyx. Right, Bishop?"

There was a sudden silence as everyone waited for Bishop to respond. But he hadn't heard a thing. He was too engrossed in the pool playing with Pipsqueak.

"Right, Bishop?" Mandy asked, louder this time.

As Bishop looked up, Mandy thought she noticed a slight scowl on his face. Moments later it was gone.

"Sorry." Bishop was nonchalant. "Whatever you all decide is fine with me."

"Are you sure you're all right?" Mandy asked.

"I'm fine!" Bishop said. "I'm going home now and play with Pipsqueak in peace!"

Bishop climbed out of the pool, grabbed his towel, and a can of soda. He then stormed into the house with Pipsqueak flying around his head.

"He's acting very strange," Mandy said to Gary.

Gary shared his concern. "Maybe you should see if he's okay."

"I'll be right back." Mandy followed Bishop into the house.

Gambit turned to Gary. "Maybe you should let my brother do what

he wants to do, rather than what you want him to do."

"Bishop was never like this before," Gary said. "We were always buddies... until you showed up."

"Things change, big boy. Get used to it. Just stay out of my way, and away from Bishop and you won't be hurt. I'm going back to Bishop's, I mean, our house." Gambit jumped off the chair.

"Tell Bishop I'll see him later. There are a few things I need to do," Gambit said as he left the yard. As he passed the pool, Aquarian stuck his head out of the water.

"Aquarian! Have you been underwater this whole time?" Gary asked.

"Yes." Aquarian walked to the shallow end of the pool. Gary saw that he was still fully clothed. "I feel more at home underwater than I do above. Where is everyone?"

"Don't ask," Gary sighed.

With hardly a ripple Aquarian slid back underwater.

Meanwhile, Mandy was looking for Bishop. She was hoping to catch him before he changed and left for home. She moved quickly from the kitchen into her living room. He wasn't there. She turned to enter the family room when she suddenly walked right through a person standing in her way.

"Oh!!!" Mandy shrieked. She turned, and the two stared at each other for a moment. Mandy was shaking. "I just walked through you!" Mandy gasped. "Who are you? Wait! I know! You're that BJ person!"

"Yes indeedy I am."

"Bishop told me about you," Mandy said.

"Did he tell you that I was handsome, rugged, bold, romantic, debonair, and sophisticated?"

"Actually, he said you were strange."

"I'll accept that! You know, when you say that, you remind me of my mother. Bless her soul."

"I'm sorry. Is she dead?" Mandy asked.

"Nope. Just felt like blessing her soul. Got any souls you want me to bless for you?"

"No. Thank you." Mandy was beginning to calm down. She took a deep breath. "Okay, why don't you tell me who you are and what you're doing here?"

"In a way," BJ replied. "I was sent to assist you."

"Then are you one of Alabaster's agents?"

"Hmm," BJ pondered Mandy's question for a moment. "I guess you could say that the answer to that is, yes. Next question from the panel."

"Panel? What panel?"

"Don't mind me. Too much television as a kid. You should watch out for that when you have kids. Wait a minute, forget I said that." BJ suddenly started to flicker.

"What's happening to you?" Mandy asked.

"Great Gugiley Mugiley! They still don't have it right. Okay. I'm afraid that I've got to be leaving you sooner than I had expected. Before I go, I can steer you in the right direction. If you want to find the missing chess piece, you may want to start where you began your last quest."

"Wait a minute!" Mandy was getting nervous again. "What do you know about the missing piece? Did you take it?"

"No. I wish I could tell you who did, but at this point in time, even if I could, you wouldn't believe me." BJ flickered more rapidly. "Darn. Okay, one last thing. Don't tell anyone that you saw me. Not even Bishop. There's a reason. I'll tell you more, the next time we meet." BJ bent over Mandy as if to kiss her on the forehead. "There are times that I hate being a hologram."

BJ flickered away just moments before Bishop entered the kitchen. He had changed back into his clothes and he was carrying a can of soda. Pipsqueak was asleep on his shoulder.

Bishop was all smiles. "Hey, Mandy. This was a great party."

"It was?" Mandy was bewildered.

"Let's do it again. Tomorrow, maybe?"

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"Bishop, are you feeling okay?"

"Sure. Why do you ask?"

"You don't remember storming into the house a few minutes ago?"

"What?"

"You got upset when we started to make plans to find the missing chess piece," Mandy explained. "You were in a total bad mood."

"Are you sure? All I remember is getting out of the pool, and then coming in here to change." Bishop seemed unconcerned about this discrepancy in their stories. "Oh, well. Are we going on another quest? What did you all decide?"

Mandy thought it best not to reveal her knowledge of BJ. "Sort of. We thought that it would be a good idea to start looking where we be-

gan your last quest."

"You mean Philadelphia?"

"No, I don't think that's what he meant," Mandy replied.

"What 'who' meant?"

"Oh! Uh, Gary. What Gary meant," Mandy covered. "He thought that we should start where we started before."

"Our last adventure started when I accessed C.H.I.P for the first time."

"Yes. That's it. At least, that must be what he meant. We should ask C.H.I.P," Mandy declared. "I think C.H.I.P. might be lonely. Nobody ever uses him anymore."

"I'd forgotten all about C.H.I.P. I got so used to using Checkmate that I never even think about him. Why don't we all go to my house and get this quest rolling?"

"Give me a minute to change," Mandy said as she dashed upstairs.

Bishop exited to the back yard. A few moments later, BJ appeared in the room. He was standing in the middle of the kitchen table, with his torso above it and his legs below it. He looked down at himself and frowned.

"Thanks guys. Another great landing."

He walked out from the middle of the table and looked out the window at Bishop, Gary and Aquarian.

"I'm really sorry that I can't tell you guys more," BJ sighed. "But if I help you too much, it may mean the death of someone very close to me."

CHAPTER SIX

SUSPICIOUS MINDS

Back on the Homeworld, Christie Rae Mann was looking out the window at the people below. She knew all of them of course, but she felt a bit distant from them. Had her years away on Earth made her feel isolated from her own people? All the friends that she had known over the years were now gone and she had very few people that she could talk to. She needed somebody to talk to. About her worries and concerns and thoughts. She had never wanted to be in charge of things. Her life was happier when she was a follower, but she had been thrust into the role of a leader due to unforeseen circumstances. She worried about her decisions and if she would come to regret them one day. She sent Justin and Reprint out on patrol so she could get an idea of what was going on in the enemy's camp. A more experienced leader would not need to do such things. A true leader would know his enemies and be ready for their next move. But she was not that type of leader and she was forced to get assistance wherever she could. Suddenly she heard a noise behind her. She turned and saw Justin helping a wounded Reprint through the door. Reprint's clothing was torn and bloodied and he was walking with a limp.

"Reprint!" Miss Mann exclaimed. "What happened?"

"I found him while I was out on patrol," Justin answered. "He had been captured and was being held in one of Onyx's encampments. I managed to free him and help him escape. It looks like they did a job on him."

Reprint groaned and fell to his knees.

Miss Mann dashed to Reprint's side. "Don't try to speak, Reprint. Save your strength."

Miss Mann and Justin laid Reprint on a couch and Miss Mann then started tending to his wounds. Justin walked over to the window and looked out. In the background he heard the sounds of shots. There was an occasional crackling flash as the force field stopped another assault upon the kingdom.

Miss Mann looked up as a shadow blocked her light. Standing quietly beside her was Diggory holding some medical supplies.

"Diggory? What are you doing here?" Miss Mann asked.

Diggory held out the medical supplies. "I saw that someone was injured and I brought something to help."

Miss Mann grabbed the supplies from Diggory. "Thank you, but have you found out anything more about Castleton?"

Diggory shook his head. "No, I've been attending to other errands."

Miss Mann became very concerned. "Other errands? I want you to forget any other errands! I need you to find out whatever you can about Castleton! Now leave and do as I tell you!"

Diggory dashed out of the room.

"Do you think he's going to be okay?" Justin asked.

"He'll be fine. Although I may have frightened him a little."

"I meant Reprint," Justin replied.

"I believe so. His wounds don't appear to be life threatening. It's a good thing that you found him when you did." Miss Mann walked over to the window next to Justin.

"I'm just sorry that I didn't find him sooner," Justin sighed. "When I change into a wolf, it's sometimes hard for me to concentrate on what I am supposed to be doing."

"That might be the wolf nature trying to take greater control. You will have to manage that part of your psyche or one of these days you might remain a wolf permanently! We'd all miss you." Miss Mann ran her hand through Justin's hair.

Justin changed the subject. "I've been working on controlling it. I thought I would show you later when I had more control but let me show you what I can do."

Miss Mann looked as Justin closed his eyes and concentrated. His form slowly changed from human to wolf but suddenly stopped in mid transformation. Justin was a blend of human and wolf. He looked



like a wolf boy.

"What... do... you... think?" he growled slowly as if each word was a great struggle to get out.

Miss Mann nodded her head. "Very good. How long can you retain this form?"

Justin quickly reverted back to normal looking exhausted. "Not very long. But I'm working on it. I can get it to last longer than when I first tried to do it. The only problem is that after I change back I can't change again for awhile. It takes a lot out of me."

Miss Mann smiled. "I'm very impressed that you were able to do it for that long. If you keep practicing you might be able to overcome those limitations. I wonder if Bishop has been practicing his powers?"

"Any word from him yet?" Justin asked.

"No," Miss Mann replied as she looked up at the monitor. "I keep hoping that he will contact us eventually."

Miss Mann picked up a device that looked like a remote control from a nearby table and started to fiddle with it.

"I wonder what could be keeping him?" Justin asked. "You don't think that he may have decided not to return here? Or maybe something horrible has happened to him back home."

"I hope not, Justin. I hope not," Miss Mann admitted as she turned her attention back to Reprint.

Meanwhile, back on Earth, Bishop, Mandy, Gary and Aquarian had returned to the Chance house. Bishop sat in the chair closest to C.H.I.P. A few bottled waters were also on the table next to C.H.I.P. Bishop threw his towel on the floor close to his feet. Pipsqueak flew down to it, and swiftly fell asleep, curled up on the towel.

Bishop turned to Gary. "Are you sure that Gambit said he was coming home?"

"That's what he said to me."

"So where is he, then?"

"Why are we waiting? We can fill him in later, Bish," Gary offered. "Let's see if C.H.I.P. can tell us anything."

Bishop picked up the keyboard, and then set it back down. "I forgot that I don't need this. I'm still not used to computers taking audio commands from me." C.H.I.P. emitted a series of beeps. "It looks like it's warmed up."

Gary pointed to some lettering that had appeared on the monitor. It



was notification of an incoming message.

"Okay, C.H.I.P. What is this incoming message?" Bishop asked.

"Switching to remote user. Please wait," the tiny computer replied.

An image appeared on the monitor, showing Justin and Miss Mann sitting in chairs in Bishop's castle. Miss Mann was adjusting the controls on a device that she was holding. Justin was facing the monitor.

"Look! It's Justin!" Mandy gasped.

"And Miss Mann!" Gary added.

"What's this all about?" Bishop asked.

Back on the Homeworld, Justin was suddenly ecstatic.

"Miss Mann! Look at the screen! It's Chance! And the others," he said.

Miss Mann nearly dropped the device she had in her hands.

"Bishop?" she smiled. "Is it really you? Thank the One."

Bishop could see the grave concern in Miss Mann's eyes. "What's the matter?" he asked. "What's going on there? Is everything all right?"

"No, Bishop. We believe that Onyx is alive and now he and his emissaries are attacking the kingdom."

"How long has this been going on?" Bishop asked.

"Since shortly after your departure," Miss Mann replied.

"But how could he do all this after being gone for all those years?" Bishop asked.

"Unbeknownst to us at the time, he left behind his protégée, Talisman, to watch over his affairs while he was gone. Talisman kept Onyx's weaponry in working order, and slowly gathered more followers for Onyx. In Onyx's absence, Talisman has been able to keep Onyx's rebellion alive until he returned. We still aren't sure of all the things he has done. We only have this amount of information because of Justin and Reprint. They have been very helpful in gathering this information for me."

"Why did you wait so long to contact me?" Bishop inquired.

"We have been trying to contact you since the battle began, but for some reason the warning beacon has only started to function now. The beacon was supposed to set up this connection the first time you signed on to C.H.I.P. But it has been months and we have heard nothing. I feared that something terrible had happened to you."

"Actually, this is the first time that I've signed on to C.H.I.P. since I've returned home."

"My goodness, Bishop. What have you been doing?" Miss Mann asked.

"I only recently came back home. I guess I've been putting it off for so long because of all the unpleasant memories that it's held for me. Because of Onyx and my grandfather."

Miss Mann nodded her head. "Yes, I can understand why you would have been reluctant to return home. I should have considered that before I let you return."

"Hey, you look great, Mandy," a suddenly love sick Justin said with a smile. "I've missed you."

Mandy moved closer to the monitor. "I missed you too. Is that a new uniform that you have on?"

"Yeah. It automatically disintegrates when I change into a wolf and then reappears when I change back. It's made of something called free atoms. I don't understand the technology, but it beats being buck naked when I revert to human form."

"If you're done talking fashion here, can we get down to business?" Gary grumbled.

"Sounds like O'Leary hasn't changed," Justin laughed. "Are you hungry, big guy? You always got grouchy when you were hungry. Which was all the time, as I recall."

Bishop interrupted. "Miss Mann, who is that lying down behind you?"

"That's Reprint," Miss Mann replied. "He was injured on patrol."

"Is he hurt bad?"

"He will survive. For now, at least. I can't say how much longer any of us has inside these walls. Your father built a force field to protect us from short term attacks, but it was not designed to last this long. It was only supposed to last long enough until the castle's offensive program could be utilized."

"If I were there, how could I help you?" Bishop asked.

"We need your help with the computers that work the castle's defenses. They will not function for Justin or myself."

"What about Castleton?" Bishop asked.

"Castleton has been taken prisoner," Miss Mann responded quietly.

"Oh no!" Mandy gasped.

"I can only pray that he is still alive. If you were here, Bishop, I'm sure you could work the computer with your power."

"Yeah," Justin added. "So how fast can you get here?"

"We have a problem," Bishop replied.

Miss Mann grew pale. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"We can't activate the portal because Checkmate won't turn on. It seems that one of the chess pieces is missing again."

"Again!" Justin shouted. "What's your problem, Chance? Can't you put those stupid pieces away when they aren't in use? Don't you realize how important they are? What's wrong with you?"

"Calm down, Justin," Miss Mann said. "Getting worked up over this won't help."

Justin was just getting started. "We're about to get blown to bits and Chance can't help because he lost a chess piece! How lame is that?"

"Justin!" Miss Mann was firm. "That's enough!" She turned to the monitor. "Bishop, which piece is missing?"

"The white king," Bishop replied. "I'm sorry." He looked crestfallen.

"The king? How odd." Miss Mann suddenly smiled. "But that is good news."

"It is?" Justin was stunned.

"How is it good?" Bishop asked.

"The most important component of the computer lies in the bishop," Miss Mann explained. "Your father only had the one made because of the rare materials used. That is why it was so important for you to find it on your quest. The king, however, is a less important piece. There might be others at Alabaster's workshop."

"You mean his secret workshop here at the house?" Bishop asked.

"No, Bishop. When your father built Checkmate, he did so at his other workshop. One where he had access to the vital materials that he required."

"So where is this other workshop?" Gary asked.

"I don't know, Gary. Alabaster did not tell anyone, including myself. That way, if we were captured by Onyx we would be unable to divulge its location."

Justin stepped forward to the monitor. "I've been thinking."

"That's a first," Gary said sarcastically.

Bishop ignored him. "What is it, Justin?"

"Well, we found the last chess piece hidden in a statue in Wellington Park, right?"

"Yeah, so what does that have to do with us?" Gary asked.

"I've always wondered how Alabaster got the piece in the statue and how he was able to get it to operate the way it did. My father's company put that statue there. Chance, do you think maybe that your father and mine were in business together?"

"I don't know," Bishop replied. "We could go to Wellington Computers and try to find out."

Miss Mann brightened. "You may be on to something, Justin. Alabaster and your father. Hmmm! That would explain how Wellington Computers got its edge in the market. With Alabaster's help they would be the leaders in technology."

"Good thinking, Justin. If you were here, I'd give you a great big kiss," Mandy said.

"I'll take a rain check on that," Justin smiled as a jealous Bishop fumed.

"This doesn't sound too bad, Bish," Gary said. "All we have to do is go to Wellington Computers and see if we can find your father's workshop. Then we find another white king and bring it back here. Piece of cake."

"Again, he brings up food," Aquarian observed.

"Go drink some motor oil," Gary said as he pulled another lollipop out of his pocket. "Ahh! Cherry!"

Bishop reached for a bottled water. "Drink, that's a good idea."

Mandy looked at him a little concerned.

"Miss Mann, if my father has a workshop at Wellington Computers, would it have remained untouched all these years?" Bishop asked.

"If it is there, I'm sure the door will be locked with some sort of electronic device designed by Alabaster so that nobody would be able to enter it," Miss Mann replied. "Or it may have utilized compressed space, like his lab in your house."

"Don't worry, Miss Mann," Bishop said. "We'll get the piece and be there as soon as possible. Is there anything you want us to tell your father, Justin?"

Justin was distant. "No way. I doubt if he even realizes that I haven't been home these past few months."

"I know you'll do your best, Bishop," Miss Mann said. "You haven't disappointed me yet."

"Thanks. We'll be in touch very soon." Bishop addressed C.H.I.P. "End transmission."

The screen went blank and was replaced by the letters C.H.I.P. flashing across the screen like a screen saver. Bishop picked Pipsqueak off the floor and turned to his friends. "Let's get started," he said.

At that moment, Gambit walked into the room. "Started? What did I miss?"

"You missed everything," Gary said with effort. It was clear that he wasn't happy to see Gambit.

"I was talking to Miss Mann back on the Homeworld," Bishop said.

"Really?" Gambit replied. "How did you do that?"

"Through C.H.I.P.," Bishop explained. "I'll tell you about it later."

"How are things back home?" Gambit asked. "Probably all peaceful and perfect, right?"

"No." Bishop was grim. "Actually they're at war. It looks like Uncle Onyx is back from the dead and more powerful than ever. He might win if we don't get there soon."

"Back from the dead, huh? Leave it to Uncle O. But why should you bother to go back there and try to fix things? You've only been there once. They hardly know you. And you barely know them. Why should you care what happens to them?"

"Because it's the right thing to do," Bishop said with fierce determination.

"So, brother how are you going to get back there? Did you find the missing chess piece?"

"No, but we think that there are extra pieces in my father's... uh... our father's workroom."

"What workroom would that be?" Gambit asked. He appeared to be deep in thought.

"We think he might have built a workroom at Wellington Computers," Bishop replied. "He may have been a silent partner with Justin's father."

"Justin," Gambit mused. "He's that friend of yours who stayed on the Homeworld. The wolf-boy."

"That's right," Gary said. "Justin Wellington the third."

Gambit looked at Gary as if seeing him there for the first time. "Oh, I see that you decided to tag along after all. What's the matter, Jumbo, can't take a subtle hint?"

Gary was angry. "Bishop, tell your brother to keep his remarks to himself."

Bishop said nothing. Gary and Mandy both turned to him, but he was once more engrossed in playing with Pipsqueak.

"Look," Bishop said happily. "Pipsqueak woke up. How you doin' little fella?"

"Bishop, we're talking to you." Mandy was assertive.

"What is it?" Bishop asked, as if he hadn't heard anything.

"It would appear that Gambit does not get along with Gary," Aquarian stated.

"Ah, a news flash from the talking toaster," Gambit declared.

Aquarian looked puzzled. Mandy grabbed Bishop's arm and looked him square in the eye. "Bishop, could you please say something to your brother?" she asked forcefully.

Bishop stepped back. "Why does everyone keep yelling at me?"

"I wasn't yelling. It's just that you didn't hear me the first time I asked you."

"Fine, fine, I hear you now," Bishop scowled. "So, what is so important that you have to keep interrupting me?"

"Are you okay?" Mandy asked. "You're not acting like yourself."

"Yeah, Bish, you have been acting a little weird lately," Gary added.

"Oh, so now you are both ganging up on me." Bishop was getting agitated. "It seems like my brother is the only one who isn't making trouble here. I don't know if I really want you all to tag along. Maybe Gambit and I can handle this one by ourselves."

"You can't mean that," Mandy gasped.

"Don't worry, babe. You can still be his girlfriend," Gambit said. "Just keep out of our way."

Bishop agreed. "You'll just hold us back."

"Bishop!" Mandy exclaimed. "You've never talked to me like that before."

"Well get used to it. And if nobody has any objections, I'm going to get a soda." Bishop left the room and entered the kitchen.

Gary glared at Gambit. "It's you! I don't know how, but you're doing this to him!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Gambit replied. "I guess the stress of all this Homeworld business is getting to you."

"I think you're getting a little too close to Bish," Gary stated.

"Why not?" Gambit replied. "He's my brother. He's also the only family I have left. If we work together there's nothing we can't do."

"Like what?" Gary asked distrustfully.

Gambit smiled. "You'll have to wait to find out."

Mandy sat on the sofa silently sobbing to herself. Aquarian stood next to her trying to figure out what had just happened. Bishop's sudden personality shift was not computing in his mind. Gary simply stared at Gambit. Bishop returned with a ginger ale soda in hand. Pipsqueak was

fast asleep on his shoulder.

"So is everyone ready to go? I think Wellington Computers might still be open," Bishop, sounded almost cheerful. Nobody responded.

Bishop saw Mandy crying on the sofa. "Mandy, are you okay? What's the matter?"

"Bishop, I just don't understand your mood swings," Mandy said between sobs.

"Mood swings?" Bishop was confused. "I don't know what you are talking about. Maybe you should go home and get some rest."

Mandy shook her head. "No. I'll be okay. I miss Justin and I was crying because I'm worried about him." Mandy felt uncomfortable lying to Bishop but she had to tell him something that he would believe.

Bishop nodded his head in agreement. "Yes, I'm worried about all the people on the Homeworld. They are my responsibility. Okay, let's head off to Wellington Computers."

"Yeah! Let's go!" Gambit said. "We've got a Homeworld to save!"

Bishop put a sleeping Pipsqueak in one coat pocket and a bottled water in the other. He left the house followed closely by Gambit and the rest of his friends.

As the door closed a figure slowly materialized in the living room. BJ materialized looking worried. He kept adjusting the device on his wrist.

"Trouble, trouble, trouble," he said to himself. "This is not going according to plan. They're going to blame me. I know it, they always do. BJ can't do anything right, they always say. He only got the job because of who he knows. He couldn't get the job done if his life depended on it. Well, more is at stake here than my job. And I know the answer to it all is somewhere in this house."

BJ continued to walk around the room muttering to himself. He held his hand over several objects in the room, making adjustments on the device around his wrist. He finally stopped and sat down in a chair, only to end up falling straight through the chair, since he was not solid. He then jumped to his feet.

"That's it! Why didn't I think of asking him before? He'll know the answer." BJ then pushed a button on the device around his wrist and vanished.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BEG, BORROW AND STEAL

The four young adventurers jumped on their bicycles and headed off to Wellington Computers. Bishop loaned Gambit one of his older bikes for the trip. It was the bike he used to ride all over town before he earned enough money to purchase a mountain bike last summer. Since then it got very little use, but Bishop still couldn't bring himself to part with it.

Bishop and Gambit were so engrossed in their conversation as they pedaled to the Wellington Computers building that they failed to notice that Gary and Mandy were lagging behind. Gary wanted to talk privately to Mandy and this was the first chance that he had.

"I've been thinking about Bishop's 'brother'," Gary said to Mandy.

"What about him?"

"How do we know that he really isn't Onyx shape shifted into a kid?"

"So you believe Onyx is alive too?" Mandy asked.

"Yeah, it's all starting to add up. But what do you think of my idea about Gambit?"

"It's possible. But how could we prove it?"

"I don't know, yet. Do you have any idea what's going on with Bishop?"

"No. But it's clear that Gambit is somehow responsible."

BJ suddenly materialized a few inches above the street alongside Mandy and Gary. As they rode their bikes down the street BJ remained

next to them without the need to run or walk. He just floated beside them.

"He certainly is responsible, right up to his beady little eyes!" BJ said.

Mandy turned at the sound of his voice. "BJ! You're back!"

"Sshh," BJ said. "I don't want Bishop to know that I am here. Covert operation time."

Mandy looked in disbelief as BJ continued to float next to them. "How are you doing that?"

BJ glanced at the road passing quickly beneath him. "Oh that. Just a bit of technology that you aren't familiar with yet. No big thing."

Gary was staring at Mandy as if she had taken leave of her senses. "Who are you talking to?" he asked.

"It's kind of hard to explain, Gary. But there's a holographic person here that only Bishop and I can see. He's an agent of Alabaster's. His name is BJ."

"Yeah, right." Gary rolled his eyes. "Are you sure you're feeling okay?"

"Is this chubby little fellow, Gary?" BJ asked. "Great Gugiley Mugiley, I find that very hard to believe."

"Why?" Mandy asked.

"It's just that I heard a different description of what he would look like," BJ explained. "I was never told that he was so, uh, rotund."

"Mandy," Gary interrupted. "I'm starting to worry about you."

"I wish there were some way I could prove to you that BJ really exists, Gary," Mandy said.

"Perhaps you should go home," Gary suggested. "Maybe you aren't ready yet for another adventure."

"Yes, I am," Mandy asserted firmly. "BJ, help me. How can I convince Gary that you are really here?"

"No problemo," BJ said as he looked at the device on his wrist. "Just tell him that in a few seconds, a car is going to make an illegal turn and almost hit you both."

"BJ said that a car is going to make an illegal turn and almost hit us," Mandy said to Gary.

"If you say so," Gary said, still sounding concerned for his friend's well being.

At that moment, as if on cue, a beat up old car with several dents and scratches made a right turn from the left lane just narrowly missing

Mandy and Gary. Instinctively they quickly applied their brakes. Bishop and Gambit continued down the street unaware of the near disaster.

"Go back to school and learn how to drive," BJ yelled at the driver.

"Okay! Okay, I believe you," a startled Gary replied. He then nervously produced a fresh lollipop from his pocket and placed it in his mouth.

A disbelieving BJ stared at the lollipop in awe. "A lollipop? Great Gugiley Mugiley, they're never going to believe this one back home."

"Why not?" Mandy asked.

"Because I've always pictured Gary as a health food fanatic," BJ replied.

"Gary?!" said a surprised Mandy.

"What?" Gary responded.

"It's nothing, Gary. Nevermind." Mandy started pedaling her bike. "Come on. We've got to catch up with Bishop."

As they began pedaling, Mandy looked at BJ. "You said that Gambit is responsible for what is happening to Bishop?"

"I did?" Gary asked.

"I'm talking to BJ," Mandy said.

"I just confirmed what you had already said," BJ answered Mandy. "I've known since the beginning that he was responsible, but I was unable to tell you until you figured it out."

"Why couldn't you tell us?"

"Tell us what?" Gary asked.

Mandy frowned. "I can't keep repeating everything BJ's saying right now, Gary. Just roll with it, okay? I'll fill you in later after we're done talking. So BJ, why couldn't you tell us about Gambit?"

"It's all these rules I have to go by. You don't know how many rules they have. Rules for this! Rules for that! My goodness, they even have rules on when you can go to the bathroom, and for how long. It's like I'm back in grade school."

"You aren't making any sense," a frustrated Mandy said. "What are these rules and who are you talking about?"

BJ was evasive. "Sorry, that's rule number two. No talking about 'them'. But I can tell you that I spoke with my uncle last night. He's an expert in this time..., uhm, type of activity. He's very good at covert operations. And he gave me some great advice."

"Your uncle?" Mandy asked. "Who's that?"

"All I can say is that he is very familiar with all of you and I listen to

everything he tells me. Even if he is a little batty.”

Mandy was impatient. “What did he tell you?” She demanded.

“He said that I should just let you guys do your thing, and keep out of it,” BJ replied. “So I’m afraid I’ll just be watching in the background.” He grabbed a bag of popcorn out of nowhere. “Well, I’ve got to run. Ta for now.”

Mandy stared in amazement as BJ flickered out of existence once again.

“What happened?” Gary asked after a few moments of silence.

“He’s gone.”

“Did he give you any good information?” Gary asked.

“Yes,” Mandy whispered. “And no. It’s hard to say with him. Every answer is a non-answer.”

Mandy had been so engrossed by BJ, and Gary had been so captivated watching Mandy talk to nobody that they didn’t notice the Wellington Computers building looming ahead of them. Bishop stopped his bike. “Hey guys, we’re here.”

The rest of the group also stopped their bikes and they all looked at the tall building looming before them.

“This is the first time I ever came to this place,” Mandy said. “Justin would never agree to take me here.”

They parked their bikes behind a nearby fountain and they walked into the building. As the group entered the main lobby, they had to make their way past many important looking people dressed in suits and other business attire that were all busy rushing from place to place. Everybody was so busy rushing off to where they had to go that nobody paid any attention to the young visitors. If any of them had they would have assumed that the group was on their way to the company computer store located near the elevators. An elderly guard sat outside the store heavily engaged in reading a newspaper.

As the group pushed their way through the crowd they found a directory on a nearby wall. They saw that Justin Wellington Jr. had an office on the tenth floor. They entered the first empty elevator. As Gary pushed the top button for the tenth floor he looked at the other buttons on the panel. “Hey look guys, they have a red button here.”

“Don’t press it,” Mandy exclaimed.

“Okay, okay,” Gary said. “Calm down. I wasn’t going to.”

The elevator made its way to the tenth floor. There they found a door marked “Wellington Computers – President’s Office”. Inside a reception-

ist was seated at a desk facing a computer terminal. A water cooler stood a few feet away from the desk.

As they opened the door the receptionist looked up at them and smiled. “Hello. Are you children lost?”

“No, we’re not, and we are not children,” Gambit coldly replied.

“We have business with Mr. Wellington,” Bishop explained.

“Mr. Wellington is a very busy man,” the receptionist stated.

“Can’t he spare just a few minutes for us?” Mandy asked. “We’re friends of his son, Justin.”

“I’m sorry, dear, but Mr. Wellington has a very full schedule.”

Bishop nonchalantly placed his hand on the back of the computer terminal and concentrated for a few seconds. “I think if you check his schedule, you will find that we are expected. There should be an appointment for Mr. Chance and party.”

“Now young man, I know his schedule, and I can tell you that he has no such appointment,” the receptionist countered. “I’m going to have to ask you all to leave.”

“It doesn’t hurt to check, does it?” Bishop asserted.

“Very well, if it will get you to leave, I’ll show you that his next appointment is with...” The receptionist looked at the appointment schedule and froze.

Bishop smiled innocently. “Did you find it?”

“That’s odd,” the receptionist said. “There is an appointment for Mr. Chance and party. I’m sure this wasn’t here before. I never entered it.”

The receptionist then stood up. “Please wait here. I need to speak with Mr. Wellington for a moment.” She then knocked on a door located behind her desk, opened it and disappeared inside.

“Good going, Bish,” Gary said. “That one always works.”

“We’re not in there yet,” Bishop warned. “I don’t quite trust her. In fact, I’m getting bad vibrations from all over this place.”

Bishop walked over to the water cooler and drank several cups full of water.

At that moment the receptionist returned. She was clearly aggravated.

“Mr. Wellington said that he will see you now,” she said.

Once Bishop and his friends entered the room, the door closed behind them as if by remote control. They were in a huge office, decorated with many fine paintings on the wall, and a sweeping view of the town down below. Filing cabinets lined the walls and in front of them was an



enormous oak desk. The back of the chair was to the desk. Many picture frames of various sizes were neatly arranged on the desk. An enormous painting hung on the wall directly behind the desk. As the chair swung around, Bishop could see that the man in the chair was the same man in the painting, Justin Wellington II.

"My receptionist tells me that you young people have an appointment with me," Mr. Wellington said. "I thought that odd, since there is no mention of it in my laptop computer, which also has all my appointments in it. Now tell me who you are, and what you want of me?"

"My name is Bishop Chance. We're friends of your son, Justin."

"Humph! I didn't know the boy had any friends." Mr. Wellington stared directly at Bishop. "If you are friends of Justin, why isn't he with you?"

"He's been, uh, visiting friends out of town," Bishop replied sounding less than convincing.

"Is that so? I thought that he was with his mother these past few months. No matter, I'm much too busy to keep track of his day to day movements. What brings you here, Mr... what did you say your name was?"

"Bishop Chance."

Mr. Wellington suddenly seemed interested. "Chance? You wouldn't be any relation to Alan Chance? No, you couldn't be, he died a long time ago."

"Actually, he was my father."

"Well, that would explain it," Mr. Wellington said.

"Explain what?" Bishop asked.

"Your knack with computers, my boy. Somehow you were able to get your name into my receptionist's computer without her knowing about it. The only other person I know who was that good with computers was Alan Chance."

"So you did know Bishop's father?" Mandy asked.

"Yes, he was an employee of mine for awhile."

"I had heard that he was more of a silent partner," Bishop said.

"Silent partner? Ha!" Mr. Wellington drummed his fingers on his desk. "I'll bet many of my employees tell their children that they have important jobs with this company. I have never had a partner, silent or otherwise, in my entire career. I made this company into the global giant that it is today, with no help from any partners."

"Did my father have a workshop here?" Bishop asked.

"I believe that he had one down on the third floor somewhere, but that was many years ago, and I'm sure that it has been emptied out since then."

"Could we go check for ourselves?" Bishop asked.

"No, you can't. This is private property. Besides, I think it's time for you to leave."

"I'm trying to learn about my father, Mr. Wellington. He died before I had a chance to know him. Couldn't we please just look for a minute?" Bishop pleaded.

Mr. Wellington was clearly angered by Bishop's insistence. "No! You may not. Your father's former workshop is in a very secure part of the building and very few people are allowed there. Now if you don't leave, I will have to call security and have them escort you out of the building."

As everyone's attention was directed to Mr. Wellington, nobody noticed Gambit slowly walking around the room. He held a small device in his hand that slowly blinked as he moved around the room. Occasionally he would point it at something hoping for a different response from it.

Mandy looked closely at the picture frames on the desk. The pictures were of Mr. Wellington alongside other distinguished looking men and women. Some were at social functions while others were at different sporting events. "How come you don't have a picture of Justin on your desk?"

"That is none of your concern young lady."

"But they're all of you," Mandy said looking around the room. "All the pictures and paintings in the room are of you. Don't you have even one small picture of your only son?"

"I don't need a picture of my son to remember what he looks like."

Gary picked up one of the picture frames. "Well you will never forget what you look like," he said. "Not with all these pictures."

"Put that down," Mr. Wellington commanded as he rose from his chair.

"I'll bet he doesn't have one of Justin because he's not in any pictures with him. Justin said they never spent any time together," Bishop said.

Gary tossed a picture frame to Bishop across the desk. "Hey Bish, check this one out. He's with the President at the White House."

Bishop caught the frame and looked at the picture. "What a surprise. No Justin."

As Gambit stopped in front of a filing cabinet the device started

to blink very quickly. He then pulled a small cylindrical device from his pocket and aimed it at the lock. The lock sprung open and he opened the top drawer.

Gary grabbed another frame off the desk and tossed it to Bishop. "Look at this one."

Bishop grabbed for the frame with his free hand but missed. The frame crashed on the floor and pieces of glass shot out all over.

"Sorry. I wasn't ready," Bishop said.

Mr. Wellington picked up the broken frame and slammed it on his desk. "Enough! I want you kids out of here immediately or I will have security throw you out!"

Grabbing something out of the cabinet, Gambit quickly closed the drawer and turned around.

"Okay, we'll go," Bishop said as he grabbed Mandy by the arm and walked to the door. The rest of the group followed them into the elevator.

Once inside the elevator, Aquarian was the first one to break the silence.

"He was lying," Aquarian remarked.

"About what?" Bishop asked.

"When he said that he had no partner."

"How do you know that?" Bishop asked.

"When he said it he was drumming his fingers on the desk. And then when he said that the workshop no longer existed he was drumming his fingers again. I recall Justin saying that he always knew when his father was lying because he would always drum his fingers on the table."

"I don't remember Justin saying that," Bishop said. "Are you sure?"

"I can recall everything that everybody has ever said around me," Aquarian paused. "I am now going into playback mode."

Aquarian began to speak in Justin's voice. "My father is so predictable. For example, he always drums his fingers on the table when he's lying. Something I learned to use to my advantage."

Gary was impressed. "That's pretty good."

"Yeah, so now it's a tape recorder too," Gambit sneered. "Big deal."

The elevator finally arrived at the ground level. The group quickly exited the building.

Gambit was noticeably upset. Once they were all outside he stopped walking and clenched his fist. "I can't believe that pompous windbag!"

"What's the matter, Gambit?" Bishop asked.

"I want to go back up there and give that old man a piece of my mind. Nobody treats me, I mean us, that way. You go back home. I'll meet you there later."

"I don't think that's a good idea," Gary said.

"When I want your opinion I'll ask for it!" Gambit snapped. "Until then, clam up!" He then turned around and headed back toward the building. Bishop started after him.

"Gambit," Bishop called out.

Mandy grabbed Bishop's arm. "Let him go," she said. "He'll come back after they throw him out again."

"So what do we do now?" Gary asked.

"We are not going home without that chess piece," Bishop replied. "Miss Mann and everyone back on the Homeworld is counting on us. We can't let them down. Tonight, after this place closes for the day, we'll sneak back in and find my father's workshop and get what we came for," Bishop declared. "But some things we have to get done first. Hold out your palm pilots."

Mandy and Gary did as they were told. Bishop waved his hand over the devices and muttered a few words. The palm pilots glowed softly for a few seconds and then returned to normal.

"Everything you need to do and get is on your palm pilots," Bishop continued. "It's important that you do everything. Meet me back here at sunset."

Several hours after sunset, Mandy was the first to return to Wellington Computers with her collection of items. Gary quickly followed. Bishop and Aquarian were the last to arrive. Bishop had a backpack slung over his shoulder. Pipsqueak was perched on his shoulder.

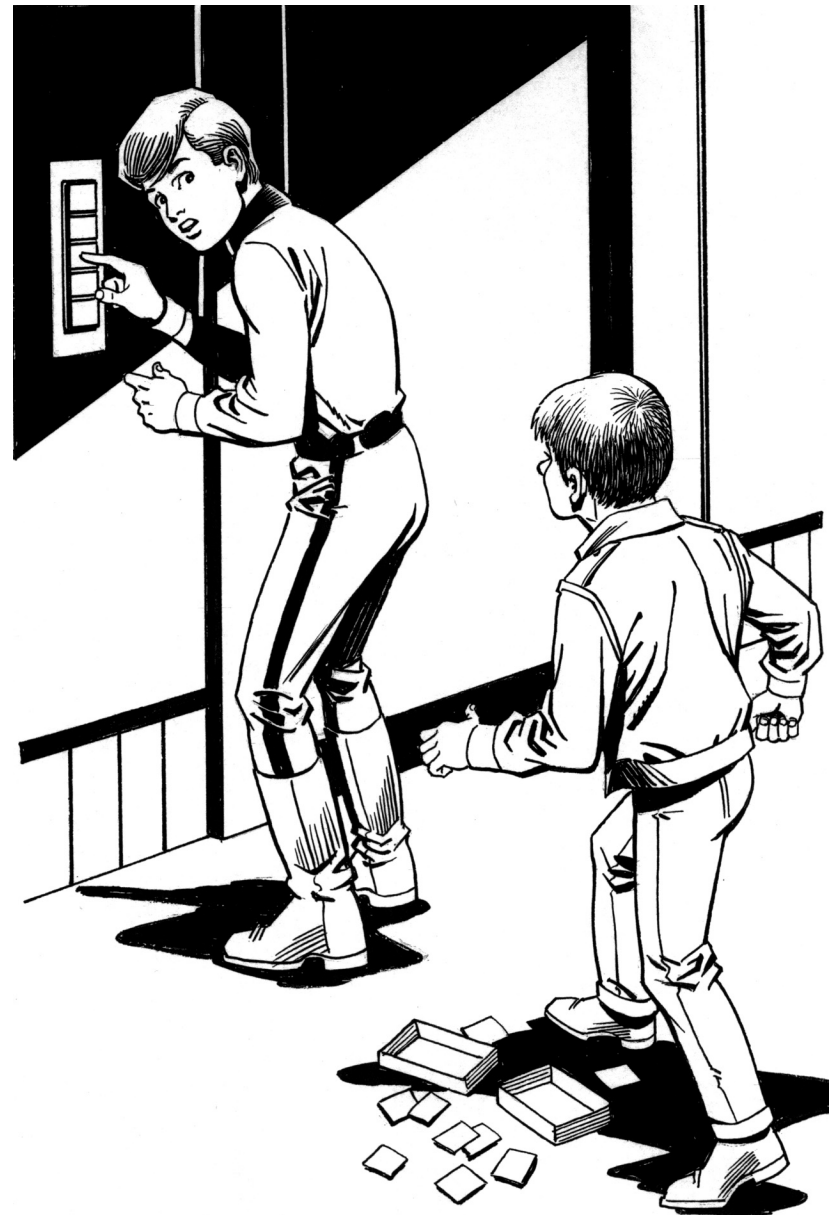
"Did you get everything?" Bishop asked.

"Yes," Gary and Mandy replied.

"Good," Bishop said. "The building should be pretty much empty. The only people left are a few security guards."

Mandy looked around the exterior of the building. "I wonder where your brother is?"

"We've got no time to look for him," Bishop replied as he pulled a bottle of water from his back pack and took a huge swallow. "I found a back window that is small enough for Aquarian to squeeze through once we get it open. When he gets inside he can unlock the back door and let



us in. But first, I will have to deactivate the security system. To do that, I'm going to need access to a computer with a modem connection."

"You can use ours back at the confectionary store," Gary offered. "It's only a block away."

"Great. I'll go to your parents' store and use their computer for a few minutes. I'll tap into Wellington mainframe and deactivate their security system. It should take me about five minutes. I won't leave it deactivated for too long."

"Why not?" Mandy asked.

"Because the longer it's off, the greater chance we have of the guards finding out it's been deactivated. So you will have to get Aquarian inside before the system is back on-line. I'll give you ten minutes. That should also give me enough time to get back here and get inside before everything is reactivated. Does anybody have any questions?"

"I do," Aquarian responded. "Where is this window that you want me to climb through?"

"Follow me."

The group followed Bishop to the back of the building, where he pointed to a small window about ten feet off the ground.

"How is Aquarian supposed to get up there?" Gary asked.

"Gary can stand underneath the window and then Aquarian can climb on his shoulders and he should just be able to reach the window," Bishop replied.

"But how will he get down, once he gets through the window? That's gotta be a good ten foot drop!" Gary said.

"Simple, Gar. He'll just drop to the floor. Remember, Aquarian is made of really strong materials. He should have no problems dropping from that height. Then he can open the door. I'll be back in ten."

Bishop ran down the alley with Pipsqueak flying behind him.

"Do you think we can do this?" Gary asked Mandy.

"I hope so," Mandy sighed. "Otherwise we're going to be calling our parents from the police station."

"Maybe we should start," Aquarian suggested.

"Easy for you to say, you're not going to have someone balancing on your shoulders."

A few moments later, Bishop was in front of O'Leary's Confectionaries. On the door was a crudely drawn sign that read Closeb. It was a sign that Gary had drawn when he was in the first grade. Much to Gary's

chagrin, his mother still used the sign after all these years. Bishop always chuckled when he saw letter 'd' written backwards on the sign. Bishop started to unlock the door with the key that the O'Learys had given him when he suddenly heard a noise emanating from inside the building.

Quietly he entered the store and made his way around in the dark. He was now glad that he had offered to help the O'Learys in the store these past few months. He knew the inside of the store like the back of his hand and he didn't require a light to get around. He heard another sound coming from the supply room in the back. As he got closer he saw the light of a flashlight moving across various boxes of candy and other stock. He observed the outline of a small figure moving in the other room. Slowly, he began creeping up on the figure.

Before he got any closer he was momentarily startled when BJ suddenly materialized nearby.

"What happened to the lights?" BJ asked. "Forget to pay the light bill?"

Bishop jumped at BJ's sudden appearance. "Shhhh!" he whispered. "There's someone in the other room that I don't want to know I'm here."

"Oh, covert stuff," BJ loudly proclaimed. "Great! Can I join in?"

"Yeah, sure," Bishop replied softly. "Just keep your voice down."

"Why?" BJ asked. "You and Mandy are the only lucky individuals who can hear me."

"Oh. Yeah. That's right. Lucky us. Well anyway, keep it down." Bishop started to slowly close in on the figure.

BJ assumed a stalking pose and followed Bishop. "Commando style it is then."

As Bishop got closer he saw the figure was pulling small brightly colored packets out of a box. The figure had his back to Bishop. Bishop couldn't see him very well but as soon as he got close enough he jumped and tackled the person to the floor.

The flashlight fell out of the intruder's hand as the two of them wrestled each other on the floor.

"That's the way," BJ observed as he gestured feverishly. "Get him! Punch him! Knock his teeth out! Oh wait, don't do that. That will hurt. Okay, then, tickle him instead. That will teach him."

Bishop finally pinned the intruder down. As he sat on top of the intruder he suddenly heard a familiar voice.

"Get off me whoever you are," the voice said. "Or I'll tell my parents on you."



Bishop reached over and grabbed the flashlight on the floor nearby. He shined the light in the intruder's face and recognized him immediately.

"Jerry!" Bishop exclaimed. "What are you doing here? The store is supposed to be closed."

Jerry wiggled underneath Bishop's grasp. "If you get off me I'll tell you."

"Hey, it's just a kid," BJ noted. "I wasted my commando technique on a kid. No fair."

Bishop shot BJ a warning glance as he got off of Jerry. "BJ! Just forget it." Bishop walked over to the wall switch and turned on the lights. As his eyes got accustomed to the light he saw Jerry standing by an open cardboard box. Inside the box were many small colorful packages, the same type that were now scattered all along the floor.

"Okay, Jerry," Bishop continued. "Fess up. What's going on here?"

"Nothing," the red haired youth replied. "Just doing a little cleaning."

Bishop shook his head. "At this time of night? And in the dark? Come on, how dumb do you think I am?"

BJ raised his hand and jumped up and down excitedly. "Pick me. Pick me. I know the answer to that one."

Bishop ignored BJ as Jerry reached down and picked up a small packet. It was yellow and green with several goofy looking monkeys on it. On the top of the packet were the words, *Mighty Morons*.

"*Mighty Morons*?" Bishop asked. "What's all this about? I gave you the money to buy the two packs I promised you."

"I know. I bought them. But I didn't get the card I needed," Jerry replied. "It's only the greatest show on television. And these are the hottest cards anywhere. I only need one more card to complete my set."

BJ looked at the scattered packages. "*Mighty Morons*? I love that show. I'm missing one card to complete my set too. Let me know if you see it."

Bishop kept ignoring BJ. "Why don't you just buy some more packs and get them that way?"

Jerry shook his head. "I did. But I spent all my allowance and I still need one more."

"Which card are you missing?" Bishop asked.

"*Dense Dennis*," replied Jerry and BJ together.

Bishop looked at his watch and shook his head. He hadn't realized

how much time had passed. He was quickly running out of time. "Well you aren't going to find one tonight. Go home and maybe I won't tell your parents I found you here."

Jerry looked around at the scattered card packages. "What about the mess?"

"I'll take care of it," Bishop replied. "Now go."

"Okay, okay." Jerry grabbed his flashlight off the floor. He then grabbed a couple of packages and shoved them into his pocket when Bishop wasn't looking. "See you," Jerry said as he raced out the front door.

"I thought he would never leave," Bishop mumbled as he sat down at the terminal. He quickly signed on using his power and within moments he gained access to the Wellington Computer security system.

BJ looked at the card packages at his feet. He felt frustration as he tried to pick up a few packs and his hands went right through them. "You know, you could open a few of these, just to make sure that everything is okay. And if you should happen to find a Dense Dennis card, I could be persuaded to take it off your hands."

"Forget it, BJ. We're here to shut off the security system, not look for cards."

"Fine. Don't help out a friend," BJ muttered. "See if I help you next time."

Bishop finished typing and stood up. "Done. Come on. Let's go."

As he headed for the door, Bishop grabbed a couple of bottles of water and threw them into his backpack. BJ stared at the multitude of packages around him and sighed. "One lousy pack. You couldn't grab one lousy pack."

Back at Wellington Computers, Oscar Tangent slowly got up from his chair at the guard's desk to make his hourly rounds of the building. Not much ever happened and that is the way that Oscar liked it. After many years as a police officer he considered himself lucky that he had never been injured on the job. He thought that when he retired, he would then be able to relax. But he discovered that he didn't have enough money to live on and he was forced to go back to work. Eventually he found a job with low risk and even lower pay. After a few minutes of strolling about the building, as he did several times every night, Oscar came to a stop in the loading dock area. He leaned against a nearby wall and pulled out a pack of cigarettes.

At that moment, high over Oscar's head, Aquarian was crawling through a small window. Oscar stood directly below the dangling Aquarian, totally oblivious to the intruder above.

"Another dull and uneventful night," Oscar mused. "Just the way I like it." Oscar lit his cigarette. "I should have done this years ago. It's much safer than police work."

Suddenly Aquarian released his grip on the windowsill and dropped to the floor below. His fall was broken by the unsuspecting Oscar. Aquarian got up and looked at the unconscious guard on the floor.

"Excuse me," Aquarian said. "I did not know you were there." Spotting the fallen cigarette on the floor Aquarian picked it up and looked down again at Oscar. "You know that these are not healthy for you." Throwing the cigarette to the floor Aquarian stomped it out with his foot. "You will thank me for this later." Grabbing the guard by the arms, Aquarian dragged him and hid him behind some nearby crates. "You should be safe here," Aquarian said as he went to open the back door.

Heading back down the street, Bishop ran to the back of the building where he found Aquarian opening the back door and letting Mandy inside. A nervous Gary waited impatiently nearby sucking a lollipop.

"I thought you would have had the door opened by now," Bishop said.

"I would have, but when I climbed inside I fell and landed on top of a security guard," Aquarian replied. "I had to move him out of the way."

"A security guard?" Gary asked. "Is that what all that noise was? This is getting off to a great start. I think we should stop here and just go home."

"No," Bishop said defiantly. "I came here to get some answers and I'm not leaving until I get them. You can go if you want, but I've got to go in."

"Relax, Bish," Gary said. "I'll go in with you. I wouldn't leave you in a lurch. Besides, you don't know what we're going to find inside."

"Yes, there may be a vending machine in there that still has some food in it," Aquarian quipped.

Gary shot him a nasty glance. "Quiet, or I'll let Jerry take you apart and try to put you back together."

Once inside, they quickly closed the door, and the four comrades made their way to the main lobby.

"Okay, what floor did Mr. Wellington say my father worked on?"

"It was the third floor," Aquarian replied.

"Are you sure?" Bishop asked.

Aquarian replayed Justin Wellington II's voice from their meeting. "I believe that he had one down on the third floor somewhere, but that was many years ago, and I'm sure that it has been used for something else."

The foursome ran to the elevator. Bishop studied the buttons.

"What are you staring at?" Mandy asked.

"Something's strange. The buttons only go up to the twelfth floor. This building has thirteen floors," he said.

"What's so strange about that?" Aquarian asked.

"Most buildings don't have a thirteenth floor. The buttons usually jump from twelve to fourteen. Many people feel that the number thirteen is unlucky. But there is no fourteen button. It stops at twelve."

"Maybe you miscounted the floors when we were outside," Gary said.

"Maybe," Bishop replied.

The elevator stopped on the third floor and they entered the hallway. At the far end they came across a door with a very unusual lock on it. It had a series of letters and numbers on it in addition to several unrecognizable symbols.

"This is the door we want," Aquarian pointed out. "The markings are consistent with ones that were programmed into me by Alabaster."

Gary reached for the lock. "What's all this stuff on here?" As he tried to touch the lock his hand stopped a few inches away. "That's weird, I can't touch this thing." He moved his hand to the door and the adjoining wall and had the same result. No matter how hard he tried he couldn't get his hand to touch the door or wall.

Mandy reached for the door but her hand also stopped a few inches away. "It's like there's some kind of force field around this wall."

Aquarian also had no luck when he tried to touch the door. "This will make it difficult to get inside."

"Gee, you think?" Gary asked sarcastically.

"Let me try," Bishop said as he attempted to touch the lock on the door. He was surprised when he easily grabbed the lock in his hand. "Strange, I didn't have any problem."

"It is possible that the security system is genetically encoded to allow certain individuals to touch it," Aquarian analyzed.

Bishop tried to open the door but it was locked shut. "Yeah, but it's still locked."

"Can you figure out the combination?" Gary asked.

Bishop placed one hand on the doorknob. "Let's see if my power can open it for us," he said. He then placed his other hand on the lock, mumbled a few words and turned the knob. The door opened into darkness.

"Way to go, Bish," Gary said proudly.

"Lights on!" Bishop commanded.

As he spoke the command the room was flooded with light revealing various pieces of laboratory equipment, all covered with dust from many years of neglect. Bishop walked to the nearest table and began to rummage through the mess that was cluttered on top of it.

"It looks like your father was into a lot of different things," Mandy said. She was spellbound by the beakers of various sizes which were filled with different colored liquids.

As Bishop looked around the room, he was suddenly flooded with thoughts of his father.

"Yeah, it's like he was expecting to come back, and never did. I wonder what he was working on before he..." Bishop stood silently. He remembered his parents unexpected death.

Mandy put her hand on Bishop's shoulder. "It's all right. Try not to think about it."

Bishop composed himself. "You're right. We're here to look for a white king. So you guys look for it, while I put the rest of Checkmate together."

Bishop opened his backpack and pulled out several bottles of water which he put on a table. He then pulled out a chessboard and many chess pieces. Just as Bishop finished putting the set together, Gary yelled out from across the room.

"Hey! I found some chess pieces over here!"

Bishop, Mandy and Aquarian ran over to Gary who was standing in front of a large cabinet. They started rummaging through various chess pieces of many sizes, shapes and colors. After finding three black kings, and two broken white kings, Bishop finally pulled out of the pile a complete white king. He smiled. "I found one! A white king!"

"Very good, bro," Gambit said from a doorway at the back of the room. He clapped his hands together and two security guards and Justin's father entered the room behind him.

Gambit smiled at Bishop. "I knew that you would show up if we waited long enough. You're as predictable as prune juice!"

Bishop was silent.

"Should I kill them now, sir?" Justin's father asked.

"No, not yet. I still need them alive, for now."

Mandy gasped. Gambit's eyes were glowing red.

"Oh, crap!" Gary moaned.



CHAPTER EIGHT

SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND

If you would be so kind as to accompany us, I have something that you should find interesting," Gambit said. He watched as they walked out of the room. On his way past the desk Bishop reached over, grabbed a bottled water and took a quick swallow as the foursome walked into an elevator. Justin's father and the two security guards followed. Gambit waited until everyone was inside before he simultaneously pressed the buttons for the twelfth and first floors and the door open button.

When the elevator doors opened they all stepped out into a dimly lit hallway. Looking down the hallway Mandy saw only four doors leading to unmarked rooms.

"Where are we?" Mandy asked.

"This is the thirteenth floor," Gambit replied. "You're lucky. Not many people get a chance to see it."

Gambit then brought them to a door that was similar to the one at Alabaster's workshop. Many of the strange symbols that were on Alabaster's lock were also on the lock on this door. A worried Mandy and Gary looked at Bishop, but he seemed to have slipped into another trance. Again Pip-squeak was sitting peacefully on his shoulder, nuzzling him on the neck.

"What is this? Where are you taking us?" Gary demanded, attempting to take control of an increasingly disturbing situation.

"All in due time, chubby," Gambit said with a chuckle. "You should learn to control your temper. You don't see Bishop getting excited, do you?"

Gary was surprised when he saw that Gambit didn't encounter a force field around this door. In fact, Gambit opened the door without any difficulty and he led them into a room very similar to Alabaster's workroom. This room was more cluttered than the other. It was almost as if the original owner had left it intending to come back and organize everything.

"What is this place?" Mandy asked.

"This is my workplace," Gambit said.

Gary looked around. "Your workplace? This place is filled with stuff. You couldn't have gotten all this together in the few months that you've been on this world."

"You're not as dim as you look," Gambit said with a smile. "Actually, this is Onyx's workplace. I have merely taken it over for awhile. I will need it, if my plans are to succeed."

"Plans? What plans?" Mandy asked.

"Dual world domination, of course. Why rule one world, when two are available?"

"Wait a minute!" Gary was right in Gambit's face. "You're Onyx, aren't you? You somehow survived when your castle fell on you, and then you made your way back to Earth, and shape-shifted into a twerp posing as Bishop's brother!"

Gambit laughed. "Interesting theory, but you're wrong again. I am not Onyx. And I am not a twerp! You moron!"

"Dweeb!" Gary countered.

"Overweight ignoramus!" Gambit retaliated.

"Snot nosed jerk face turd," Gary struck back.

"Will you two stop!" Mandy shouted.

Gary and Gambit backed away from each other. "Yes, I will stop. I don't have time for such nonsense," Gambit said. "I am not Onyx, but I am going to play Onyx's game. And I'm going to win!"

"You'll never get away with it!" Gary was defiant. "Bish will stop you, like he stopped Onyx!"

"Stopped Onyx? Ha!" Gambit laughed. "Onyx and his men are storming the castle back on the Homeworld! You call that 'stopping' Onyx?" Gambit smiled. "As you may have noticed, Bishop has been very susceptible to my suggestions."

"So you're responsible for his strange behavior!" Mandy said.

"Don't thank me. Thank the yipple."

"Pipsqueak? He's harmless," Mandy said.

"Don't think he's harmless just because of his size. Everyone on our world knows that if a yipple becomes attached to you, it feeds on your brain wave activity and makes you easily susceptible to suggestion. The longer Bishop kept his yipple around him, the stronger my control over him became. I was determined to make Bishop my ally, either willingly or not."

"You stink," Gary growled.

"Quiet, tubby. You don't figure into my plans, and you are expendable."

Mandy looked at Pipsqueak as he nuzzled up against Bishop's neck. "Who would have thought that such a small cute animal could do something so horrible."

Gary turned to Aquarian. "You're supposed to protect Bish. Why didn't you warn us about the yipple?"

"The yipple was not part of my programming," Aquarian replied.

Gambit looked at the bottled water that Bishop had placed on a nearby desk. "There is also another side effect to a yipple's attachment," Gambit said. "It causes the attached person to become very dehydrated. They're always thirsty." Gambit laughed as he turned his attention to a computer on the nearby desk. A large flat panel monitor was mounted to the wall above it.

"The computer on this desk is linked to Onyx's system under Bishop's house. With it, I am able to access any system, anywhere. Any computer, any mainframe, any satellite, any utility company. Anything and everything will be under my control. All nuclear weapons! All the armies! The only person who had any chance of stopping me is over there, under the control of a yipple!"

"If you have so much control, why haven't you taken over the world yet?" Gary asked.

"I am unable to break past each company's and country's security to access their computer systems. But with Bishop's ability to get past any security system, I won't need any passwords, clearances or decryptions. With him working for me, I can control it all!"

"You do not control the Homeworld," Aquarian asserted.

"That, too, will change. Once I am in firm control of this world, I shall transfer troops into the Homeworld. Any opposition will soon fall. And eventually, I hope to do away with human troops and create my own army of androids. All designed to follow me. Once I activate this program, the world shall be mine. The end of a perfect day, don't you think?"

BJ suddenly appeared next to Gambit. He held a pennant in his hand that read 'Evil sucks' in bright blue letters. "Nasty little character, isn't he?"

"BJ!" Mandy cried.

"What?" Gambit and Gary said in uncharacteristic unison.

"Quick! Is there anything you can do to help us?" Mandy pleaded.

"Oh, boy, I'm afraid not," BJ stammered. "Remember those rules I told you about? The best I can do is to give you some advice, and observe."

"Well that's a surprise!" Mandy said sarcastically.



"A little upset, aren't we?" BJ motioned for Mandy to calm herself. "Okay, here is my advice. You need to get Bishop out of his trance."

"Gee thanks," Mandy sighed, suddenly feeling utterly defeated.

"If you're done talking to yourself, we'll get on with this," Gambit said smiling once more.

"Your plan will never work," Gary said. "Even if you do control some systems it doesn't give you control over the people who run the governments and the military. And what about the television and newspaper journalists who report every day on what the leaders and armies do? You can't control all of them."

Gambit laughed. "You've lived on this world your whole life and you really know so little about it. The militaries take their orders from people higher up. Control them and you control their underlings. The journalists are the easiest to control. Without access to satellites, computers, phones, even electricity they will all have a hard time reaching very many people. You would be surprised by how much of your world is being run by computers. Even down to your military defenses. And those I shall use to control your world leaders."

Gambit walked over to a cabinet and pulled out a small cylindrical device. "And for the few people I can't control," he continued. "I have this."

"What is that?" Gary asked.

"A little device created by Onyx shortly before he left here. It secretes a miniature chip into a person's system. Once activated, that person has to follow my commands. It only works for a few days before burning itself out, but I'm working on prolonging that. Hopefully I can make it last forever."

Mandy raced toward Bishop. "I'm sorry, Bishop, I hope this works," she said as she pushed him against the desk into the computer. Bishop screamed as sparks flew out of the computer. Then his body went limp and he fell to the floor.

"Are you crazy?" Gary cried.

"I'm sorry! I was trying to shake him out of the yipple's trance!"

"He's not moving," Gary said. "Is he dead?"

Gambit grabbed Bishop by the wrist. "He still has a pulse. A very slow one, but at least he is not dead." He turned to Mandy. "Which is more than we will be able to say about you."

Bishop's voice suddenly filled the room. "Not so fast."

Everyone turned to look at Bishop on the floor. He was still unconscious.

"No, over here," Bishop's voice said from above. Bishop's face was watching them from inside the computer monitor on the wall.

"Bishop! What's going on?" Mandy gasped.

"Somehow, when you knocked me against the computer, my brain waves were transferred into it."

"Bishop's natural control of electronic devices must have caused his brain functions to download into the computer when his brain was weakened by the yipple," Gambit said.

"You got it," Bishop replied. "I'm now connected to everything."

"So there, Gambit. Now we have control!" Gary declared.



"Not 'we', Gary. 'I,'" Bishop said. "And from where I sit, I think that the world would be better off if I were in control of things."

Justin Wellington II finally spoke. "You won't be controlling anything! This is my building!"

"Sorry, old man. This may be your building, but it's sitting in my world!"

"Come on, Bish," Gary said, sounding more nervous than he realized. "You almost had me going there. Why don't you come out and we can go help Miss Mann back on the Homeworld?"

"Once I finish with this world I intend to continue on to that one too. Like brother, like brother. Right, Gamby?" Bishop looked at Gambit and laughed.

"I don't think he's kidding," Gary said to Mandy.

A furious Mandy glared at Gambit. "This is all your fault! If you hadn't done all this fooling around with his brain, he wouldn't be talking like this!"

"I don't think there is anything wrong with him," Gambit replied. "In fact, he is starting to speak sensibly for the first time in his life." He turned to the monitor to address the image of Bishop. "What a team we will make, brother. Gambit and Bishop, co-rulers of two worlds."

"My plans for global domination don't involve you," Bishop replied. His voice was coldly casual.

"As if Gambit wasn't a big enough pain in the butt, now we've got a deranged Bish to worry about," Gary observed.

"I'll show you how big of a pain I can be," Gambit said to Gary. "Someone is going to have to carry you out of here after I get done with you. It's about time you found out what power I acquired on this world of yours!"

Gambit positioned himself between Gary and the door. Before anyone could react, Gambit started to change form. He grew to over six feet in height. Claws and fangs began to sprout from his fingers and mouth. Long dark hair covered him from head to foot.

"Great Gugiley Mugiley!" BJ exclaimed.

"What's happening to him?" Mandy screamed.

"If I had to guess, I would say he's changing into a big hairy creature," BJ said.

"I can see that," Mandy replied.

The creature reached out and grabbed Gary in its hairy muscular arms. He lifted the struggling youth with very little effort.

"Someone, help!" Gary yelled as he struggled to get out of the creature's grip.

Mandy looked at Aquarian. He was simply standing nearby making no attempt to save Gary. "Aquarian, why aren't you helping Gary?"

"He requested that I delete him from my rescue program," Aquarian casually responded.

"You've got to help him," Mandy pleaded. "Please do something."

Aquarian stood silent for a second. His head cocked from left to right and then he leaped into action. Immediately the small android was on the creature's back. He had his arms wrapped around the creature's



neck. The creature was momentarily distracted by this effort and almost lost his grip on Gary.

Mandy looked up at Bishop's image on the screen. He was watching all of this with an evil smirk on his face, as if he enjoyed seeing his friends fighting for their lives. Mandy's attention turned back to the creature as she heard its howl bellow through the room. The creature released its grip on Gary and dropped him to the floor. The creature then grabbed Aquarian pulling the android loose from its body and hurling him at the two security guards, knocking them all to the floor.

The creature then turned around and spotted Mandy. As he advanced on her she slowly backed up. She stopped when she bumped into the desk.

"What do I do now?" she asked BJ.

"Sorry," BJ replied. "I'm just here to observe. But I must tell you that it is much more exciting to see this happening than it is to just hear about it."

Mandy's hands felt something on the desk. She picked it up and threw it at the creature. It just bounced off the creature with no effect. She started grabbing different things on the desk and kept throwing. None of them seemed to have any effect on the creature as it slowly advanced towards her. Suddenly her hands grabbed Bishop's open bottled water and she threw that at the creature. The water spilled onto the creature and it stopped moving. Then it howled in pain. The creature began to shrink. Slowly changing back to the human form of Gambit.

Mandy was confused. "What just happened?"

"If I had to guess, which I don't, I would say that water neutralizes nasty boy's power," BJ said as he looked at the angry damp Gambit.

Mandy stared in disbelief. "Just that little bit of water did all that?"

"It seems to be enough to slow him down temporarily," BJ replied.

Aquarian came over and helped Gary to his feet.

"Thanks, Aquarian," a relieved Gary gasped. "I guess you didn't delete my name from your rescue program after all."

"No, I just moved your name down the list of things to rescue. Your name falls between a gopher and a wombat."

"What the heck is a wombat?" Gary asked.

"It is an Australian marsupial animal that resembles the opossum," Aquarian answered.

"I don't care what it is, move my name further up the list. I'm not staying down near no stupid wombat!"

Gambit started to walk toward the threesome. "You idiots! Just you wait! I'm gonna..."

Before Gambit could finish, a flash of electricity shot out of the computer and struck him in the chest, knocking him unconscious to the floor.

"That was entertaining, but I don't have anymore time to waste with you!" Bishop snarled. He then turned his attention to Justin Wellington II. "Now, what am I going to do with you, pops?"

"Surely you don't intend to do me any harm? I am a very wealthy man and can make it worth your while," Justin Wellington II said as he pulled his wallet out of his pocket. "How much do you want? Everyone has a price."

While Justin Wellington II was pleading for his life, Gary, Mandy and Aquarian slowly gathered together and spoke quietly between themselves.

"What are we going to do now?" Mandy asked.

BJ glanced at the device on his wrist. "I don't know about you, but I have to take off. Ta for now." BJ raised his hand and did a salute just before he disappeared.

"Maybe we can unplug the computer," Gary suggested.

"No," Mandy replied. "We don't know what kind of damage that could do to Bishop."

"Bishop is definitely not behaving like himself," Aquarian stated.

"Wait until I give the word and then run for the door," Gary said.

Gary slowly moved over to the table on which Bishop had placed his backpack. He quickly slid the chess pieces and chessboard into the pack and he was about to close it when he heard Bishop's voice.

"What are doing over there, Gary?"

"Uh, nothing, Bish. Just waiting to see how you're going to kill Mr. W."

"Keep out of this!" Mr. Wellington sneered. Gary couldn't tell if he was angry, frightened or both.

"Why do I think you're keeping something from me?" Bishop asked. "Come on, Gary, we're still friends aren't we? Just because I want to take over the world, it doesn't mean we still can't be pals."

"Okay, everyone, run!" Gary cried out as he slung the backpack over his shoulder and ran for the door. Aquarian and Mandy followed him into the hallway.

A flash of electricity shot out of the computer just missing Mandy by

inches as she scooted out of the doorway. "What are you two waiting for?" Bishop barked at the two stationary security guards. "Go get them and bring them back here! Alive! For now."

As the two men ran from the room, Bishop looked down at the unconscious body of Gambit. "Bro, I'm going to have to find a way to keep you out of circulation for awhile."

Gary, Mandy and Aquarian raced down a stairwell to the third floor and returned to Alabaster's workroom.

"Quick, close the door!" Gary yelled as they ran inside.

Aquarian closed and locked the door, just as the two guards arrived.

"I hope that lock will keep them out for awhile," Gary gasped as he struggled to catch his breath. He wasn't use to exercise any more strenuous than helping his parents make milkshakes at the confectionary store.

"Can't Bishop open it?" Aquarian asked.

"No. Bishop is too far away to control it. He needs to be in close proximity to what he wants to control, and he seems to be stuck in that computer."

"He does?" Mandy asked. "How do you know that?"

"He's been living with me for the past couple of months. I've noticed that his control is weaker the further away he is from the thing he's trying to control."

"Won't the force field around the door stop them?" Mandy asked.

Gary touched the door. He could feel the guards pounding on it from the other side. "No, I don't know how to activate it."

"So then we're trapped in here!" Mandy said. "The door is the only way out!"

"There's another way," Gary replied. "I think." He opened the backpack and pulled out the chess set.

"The chess set?" Mandy asked. "How is that going to get us out of here? Bishop is the only one who can activate it."

"Yes and no," Gary said. "That's where Aquarian comes in. He can play back anything he's heard in anyone's voice. So I'm hoping that he can playback Bish's request for a portal and Checkmate will activate it for us."

"Hurry!" Mandy said. The guards were still banging on the door.

Gary quickly put all the pieces in place. As he placed the last chess

piece, the white king, in place, Checkmate began to glow to life. As the glow intensified, the white king started to morph and slowly come to life on the board. He rubbed his eyes and in a voice louder than one would have expected, he boomed:

"The players are in place! The game has begun!"

"You can say that again!" Gary said.

"Didn't he say that the last time he was activated?" Mandy inquired.

"Yeah," Gary surmised. "It must be programmed to start up that way every time it's turned on."

"I am now fully functional!" Checkmate declared. "Please state the nature of the request."

The banging on the door was getting louder. Gary looked at Aquarian. "Aquarian, it's up to you."

"Checkmate, open up a portal, right here, right now," Aquarian commanded in Bishop's voice, recalling the command Bishop had given for their prior trip to the Homeworld.

The miniature king reached into his pocket. Pulling out his hand he threw a small crystal ball into the air. It got brighter and bigger as a bright light began to appear in the middle of the room. It started to form into a portal the size of an oval doorway.

"I am requesting that you open another portal in four hours," Aquarian continued, still in Bishop's voice.

"Let's go!" Mandy said. She was the first to step into the portal. Seconds later, BJ flickered into existence. Neither Gary nor Aquarian could see him as they entered the portal.

"Great Gugiley Mugiley," BJ said as he walked around and examined the portal. "I'm not sure if this will work, but here goes nothing."

BJ closed his eyes and stepped into the portal just as it closed. Once the portal was gone, the security men broke down the door. They charged in and found the room deserted.


 CHAPTER NINE

HOLDING ON TO YESTERDAY

BJ was suddenly standing in an open sun-drenched field with Mandy, Gary and Aquarian. He shielded his eyes from the glare.

Mandy was both startled and pleased to see him. "BJ? What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Great Gugiley Mugiley! Is it always that rough of a ride?" BJ looked at the device around his wrist, which started to pulsate in different colors. "Oh, oh, this doesn't look right. I wonder if they knew this would happen?"

"You look a little shaky," Mandy observed.

"Yes, yes, I'll be fine once everything stops spinning," BJ replied.

"Mandy, who are you talking to?" Gary asked.

"It's BJ again. Just take my word that there is somebody here that you can't see."

"Right! Gambit turns Bish evil. Bish wants to take over the world. And you're talking to somebody that I can't see. Just another typical day in the life of Gary O'Leary."

"This is where we arrived the last time we were here," Aquarian said. "I also have a photographic memory."

"It figures," Gary said.

Mandy squatted down to look at a flower down at her feet. Each petal was a different color of the rainbow. Very carefully she touched the petals and she was surprised to hear a tuneful melody emanate from the plant.

"I'm always surprised at what we find here," Mandy said. "The flowers and everything are so different here."

Gary took a deep breath. "Yeah and the air smells different too. It's got a sweet kind of smell. Almost like honey. It makes me feel a little hungry."

"Everything makes him hungry," Aquarian said to himself. He was unaware that BJ heard him.

"Two points for the android," BJ said as he turned and looked for Mandy. He found her a few yards away looking at a small yellow leafed bush. "Find something interesting?" BJ asked Mandy.

Mandy pointed to a small yellow bird in the bush. "That bird was green before it flew into the bush."

BJ crouched down to get a closer look at the bird. "Oh, that's a Keppi Keppu. Their colors change depending on their surroundings."

"You know about them?" Mandy asked.

"Sure, they're found all over the Homeworld," BJ said as he walked back to Gary and Aquarian. Gary was busy arguing with Aquarian.

"I don't need you to tell me how to get to the castle," Gary said. "It's this way."

Gary began to walk towards a large growth of trees.

Gary stopped when he heard Bishop's voice behind him. "Hey Gary! Come here a second. You've got to see this."

Gary turned and saw Aquarian smiling. He then realized that it had only been Aquarian replaying Bishop's voice.

"I hate it when you do that!" Gary scowled.

"Follow me," Aquarian said in his normal voice. "We should be able to see Bishop's castle from over there."

Mandy, Gary and BJ followed Aquarian through a small patch of trees in the opposite direction. They soon emerged at the top of a hill.

"There it is," Aquarian said. He pointed to the glistening white castle in the distance. It was surrounded by a force field in the form of a light blue bubble.

Gary realized how happy he was to be back on the Homeworld. "Let's go!" he said.

"That would not be wise," Aquarian countered.

"Why not?" Gary asked. "I love this place. The chef at the castle is awesome!"

"Remove food from your thoughts," Aquarian ordered. "We have greater concerns. There appears to be a small war going on between us

and the castle."

A short distance in front of the group was a tent. Coming out of the tent and looking in the other direction was a tall man dressed in black. A few seconds later a smaller form, also dressed in black but with a red stripe running through it, came out of the tent and stood next to him.

"Look!" Mandy said. "That person who just came out of the tent. It's Print!"

"Quick!" Gary whispered softly. "Get behind these trees!"

"How are we going to get past him, and the army, and into the castle?" Mandy asked as she crouched down in the shadows.



"I don't think these jokers will let us walk up to the door," Gary said.

Suddenly, Mandy jumped and gasped as she felt something nudge her on the leg.

"A wolf!" she said looking down at her leg.

"Hang on, Mandy," Gary said slowly. "It might not be ferocious."

"How can we tell if he is or isn't?" Mandy asked.

"If he attacks you, then he's ferocious. If he doesn't, then he's friendly," Aquarian replied.

"Gee, he's a lot of help," BJ declared.

"Tell me about it," Mandy sighed.

At that moment the wolf morphed into the form of Justin.

"Oh, oh," Gary said, "It looks like the ferocious type."

"Very funny. I've missed you too, O'Leary," Justin declared.

"Justin!" Mandy cried as she gave him a hug.

"At least he's not naked this time!" Gary said.

"What are you doing here?" Mandy asked.

"Miss Mann asked me to scout around for you after we communicated," Justin explained. "She assumed you would come back here to help." Justin looked around. "Where's Chance?"

"We had a little accident back home," Mandy replied. "Bishop's brainwaves are stuck in Onyx's master computer back in Wellington Computers."

"Never a dull moment with you guys, is there?" Justin said.

"That's not the worst part," Mandy continued. "Somehow his brain got frazzled by a creature called a yipple, and now he's intent on taking over the world."

"Yes, both worlds to be exact," Aquarian said.

"Chance? You're kidding!" Justin laughed so hard he sprouted a few wolf hairs on his face. "Oops."

"Mandy's not joking," Gary said. "So if you can give us any info, spill it. By the way, wolf boy, you'll never guess who Onyx's secret partner is!"

"Gary, I don't think we should get into that right now," Mandy said.

"Fine. I just thought he should know." Gary reached into his pocket and pulled out a grape ice pop. He started to lick it. Mandy looked at him strangely.

"Where did you get that?" she asked him.

"Get what?"

"That ice pop. You didn't bring it with you when we left Earth."

"I don't know. I just reached into my pocket for a lollipop and found this instead. Funny thing is, I was just thinking about how much I could go for one right now."

"But it's still frozen!"

"Yeah, so?"

"If you had an ice pop in your pocket before we left Earth, it would have melted by now. Do you know what this means?"

"He has insulated pants?" Aquarian theorized.

"No," Mandy said. "But let me check my theory first. Gary, put your hand in your pocket again."

"Okay. But I don't see why."

Gary reached into his pocket and pulled out a strawberry ice pop. "Hey, I was thinking I'd rather have a strawberry one instead of a grape one."

"That proves it. I've figured out your power. You have the ability to create frozen ice pops out of your pocket."

Justin laughed. "What a lame power."

"Or so you think," BJ quietly said to himself.

"At least I don't wind up naked after using my power," Gary said. "Besides, I think it's pretty cool."

"You would. Wait here. I'm going to scout around for a safe way to get you back to the castle," Justin said as he started to change form.

"Wait!" Mandy said.

Justin froze in mid-change.

"We can't just stay here all night," Mandy continued.

"I won't be gone that long. Wolves travel fast. You'll be safer here, away from the fighting." Justin completed his transformation and ran off in the direction of the castle.

"So that was Justin?" BJ said. "Interesting. Not at all as I pictured him. Guess you can't believe everything you hear."

"What have you heard?" Mandy asked.

"What?" Gary asked.

"Not you, Gary," Mandy sighed. "I'm talking to BJ."

"Oh, yeah. Your invisible friend," Gary said.

"C'mon, BJ, can I tell them about you. We're all in this together."

"Alright," BJ said. "I'd hate for them to be in the dark forever."

Mandy looked at Gary and Aquarian. "Well, to start off, BJ appeared to Bishop and me at our houses the other day. He appeared in the form

of a holographic image because he's an observer who is here to... well he didn't say exactly why he was here. But to make a long story short..."

Gary grinned. "Too late," he said as he slurped at both ice pops simultaneously.

"To make a long story short, he's here to observe us, and for some reason Bishop and I are the only ones who can see or hear him."

Gary shook his head. "I find that hard to believe. I think the stress we've all been under has finally gotten to you."

"Everything that's happened to us since Bishop's birthday is hard to believe," Mandy replied. "Why should this be any different?"

"I believe you, Mandy," Aquarian said.

Mandy gave Aquarian a small kiss on the cheek. "Thank you, Aquarian. That's very nice of you."

"That does not compute."

"Someone needs to rewrite his software," Gary said as he pulled another ice pop out of his pocket. He regarded it with dismay.

"Darn! Lemon! Hey, anyone want an ice pop?"

Back at the castle Justin morphed back into human form and entered the observation room. He found Miss Mann and Reprint in the middle of a heated discussion.

"It's just not fair!" Reprint said. "He gets to have all the fun!"

"What Justin is doing is not fun," Miss Mann argued. "It is very serious and dangerous work."

"You can say that again," Justin declared.

"At least you're out there doing something," Reprint said. "I'm stuck in here with a stupid broken arm."

Miss Mann tried to calm herself as she calmed Reprint. "Now, Reprint. If we didn't have you, we never would have found out that Talisman has been commanding Onyx's troops."

"Yeah, that's why they're so lame," Justin said. "Talisman thinks he's as bad as Onyx, but he's not even close. By the way, Mandy, Gary and Aquarian are back."

"That's wonderful news!" Miss Mann said. "Now that Bishop is here, we have some hope."

Justin frowned. "Actually, Chance isn't here."

"He isn't?" Reprint asked.

"Has something happened to him?" Miss Mann asked.

"Mandy said he got involved with something called a yipple and now

his brain is all screwed up. And his consciousness has been transferred into a computer."

"You see?" Reprint exclaimed. "Even they are having more fun than me!"

"A computer? And a yipple?" Miss Mann cried. "Oh, no!"

"What's a yipple?" Reprint asked.

"Good question," Justin answered. "Some kind of creature I think."

"They used to be a nasty problem here a long time ago, until we found a way to counteract their power," Miss Mann said. She reached into a drawer and pulled out a small vial containing several small green pills. "These pills should bring Bishop back to normal. I just hope it isn't too late. If one is under the spell of the yipple for too long, it can be irreversible."

Reprint started to rise. "We had better go help Bishop."

Miss Mann put her hand on his shoulder and gently pushed him back into his seat. "No," she said. "You're not strong enough. It's better if Justin and I go. The force field should hold out a little longer. If we don't get Bishop back to normal and back here to help, then this war will be over very quickly. And not for the better."

"I believe that Alabaster had a device that could help switch Bishop's mind back into his body. We will need to make a quick stop in his castle workshop along the way to pick it up."

"What are we waiting for?" Justin asked. "Let's go!"

Justin began to morph into a wolf as he left the room. Miss Mann followed him. Reprint was left alone sitting in his chair looking out the window.

"If only we were back on Earth," he said. "I wouldn't feel so helpless."

A short while later Mandy heard a rustling in the bushes near where she was hiding with Gary and Aquarian. It was Justin returning in wolf form. He changed to his human self as he approached.

"Good news!" Justin said. "Miss Mann will be here shortly."

"That's great," Mandy replied. "How soon?"

Miss Mann emerged from the woods. "How about, right now?"

"Miss Mann!" Gary and Mandy cried in unison. They collided as they both raced into her arms. BJ, meanwhile, became very animated.

"Great Gugiley Mugiley! It's her! In the flesh! The legendary Christie Rae Mann!!!" BJ excitedly exclaimed.

"Calm down, BJ," Mandy said.

"To whom are you speaking, Mandy?" Miss Mann asked.

"It's an invisible guy only she and Bish can see or hear," Gary replied.

Miss Mann was puzzled. "Invisible?"

"Actually he's a hologram, sent here from somewhere to observe," Mandy replied. "At least that's what he said."

"We have such technology here on the Homeworld, but I didn't think science on Earth was that advanced yet," Miss Mann mused. "Unless he's from here?"

"I don't know," Mandy replied. "He hasn't said. He doesn't say much. I mean, he talks a lot, but he really doesn't say anything."

"I resent that!" BJ said.

"Well it's true," Mandy countered.

"Oh yeah?" BJ replied. "Well I'm rubber and you're glue and whatever you say bounces off of me and sticks to you." BJ turned his back to Mandy and faced Miss Mann.

Mandy just shook her head in disbelief.

"Perhaps he was sent by Alabaster. What is he doing now, Mandy?" Miss Mann asked.

"Well, he's just standing there, staring at you."

"Oops! Sorry! Moi? Staring? An observer never stares. We observe. And oh, boy, am I ever observing," BJ said with a broad grin.

"Justin told me everything about Bishop," Miss Mann said. "I have something in my bag that I believe could be useful to us in restoring him back to normal."

"What is it?" Gary asked.

"It's a device that Alabaster created which should restore Bishop back into his body. In addition I have some pills that we developed years ago that will counteract the effects of the yipple. We just have to get it close enough to Bishop to utilize all of this. How much time do we have before the portal reappears?"

Mandy looked at her watch. "About half an hour."

"Then we had better hurry to the retrieval spot," Miss Mann said.

"But aren't you needed here for the war?" Aquarian asked.

Miss Mann was so direct she almost sounded uncaring. "If we don't help Bishop, we'll have much worse than a war on our hands. It shouldn't take me too much time to correct the situation. I'll have enough time to leave and get back before anyone notices that I'm gone."

"I'm going with you," Justin said.

"No, Justin, you should stay here," Miss Mann ordered. "I need you here to watch over things in my absence."

"No, Miss Mann." Justin was assertive. "I stayed here so I wouldn't have to confront my parents, but I'm going to have to do it sometime. And if there is anyone that get you around my father's building without being detected, it's me."

Gary put his hand on Justin's shoulder. "There's something I've got to tell you."



"What is it?"

"It's about your father," Gary started. "You're not going to believe this."

"There's nothing you can say about my father that I won't believe."

"He's, well, he's on Onyx's side."

Justin was stunned.

"I know it's hard to believe, but your father was fighting against us when we were there," Gary explained.

Justin looked angry. "It's not so hard to believe. He never cares about right or wrong. All he cares about is making money. If he's against you guys, then he's against me, too. Let's go!"

BJ grinned as he heard Justin say this. "And so it begins. The important turning point in young Wellington's life. I wonder if he knows what road this will take him down. Only time will tell." BJ laughed. "Time, oh yes, only time and me."

Twenty minutes later, the group arrived at the retrieval sight.

"Made it, with a few minutes to spare," Mandy said.

"Well look who's here," said a sudden voice from the nearby woods.

The person speaking was partially obscured by shadows.

Mandy thought he sounded familiar. "Reprint? Is that you?"

The figure stepped out into the sunlight. It was Print. He was holding a gun, aimed at the group. "Don't you wish!" he sneered.

"What do you want, Print?" Miss Mann asked.

"I heard what you said about going back to Earth! I want to return and get my powers back. You're going to make that possible. Don't any of you try to follow me through the portal or I'll kill you. I'm going back alone." Print kept his gun locked on the group as he spoke.

"Great Gugiley Mugiley! This doesn't look good," BJ said as he studied the device on his wrist. "According to my calculations, you have less than two minutes to stop him or you won't make the portal back home."

"We're open to suggestions," Mandy said, panic evident in her voice.

"No, sorry, can't interfere. Remember?"

"You aren't helping much!" Mandy shouted. "You never help! Why do you keep hanging around, anyway?"

"Who are you talking to?" Print sneered. "Who else is here?"

While Print was focused on Mandy, Gary motioned to Justin. Justin

understood perfectly. Seconds later, the two boys charged toward Print. Print whirled around and took aim at Gary and Justin.

"No!" Mandy screamed.

Before anyone could move, Aquarian leapt through the air and landed on Print, knocking him to the ground. Everyone was stunned.

"It appears that I have knocked Print unconscious," Aquarian observed with detachment.

"You just leaped over ten feet!" Gary exclaimed. "How did you do that?"

"It was not that difficult," Aquarian replied. "Not being human, I don't suffer from all of your limitations."

"If you could leap that far, then why did I have to put you on my shoulders to get you into the window at the Wellington building?" Gary asked. "Why didn't you just jump?"

"Because Bishop's plan called for me to get on your shoulders. I am programmed to follow Bishop's orders."

"You could have told him you could do it," Gary said exasperated.

"He never asked."

At that moment, the portal appeared.

"What are we going to do with Print?" Mandy asked.

"We can't bring him back to Earth," Miss Mann replied. "We can't let him regain his powers."

"But if we leave him here unguarded, then when he wakes up, he'll tell everyone that you've left and that the castle is defenseless," Justin said.

"Aquarian, you will have to be in charge while I am gone," Miss Mann said.

"Me?" Aquarian asked. "You want me to remain here?"

"You can watch Print and keep him from getting information back to Onyx," Miss Mann explained.

"I am only programmed to take orders from Bishop or Alabaster," Aquarian said.

"You are also programmed to protect Bishop. By allowing me to go back to Earth, you will be helping to protect Bishop."

"Then I will stay," Aquarian consented.

"We will all be back soon," Miss Mann said as she entered the portal. Mandy, Gary and Justin followed. BJ walked up to the portal and looked at it.

"Well, not all of us will be back, I'm afraid," he said to nobody in par-

ticalar as he once again looked at the device around his wrist. "It's going to happen sooner than I thought," he said to himself. "I've been dreading this moment since the beginning." BJ then stepped into the portal just as it blinked out of existence.


 CHAPTER TEN

EVIL IS AS EVIL DOES

Back in Onyx's workshop a warped digital version of Bishop's face looked down from the computer screen at his unconscious body. Pipsqueak quietly lay on top of his chest looking up at his face on the monitor. "Pipsqueak, I think it's about time that I found out the true extent of my power," Bishop said. "Let's see what systems I can access."

Bishop became very quiet for a few seconds and then he smiled. "Cool. I've hooked up to the school's security system. I can see everything that is going on there. Take a look Pip."

The image of Bishop disappeared from the screen and was replaced with several smaller pictures of different classrooms and hallways in Bishop's school. Several teachers could be seen locking up their materials for the year, while others were busy chatting with each other before they left for their summer break.

"Things look a little boring there, Pip. I think I need to have a little fun."

The teachers on the monitor suddenly jumped when all the emergency lights and alarms in the building began to go off. As they looked around for the emergency, they were suddenly doused when all the sprinklers in the building went off in full force showering everyone in sight. Bishop laughed as they all began scrambling for the doors. Teachers knocked into each other as each tried to beat one another out of the building.

"That was fun," Bishop laughed. "Let's see what else I can do." The images of the school disappeared from the monitor and was instantly

replaced with images of busy intersections at several downtown locations. The usual flow of cars and trucks traveled along the streets. Many of them were heading for the local drawbridge that would take them out of the hectic downtown area. Bishop chuckled as he caused all the traffic lights to change to green. Several crashes occurred as cars went through intersections thinking that they had the right of way.

"That's good for a start," Bishop said. "Now let me see what real trouble I can cause."

Across town in O'Leary's Confectionaries, Mary and Barry O'Leary



were busy trying to get things back into control. In the past few minutes all the appliances in their candy store suddenly turned on and they were unable to shut them off. All of their customers had fled leaving them to battle the machines alone.

"None of the switches are working," Mary yelled over the noise of the appliances.

Barry approached the nearby blender, which was busily spinning its contents around. He tried pushing the on/off button several times with no result. He began to reach for the power cord. As if sensing the impending threat, the blender suddenly began to rotate faster blowing its lid and whirling its contents all over Barry's face. Wiping the messy contents from his eyes, Barry felt around for the cord and pulled it out of the wall socket. Reluctantly, the blender swiftly died down. "Pull the plugs," he yelled to his wife.

The two O'Learys ran around the store rapidly pulling the plugs from the out of control machines. When they were done they sat down on the stools in front of the soda counter, relaxing in the messy but quiet store.

"What was that all about?" Mary asked.

"I've never seen anything like it," Barry replied. "If I didn't know better I would say that this place was haunted."

"I wonder if it is," Mary said. "Maybe that's why the travel agency that used to be in this building left so suddenly."



Barry laughed at his wife's comment. "Honey, you know they left suddenly because they were crooks and they had to leave town before the police caught up with them. That's why we got this place so cheap."

At that moment, young Jerry came running into the store. He was out of breath. "Mom! Dad!" he gasped.

"Jerry? What are you doing here? You are supposed to be over your friends' house," Mary said.

"I was," Jerry croaked between huffs and puffs. "Jade and Kenny and me were playing a computer game when everything in the house went crazy."

Mary corrected him. "Jade and Kenny and I were playing."

Jerry shook his head. "No mom, you weren't there. It was Jade and Kenny and me."

"Nevermind," Mary replied. "What did their parents do when everything went crazy?"

"They weren't home. They ran out to the store before it all happened."

"And they left you three home alone? I need to have a talk with them about that! Why didn't you call us?" Mary asked.

"I tried, but I couldn't get through. All I heard on the phone was music when I tried to make a phone call."

"Music? Are you sure?" Barry said as he walked over to the nearby phone. He picked up the receiver and heard loud music blasting from it. "That's odd. There's no dial tone." Barry began to hum along with the music. "It does sound familiar. Where have I heard this before?" Barry handed the phone to his wife, who put the receiver to her ear and listened.

Mary nodded her head as she listened to the music. "Yes, it is familiar, but I can't remember where I've heard it."

"I know where you heard it," Jerry volunteered. "Bishop's been playing it in the house all week."

"Yes," Mary exclaimed. "I remember now. I've told him over a dozen times to turn it off. It's a horrible song. But why is it coming out of our phone?"

"Not just ours," Jerry corrected. "It's coming out of Jade's phone too."

"If that's the case," Mary added, "then it must be safe to assume that it is coming out of everyone's phone."

"First the appliances, and then the phone. What else can happen to

us today?" Barry asked.

At that moment the lights in the building began to dim and then grow in intensity and then dim again. This began to repeat itself in a faster and faster cycle.

Mary shook her head and looked at her husband. "You had to ask?"

While the rest of the town of Wellington was experiencing electrical problems, Bishop was busy talking to someone on the only operating phone in town.

"Nevermind how I got your number!" Bishop said. "Just don't hang up or you'll never find out why all of your systems are acting so crazy."

Suddenly, Justin Wellington II and the two security guards entered the room.

Bishop smiled. "Ah, the three stooges have arrived. Hold on! I'll be right back."

The three men silently walked up to the computer. Bishop's image looked down at them. "This had better be good," Bishop started. "I was on a very important phone call."

Justin Wellington II looked up at Bishop. "You wanted me to report on the status of your brother."

Bishop nodded his head. "Yes, is he out of the way for now?"

Mr. Wellington nodded his head. "I have the situation under control."

Bishop smiled. "Good. It sure is convenient that my dear brother was able to inject that nanochip into you. I guess he didn't trust you anymore than I do. Now what about my friends that were here earlier?"

"There is no sign of them. When my men made it into the room that they ran into, they were gone. I don't understand it. There was no other way out."

Bishop sat silent for a moment. "Was there anything unusual in the room?" he asked the two guards.

The two guards conferred with one another and then one spoke. "There was one thing. There was a chess set on one of the tables. It didn't look like it belonged there."

Bishop laughed. "A chess set? Well that explains everything. Gary is becoming very resourceful. I'll need to keep an eye on him when he gets back. A very large eye."

"Back from where?" Justin Wellington II asked.

"Forget it! You don't need to know. I need to finish this phone call.

Now leave!" Bishop commanded as he turned his attention back to the person on the other end of the phone.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

WHERE DOES IT SAY I CAN'T DO THAT?

B exited the portal and found himself back in Alabaster's lab. Mandy greeted him with a smile. BJ marveled at Mandy's seemingly endless good cheer. He looked toward the others. Gary, Justin and Miss Mann were examining the remains of a broken door on the floor.

"Wow, somebody was real anxious to get in here," Justin remarked. "I wonder what they wanted."

"They wanted us," Mandy replied.

Justin seemed to shudder as he looked around the lab. "I never knew this was here," he said. "Whenever I would come to visit, my father would assign an assistant to show me around the building and keep an eye on me. We would usually end up in the cafeteria." Justin paused for a moment. "You know, every time I came here to see my father, he always had a sudden meeting or something that he had to attend. Every single time."

Mandy thought she could see tears welling in Justin's eyes. She touched his arm. "Your father is a big businessman. I'm sure he's super busy all the time."

"Don't defend him, Mandy," Justin snapped. Mandy could tell by the timber of his voice that Justin really was on the verge of tears. "This place is so dark and gloomy. Dark and dismal. Just like my father." He glanced

around the room. "I thought you said Chance was here."

"He's upstairs in Onyx's workshop. At least, that's where we left him," Mandy said.

"You mean Alabaster and Onyx both had secret labs here?" Justin gasped. "Man, that's dear old dad for you. Playing both sides. Going where the money is, or where he thinks it is."

"Let's go," Miss Mann interrupted. "Bishop needs us." She turned to Gary. "Quickly. Take us to Onyx's workshop."

Miss Mann, Gary and Justin stopped just outside Onyx's workshop. Mandy stood behind them exchanging worried glances with BJ. The door was ajar. The only sounds coming from inside were of Bishop talking to himself.

"Oh, dear," Miss Mann fretted.

"This doesn't sound good," Justin said. "He sounds crazed."

Gary led the others into the room. Mandy gasped. A warped digital version of Bishop's face filled the computer screen. He appeared to be talking to someone.

"No, you don't understand!" Bishop said. "This phone call is not a joke!" He was loud and angry. "I intend to take over the world, and I am starting with this country. And I have the power to do it! To prove it, I will take the entire computer system at the Pentagon off line again. And then maybe I will shut off electricity to New York City. You don't believe me? Who do you think caused that blackout in Houston an hour ago? Bet those folks are getting a little hot under the collar without air conditioning. I'm also the one who cut off the power to the White House a few minutes ago. Now pay attention, old man. When I count to three, the power will pop back on. One, two, three! How did I do that? Never mind. Now then, about the Pentagon..."

"Bishop!" Mandy cried. "What are you doing?"

"Hang on, Mr. President. Another problem has cropped up. I'll have to get back to you."

"Were you really talking to the president?" Mandy asked.

"Of course. He's a stubborn old man. He just won't listen to reason." Bishop's eyes seemed to crackle with blue energy. "I see you've brought company. Hello, Christie, ol' gal. How are things on the Homeworld? I hope you've left something for me to take over."

Miss Mann was stern. "Hello, Bishop. I see you aren't quite yourself these days."

"Oh, this? It's an improvement, actually. I never realized just how powerful I really am. Do you know that I can control all of the world's computers, electricity, water? Everything! People will have to ask me if they want to turn on a freakin' light bulb! In fact, right now, I'm turning all the traffic lights in New York City green at the same time. Think of all the accidents! Heh, heh, heh."

"You do realize, Bishop, that we are going to stop you," Miss Mann said.

"I know you'll try. And fail. I am in total control here."

Miss Mann pulled the device out of her pocket.

"Not for long, Bishop. This should bring you back to your senses."

At that moment, Justin Wellington II and the two security guards re-entered the room. All three were armed.

"I would put that down if I were you," Justin Wellington II said.

"Father!" Justin gasped.

"Stay out of this, Justin. It doesn't concern you."

"Of course it concerns me. These are my friends."

"Friends? You've never had a friend in your life. Nobody likes you, boy."

"You haven't changed a bit, father."

"And you are still a failure to the great name of Wellington."

"The great name of Wellington is a great big curse, and it kept me from ever making friends," Justin cried. He couldn't control his anger. "Nobody likes me, because nobody likes you, or our entire family, because the Wellingtons have always made them feel inferior and they resent us for it."

"They are inferior, son. If they don't like you, then so what? As long as you have friends in powerful places then who cares what they think? And I have many friends in powerful places."

"No, father. You know people in powerful places. But none of them are your friends. None of them would ever help you if you were down, or even save your life. That's what friends are really about. That's something that I've learned recently. And that's what I have now."

Mr. Wellington looked at his son with a puzzled look.

"Didn't you even notice that I wasn't around for the last few months?" Justin continued. "That your only son has been missing?"

"I thought you were with your mother. Wherever she is. It's not my concern. She's old enough to take care of herself. And you should be too. I was when I was your age. But I guess you are too much like your

mother, weak and dependent.”

“You are a monster,” Miss Mann said with great authority. “Your son is a wonderful young man. He is brave and strong and loyal. Obviously he doesn’t owe those traits to you.”

Justin Wellington II suddenly looked enraged. “How touching. Now, for the last time, put that device down or I will have my men shoot.”

“I’m afraid I can’t do that,” Miss Mann said. “Perhaps it’s time for a little double trouble.” Miss Mann closed her eyes.

Mandy recognized the expression on her face and realized what Miss Mann was about to do. “Watch this,” she whispered to BJ. Mandy didn’t notice that BJ wasn’t paying any attention to her. He was focused on the Miss Mann and the danger at hand.



“You leave me no choice,” Justin Wellington II growled.

As Mr. Wellington spoke, two figures suddenly started to materialize next to the security guards. BJ quickly looked at the device on his wrist.

“Great Gugiley Mugiley! I won’t let this happen, and there’s nothing you can do to stop me,” he yelled at the device. “Here goes nothing!”

As Justin Wellington II turned to give the command for his guards to shoot Miss Mann, BJ tore the device from his wrist. As he tore it loose blue sparks filled the air around him. Suddenly, he became solid. He was no longer holographic.

“Fire!” Justin Wellington II commanded.

As the security guards fired at Miss Mann, BJ pushed her out of the path of the bullets. The two of them crashed into a wall, crushing the device that Miss Mann was holding.

“I’m sorry if I’ve hurt you, lovely lady, but it was the only way to save your life,” BJ said.

Miss Mann appeared to be shaken from the fall. With her concentration broken, the two figures stopped materialization. They slowly began to dissipate.

“Thank you. That’s quite all right,” Miss Mann said. “Who are you?”

“Yes, who the hell are you? And where the hell did you come from?” Justin Wellington II barked.

“BJ! They can see you!” Mandy exclaimed. “You’re not a hologram anymore!”

“Fraid not,” BJ said. “It was necessary for me to break the first rule of observation and actually participate. When I took off my device I lost the holographic link and I materialized into your world. I’m afraid I’m in trouble now.”

As BJ spoke a ripple effect went through the air and passed through the room. Everyone was momentarily dazed as it went through them.

“Great Gugiley Mugiley! Make that mega trouble!” BJ said.

“What was that?” Justin asked.

BJ helped Miss Mann to her feet. “Allow me to introduce myself. I am BJ. I am an observer from, well, let’s just say an observer who’s not doing a good job of observing.”

“This is the BJ person you’ve been talking about?” Gary asked Mandy.

“The one and only,” BJ said as he took a bow. He looked at the device, which was flashing very rapidly in his hand and frowned.

“Great Gugiley Mugiley! I’ve never gotten readings like this before.

I'm afraid to find out what they mean. With my luck, probably trouble."

"Then I guess I'd better finish what I started," Miss Mann said.

Miss Mann put her hand to her head and concentrated. As she did, two figures began to materialize from thin air.

"Great Gugiley Mugiley! I've heard about this, but never thought I would ever see it happen," BJ exclaimed.

The two figures solidified into exact duplicates of Justin and his father.

"Why did you make a duplicate of Justin's father?" Gary asked Miss Mann.



"I thought that it would be to our advantage if we had one on our side."

Justin Wellington II pointed his gun at Miss Mann. "I don't know what's going on, but I am still in control here."

Justin stepped between his friends and his father. "Drop the gun, father. I told you these are my friends. I'm not going to let you harm them."

"Justin, get out of the way. Now!!" Justin Wellington II ordered.

"Yes, Justin, please get out of the way," Duplicate Justin Wellington II said. "I don't want any harm to come to you."

"Be quiet you counterfeit me. Justin is my son, and I'll tell him what to do!" the original Justin Wellington II said.

"I think you should do as your father says," Mandy told Justin. "He doesn't sound like he's in control of himself."

"Don't worry, I'm sure he won't shoot. He may be a rotten father, but he's not a killer."

"What are you talking about?" Gary said. "He almost shot Miss Mann a minute ago."

Miss Mann tried to remain calm. "Justin, I think you should listen to Gary."

"Hey, if he wants to get shot, let him. No great loss," Duplicate Justin said.

"How dare you?" a furious Mandy hissed.

"I'm only telling the truth," Duplicate Justin continued. "Nobody likes him. Not even his old man. He knows it, you know it, and everyone knows it. So let him get shot. It's no great loss."

Miss Mann put her hand to her head and concentrated. "Oh, dear. I think I've screwed up again. Good-bye, duplicate Justin," she whispered.

"Hey, wait! You can't do this. I'm..." At that, Duplicate Justin disappeared into a puff of smoke.

Justin Wellington II was enraged. "Enough with all these tricks. I'm giving you to the count of three to move out of the way."

Justin stood his ground. "Take your best shot, old man."

"One!"

"Justin, don't!" Mandy pleaded.

"Don't worry, I know what I'm doing," a confident Justin replied.

"Two!"

"I guess I'll have to interfere again," BJ sighed.

"Three!" Justin Wellington II cried.

BJ pressed the device that had been on his wrist just as Justin's father pulled the trigger. A sudden glow surrounded BJ, Justin, Gary, Mandy, Miss Mann and Duplicate Justin Wellington II, and then dissipated.

Justin patted himself. "Am I dead?"

"No, but your father sure looks strange," Mandy said. "He's not moving."

"Neither are the two guards," Gary said.

"Look at Bishop," Mandy said. "His image isn't moving either."

Duplicate Justin Wellington II walked towards Justin's father and tapped him on the forehead. The original didn't move or blink. Bishop's face on the monitor was frozen in the same manner.

"Handsome devil," Duplicate Justin Wellington II observed. "Too bad he's such a dirty rotten scoundrel."

Miss Mann pointed to the bullet that had fired from Justin Wellington II's gun. It was frozen in mid-air, just inches from Justin. "What is going on here?"

"I'm afraid that's my doing," BJ offered. "When Justin's father started to shoot, I temporarily stopped time for everyone but us with this device. As I told you, I am an observer. What I didn't tell you is that I am from the future. I was sent back to observe the events that transpired here during the past few days."

"The future? Why should anyone in the future care about what happens here?" Gary asked.

"Are you kidding?" BJ was very animated. "Every school child on both Earth and the Homeworld is taught about the adventures of Bishop Chance and his Preservers of the Light."

"Preservers of the Light? Who are they?" Justin asked.

"Why, you are!" BJ said as he began to point to various people in the room. "And Mandy, and Gary and Aquarian and Reprint, and..." BJ looked around the room and stopped. "Oops, sorry, the last member of the team hasn't joined yet. But anyhow, your many exploits are known throughout both worlds."

"We haven't done all that much," Mandy said.

"Maybe not yet, but you will. Oh yes, you will."

"How about Miss Mann?" Gary asked. "Isn't she a Preserver of the Light?"

"She was, but her involvement suddenly and tragically ended when she was fatally shot by Justin's father," BJ answered sadly.

"Mercy!" Miss Mann exclaimed.

"What are you talking about?" Justin asked. "My father didn't shoot her."

"Of course, I didn't," Duplicate Justin Wellington II said. "I wouldn't think of harming her."

"You wouldn't, but Justin's actual father did in the original time line," BJ explained with a shudder. "He shot her dead. But when I entered this time and pushed Miss Mann out of the path of the bullet, I changed history. And now I don't know how much damage I've caused to the time line. Do you remember that ripple in the room a few minutes ago?"

Mandy nodded her head and shuddered. "Of course."

"That was the time line being effected by my actions here today. It traveled all the way from this moment, up to the end of time."

Justin was skeptical. "The end of time? Isn't that kind of far to go for just one small change?"

"No change is too small. That is why we are forbidden to interfere with the course of history."

"If it's so terrible to change history, why did you do it?" Gary asked.

"To save Miss Mann's life," BJ declared. "I couldn't let this lovely woman die!"

Mandy smiled. "BJ, you've got a crush on Miss Mann, don't you?"

"Mandy!" Miss Mann gasped. BJ turned away from the group.

"I'm sorry," Mandy said. "I didn't mean to make anyone feel awkward."

"Well it appears that you did," Miss Mann replied.

"Mandy is right," BJ mumbled. "Great Gugiley Mugiley! How do females always know these things? It wasn't supposed to happen like this. You weren't supposed to know."

Miss Mann smiled. "There is nothing to be ashamed about. I feel honored that you would risk so much to save my life. Please call me Christie Rae." Miss Mann paused. "You are a brave and courageous person."

"Well, my mother thinks so. She was, is, a remarkable woman. That's the problem with time travel. You have trouble with your tenses."

"But that still doesn't explain why only Bishop and I could see or hear you," Mandy said.

"As you may have noticed, I'm not the most professional observer," BJ admitted. "In fact, this is the first case I've ever been sent on. It's probably going to be my last case too. Then again, maybe not. In my time I have a few important connections because I am descended from you and Bishop."

"Descended? How?" Mandy asked.

"Well, I shouldn't be telling you this, but you and Bishop eventually get married, and, uh, many generations later, I become one of your descendants."

"Married?!" Mandy gasped.

"What?" a shocked and jealous Justin cried. He looked at Mandy. "I can't believe you married Chance!"

"But... But... I didn't!" Mandy sputtered. "BJ, explain yourself."

BJ shook his head. "That's all I'm going to tell you about it. I've already said too much."

"How about me?" Gary asked. "What happens to me?"

"And me?" Justin asked. "What about me?"

"I can't tell you anything too specific. I'll just tell you that one of you becomes the first president of the newly formed United States of America and Canada nation."

"Cool," Justin beamed. "I get to be president one day. I like it!"

"What do you mean, you?" Gary grumbled. "How do you know it's not me?"

"Get real," Justin sniffed.

"So which one of them becomes president?" an excited Mandy asked BJ.

"Neither," BJ whispered. "I just enjoy seeing them in one of their legendary arguments. People still talk about that in my time."

"You're incorrigible," Miss Mann laughed.

"That's what everyone tells me."

"What happens to me?" Duplicate Justin Wellington II asked. "The real me that is."

"I'm sorry," BJ said shaking his head. "I don't know. History doesn't say much about you."

"How is that possible? I'm a giant of industry. I am president and CEO of a large multi-national corporation."

"The only thing that I remember reading about you is that you were Justin's father. And not a very good one. Sorry."

"You spend your whole life trying to make something of yourself and history forgets all about you," a depressed Duplicate Justin Wellington II groaned.

"Give us a break, duplicate dad," Justin said. "Remember, you aren't the real deal."

"How am I supposed to marry Bishop?" Mandy asked. "He's still

trapped in that computer!"

"That shouldn't be any problem," Justin said. "Miss Mann brought that device back from the Homeworld to return Bishop back to normal."

Miss Mann pointed to the broken device on the floor. "I'm afraid that isn't an option anymore. When BJ and I fell the device was smashed. It's useless now."

"Oh, dear," BJ fretted. "I'm so very sorry. Now I see how I have altered history. By saving you I may have doomed us all!"

"Wait a minute, BJ," Mandy said. "You're from the future. Can't you tell us how we get Bishop back to normal?"

"Normally, I could, but this time I can't. You see, in the original time line, when Christie Rae was shot, the device remained intact and you were able to use it to bring Bishop back to normal. But since I've changed history, I can't tell you what to do!"

"Great! Just great!" Gary cried. "How are we going to help Bishop now?"

"I've got an idea," Justin said. "BJ, tell us more about that device you have. You say that you can stop time with it. What else can it do?"

"I can communicate with your future, which is my present. I can also stop time, reverse it or make it go forward very quickly."

"Hey, if you can communicate with people in the future, why don't you ask them for help?" Gary asked.

"Things have been happening so quickly that I haven't had an opportunity to do so. I'll give it a try now." BJ adjusted a few controls on the device. After making a few adjustments he spoke into it.

"Observer one, to Control."

Silence. BJ tried again.

"Come on guys, this is no time to fool around," he yelled. "Stan! Ollie! Come on guys! Guys?" More silence. "It's no use. Since I've changed history, it seems I've lost contact with my own time. Great, just great. Now how am I supposed to get back home? And there was a new episode of the Mighty Morons on today."

"That dumb show is still on in your time?" Gary asked. "My stupid little brother loves that show!"

Justin had another idea. "Maybe we can use that device on Chance and send him back in time before he got stuck in the computer and turned evil by the yipple."

"That's a great idea," Mandy said. "How about it, BJ? Could it work?"

"Huh? Yah, I guess it's possible. I'm not sure. I have never tried anything like it before. But what do we have to lose?"

"It won't hurt him, will it?" Mandy asked.

"I don't think so. Give me a few seconds to think about it."

BJ used his fingers to work out calculations in the air as he mumbled seemingly nonsensical mathematical equations to himself.

"No, it shouldn't," he said. "Or at least I hope it won't. My insurance has an exclusion for temporal transgressions."

Gary was snide. "That's reassuring."

BJ lifted Bishop's body off the cot and placed it near the computer that currently housed his consciousness. He placed his device on Bishop and pressed a few buttons. A field of energy surrounded Bishop and the computer. Slowly it died out.

Mandy ran over to Bishop. "Did it work? Is he okay?"

BJ looked up at the monitor.

"His image is gone from the monitor, so that's good news. Let's see if I can bring him back to consciousness."

BJ shook Bishop a couple of times trying to wake him up. When that didn't work he slapped his face twice. Bishop slowly started to move.

"Ouch! What's going on?" Bishop was groggy. He looked to his side and saw BJ. "What are you doing here? Where am I?"

"Bishop, are you all right?" Mandy asked.

"I think so. Why do you ask?"

"You were trapped inside that computer, but BJ got you out, and returned you to your own body," Mandy said.

"Trapped in a computer? What are you talking about?"

"He doesn't remember being out of his body," BJ explained to Mandy. "Since we reversed time for him, it never happened to him."

"But we remember it," Mandy said.

"Yes. That's called a time paradox. Don't try to think about it. It can drive you crazy. It's worse than a hangover."

Bishop saw Justin and Miss Mann standing behind Mandy. "Miss Mann? Justin? How did you get off the Homeworld?"

"I'll tell you later. It's good to see you again," Justin said as he shook Bishop's hand.

"That was pretty cool, what you just did," Gary said to BJ.

"You can see BJ?" Bishop asked Gary.

"Everyone can see and hear me now," BJ replied. "Long story. Don't ask."

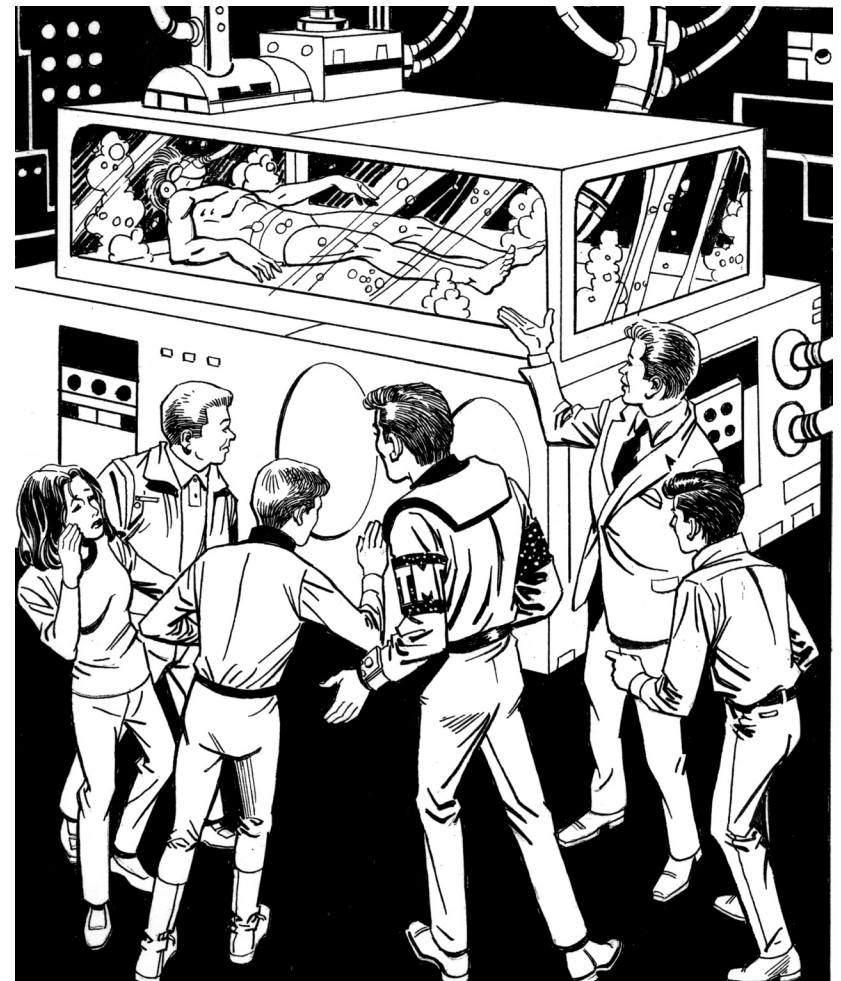
"Yeah, Bish," Gary replied. "We know all about BJ. He's from the future, Gambit is the bad guy and there's more to yipples than meets the eye."

Mandy took the yipple from Bishop's shoulders and held it firmly in her hands.

"Pipsqueak!" Bishop tried to grab his furry friend, but Mandy pulled away.

"No, Bishop," Mandy said. "It's better that you stay away from Pipsqueak for awhile. You haven't been feeling well, and, and, uh..."

Miss Mann took the squirming yipple from Mandy. "And you



wouldn't want him to get sick, now would you?" she said.

"No, I guess not," Bishop said.

"Don't worry, Bishop," Miss Mann continued. "I'll find someplace to put him where he can't do any harm. I mean, where he can't come to any harm."

Miss Mann opened a drawer, tossed the yipple in and slammed it shut. As the yipple squeaked in protest, Miss Mann took the vial out of her pocket and popped out a few pills. "You have been through a great deal lately Bishop. Take a few of these pills and you should start to feel better very soon."

Bishop took the pills and swallowed them. A soft glow quickly enveloped his body and just as quickly disappeared. He turned and saw the three frozen men near the door and Duplicate Justin Wellington II seated nearby.

"Justin, what happened to your father? And why are there two of him?"

"My father is frozen in time," Justin said. "That other one is a dupe created by Miss Mann."

"BJ, don't you think you should unfreeze time now?" Mandy asked.

"Wait a minute before you do," Gary said as he walked over to the three men and removed their weapons. He handed the guns over to Miss Mann.

"Everyone synchronize your watches," said BJ. "When you hear the tone, the time will be 3:30 and 33 seconds."

Gary looked at his watch. "That's not the correct time. I've got..."

"Ding!" At the ding, BJ pressed the device and time started again for the rest of the people in the room. The three men were startled to find themselves unarmed. They were equally surprised to see everyone standing in different places, and Miss Mann holding a gun on them.

"If you gentlemen would be so kind as to raise your hands and keep them above your heads," Miss Mann said, her tone more serious than it had been. "Believe me when I tell you that I know how to use a gun, and I'm not afraid to do so. Gary, Justin, lock the guards in their own handcuffs."

Gary and Justin handcuffed the two guards and gave Miss Mann the keys. Justin then walked up to his father.

"I can't believe you were willing to shoot me. I'm your son!"

A visibly shaken Justin Wellington II pointed to Bishop. "I wasn't, Justin. I mean, I didn't want to. That kid is to blame!"

Justin was indignant. "Are you trying to tell me that Chance was forcing you to threaten me?"

"Me?" Bishop asked astounded. "How could I force you to do anything?"

"Yes! Him and his rotten brother!" Justin Wellington II pointed to the back of his neck. "When that kid's brother came to see me yesterday, he located a device that I had hidden away in my office. Not too long ago I found one of Onyx's inventions and I was going to have my men take it apart and see what it could do."

"And steal the idea and market it as your own, making more money that you don't need," Justin stated.

"That's just smart business," Justin Wellington II continued. "But before I could do that, Gambit found it and used it to insert a nanochip into me. From that time on I was unable to control my actions. I had to do everything he said. He also had me insert nanochips into these two security guards." Justin Wellington II looked at the computer that had housed Bishop's altered consciousness. "My guess is that it was all controlled through that computer, because when Bishop got stuck in it, he took over control from his brother. I realize we don't have much of a relationship, Justin, but I would never want to hurt you."

"It's a little late for that, dad," Justin sneered.

"There are different forms of abuse," Miss Mann injected. "Physical abuse is only one of them."

Gary looked around the room. "Speaking of Gambit, where is that butt head?"

"I don't know," Bishop said. "I don't seem to remember much of what's been happening lately."

"If you'll follow me, I'll show you where I was instructed to put him," Justin Wellington II said.

"Before we go anywhere, allow me to finish something," Duplicate Justin Wellington II said as he grabbed some rope and tied the hands of the real Justin Wellington II.

"There!" Duplicate Justin Wellington II said. "I feel a bit safer knowing that he can't do anything. I just don't trust him, which is pretty bad considering that I am him."

Justin Wellington II led the group down the corridor and stopped at the front of another unmarked door.

"This door is locked," he said. "The key is inside my coat pocket. If somebody could get it for me, I'm afraid that I'm a little bit tied up right now."

"That's quite all right. I have a set of keys in my coat pocket as well. We'll use those." Duplicate Justin Wellington II pulled the duplicate keys out of his coat pocket and opened the door.

There was a huge glass tank filled with water in the center of the room. Gambit was submerged in it, stripped down to his shorts and hooked up to a breathing device, floating helplessly in the water. There was a metal cover on top of the tank. Gambit's clothes had been tossed into a pile on the floor. Several monogrammed towels were hung on racks that had been mounted on a nearby wall.

"Ah, Gambit under glass," BJ said.



"What is this?" Bishop asked.

"It looks like a giant fish tank," Mandy replied.

"That is the tank I use for therapy," Justin Wellington II said.

"Therapy?" Justin asked.

"Yes, when I get too stressed out from a busy day, I float in the tank to calm my nerves. By the way, I don't normally use it with the top, but it was necessary to keep him from getting out."

Gambit banged on the side of the tank. He was angry as hell.

Gary smiled. "It doesn't seem to work for Gambit. He looks super stressed to me."

"You need to calm your nerves?" Justin said to his father. "I never knew you got stressed. I thought you only created stress for other people!"

"Where did you find such a huge tank?" Gary asked.

"I got it remarkably cheap when a fish wholesaler went out of business," Mr. Wellington said.

"That's my father, rich but cheap."

"I do not make my money so it can be squandered away foolishly." Mr. Wellington was defensive.

"What good is money if you don't have anyone you can spend it on?" Duplicate Mr. Wellington asked.

Mandy watched as Gambit struggled inside the tank. "Will someone get him out of there?"

"What?" Gary said incredulously. "Why do you want him out? He can change into that horrible creature. And he can control old man Wellington with that chip in his body."

"Watch who you call old, chubby," Justin Wellington II said.

"Watch who you call chubby, gramps," Gary countered.

Bishop walked over to Justin Wellington II and mumbled a few words. "It's okay, I've deactivated the chip. Gambit can't control him anymore. And I've still got a bottle of water that we can use against him if should decide to change again."

"I still don't trust him," Gary replied.

"He can't stay in there forever," Mandy said. "He's got to come out eventually."

"Okay, I guess you're right," Gary countered. "How about in ten or twenty years?"

"Just get him out," Bishop commanded. "There's something I want to ask him."

Duplicate Justin Wellington II and BJ removed the top from the tank and pulled an angry Gambit from the tank. Gambit was soaking wet and he was in a very disagreeable mood.

"Someone is going to pay for this!" Gambit screamed. "Nobody does this to me! Do you have any idea who you are dealing with?" He saw Bishop standing beside Mandy and rushed toward him. "You made them do this to me!" Gambit grabbed a startled Bishop by the throat.

"You jerk! You idiot!" Gambit yelled. "I'll kill you!"

Gary tore Gambit away from Bishop and punched him in the nose. Gambit stood momentarily dazed. A strange look came over his face.



"I don't feel very well," Gambit mumbled. He fell to the ground, unconscious.

"That's going to hurt come the morning," BJ said.

"You could have just pulled them apart," Mandy scolded Gary.

Gary smiled. "I know, but I've been wanting to do that for a long time."

"It's going to be awhile before he answers any questions," Bishop surmised. "Okay. We were supposed to be going to the Homeworld."

"Yes, and time is of the essence," Miss Mann remarked.

"We just got back from there," Gary groaned. Bishop looked puzzled.

"Another long story," Justin said to Bishop.

"Where is Checkmate?" Bishop asked Gary.

"Back in Alabaster's workroom."

"Come on everyone, let's get moving," Bishop said. "BJ, grab Gambit and bring him along."

BJ was the last to leave the room. Not wanting to get wet he wrapped a couple of towels around Gambit and lifted him up to carry him out. "A fine way to treat a visitor from the future," BJ moaned. "Make me do all the heavy work."

Back in Alabaster's workroom, BJ placed Gambit in a chair by a table and then stood by Miss Mann. He couldn't take his eyes off her. Miss Mann pretended not to notice but was unconvincing in her pretense. Bishop meanwhile was trying to put all the chess pieces back into place on the chessboard. He placed the bottle of water at the end of the table.

"Boy, whatever you people did in here, you sure made a mess," Bishop said.

Gary looked at Justin Wellington II. "Thanks to a few people."

"I told you this is not my fault!" Justin Wellington II declared. "Will someone please untie me now?"

"No way," Duplicate Justin Wellington II replied.

Bishop looked up from the chess set toward Miss Mann. "You still haven't explained how I can help the war back on the Homeworld. I'm only one person. How can one person stop a war?"

"Bishop, never underestimate the effect that one person can have," Miss Mann said. "Just look at what BJ did for me. And I am eternally grateful to him for that."

BJ moved closer to Miss Mann. "I know a way you can show your gratitude."

Miss Mann smiled and gently pushed BJ away. "Down boy. There will be time later."

Bishop finished the task at hand. "Okay, Checkmate is complete again. Ready, everyone?"

Everybody nodded in agreement.

"Checkmate," Bishop commanded. "Open a portal, and reactivate another one in twenty four hours."

Everyone watched as the miniature king created another portal in the center of the room. Nobody noticed Gambit regaining consciousness. He spotted the bottle of water on the nearby table. As everyone's attention was turned to the portal he slowly reached out and grabbed the bottle.

"Let's go," Gary said as he entered the portal.

"Gary, slow down. You don't know what might be on the other side," Miss Mann said. "Remember, the Homeworld is at war!"

Justin Wellington II watched in disbelief as Miss Mann followed Gary into the portal. "Justin, you aren't planning on going into that thing, are you?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Justin replied.

"How do you know it's safe?"

"What's the matter father? Are you afraid? I thought the Wellingtons feared nothing."

"We don't. But I care about you, even if I don't always show it."

"You never show it," Duplicate Justin Wellington II said.

"Quiet me, I mean you," Justin Wellington II said to his duplicate.

"Good-bye father. Maybe I'll see you again one day." Justin stepped toward the portal. "Or, maybe not." He took Mandy's hand. "Here we go," he said, as the two of them disappeared.

"BJ, can you carry Gambit through the portal?" Bishop asked.

Gambit leapt up from his chair holding the bottle of water high in the air.

"Someone is going to have to carry you after I get done with you. It's about time I took back control of the situation."

Gambit positioned himself between Bishop and the portal. Before anyone could react, Gambit started to change form. He grew to over six feet in height. Claws and fangs began to grow from his fingers and mouth. Long dark hair covered him from head to foot. He turned for a moment and faced the portal. With the bottle of water still in his hand he

threw it into the portal.

BJ looked around the dry, waterless room. "Don't tell me that was your last bottle of water."

Bishop nodded his head. "Yeah, it was."

BJ groaned. "You just had to tell me that. Didn't you?"

"You're from the future," Bishop remarked. "What do we do now?"

"Maybe we should retreat. That always works in the movies," BJ said with little optimism.

As BJ turned toward the door, the creature growled. He grabbed a nearby table and threw it at the doorway, blocking the exit.

BJ looked at Justin Wellington II. "Got any ideas, old man? How about one of those legendary executive decisions you're so good at?"

"It is obvious that the creature is interested in you and the boy. I am in no peril," Justin Wellington II observed. The creature growled at Justin Wellington II and advanced towards him. "Of course, I could be wrong. Bishop! Do something!"

"BJ, untie Mr. Wellington," Bishop ordered. "He can't stay tied up with that thing in the room."

BJ hurriedly began to untie Justin Wellington II's ropes as Bishop stepped toward the monster.

Duplicate Justin Wellington II stared at his original. "That is so typical of you. Expecting a young man to sacrifice himself on your behalf. I am ashamed to be your duplicate. You have no redeeming qualities."

"Look, whoever you are, I have had just about enough of you and your big mouth!" Justin Wellington II barked as BJ finished untying him.

"I am not one of your employees that you can just order around," Duplicate Justin Wellington II cried. "I have had it up to here with you!" He pushed Justin Wellington II into a wall. Justin Wellington II responded by punching him in the stomach. Within moments the two men were pounding each other.

BJ watched the two men fighting. "Nice to see where their priorities are."

Bishop, meanwhile, moved to distract the creature Gambit had become. "Hey, Gambit, or whatever you are. Forget about old man Wellington! I'm the one you want! Why don't you try taking me on?"

The Gambit creature advanced toward Bishop just as Justin Wellington II knocked his duplicate to the ground. He saw the creature advancing toward Bishop.

"He's drawing the creature away from me. Why did he do that?"

Justin Wellington II asked his dazed double.

"To save your life," Duplicate Justin Wellington II said. "He is a very brave boy. A lot like your son."

"I wanted to save you for last, Bishop, but I guess your friends will have to have that honor," the Gambit creature growled. "Who should I kill last? Your pretty little Mandy?"

"It can talk?" Justin Wellington II asked. "Why didn't it say anything the last time?"

"Maybe it had nothing to say," BJ noted.

"Last time?" Bishop asked as he kept backing up. "He's changed into this thing before?"

"Yeah," BJ replied. "You were there, but it's one of the things you don't remember anymore. Remind me to tell you about it later."

Bishop dodged the creature as it took a swipe at him. One claw tore the shoulder of Bishop's uniform. Bishop was briefly distracted as the torn uniform mended itself. "If there is a later," Bishop said.

"Maybe I should save your rotund friend Gary for last!" the Gambit creature continued. "Or that big mouth, Justin? I'll kill that one very slowly. That would teach his father to betray me."

"You will never hurt my son!" Justin Wellington II cried. As he started to move towards the creature, Duplicate Justin Wellington II punched him in the jaw and knocked him to the floor. "Sorry, old boy, but I can't let you sacrifice yourself."

The fallen Justin Wellington II grabbed his duplicate's shirt and pulled him down to the floor. The two Justin Wellington IIs grappled with each other until Bishop was no longer able to figure out which was the original and which was the duplicate.

"I have to do this to protect Justin," one of the Justin Wellington IIs said as he knocked out the other. He then got up and rushed toward the Gambit creature like a football player ready to tackle his opponent. The creature was thrown off balance by the force of Mr. Wellington slamming into him. The Gambit creature swung wildly, slashing Mr. Wellington deeply across the chest. The Gambit creature then lost his footing and stumbled into the portal. Mr. Wellington fell to the floor, blood gushing from his wound. Bishop rushed over to him and knelt beside him.

"Are you all right?" Bishop asked.

"I'm fine," the wounded Mr. Wellington lied. "Don't worry about me. Once a line backer, always a line backer." He coughed. "Guess it's been too long since I've played college football."

Bishop looked at the two Mr. Wellingtons on the floor. One bleeding, the other one unconscious.

"Are you Justin's real father, or the duplicate?" Bishop asked.

"Just tell Justin that his father loves him." Justin Wellington II looked at the other Justin Wellington II. "Both his fathers. And watch over Justin. Please. He's all that we have."

The wounded Mr. Wellington's head dropped to the floor. He was motionless.

"Mr. Wellington?" Bishop cried. He turned to BJ. "BJ? Is he..."

BJ shook his head. "I'm sorry. He's gone."

Bishop was frantic. "But was he Justin's father or the duplicate?"

"I don't know," BJ said. He turned and saw the portal starting to close. "And we've got no time to find out. Come on!"

BJ grabbed Bishop by the arm and pulled him into the portal. It closed with a thunderous boom, leaving one Justin Wellington II unconscious and the other dead.

CHAPTER TWELVE

STORMY WEATHER

Back on the Homeworld, Reprint and Aquarian were having a hard time getting matters under control. Shortly after Miss Mann had left for Earth an unexpected situation had arisen. Reports had reached them that one of Onyx's Emissaries was loose in the castle.

Reprint was pacing the floor nervously. He looked very tired and worn out as Diggory entered the room. "Has the intruder been spotted again?" Reprint asked.

"No sir," Diggory replied. "Not since the initial sighting."

"And we don't know who it is?" Reprint asked.

"No sir. All reports just claim to have seen a hooded figure moving about the castle."

Reprint shook his head and banged his good hand on a nearby table. "I wish Aquarian were back from his search of the castle. When we first heard about this intruder Aquarian ran off looking for him. I couldn't stop him."

Diggory nodded. "Yes, he seems to prefer action over words."

Reprint smiled. "I'm glad you're here, Diggory. At least there's one person I can count on who will listen to me."

"Yes sir," Diggory replied hesitantly. "I am very good at listening."

Several hours later Bishop and his friends arrived back in the castle on the Homeworld. Reprint was sitting in a chair with his arm in a cast. Mandy and Justin were on the other side of the room speaking. Justin

appeared to be noticeably upset. Bishop, BJ and Miss Mann were standing by the window staring down at the carnage below.

Gary entered eating an ice pop. He walked by Reprint who was looking very depressed sitting in the chair. "Well, I've got that creep Gambit locked up with that jerk Print downstairs," he said.

"Gary, that's my brother you're talking about," Bishop replied.

"He says that he's your brother, but I still don't believe him," Gary continued. "At least we know he wasn't Onyx in disguise."

"Is that what you thought?" Justin asked.

"Sure. Onyx could have used his shape shifting powers to become a kid. Or that big hairy monster that he changed into." Gary shuddered as he remembered being held in the monster's strong grip.

"So why do you think it's not Onyx?" Justin asked.

Bishop answered before Gary had a chance to respond.

"Because Onyx would have lost his shape shifting abilities once he got back here to the Homeworld," he explained. "If Gambit were Onyx, he would have turned back into Onyx once we got back here."

"Unless Onyx has found a way of making his power permanent on both worlds," BJ said, sounding more worried than he had intended.

Miss Mann gasped. "Oh, dear. That's all we need!"

"Tell me, do we eventually defeat Onyx?" Mandy asked BJ.

BJ's reply startled everyone in the room! "All I can tell you is that in your darkest hour, he becomes your most trusted ally."

"No way!" Gary cried.

"You've got to be kidding," Justin said.

"I'll believe it when I see it," Bishop said.

Reprint shot up from his chair, noticeably upset. "Okay. Why don't you all say what's on your mind?"

Everyone turned to look at him. They all had puzzled looks on their faces.

"What are you talking about?" Bishop asked.

"I failed you," Reprint replied. "I failed all of you. You left me in charge and now there's an intruder roaming the castle."

Bishop walked over to his unhappy friend. "I don't blame you for that. None of us do. It's not your fault. You'll feel better once we've tracked down whoever it is."

"I should be the one blaming myself," Miss Mann said to everyone's surprise. "That person must have been here before I left for Earth. That must be how they were able to capture Castleton. Whoever is loose in

the castle has caused us a great deal of trouble and I intend to find out who it is!"

"I wonder if Aquarian has found the intruder," Mandy said.

"Why aren't we all out looking for him?" Gary asked.

"Because it was necessary to tell Bishop all that we know so he will be better prepared to make the proper choices later," Miss Mann explained. "If one is to lead, one must be well informed."

Their attention was suddenly drawn to the door as Aquarian came bursting into the room.

"I have made a careful examination of every room and I was unable to find the intruder," Aquarian said quickly. "He must have left the kingdom."

"But how did he get past the forcefield?" Gary asked. "First to get in, and then to get out?"

"We can't worry about that right now! I have increased the guards inside the castle and everyone is on watch." Miss Mann was assertive. "We need to get to the control room right away."

"You all go ahead. I have something very important that I need to speak to Justin about," Bishop said.

"Please be quick," Miss Mann said as the others left the room. Once she followed, Bishop and Justin were alone.

"What's up?" Justin asked.

"I wanted to tell you about some trouble we had before we entered the portal," Bishop said.



"Oh, no. Was it my father again? All my life he's been a pain in my butt. Sometimes I wish he were dead."

"He is," Bishop said softly.

"What? Come on, Chance. That's nothing to joke about."

"I'm not joking. Just as BJ and I were getting ready to enter the portal, Gambit used his power and changed into a large creature, like Bigfoot. He was trying to kill us. Then your father and his duplicate got into a fight. Then I lost track of which one was your father and which one was the duplicate. One of them heard Gambit say that he was going to kill you. He went ballistic and attacked Gambit. He was able to subdue him, but not before..."

Bishop stopped when he saw Justin crying.

"I'm sorry that I had to tell you this. I'm not even sure it was your father. It might have been his duplicate. But either way, he did it because he was trying to save your life."

Justin wiped his tears on his sleeve. "I can't believe he would do something like that. I didn't think he cared about me. He never had time for me. He was always too busy with everything else. Then the last time I spoke to him I said something cold and stupid. I wish I could have said something different."

"We all wish we could have done some things differently. We just have to learn from our mistakes."

Across the room, Gary stuck his head in the doorway. "Miss Mann says we're running out of time! Are you guys ready?"

Bishop turned to Justin. "Are you going to be okay?"

"Yeah. It's something that I'm going to have to deal with. I can't let it stop me. We've got things to do. Let's go!"

Bishop was stunned. The control room that Miss Mann had described as their center of operation was totally empty except for a few dusty chairs.

"This is a control room?" he asked. "Where is everything?"

"Everything we need is here, but only you can access it Bishop," Miss Mann replied. "Please sit down."

Bishop sat in a chair in the center of the room. Miss Mann handed him a pair of black gloves and a futuristic visor. "First you need to put these on," she said. As Bishop lowered the visor over his eyes, he saw his friends in the room, but the room was suddenly filled with machinery and computers.

"Wow, this is awesome!" Bishop exclaimed. "Look at all this stuff! Where did it come from?"

Gary looked around the empty room. "What stuff, Bish?" he asked.

"Bishop is seeing a virtual reality version of this room," Miss Mann explained. "Within that virtual reality he has access to everything necessary to defend us and to win this war."

Bishop was almost gleeful. "You mean I can use all this stuff?"

"Yes, as soon as you put on the gloves, you will have the ability to use everything you see."

"So that's why you were so anxious to get Chance back here," Justin said.



"I'm sorry I couldn't confide in you, Justin. I could not run the risk that Onyx's men might capture you, or anyone, and extract this information."

"You mean torture us for it, right?" Reprint asked.

"Onyx is not above such sick tactics," Miss Mann replied. "You all know that."

Bishop placed the gloves on his hands and started moving them in the air as if operating the machines he saw in front of him. Suddenly it started to rain in the room.

"Stop that!" yelled a soggy Justin.



"Great Gugiley Mugiley!" BJ exclaimed. He placed his hands above Miss Mann attempting to keep her dry.

"I'm getting soaked," Gary complained.

"Bishop, you've activated the weather controls!" Miss Mann said.

"Oops, sorry! Nothing's labeled in here. Maybe this will stop it."

Bishop motioned with his hands again and the rain was replaced with a raging snowstorm.

"Bishop, this is worse!" Mandy cried.

"I'm freezing!" Justin chattered.

"I'm not," Aquarian said.

"Okay, okay, hold on, give me a chance!" Bishop moved his hands again and the snowstorm stopped.

Gary looked around. "What's next? Lightning? Hail? A tornado?"

"I wonder what this red button does?" Bishop said.

Mandy freaked. "No, not the red button! Red buttons never do anything good!"

"Okay, okay," Bishop smiled. "Hey, look at this!"

"Look at what? None of us can see anything," Justin said.

"A huge view screen just appeared. I can see our castle and the surrounding area." Bishop made a few adjustments and the image began to shift direction. "I think I've got the hang of moving the picture." The images on the screen kept changing until a small encampment appeared in the distance. "I see something. I think it might be Onyx's base camp. I'm going to zoom in." The image moved in closer to the camp. An imposing man all dressed in black was shouting out orders to a few nearby men. "I see Onyx yelling at his men. He doesn't look too happy."

"So Onyx is alive," Gary said. "I guess you were right all along Bish."

Bishop looked at his uncle as he continued berating his men. He began to think of all the hardships that Onyx had put him and his friends through the last time they met. He had barely escaped with his life in their last confrontation and he was afraid of how things would end up this time. He was tempted to ask BJ about what was going to happen but he knew that he wouldn't get a straight answer.

"Yeah," Bishop said to Gary. "I was right, but I wish I hadn't been."

Suddenly Miss Mann clapped her hands. "Praise the One! You've accessed Alabaster's offense systems!"

Bishop could see everything that Onyx was doing on the viewscreen. He pushed another control and could suddenly hear what his enemies

were saying. "I've got audio now," Bishop remarked.

Onyx was standing in an open field yelling at Talisman and several Emissaries.

"I am surrounded by fools!" Onyx shouted at Talisman. "I cannot believe that you have not been able to penetrate their force field yet. Can't I leave you to handle one simple task without me?"

Onyx turned away, distracted by a large explosion in the distance. Suddenly a miniature rain cloud appeared over Talisman and the Emissaries and drenched them. The cloud disappeared just as Onyx



whirled around again. He stared at them in disbelief.

"What is this? Some type of joke? I will not tolerate this!!"

The men tried to explain, but Onyx didn't give them the opportunity.

"Enough! Begone!" Onyx said. The men turned and ran off, leaving him alone. "I cannot believe that I allow myself to be served by such incompetents," he hissed.

As Onyx stormed off, a miniature rain cloud appeared in the area that he had just left. He turned and saw it. The cloud began to follow him as he walked across the field.

"Bishop!" Onyx roared in no particular direction. "Even though I can't see you, I know that you are somehow behind this! My spies have told me that you have returned. Don't toy with me, boy! Your father was unable to defeat me, so what makes you think that you can? I am much more experienced in this sort of thing than you are! You've already disrupted one of my plans, I will not have you interfere in another!"

A lightning bolt hit the ground several feet away. Onyx didn't flinch. He pulled a small communication device from his cloak.

"Talisman! Bring the prisoner here!" he shouted into the device. He then screamed towards the sky once again. "Bishop, I know you can hear me! I am tired of playing these games of yours! You will either surrender within the hour or I shall have to make an example of an old friend of yours."

Talisman arrived, dragging Castleton behind him. Castleton had been beaten and was tied up in chains.

"The prisoner, as you requested, oh great Onyx."

"As you can see, Bishop, I have Castleton as my prisoner. He refuses to give me any information. Since he is of no use to me, I will have him killed, unless you surrender to me within the hour. It is your choice! Your kingdom, or your friend."

Back at the castle control room, Bishop cried out. "No! He's got Castleton! He's threatened to kill him unless I surrender everything to him within the hour!"

"That fiend," Miss Mann fumed. "I promise that I will not rest until Castleton has been safely returned to us!"

The rest of the group dashed from Bishop's side to the windows to try and spot Castleton, but Onyx's camp was too far away to see. At that moment, Gambit and Print entered the room through a door in a dark corner and snuck up behind Bishop. Gambit pressed his hand over



Bishop's mouth, pulling him backwards. Bishop instinctively grabbed for something to hold on to, forgetting that everything he was seeing was in virtual reality and not really there. He grabbed on to a lever in the virtual reality world, pulling it down as he fell to the floor with a crash.

Bishop's friends gasped as the light blue bubble that was the force field surrounding the castle started to pulsate. As the pulse began to build in intensity, small flashes and sparks could be seen shooting out from the field.

"What's happening?" Mandy gasped.

"There's too much power going to the forcefield," Miss Mann observed. "The system is beginning to overload. I don't know how much longer it can last."

Bishop struggled unsuccessfully as Gambit pinned him to the floor. Hearing the scuffle behind them they turned around to see Print grab the gloves and glasses off Bishop as Gambit held him down.

"It's Gambit and my brother!" Reprint cried.

"Very good, bro!" Print laughed. "We're back!"

"How did you get out of that cell?" Reprint asked.

Gambit laughed as he jumped up off of Bishop. "I know a few secrets about this place. In fact, here's one now." Gambit pushed a rock on the wall and a section of it slid to one side. He and Print then exited through the opening.

"So long, losers!" Print called on his way out. Reprint and Justin dashed toward the opening, but the wall closed by the time they reached it. BJ and Miss Mann rushed to aid the fallen Bishop.

"Bishop! Are you okay?" Miss Mann asked.

"Yeah," Bishop replied. "I'm not hurt."

BJ and Christie Rae Mann looked at each other and realized that they were almost face-to-face. It appeared that they were about to kiss when Bishop interrupted.

"Hello, we're in the middle of a war," Gary said. BJ and Miss Mann quickly pulled apart as if surprised by their actions.

BJ smiled. "Sorry."

Mandy was agitated. "In case you've all forgotten, Gambit and Print are getting away."

"Yes, of course," Miss Mann said. "We must retrieve the gloves and goggles as soon as possible."

"How?" Gary cried. "The door's closed!"

Aquarian ran toward the wall. "Let me try breaking through it."

“Wait! Aquarian! Stop!” Miss Mann ordered, in a vain attempt to stop the android.

Aquarian smashed into the wall in an attempt to break it down, but there was no effect on it at all. Aquarian on the other hand was dazed. “I wish I had my original strength back,” he grumbled. “I could have broken through this wall with no problem.”

Miss Mann walked to the wall and pressed the same rock as Gambit did earlier. “Gambit is not the only one who knows secrets!” she declared. Nothing happened.

“Blast!” Miss Mann fumed. “He must have locked the door from the other side. There’s a way to override the lock. If only I could remember how. Wait a minute! We don’t need the override. We’ll use Bishop!”

“Me?” Bishop asked.

“Yes. It’s an electronic lock,” Miss Mann explained. “You can override the system with your power.”

Bishop put his hand on the wall and mumbled a few words. Once again, the wall slid to one side.

“Quickly now, before they get too far ahead of us,” Miss Mann said as she dashed into the passageway. The others hurriedly followed only to discover that a few feet into the tunnel, it split into four separate corridors.

“Which one did they take?” Mandy asked.

“If we split up into four groups we could check out each corridor,” Gary suggested.

“Mandy and I will take the first corridor,” Bishop said. “Gary and Justin can take the second. Aquarian and Reprint can take the third. BJ and Miss Mann can take the fourth.”

BJ saluted Bishop. “Aye, Aye, Sir!”

“How come Chance gets Mandy and I get stuck with Tubby?” Justin whined.

“Keep your complaints to yourself,” Miss Mann said. “Hurry, everyone!”

Bishop and Mandy ran into the first corridor. Justin pushed Gary out of the way and entered the second corridor ahead of him. Aquarian and Reprint disappeared into the third corridor, leaving BJ and Miss Mann alone.

BJ stared into Miss Mann’s eyes. “Before we go, I just wanted to apologize for what happened earlier. I’m only supposed to observe. I’ve gone beyond that. Way, way beyond.”

Miss Mann pulled him closer. “If it hadn’t been for you, I wouldn’t be here now,” she said. “We don’t have time for this now. We must go after Gambit and Print.”

Miss Mann kissed BJ firmly on the mouth. BJ was startled at first, but he quickly surrendered to the moment.

“Now come on, silly,” Miss Mann said as she entered the fourth corridor.

BJ smiled. “And I always thought history was boring,” he chuckled as he watched Miss Mann run into the tunnel.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WHO ORDERED
JUST DESSERTS?

Bishop and Mandy were walking through the long, winding first corridor when Bishop stepped on a loose stone in the floor. A panel in the wall ahead of them opened, revealing an android that resembled Aquarian. The android immediately walked toward them.

"Aquarian?" Bishop said. "What are you doing here? You're supposed to be with Reprint."

The Aquarian duplicate came closer. "Intruder alert! Intruder alert!" he began to yell.

"I don't think that's Aquarian," Mandy said.

The Aquarian duplicate grabbed Bishop by the wrist and pulled him back down the corridor. "No one is allowed here but authorized personnel. You will be taken to a detention area."

"Ouch! He's got a strong grip," Bishop said. "He's definitely not our Aquarian." The duplicate Aquarian tightened his hold on Bishop. The pain was excruciating. "Stop!" Bishop yelled.

As commanded the duplicate stopped and went limp. Bishop pulled his hand free from its grasp.

"Come on," Bishop said to Mandy. He was rubbing his wrist as he continued down the corridor. "That was almost too easy. He had one heck of a grip. I hope we don't run into anymore like him."

At that, Bishop stepped on another loose stone on the floor. This time a series of openings appeared in the wall ahead of them and a dozen more Aquarian duplicates appeared.

"Intruder alert! Intruder alert!" the twelve Aquarian duplicates sounded in unison.

Bishop and Mandy started to back away from the duplicates.

"What are we going to do?" Mandy asked.

"I don't know. I have to be closer to them to control them, but there are too many to be near at one time." Bishop backed into the first Aquarian duplicate. He studied the deactivated android. "Hey, wait a minute. I've got an idea. Reactivate!" Bishop commanded the android.

"Do you think that's a good idea?" Mandy asked.

"Don't worry. I've got it under control. I hope."



"Intruder alert!" the reactivated Aquarian Duplicate No. 1 blared.

"I want you to turn around and stop all those androids coming towards us," Bishop commanded.

Aquarian Duplicate No. 1 walked toward the advancing group. He effortlessly picked up the first one and swung it at the other duplicates as they tried to pass him. As each one was struck it flew against a wall and broke into several pieces. When he was finished he took the duplicate in his hands and broke it over his knee.

Mandy looked at the broken android parts that now littered the floor in front of them. "Bishop," she gasped. "That android is so much stronger than the other two Aquarians we found back on Earth."

"I know. Maybe Castleton modified my father's original model."

The Aquarian duplicate walked through the broken debris towards Bishop and Mandy.

"Very good. Now, deactivate," Bishop ordered.

The duplicate stopped in the middle of the corridor and went limp.

"Why did you deactivate him," Mandy asked. "He could have helped us against Print and Gambit."

Bishop shook his head. "I don't want our Aquarian to see him. He's already upset that his strength is gone. This would be too painful of a reminder of what he's lost."

Bishop gazed in amazement at the deactivated android as he and Mandy walked past it. He still could not get used to the idea that even though these people lived in simpler looking buildings, they were much more technologically advanced than Earth people. He felt that there must be more to what was going on and he knew that he must someday find out what it was.

Further down the corridor Bishop and Mandy came to a blank wall. Looking around Mandy located a lever near the floor. As she pulled it a section of the wall opened up at the end of the corridor.

"Let's see what's on the other side," Bishop said. He ran through the doorway. Mandy followed. Seconds later they both froze. They were standing outside the castle, facing Onyx's troops. Talisman was standing directly in front of them.

"Crap!" Bishop said.

Meanwhile, Justin and Gary were walking along the second corridor.

"Justin, I just wanted to let you know that I'm sorry about what

happened to your dad," Gary said, somewhat out of breath from walking so briskly.

Justin walked a little faster.

"You just can't walk away from this," Gary continued. "You've got to talk about it."

"Now's not a good time," Justin replied. "Or haven't you noticed that there is a war going on?"

Gary was persistent. "War or no war, it's still something that you need to talk about. He was your father. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"



Justin stopped.

"Finally. Now we can discuss this," Gary said.

"That's not the reason that I've stopped, you jerk. Look!" Justin pointed to the floor just ahead of them. A large section was missing, making it impossible to continue on.

"Oh, great!" Gary groaned. "There's no way we can get across that! We're going to have to go back."

Justin turned around. "We can't! There's a section of the floor missing back there, too."

Gary turned around and saw the missing floor section he realized that whatever had caused the floor to disappear ahead of them had also caused it to disappear behind them once they had gotten to this part of the tunnel.

"Great," Gary grumbled. "Now we can't go backward or forward. We're stuck here!"

"No," Justin exclaimed. "Look! There's a lever on the other side. Maybe it closes the holes. I think I can jump across and pull it."

"What? Are you crazy? That's too far for you to jump. It would be suicide. Come on Justin. I know you're upset about your dad but..."

"Look, I'm not upset about my father!" Justin cried.

"You're just saying that."

"No, it's true. I know I should be upset about it, but that's the problem. I don't feel anything about it. Nothing! It's just that my whole life was spent without him. He's always been somewhere else. He never had any time for me. So after all this time I figured that if he doesn't need me then I don't need him."

Gary frowned as he listened to Justin speak. He had always felt that Justin was a jerk because he was so wealthy and that he acted superior to everyone else because of it. Now he was beginning to understand that the way Justin behaved back at school was just his way of hiding his loneliness. All of his riches couldn't buy him the one thing he wanted most: A family that cared about him.

"I guess deep down, maybe I wanted him to need me," Justin continued. "But I was talking to Mandy earlier, and she told me that my father didn't even notice that I've been gone for the past few months. What does that say about him?" A tear began to roll down Justin's cheek. "And what does that say about me? Now my father is gone and I will never have the chance to get him to care about me. So now what do I do? Who do I have?"

Gary pulled an ice pop out of his pocket and offered it to Justin. "You've always got us, dude. You may be a jerk, but we're still your friends."

Justin looked down at the small token of friendship that Gary offered him and smiled. "Yeah, I know. And I guess I like all of you guys, too."

"Even me?"

"Yeah, even you. But don't tell anyone I said so, or I'll kick your butt."

Justin looked once again at the openings in the walkway. "Okay, now about that jump."

"I still can't let you jump across that," Gary said.

"Are you afraid that I can't make it?"

"I'm not afraid of anything."

"Since when? You're afraid of water. You were terrified when we were on that boat down in Florida a few months ago."

Gary gazed downward. "That's different," he said. "I wasn't always afraid of the water. I use to enjoy it. When I was younger I would snorkel underwater all the time."

"What happened?"

"A few years ago I went alone to the beach. It was late in the day and everybody else had already left for the day. I looked out onto the water and I saw something floating a short distance away. So I put on my snorkel gear, which was only a mask and a breathing tube, and I tried swimming out to it. I was a better swimmer when I could keep my head under water instead of above the water. But I found that no matter how far I swam towards it, I couldn't catch up to it. Eventually I popped my head above water and looked around and saw that I was far from shore. I dove back underwater and swam toward the beach. But after a few minutes I popped my head above water again and saw that I was swimming even further away from the shore."

Justin was engrossed by the story. "How did that happen?"

Gary shook his head. "I wasn't that great of a swimmer. I think that tide was going out and it was driving me away from the shore. I began to panic and I tried swimming as hard as I could. All that kept going through my mind was that I was going to drown and nobody knew where I was. I was kicking my feet so hard that water started to go down my breathing tube and that just made me panic even more. I started to get very tired and I had no idea how far from shore I was. Finally I couldn't swim anymore and my feet started to drop. When they did I could feel

sand beneath my feet. I was only a few yards from shore. I ran out of the water. I sat down on the sand and cried. I thought about how close to dying I had just come. That was the last time I went to the beach and the last time I've gone into deep water. I've never told this story to anyone before."

"You've never told Chance?" Justin was amazed.

"No," Gary replied. "Not him or anyone in my family."

"So why did you tell me?"

"I'm not sure," Gary said. "Maybe it's because of all the stuff you just told me. But please don't tell anyone what I told you."

"Okay, you keep my secret and I'll keep yours," Justin said. "And when we get back to Earth I can give you some swimming lessons. I was on the swim team remember? I know a thing or two about swimming. That might help you get over your fear."

Gary smiled. "Thanks. I might do that. But first we have to figure out how to get across this thing."

"You're forgetting something." Justin began morphing to wolf form. He stopped in mid-transformation. "I'm learning how to control my transformation." Wolfboy Justin took several steps back. He looked up at Gary and then ran toward the hole and jumped. He just missed the floor and started to fall into the hole.

"Justin!" Gary cried.

Wolfboy-Justin grabbed the ledge with one paw, and then started to climb out of the hole. After pulling himself onto the floor he sat for a few seconds trying to catch his breath.

"Are you okay?" Gary asked.

Wolfboy-Justin slowly nodded his head as he began to change back to human form. He pulled the lever. The holes behind him closed.

Gary walked to Justin. "You had me scared for a few seconds," he said. "Come on, let's see where this thing ends up."

The corridor Aquarian and Reprint found themselves in was different from the other two. It was curved throughout, in the form of an endlessly winding passageway. Reprint was having a difficult time keeping up with the swiftly paced android.

"Could you slow down a little?" Reprint asked. "You're walking too fast. You're going to wear down your batteries."

Aquarian continued at his brisk pace. "I do not run on batteries. I am powered by neutrium crystals."

"Neutrium crystals? I've never heard of them."

Aquarian walked even faster. "They are found only on the Homeworld."

"Can you please slow down?" Reprint puffed. "I feel like we're walking around in circles."

"Don't worry," Aquarian responded. "I know exactly where we are."

"Great! Where?"

"In a corridor in the middle of the castle."

"I knew that!" Reprint fumed.

"Good, then you are not lost, either."

"Oh, brother!"

Aquarian suddenly stopped and looked around. "Where?" he asked.

Unable to stop in time, Reprint collided into Aquarian and bounced off. "Where, what?"

"Where is your brother? I do not see him."

"I didn't say that I saw him. 'Brother' is just an expression."

"An expression?" Aquarian was puzzled. He started to walk down the corridor again. "What is an expression?"

"An expression is, well, it's..." Reprint was exasperated. "Oh, never mind. Forget it."

"As you wish. Deleting file."

"Oh, brother!" Reprint exclaimed again.

Aquarian stopped once again and looked around. "Where?" he asked.

Reprint slapped his good hand to his forehead. "Not again!"

Elsewhere, Miss Mann was racing along in the fourth corridor closely followed by BJ.

"So where does this corridor take us to?" BJ asked.

"I don't remember. It has been a long time since I've been in any of these tunnels. In fact many years ago when I was a young girl, I use to play with the royal children in these very tunnels." Miss Mann paused for a minute as she began to remember those events. A look of sadness crossed her face. "Things were a lot different back then. He was different back then." She stood silent for a few seconds, lost in moments of another time.

"Who was different?" BJ asked.

"Nevermind," Miss Mann was firm.

"We need to pick up the pace. We have to find where Print and Gambit have gone."

"If we should happen to find ourselves in some sort of private romantic spot, then it would sure be a shame to waste it," BJ smiled.

"BJ! Will you please keep your mind on our mission? I can assure you that wherever we come out, our location will not inspire romance!"

As Miss Mann rounded a corner, the corridor came to an abrupt end. Hanging on the wall in front of them was a large ornate tapestry. Miss Mann and BJ pushed it aside and walked into a beautifully decorated bedroom.

BJ smiled at a shocked Miss Mann. "You were saying?"

"Great Gugiley Mugiley!" Miss Mann exclaimed.

BJ smiled.

Outside the castle, Talisman glared at Bishop. He pointed a finger at the boy. "You!" he exclaimed. "The boy king! At last I will have my revenge!"

Bishop was stunned. "Me?" he asked. "What did I do? Revenge for what?"

"Revenge for my sister!" Talisman hissed, his eyes burning with hatred.

"Your sister? I didn't do anything to your sister. I don't even know her."

"Liar!" Talisman bellowed. "Onyx told me that you would deny it. He said that you were a cowardly liar who was unfit to rule. That you can't do anything right."

Bishop began to get a little nervous. "I can rule," he sputtered. "I just don't want to right now. I've got other things I have to do first."

"The first thing a ruler needs to do is rule," Talisman replied. "To command and control his people with a firm hand. That is why Onyx is a true king and not a murderous coward like you."

Bishop was too shocked to reply.

Mandy stared at Talisman defiantly. "You're wrong! Bishop hasn't killed anyone."

Talisman was enraged. "He murdered my sister, Random!"

"Random was your sister?" Bishop gasped. "But I didn't murder her. She died when Onyx's castle exploded. I barely escaped with my life."

"And were you not responsible for the destruction of the castle?"

Talisman asked.

"Yeah, kind of," Bishop answered hesitantly. "But I didn't mean for her to die when it collapsed."

"You are responsible for her death," Talisman said as he slowly began to advance towards Bishop and Mandy. They began backing up towards the opening in the wall behind them. Mandy turned and raced to pull the lever that would close the entrance. Seconds before it slammed shut Talisman dashed through the opening. He flashed an evil smile at Bishop.

"Not fast enough, boy."



Bishop grabbed Mandy's hand and pulled her down the corridor with Talisman in hot pursuit. From time to time Bishop would look behind them and see Talisman's evil grin. He was gaining on them.

"Give it up, boy," Talisman said. "You are just delaying the inevitable."

Suddenly Bishop tripped over something and tumbled to the floor. Looking around he saw the broken android pieces scattered on the floor around him. He then saw a triumphant Talisman glaring down at him.

"I told you that I would have my revenge!" Talisman reached down and grabbed Bishop's throat, laughing as he tightened his grip. Bishop gasped for air.

Just as he was about to lose consciousness Bishop saw something fly over his head and strike Talisman's forehead. Stunned by the blow, Talisman released his grip on Bishop. As he crashed to the floor Bishop saw an Aquarian head at Talisman's feet.

Mandy was standing a few feet behind him with another Aquarian head in her hands.

"Hurry up," she cried out to Bishop. "We've got to get out of here."

Bishop got to his feet as Mandy threw another head at Talisman. He



had just enough time to duck out of its path.

Bishop and Mandy again started down the corridor when they came upon the deactivated duplicate Aquarian. Bishop stopped next to it and turned to look behind them. He could see Talisman heading in their direction.

"Come on, Bishop," Mandy pleaded. "He'll catch us if we don't keep running."

Bishop shook his head. "I'm tired of running. I've got an idea." He looked at the android. "Reactivate," he commanded.

The android sprang to life and grabbed Bishop by the wrist. "Intruder alert!"

With his free hand Bishop pointed down the corridor at Talisman. "No! There's the intruder! Stop him!"

The android immediately released Bishop and walked down the corridor towards the swiftly approaching Talisman.

"Intruder alert!" the android said as he took a firm hold of Talisman's arm.

Talisman stopped suddenly as he tried to break free of the android's grasp.

"Let go, you stupid android," Talisman commanded, as his attempts to break free were unsuccessful. "I will not be stopped. I am too close to victory." He tried in vain to grab Bishop with his free hand but Bishop remained out of reach.

Bishop laughed as the android grabbed Talisman's other arm and pinned both arms behind his back.

"Victory? Yeah, right," Bishop replied. "Let's get him out of here. We can ask him questions later. First we still have to find Gambit and Print."

Meanwhile, Gambit and Print had doubled back to the Master Control room. Print stood in the middle of the room wearing the VR visor and gloves.

A noticeably agitated Gambit paced the floor. "Will you hurry up!" Gambit demanded.

"Don't worry, I know what I'm doing."

"You have no idea what you're doing. Give those things to me! I know what to do!"

"You said that before when you told me that you knew how to get us out of here," Print complained.

"I do know how to get us out," Gambit replied. "I brought us back

here so we could use this device to sabotage their offensive systems."

"And we will when I get done."

"Well, then, shut up and do something!"

"Don't tell me to shut up," Print steamed. "You're not Onyx."

"No, I'm not Onyx," Gambit began, "But I am..."

Suddenly, a doorway opened on the far side of the room, revealing Gary and Justin. Gary was holding a fresh ice pop in his hand. He pointed in the direction of Gambit and Print.

"There they are!" he exclaimed.

"How did you get here?" Print asked.



"Through the corridor, duh," Justin said.

"But how'd you get past the trap we set up?" Print continued.

"You mean the holes in the floor?" Gary asked. "My friend here was able to bypass that for us. When we reached the end of the corridor it led us back here."

"Well it's the two of you against the two of us." Moving at blinding speed, Print leapt at Justin and punched him in the jaw, knocking him to the floor. Then pinned him down. Justin struggled to get up but he was still too exhausted after his recent transformation.

Meanwhile, Gambit hit Gary hard in the stomach. Gary dropped his ice pop and fell to his knees. Gambit moved back and picked up a chair. He raised it over his head, ready to slam it down on Gary.

"Give it up, fat boy!" Gambit laughed. "There's no way you can defeat me!"

Gary looked down and saw his fallen ice pop melting on the floor. He reached into both pockets and pulled out two more. Just as Gambit was about to slam the chair down on Gary a bright flash outside the window momentarily distracted him. The blue forcefield surrounding the Kingdom of New Hopes overloaded and blinked out of existence.

Gambit smiled. "It's gone! The forcefield is gone! Now it is just a matter of time before Onyx's men storm this castle!"

Before Gambit realized what was happening, Gary threw the two ice pops at him. Both hit him in the face. Gambit dropped the chair. Gary reached into his pockets for more ice pops, producing dozens of the frozen treats. Print, meanwhile, could only stare in disbelief.

"Where are all those things coming from?" he asked.

Gary ignored him. He was too busy bombarding Gambit with ice



pop after ice pop. Shielding himself with his hands as he backed away, Gambit stepped on a melting ice pop, slipped, and fell to the floor.

"I've been waiting a long time to do that," Gary said with a smile.

Gary turned to help Justin but as he walked past the fallen Gambit, Gambit grabbed Gary's leg and pulled him down to the floor next to him.

"Nobody does that to me!" Gambit shouted, punching Gary once again in the stomach.

"Too bad you don't have Bishop here to help you," Print laughed.

"Will we do?" Reprint asked, stepping from the original opening in the wall, with Aquarian by his side.

"Reprint? Where did you come from?" Print demanded.

"After a lot of twists and turns in that stupid corridor we finally found came out into an area filled with many large holding cells. Including the cell that you had escaped from. So we backtracked our way back here."

"A lot of good you will do with your arm in a cast," Gambit laughed. "And that shrimp next to you is also powerless."

"I'll show you powerless!" Aquarian said as he leapt across the room and knocked Gambit off of Gary. As a stunned Gambit lay on the floor, his face resting in a gooey mess of melting ice pops, Gary pinned him down by sitting on him.

With Print momentarily distracted by Aquarian and Gambit, Reprint rushed toward his brother and hit him on the head with his cast. Print fell. Justin rolled over and pressed Print to the floor holding his arms behind his back. Aquarian ripped the VR gloves and visor off Print.

"These don't belong to you!" Aquarian said.

Bishop and Mandy appeared in the opening of the hidden passage. Behind them the duplicate Aquarian still maintained a strong hold on Talisman, who struggled in vain to get loose.

"Right," Bishop declared. "They belong to me!" He took the visor and gloves.

"I see that you found Gambit and Print," Mandy said to Gary.

"Print was trying to access the offensive system," Gary replied.

"Yeah, but those stupid things don't work," Print complained.

Bishop put the gloves and visor on. He smiled. The room was again filled with the offense and weather systems.

"They work for me," Bishop smiled. He activated the view screen and saw Onyx's men at the base of the castle.

"Hurry and reactivate the force field," Mandy said.

"It's too late!" Bishop exclaimed. "A lot of them are already inside the kingdom! If I activate it now, they'll be trapped inside the force field with us."

"Ha! Onyx will be victorious!" Talisman said triumphantly. "Give up, and we may let you and your friends live!"

Bishop pushed a button with unusual markings above it.

"Here's something that looks promising," he said.

On the view screen a series of cannon shaped machines appeared at the top and base of the castle. Onyx's men momentarily stopped their attack. Without a leader they appeared to be disoriented.

The cannons began to fire. Energy balls of various colors shot out at Onyx's men. As the balls reached their targets the men were trapped inside. The harder they fought to get out, the stronger the energy balls became.

Shortly there were just two Emissaries left to capture. Turning around, one of the Emissaries saw an energy ball heading straight for him. Grabbing his fellow Emissary he threw him into the ball, trapping him. Sensing defeat at hand, the last Emissary retreated. Everywhere he moved he just narrowly avoided being trapped by one of the colorful balls.

"Darn! He's good!" Bishop noted as he concentrated harder on his target.

Seeing a patch of trees ahead, the Emissary headed for them and protection from the energy balls. Just before he stepped into safety Bishop took aim and shot another ball at him. The Emissary howled as it enveloped him taking him captive.

"Got him!" Bishop cheered.

"Bishop, what's happening?" Mandy asked. "We can't see!"

"This war is history!" Bishop replied.

"This is impossible! Those things weren't working," Gambit exclaimed.

Miss Mann and BJ appeared in the doorway. Their clothes were rumped and Miss Mann's hair was disheveled.

"That is because they are genetically encoded to only work for someone of the royal line," she said.

"Miss Mann! Where have you been?" Mandy asked.

Miss Mann looked at BJ and smiled.

"We were unavoidably detained," she replied.

"Care to be detained again?" BJ asked.

"Miss Mann, I've captured Talisman and stopped his men," Bishop announced proudly. "And all the Emissaries are trapped inside giant balls of energy."

Talisman struggled in vain to get free. "As soon as I free myself I shall release my men and then you shall pay!"

"I'm not going to lose any sleep worrying about that ever happening," Bishop responded.

"Energy balls? What kind of crappy weapon is that? Where are the guns and lasers?" Print sneered.



"Life is too sacred to be shed, even in battle," Miss Mann explained. "That is why Alabaster designed an offensive system that would not cause anyone's death. I think it is time for us to go out and find Onyx."

"Ugh! Do we have to?" Gary asked.

"Don't worry, bud. I'll protect you!" Justin said with mock valor.

"I didn't see Onyx out on the battlefield," a worried Bishop said. "I don't know where he is."

A hooded figure suddenly appeared in the doorway with a gun in his hand. With his free hand he slowly removed the hood from his head revealing the menacing face of Onyx. He fired a shot into the wall right behind where Bishop was standing. "I'm right here, my boy," he smiled. "I must thank you for removing that pesky forcefield. It has made my job much easier."

"Master!" Talisman exclaimed.

Onyx glared at his protégé. "Silence! I shall deal with you momentarily."

As Bishop saw his uncle in person all his old fears and emotions began to surface. Up until now he had been able to keep control because he had only seen his uncle from a distance. Now that he saw him up close he began to worry if he could defeat him again.

"Onyx!" Miss Mann exclaimed. "The forcefield hasn't been down that long. How did you get in here?"

"My dear Christie Rae," Onyx chuckled. "Clueless as always. You were always so easy to deceive."

"You beast!" Miss Mann fumed.

"You didn't always think that way," Onyx said with a smirk. "But your forcefield has not been a great deterrent to me. In fact, I've gotten in and out of this place, past your puny little forcefield on numerous occasions. None of which would have been possible without the assistance of a young ally within your own organization."

"Yeah, right," Gary exclaimed. "Like who would ever help you?"

"I have had many allies assisting me, puffy one," Onyx countered. He turned his gaze toward Justin. "Several in this very room in fact."

"I haven't been helping you," Justin yelled back defiantly. "At least not this time."

"No," Onyx agreed. "This time I've had the assistance of a more willing ally." Onyx shifted his gaze to Diggory, who was standing alone near an open window. "Didn't I, boy?"

All eyes turned to Diggory.

Bishop was astonished. "Diggory? You? Why?"

Diggory tentatively stepped forward. "It began the first time you visited here," Diggory began. "News had arrived at my parents' house that you had appeared and that my services were needed. On my way here I passed the remains of Onyx's castle. I could hear someone moaning underneath the rubble. I found Onyx severely injured and near death. I ran home and with the help of my father, we were able to bring him back to our house. Then I came to the castle and met you for the first time."

Bishop was angry. "You didn't say anything to me about Onyx."

Diggory shook his head. "No, you had too many other things on your mind. I didn't think you needed that, too. Eventually, my mother and sister helped nurse Onyx back to health."

"That was a bad idea," Gary remarked.

Bishop pointed to Onyx. "But he's evil," Bishop said. "Why did you betray me and help him?"

Diggory was silent for a moment before he replied. "I didn't betray you. My family has always served the royal family. And you both are members of the royal family."

"But look at all the terrible things he's done," Bishop exclaimed. "You can't serve him."

Diggory shook his head. "You don't understand. It is not our place to judge who we serve. Whether you consider Onyx evil or good, he is still a member of the royal family. I must offer him my assistance as I would offer it to you. Not all rulers have been benevolent like your father and grandfather. Many have been cruel and unjust. But that does not mean that we must stop serving them. I do what I have to because it is what my family has always done. I cannot take judge or take sides."

"I am disappointed in you," Bishop said sadly. "I will have to decide what to do with you later. Right now, Onyx is the bigger problem."

Mandy stared hard at Onyx. "Bishop will beat you. He's beaten you before."

"Your army has been defeated," Miss Mann added. "Why don't you just admit it and surrender?"

"Never! I was born to lead!" Onyx declared. He then pointed at Gambit. "And I would have won if you had gotten Bishop under control, as I ordered. You are not fit to be called my son!"

"Gambit is your son?" Mandy gasped.

"Figures," Gary said. "I thought I recognized Onyx's smell!"

Bishop turned to Gambit. "So you're not my brother?"

"No!" Onyx answered for his son. "He is my offspring! My worthless offspring! Talisman raised and instructed him in my absence. He pretended to be your brother so he could get close to you and use the yipple to control you. And it should have worked. He must have botched it somehow."

"It's not my fault, father!" Gambit cried. Gary was still sitting on him. "I did have him under control!" He pointed at BJ. "It's all his fault! He interfered and screwed everything up."

"Do not blame others for your failures," Talisman admonished. "Did you not learn anything that I taught you?"

Onyx looked at his son and scowled. "You are a pitiful excuse for a son. Look at you stuck under that rotund pest. I am ashamed!"

"Watch who you're calling a pest," Gary warned.

Gambit was on the verge of tears. He twisted and shoved Gary off of him. "Get off me, Jumbo!" he screamed.

Onyx turned to BJ. "And who are you? The one player in this game I don't recognize."

"Me?" BJ said innocently. "Oh, just a distant relative. Very distant, actually. Very, very, very distant. Way out there."

"I have no use for relatives. They have all been a disappointment to me," Onyx hissed. He looked at Gambit and Bishop.

"It's not my fault!" Gambit cried again.

Justin turned to Gary. "And I thought my father was a jerk," he whispered.

"The problem still remains," Onyx growled. "What am I to do with all of you?"

"Your army has been defeated," Bishop stated. "Why don't you just give up, uncle?"

Onyx waved his gun in Bishop's direction. "I am still in control here. And the first one of you who moves, dies." Onyx looked at Aquarian. "Don't get any ideas, android. I'll shoot Bishop if you move in my direction."

"You wouldn't dare," Gary said. "You need Bish for your plans."

"I have other plans, large one. If Bishop will not work for me, he is as useless to me as my worthless son."

"I am not worthless!" Gambit sobbed. He was totally losing control. "Father! Give me another chance! I'll prove to you that I am not worthless!"

"I do not give failures a second chance," Onyx hissed. He then aimed

his gun at Gambit and fired. Gambit fell to the floor near Gary.

Still in the android's grasp, Talisman looked in shock at Gambit as he lay bleeding on the floor. "Gambit?"

Mandy gasped. "You shot your own son!" she cried.

Onyx was cold. "I always eliminate things that are of no further use to me."

Gambit pulled his bloodied hand away from his chest and stared at it. "All I want is a second chance. Just a second chance," Gambit rambled over and over.

"That was not necessary, master," Talisman argued. "He just requires more training."

"His training is over," Onyx curtly replied.

"I have failed you, master," Talisman sadly said. "And I have failed to avenge my sister."

Bishop looked down at Gambit, and then slowly moved his gaze to Onyx. "You murderer!" he screamed.

"I've been called much worse, by much better than you, nephew. Now it is your turn." Onyx pointed the gun in Bishop's direction. As he pulled the trigger Diggory pushed Bishop out of the way. Everyone stared in amazement as the bullet hit Diggory and he fell wounded to the floor.

Bishop looked at his uncle with fury in his eyes.

"You're going to pay," he said. "Maybe you'll find this more to your liking."

Bishop, who was still wearing the glasses and gloves, then pushed a button on the virtual reality control panel. Suddenly, huge hailstones hurtled toward Onyx, knocking the gun from his hands. Bishop then somersaulted at Onyx, kicking him towards the open doorway. BJ, the closest to the door, closed it before Onyx got through. Onyx crashed into the door and fell to the floor stunned.

Bishop stared at Onyx. "In my dreams you always defeated me because I was afraid of you," he said looking at Onyx. "But now I find that I have no reason to be afraid of you because I have my friends. And together we can defeat you. Just like my father always did."

Miss Mann grabbed the fallen gun and pointed it at the motionless Onyx. "No clever retort for your nephew?" she asked.

Onyx stared at Miss Mann with silent loathing.

Mandy dropped down and tried to help the wounded Gambit. As she touched him, the wound stopped bleeding and closed.

"I forgot about your ability to heal people," Justin said. "It's cool."

Mandy then scrambled over to Diggory, who was now unconscious. She put her hands on his bloody chest and concentrated. As she concentrated harder her breathing became erratic and she looked like she experiencing severe pain. After a more few seconds she screamed and stopped. She then collapsed to the floor.

Justin ran to her side. "Mandy!" He shook her several times and she was non-responsive. He gingerly held her limp body in his arms. "You can't die on me like this. You're the only person who has ever cared about me. You're the only one that I can talk to openly. You are too important in my life to die." Justin began to cry. "I love you Mandy."

"What?" Bishop exclaimed. "Mandy! Justin!"

Bishop started to move toward his fallen girlfriend but BJ held him back. "Don't go yet. He needs this moment with her."

"But I have to find out if she's okay," Bishop protested. "And did you hear what he said to her?"

BJ nodded. "Yes, I heard. And it won't be the last time he says it. But it's the first time he's ever been able to say it to anyone. He needs to express it now, so please let him. You will have plenty of opportunities to tell her the same thing later."

Justin sighed a sigh of relief as Mandy slowly opened her eyes. "Mandy! You're okay!" he said.

"Of course I am. That took a lot out of me. But I think he'll be okay," she said with a smile.

Gambit slowly got to his feet. He studied the fallen Onyx on the floor. He rushed over to him and checked that he was still breathing.

"Father! Father! You've got to be alive!" he sobbed. "You've got to give me another chance to prove myself! I'll get Bishop the next time! I'll show you! I'll make you proud of me!"

"After all that Onyx has done to him, he's still looking for acceptance?" a stunned Justin asked.

"Yeah, and no thank you to us for saving his life, either," Gary sneered. "That's gratitude!"

"What are we going to do with Onyx and Talisman and the rest of their men?" Reprint asked. "We can't let them escape again."

"We will have to think of a way to keep them safely locked away here," Miss Mann said.

Gary pointed at Gambit. "And don't forget Onyx junior over there."

Miss Mann looked at Gambit. He was still pleading with an

unconscious Onyx. "Gambit will require special attention," she said.

"I think we should lock him up in a padded cell and throw away the key," Gary suggested.

"Funny, I once thought that about you," Justin said. He laughed and put his arm on Gary's shoulders. "Don't worry. I don't think that anymore. Much."

Bishop looked at Gambit. "So I've lost a brother and gained a cousin," he said. Gambit turned to Bishop and stared at him with malice.


 CHAPTER FOURTEEN

COME WITH ME, LEAVE YESTERDAY BEHIND

The following day Bishop and his friends were waiting in the field for the portal that was due to open. An elderly man sat in a vehicle that floated nearby. A series of different colored pulsating lights circled its undercarriage as it hovered.

Bishop looked at the elderly man in the car and turned to Miss Mann. "Is it safe for Castleton to be out of bed so soon?"

Miss Mann stepped over to the car and took the man's hand. "Yes, Castleton is on his way to a full recovery. Our doctors are extremely skilled and can speed up the body's healing abilities."

Castleton smiled at Miss Mann and turned to face Bishop. "I could not let you leave our world again without being here to see you off. I look forward to the day when you can make your stay here permanent."

"Are you sure that it will be safe for you to come back to Earth with us?" Mandy asked Miss Mann.

"Yes, Mandy. I'll only stay a day or so. There are a few things I need to do before I come back and take care of cleaning up from that horrible ordeal Onyx put us through. Onyx and his Emissaries are safely locked away and will not be going anywhere for a long time."

"What did you finally decide to do with Diggory?" Gary asked.

"Diggory has been taken care of," Miss Mann replied.

"I hope you didn't lock him away with Onyx and his followers," Mandy said. "He's not evil like they are."

"Yeah, after all, he saved Bish's life, which I thought was someone

else's job," Gary said with a glance at Aquarian.

Aquarian looked upset. "Yes, it is true. I have failed in my programming. I must be scrapped. I am useless."

Bishop came to the android's defense. "You didn't fail Aquarian. You've saved my butt on a lot of occasions. You can't be there every time. But I'm grateful for the times you are. You are an important member of this team."

Aquarian appeared pleased with this announcement. "I will endeavor to work harder and not disappoint you as Diggory did."

Bishop shook his head. "Diggory couldn't help doing what he did. He's not evil, he just has a different way of looking at things as we do. I've left him in Castleton's hands. Castleton knew my father a long time and I think he can help Diggory change the way he looks at stuff."

The portal began to form.

"Okay, is everyone ready to go to Earth?" Bishop asked.

"I'm afraid that I can't go with you guys," BJ said.

"Why not?" Mandy asked.

"I've observed all that I was sent here to observe. I might as well go back and face the music for what I've done."

"Can you return home from this side of the portal?" Bishop asked.

BJ nodded. "Yeah, space and time. Space and time. Go together like a very bad rhyme. You can't have one without the other."

Bishop looked puzzled.

"Nevermind," BJ continued. "Before I go I have a little present for you." BJ pushed a few small buttons on the device on his wrist and suddenly the face of the device popped open. BJ pulled a miniscule sphere from the device just before closing it back up again. As he held the sphere in his hand it began to grow until it reached the size of a baseball. It had an orange glow to it and there were five indentations around its perimeter.

"What is that?" Mandy asked in awe.

"It's an emergency signaling device. Bishop, if you ever need me in an emergency, just press the five indentions in order and I will come."

Bishop took the ball from BJ. "Thanks. I wish I had something to give you."

BJ smiled and shook Bishop's hand fiercely. "You've given me more than you will ever know."

As the portal opened, BJ appeared to be a bit nervous and fidgety. He took Miss Mann aside.

"Christie, will you come with me to the future? I know that I can't offer you much, but I love you and can't picture spending the rest of my life without you. Come with me. I'll take you where the things in life are free and everyday holds wonders to be seen. Come with me leave yesterday behind. And tomorrow, actually. And the day after that. We'll be going quite a distance into the future."

"I'm sorry, BJ. I can't," Miss Mann sighed. "I've already had one unfortunate love affair in my life that ended tragically."

"I've heard about that," BJ said sadly. "But I always thought that it was a fanciful tale. I never dreamed that you and he had..."

Miss Mann held up her hand. "Say no more," she asked. "I prefer that what was in the past, stay in the past. Please don't mention him while others are around. I would like to keep a few things private."

BJ bowed. "I understand."

Bishop and his friends were surprised. They never dreamt that Miss Mann had been involved in a previous relationship. Bishop secretly wondered who it had been. A quick image of his father flashed through



his mind but he swiftly dismissed that idea.

"And besides," Miss Mann said. "As much as I would like to go with you, I must stay here, in this time. There are people here who need my knowledge and experience."

"Miss Mann, are you sure?" Bishop asked.

"Yes, I'm sure. I'm needed here. I made a promise many years ago that I would serve your father until my dying breath. And until you are ready to take his place, I will keep that pledge."

Miss Mann turned toward BJ and smiled. "Good-bye, BJ. I truly wish that I could go with you. I've really enjoyed the time we had together and I would not trade that for anything else in the world. Please come back and visit again." She gave BJ a long kiss and, after a momentary pause, she entered the portal.

"Great Gugiley Mugiley," BJ whispered.

"See you, BJ. Safe trip back home," Bishop said as he entered the portal. Gary, Reprint, Aquarian and Justin followed.

"Before you go," BJ said to Mandy. "I'd like to give you something my mother gave me long ago. Something for you to remember me by."

BJ handed Mandy a small package.

"Thank you," Mandy smiled. "That's very sweet of you. Good-bye, BJ. Give my regards to the future." She tenderly kissed him on the cheek.

Mandy was the last one to enter the portal. As she entered, BJ wiped



a tear away from his eye.

"Good-bye," he said wistfully. "I'm really glad I got to know you."

As the portal closed, BJ pressed a button on the device around his wrist and disappeared.

As he stepped out of the portal back at Alabaster's workroom in Wellington Computers, Bishop studied the spot on the floor where he had last seen Justin's father. Looking around he saw there was a temporary door in the doorway and a lot of yellow police tape everywhere.

"It looks like Mr. Wellington's body has been discovered," Bishop observed.

"Yeah, but which Mr. Wellington was it? The duplicate or the original?" Gary asked.

"That, I intend to find out!" Justin declared.

Mandy took Justin's hand in her own. "If there is anything that we can do to help you Justin, just ask," she said.

Bishop was placing the pieces to Checkmate back into his backpack.

"One thing's for sure. This has been one heck of a start to our summer vacation," he said.

"You can say that again," Reprint said.

Mandy carefully opened the small package that BJ gave her and pulled out a gold locket.

"What's that?" Bishop asked.

"It's something that BJ gave me before he left. He said it was given to him by his mother, and he wanted me to have it to remember him by."

Mandy opened the locket and gasped.

Bishop rushed to her side. "What's the matter?"

Mandy showed him the open locket. Inside was a picture of an adult Mandy holding a small baby. On the other side was an inscription that read 'Bishop Jr. Age 6 months.'

"Bishop Jr.? Bishop, you don't suppose BJ stands for Bishop Jr.?" Mandy asked.

Bishop just stood there with his mouth wide open. "No way," he finally muttered. "It can't be. It's not possible."

"Nothing is impossible," Aquarian said.

THE END
for now

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

JAMES GAUTHIER

James Gauthier has served as a consultant to writers of comic books and syndicated comic strips. Second Chance is his second novel. In addition to writing the Bishop Chance adventure series, he is currently busy editing a series of books reprinting the classic comic strip Mary Perkins On Stage by Leonard Starr. More information about that series can be found at www.classiccomicspress.com. You may contact him with comments or suggestions through the website.

ED MARTIN

Ed Martin is a journalist and television critic who has written for USA Today, TV Guide and Advertising Age, among others. He is also the author of several screenplays. Second Chance is his second novel.

RAY SZWEC

Ray Szvec is a business owner and magic hobbyist with several magic tricks currently on the market. He presently lives in Connecticut with his wife and two wonderful children.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

FRANK BOLLE

Veteran artist Frank Bolle is one of the most prolific comic book artists of all time. He worked for Western Publishing, illustrating science fiction strips like Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon and Dr. Solar in addition to Boys Life, the Boy Scout magazine. Bolle drew The Heart of Juliet Jones for King Features from 1984 to 1999, and the long-running soap-opera strips Winnie Winkle & Apartment 3-G. Bolle lives in Connecticut with his wife, Lori. He is president of Connecticut Classic Arts and is a member of the National Cartoonists Society. He loves to paint watercolors and does pet portraits by commission. His watercolors have won numerous awards at shows across the country.

BOB WIACEK

Bob Wiacek was born in Manhattan. His earliest art influences were work by Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. For three years, he attended the School of Visual Arts in New York, where he was taught by Will Eisner and Harvey Kurtzman. He then apprenticed at Neal Adams' and Dick Giordano's Continuity Associates. In no time, he was inking DC's Legion of Super Heroes. His first Marvel Comics assignment, "Guardians of the Galaxy" in Marvel Presents, launched a career that has made him one of comics' most sought after inkers. His long list of credits includes Star Wars, Spider-Woman, Man-Thing, Power Pack and X-Men. Artistically he's been influenced by "everybody" from the aforementioned Ditko and Kirby to Jim Steranko, Bernie Wrightson, Howard Chaykin, Walt Simonson, Craig Russell and Steve Leialoha. He lives in upstate New York with his wife, Ann, and his son, Ian.

JUNE BRIGMAN

June Brigman has been drawing since she was old enough to hold a pencil. She studied art at the University of Georgia and Georgia State University, but most of her drawing skills were acquired through self-study and work experience. Ms. Brigman has had a long career in the comic book field. For Marvel Comics she created the "Power Pack" series, the first to feature children as super heroes. She then went on to work for DC Comics on "Supergirl" and for Dark Horse Comics on the Star Wars "River Of Chaos" mini series. Her most recent comics work was a graphic novel adaptation of "Black Beauty." She has done children's illustrations for the Bantam Doubleday Dell Choose Your Own Adventure series, and the comic strip "Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego?"™ for National Geographic World magazine. She has also worked in advertising, doing comps and storyboards. Ms. Brigman currently draws the nationally syndicated comic strip "Brenda Starr" (see ucllick.com). When not sitting at the drawing board, she's in the saddle and rides with Rombout Hunt. She lives with her husband Roy Richardson and their four cats. Her online portfolio can be viewed at: www.ArtWanted.com/juneart.

ROY RICHARDSON

Roy Richardson was inspired to pursue a comics career by the work of Jack Kirby, the ground breaking Fourth World series in particular. A Georgia native, he studied art at the Art Institute of Atlanta and Georgia State University, and in 1983 moved to New York. He has worked for all the major publishers, on such books as Captain America, Iron Man, the Flash, Star Wars, and his own co-creation, the Tomorrow Knights, which has been adapted into a roleplaying game from Zman Games. He now works in collaboration with his wife, June Brigman, inking, lettering and coloring the Brenda Starr comic strip. His online portfolio can be viewed at: www.ArtWanted.com/royart.



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